NATIONAL SECURITY TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 12, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

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Dear Mr. President:

As your industry advisor on national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) communications matters, the National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) would like to bring to your attention certain issues that are impacting the ability of the communications sector and the National Coordinating Center (NCC) to plan for and respond to major disasters at a regional level. The following recommendations are based both on the findings of a comprehensive review of the NCC initiated in early 2005 that extended into the time period following Hurricane Katrina, and on the more recent White House report on Hurricane Katrina.

One of the challenges during major disaster response efforts has been a lack of effective coordination between industry and government at the regional level. Industry's emergency planning efforts have begun to respond to this need. Likewise, the National Communications Systems (NCS), part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is developing an Emergency Support Function (ESF) #2 – Communications Federal Operations Plan to provide supplemental detail to the *National Response Plan* (NRP).

Mr. President, we believe this effort requires your personal support by directing all ESF#2 support agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, General Services Administration, Department of Defense, the Federal Communications Commission, and others to give their full attention to this matter and, when completed, to comply with the Plan. In particular, the Federal Emergency Communications Coordinator (FECC) must be acknowledged by all Federal entities as the lead of ESF #2 in the region. Further, the FECC should coordinate and the Joint Field Office (JFO) should accommodate, as necessary, the incorporation of on-site communications industry personnel with direct linkages with the NCC to provide for regional company-to-company and industry-to-government information sharing and coordination. The NSTAC believes that regional communications and information technology coordination led by the FECC, within or as a virtual capability of the JFO, would significantly improve the ability of government and the private sector to respond to major incidents. This requirement for communications industry presence must be taken into consideration as the site for the JFO is being selected.

The plans and preparations outlined above are essential steps to be taken to be better prepared for the hurricane season of 2006. However, as we both know, Hurricane Katrina was unprecedented by nearly every measure, including the extent of devastation in the impact area, the scope of the evacuation both prior to and after the event, the scale of government and private sector response required, and the security concerns for our personnel as they responded to the event. Even with the steps outlined above, we could still be overwhelmed by another event of this magnitude, particularly as recovery activities continue from last year.

To augment the activities already underway, NSTAC plans to ask the Communications and Information Technology Sector Coordinating Councils (SCCs) to conduct a short-term industry-led task force with the

primary goal of planning for a regional coordinating capability in the Gulf Coast and Southeastern regions prior to the 2006 hurricane season. This task force will be asked to determine the best short and long-term regional communications and information technology coordinating capabilities that could be established external to the JFO. This capability is aimed at coordinating the capabilities of many industry segments in disaster response efforts at the regional level. We ask you to support this effort by directing DHS, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the Homeland Security Council to support us in this effort, as requested by the industry councils.

We will ask these two coordinating councils to address the following issues: (1) how industry should coordinate regional response; (2) what funding sources may be necessary for this regional capability; (3) whether the capability should be virtual or based in an existing facility; (4) whether current Federal, State, local, and tribal authorities participate in or otherwise support such industry coordination; and (5) how a regional coordination capability can best garner recognition and support from industry and government entities. In addition, their task force should examine how best to assist Secretary Chertoff's goal of establishing a core disaster workforce able to take full advantage of existing assets, resources, and capabilities. This will also address your goal of ensuring situational awareness through the establishment of rapid deployable communications and the institution of a structure for consolidated operational reporting.

Mr. President, these steps, if taken immediately, will provide meaningful results well in advance of the hurricane season of 2006. NSTAC member companies are committed to assisting the Nation in this effort. Thank you for you ongoing support of NSTAC and we look forward to working with you and your Administration on these and other telecommunications issues critical to our national security and emergency preparedness.

Sincerely,

F. Duane Ackerman
NSTAC Chair

cc:
The Vice President
Secretary of Defense
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security
Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information
Secretary of Homeland Security
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Assistant Secretary for Cyber and Telecommunications/Director, National Communications System
Director of State and Local Government Coordination, Department of Homeland Security
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