



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Stresses Network Resiliency During Emergencies at Broadcast Incentive Auction Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing titled, “The Broadcast Incentive Auction: Update on Repacking Opportunities and Challenges”*

The images coming out of Texas over the past two weeks have been devastating. For those of us from New Jersey, they bring back difficult memories. Our hearts go out to everyone left struggling in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

But with all the devastation, there were also rays of hope. Some of the most heartening scenes from Texas also reminded us of what we saw five years ago—broadcasters once again stepping up when their communities need them most. It’s not just the journalists who put down their mics to grab the hands of people stuck in raging flood waters. It’s broadcasters doing what they do best—saving lives by providing the critical information that can let people know how to stay out of trouble.

Just like hurricane Harvey, Sandy raged on for days and the recovery lasted months. When the flood waters rose, our power was wiped out, taking nearly all of our communications with it. But through it all, broadcast stations pushed through to serve the community with local content. Both television and radio stations kept on transmitting throughout.

These efforts are what inspired me to introduce the Viewer Protection Act. This bill would make sure that television viewers and radio listeners will not lose their signal as a result of the FCC’s incentive auction. The incentive auction helps reallocate airwaves from broadcasters who have chosen to give up their licenses to use for mobile broadband. The remaining broadcasters may need to be assigned new channels through a process called repacking. As I expected, the FCC does not have sufficient funds to pay for the repacking. And—if Congress does not act—some stations may be forced to go dark.

The risks to viewers and listeners is too grave. As we are seeing, disaster can strike at any moment. Residents in the west are dealing with wildfires as we speak and people in Florida

are preparing for a hurricane. When it does, local broadcasters are crucial to keeping us safe. The Viewer Protection Act will make sure that broadcasters can continue to serve us when we need them most. So, I urge my colleagues to act quickly to get this bill passed.

But as important as it is, this bill alone is not enough. Because we also learned during Sandy that our phones become our lifelines. Unfortunately, five years ago we lost a quarter of our cell towers. In some parts of New Jersey, that number rose to as many as half. That was simply unacceptable.

So I introduced the SANDy Act, which would help wireless carriers keep their towers operating during an emergency. I also worked with wireless carriers represented by CTIA and the Competitive Carriers Association to develop a set of voluntary commitments to improve service during disasters.

One dropped call in an emergency is too much—it can be the difference between life and death. But the carriers' efforts seem to have improved the situation in Texas—we don't seem to be having the same problems so far. Instead of losing a quarter of cell towers, it looks like the number is closer to five percent. While not perfect, that is a dramatic improvement. So I want to thank CTIA and CCA for their hard work, and I hope that we can continue to work together to make sure every call goes through.

Finally, it's time for the Senate to pass the SANDy Act. The bill will make sure that wireless carriers, broadcasters, and cable operators can all better serve communities hit by disaster. We need to continue to work together to get this bill signed into law.

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