

June 4, 2024

Jessica Herron
Legislative Clerk
Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce
House Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

Re: Melody Spann Cooper's Responses to Additional Questions for the Record

Dear Ms. Herron:

I want to thank the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify before it on April 30, 2024, at the hearing entitled "Preserving Americans' Access to AM Radio." I speak on behalf of the National Association of Broadcasters and broadcasters across the country when I say how appreciative we are for the Committee's attention to this important issue.

Pursuant to the Rules of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, I attach here my answers to additional questions for the record, in the required format.

Thank you again for your help, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Melody Spann Cooper
Chair & CEO
Midway Broadcasting Corporation

The Honorable Russ Fulcher

1. Seven former FEMA administrators wrote last year to the Secretary of Transportation, asking he obtain assurances from automakers to maintain AM radios in the vehicles they manufacture for a public warning system. Where do you see the situation for ensuring public safety during emergencies in rural areas versus those in more populated areas, knowing it is more of a challenge in rural areas?

MSC: Since we began to learn that electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers were removing or planning to remove AM radio from their vehicles, a common refrain is that listeners can just stream those stations, or tune into other (paid) streaming services for their listening needs. While I am from urban Illinois, I'm all too familiar with the parts of my state where this is simply not an option, much like much of Idaho. Even during the best of weather and other factors, many Americans live and travel in parts of the country where even making a call on a cell phone can be difficult or impossible, let alone attempting to stream entertainment and information sources. AM radio has the furthest reach of any communications medium, covering many areas nothing else does.

This becomes an even more critical issue during times of emergency. Americans' access to life-saving information should not depend on their broadband coverage. Radio, and especially AM radio, is free and available to all Americans. The AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act simply asks auto manufacturers to continue to provide consumer access to radio as a safety feature in their vehicles.

The Honorable Diana Harshbarger

1. Many East Tennesseans enjoy terrestrial radio. It's how they tune into a Vols game on the road, it's talk radio from fellow conservatives, it connects them with the community. Why would car manufacturers take access to this programming away from my constituents?

MSC: So many Americans – 82 million a month – tune into AM radio for all sorts of reasons, including those you mention.

Some electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers have claimed that electromagnetic interference from their cars leads to a suboptimal AM listening experience. Rather than fix those issues, which about half of EV manufacturers seem to have done fairly easily and inexpensively, these manufacturers have decided to eliminate the option for consumers to listen to AM radio. In addition, some vehicle manufacturers have even started to drop it from their gas combustion engine vehicles, where none have claimed poor listening experiences. This leads me to the only logical conclusion – that interference is not really the driver here, but rather a different financial factor. As the car dashboard gets increasingly busier, these companies seem to have made the choice to eliminate free, over-the-air AM radio in favor of paid apps, which not only provide compensation to the auto companies, but also provide the opportunity for them to monetize the data that comes from interactive apps.

Fortunately, listeners and policymakers like you have overwhelmingly expressed their disappointment with these decisions and are pushing back with incredible force. We hope this leads to ultimate enactment of legislation that would maintain AM radio as a consumer choice and safety feature in all vehicles.

2. In 2022 Sevier County in my district was devastated by wildfires. Access to emergency notifications via AM radio could be critical in the case of another large wildfire in my district. I don't like government mandates. In general, I want to get the government out of the way. But could this be a time that a mandate is worth considering? Could the free market provide the same kind of notifications for natural disasters as what is provided by AM radio?

MSC: The case you set forth here is exactly why the federal government must act to resolve this issue. People across the country experience a variety of natural disasters every day – wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding, etc., not to mention the possibility for other emergencies like terrorist attacks or even just network failures for other communication mediums. Information before, during, and after these times of emergency is critical. In so many of these cases, cell towers go down and the power goes out – and the only option for Americans to receive vital information is through the radio. If the power is out and people don't have access to battery- or solar-powered radios, they can go to their cars to listen in ... but only if their cars provide access to free, over-the-air radio. Moreover, if people are in their vehicles when these emergencies arise or as they're trying to flee them, the car radio again provides a key lifeline.

Broadcasters are mandated to send out emergency alerts, through which federal law requires that the President be able to reach ninety percent of Americans within ten minutes of an emergency. If no one can receive them on the back end, however, this investment of time and money by broadcasters in this system is all for naught.

No other communication medium provides the reach and resilience of AM radio. None. A single AM station can reach up to 700 miles, and cut through buildings and mountains. This is why the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have partnered with radio to harden stations across the country that will remain on the air when everything else fails. This is why it is so crucial that all Americans continue to have access to AM radio in their vehicles as a safety feature. This is why Congress must pass the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act.