

Sen. Bill Nelson

Commerce Committee Hearing

Communications in a Disaster

September 29, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's two hearings on communications in disasters.

Last week, members of this Committee raised multiple communications issues and proposed various solutions.

I have focused many of my efforts on a couple proposals that I think could make a huge difference to our nation's emergency 9-1-1 system and make our citizens safer during disasters.

One of the tragedies caused by Hurricane Katrina was the crippling of the 9-1-1 emergency network. Key 9-1-1 centers were either knocked out by water or were overloaded with calls. This left citizens with no way to call for help and it severely hampered rescue efforts.

Because the current 9-1-1 system doesn't have built-in redundancies, once a local 9-1-1 center fails there is no back up. **But digital technology can fix this problem.**

Senate bill #1063 (which I introduced and is cosponsored by Sens. Burns, Snowe, Clinton, and Kerry) would require the federal government and industry to develop a plan to quickly move the nation's emergency networks from the old analog system to a more robust, Internet-based network. **This updated system would allow emergency phone calls to be automatically rerouted from a damaged 9-1-1 call center to the next nearest call center. LIVES WILL BE SAVED.**

This bill also ensures that the millions of people who use Internet phone service would be able to have full E-911 capabilities.

I thank the co-chairs of this Committee for their supportive words about S.1063, which was introduced last May. The recent hurricanes show that it's time for this Committee to pass this bill and move it to the full Senate.

I look forward to hearing the witnesses, and I thank the Chair.