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SENIOR WHIP

The Subcommittee is meeting today to receive testimony from the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Communications Commission and State and local government officials concerning the state of our timely alert and warning capabilities to the public before, during, and after an act of terror, disaster or other emergency. First, on behalf of the Members of the Subcommittee, let me welcome our panel. We're glad that you all are here to discuss the roles and responsibilities of Federal agencies, State and local governments, and the private sector with respect to issuing timely alerts and warnings to the public. With the recent rash of tornadoes in the Midwest and Southeast, and with the 2008 Hurricane season just weeks away, enhancing the reliability, resiliency, and accuracy of emergency alerts to the American public is of the utmost importance to this Committee and the Nation. Communities and individuals need to know what steps to take in the event of a natural disaster or act of terrorism. I am looking forward to hearing about the efforts FEMA and the rest of the Department of Homeland Security are making toward carrying out Executive Order 13407 on alerts and warnings that President Bush signed in June 2006.

The Executive Order directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to create a comprehensive Public Alert and Warning system for the United States. I worry that progress has been slow in making this system a reality. I look forward to hearing from the Federal Communications Commission about their role in furthering the development of next generation alert and warning systems. I applaud the efforts made by the Commission to comply with the WARN Act to establish technical standards for the capability to send nationwide emergency alerts by text messages to cell phones and other devices during a crisis. This Committee looks forward to the development of the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) for the millions of people in America that are attached to their cell phones and blackberries. It is my understanding that the FCC has included the Texas State Broadcasters Association as a member of the Commercial Mobile Service Alert Advisory Committee. I am sure they are providing invaluable input to the Committee's work.

Further, while I recognize that my state of Texas is known for being the only state that provides 24-7 emergency alerts to its visually and hearing impaired citizens, I want to encourage other states to begin to provide the same capabilities to its citizens. Finally, I am interested in hearing from our State and local witnesses who will convey the importance of alerts and warning to their constituencies. Alerts and warnings are – first and foremost- the responsibility of state and local governments. We need to ensure that any national system that we implement allows decision-makers at the State and local level to access it. Again, I want to thank the witnesses for being here and I look forward to their testimony.

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