

Broadcast Emergency Preparedness Remarks by Rep. Terri A. Sewell June 5, 2012

June 1st marks the official start to this year's hurricane season. As the hurricane season begins and tornado season continues, we are in an even greater need for life saving communications and technology. I want to take this time to thank our local TV and radio stations for the invaluable lifesaving work they do during times of emergencies.

Radio and television stations are our nation's most reliable network for distributing critical emergency information. Even when the electricity goes out and internet networks and cell phone towers go down, over-the-air broadcasting continues to air. This was never more evident than in the wake of the April 27, 2011 tornadoes and storms that ravaged the great state of Alabama.

Last year, four months into my first term in office, the State of Alabama experienced unimaginable tragedy as we were ravaged by the force of tornadoes and storms. Nine of the 12 counties in my district experienced tremendous damage and loss. These devastating storms destroyed many of our homes, churches, schools and businesses. 253 lives were lost including 76 from the 7th Congressional District.

There is no doubt that broadcasters act as first responders in times of crisis. Before and after these devastating tornadoes, broadcasters remained on the air uninterrupted, providing local communities with vital, lifesaving information. Had it not been for our local broadcasters providing critical information around the clock, many more lives could have been lost. Americans depend on their local TV and radio stations when unforeseen emergencies arise.

If we are to improve disaster preparedness in our nation, we must ensure that local stations have effective tools to communicate with the public during these times of crisis. This can be done by readily equipping mobile devices with broadcast radio for emergency preparedness. Cell phones are ubiquitous and broadcast radio would provide instant emergency information on the go to the widest possible audience during times of emergencies.

The ability to have access to lifesaving information is critical and has very serious homeland security implications. For example, during last year's 5.8 Virginia earthquake, cell phone networks in the Washington, D.C. area became overloaded and inoperable.

This should never be the case. Congress, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Communications Commission and the mobile phone industry should consider ways to expand the availability of broadcast radio service in mobile phones to keep Americans safe.

I look forward to working with these various agencies to ensure that all Americans have the next generation of emergency warnings and information.

Again, thank you to local broadcasters for providing lifesaving coverage during times of emergencies and crisis situations around the clock.