



**Statement of Jeffrey A. Citron, Chairman & CEO of  
Vonage Holdings Corp.**

Before the

**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation**

On

**Communications in a Disaster: the Effects of  
Hurricane Katrina**

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10:00am SD-562



Good morning Chairman Stevens, Co-Chairman Inouye and esteemed members of the Committee. My name is Jeffrey Citron, Chairman and CEO of Vonage Holdings Corporation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the entire Vonage family and our one million users, I want to extend my deep sympathy for those who lost family and friends, and for all those who are now homeless as a result of the Gulf Coast disaster.

Our nation is responding to this emergency with astonishing generosity and I'm proud that Vonage employees are no exception. They dug deep into their own pockets to give money to relief organizations—but perhaps more importantly they've given time and energy to keep people communicating throughout the disaster. Vonage teams have worked 24/7 to ready and ship several thousand donated Internet phones that have helped relief workers and affected families keep communicating when other networks failed.

The Wall Street Journal reported that immediately after Katrina hit, the Mayor and Chief of Police of New Orleans used several Vonage lines as their only connection to the outside world. President Bush, while aboard Air Force One, was able to call the Mayor's Vonage number, establishing some of the first communications with local officials.

Much like September 11<sup>th</sup>, phone networks failed. Wireless networks failed. Satellite phones stopped working. But the Internet was still alive in some places, and so was Internet phone service.

As thousands of patients were coming into the Baton Rouge General Hospital, Vonage was the only long distance voice system available to doctors and emergency medical personnel.

Vonage is also working with a not-for-profit (Part 15.org) and other partners such as Cisco and Intel to build large wireless Internet "hotspots" with free Internet phone service in many of the affected areas. In the cities of Pass Christian and Biloxi MS, police and other emergency responders are now using these wireless Internet connections for voice, video and data access. These networks are allowing local and federal officials like FEMA to communicate and share information in areas where there is limited connectivity otherwise.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, to be clear, Vonage's service is successful in maintaining operations during these critical moments because of the redundant and resilient nature of the Internet. Vonage's service relies upon a high-speed Internet connection. We don't own the last mile facilities that run to our users' homes. Our customers get broadband through many different means—cable modem service, DSL, wireless broadband, even satellite. Vonage applauds the network operators that kept Internet connections working for our users. The flexibility that allows our service to work over ANY high-speed Internet connection ANYWHERE is the reason our subscribers are able to communicate in the midst of the Katrina disaster.

Still, while many of the thousands of Vonage customers in the affected areas were able to maintain communications, some of our customers were not. Several hundred were without service. This is primarily because those users lacked power, and because our partner serving New Orleans was unable to send calls from the telephone network to Vonage's Internet gateways.

Despite these network failures and lack of power, our customers were able to use the Internet to forward their calls to cell phones and other locations.

If I can offer this Committee any counsel in rebuilding the communications infrastructure in the Gulf region, it would be NOT to favor one facility or provider over another. Instead, create a climate that fosters deployment of all these technologies. A robust communications infrastructure needs wired networks such as cable and DSL, as well as wireless networks such as cell towers, WiFi and WiMax.

As policymakers, and as entrepreneurs, we'll never know exactly which facilities will be available in a moment of crisis. But redundant infrastructure improves our chances of having SOMETHING that works.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to highlighting the failure of communications networks, Katrina also underscored the urgent need to make our 911 network every bit as flexible and resilient as the Internet.

Vonage is running hard and fast to build a nationwide E-911 network this year. As a result, Vonage has taken a serious look at our country's 911 system and frankly, what we've found is sobering.

In far too many cases, today's 9-1-1 system is characterized by local technology decisions and outdated infrastructure. Left to fend for themselves, dedicated 911 professionals are unable to share resources or utilize today's technology.

Did you know that many 911 centers are unable to transfer calls within a given state or region? Had this capability been in place before Katrina, when 911 centers in affected areas went down, calls could have been transferred to working 911 centers. At the very least state and national law enforcement could have had a better picture of where resources were most urgently needed.

Additionally, Congress can play a role in accelerating 911 deployment by granting the same legal safeguards to all communications services that offer 911 emergency dialing. Internet phone providers are given no legal protection for completing 911 calls, unlike wireless and wireline phone companies.

One of the main reasons citizens in New Orleans cannot return to their homes is the lack of a functioning 911 system. A robust 911 system wouldn't be limited by the bounds of a single provider's network, but would instead utilize all the flexibility and resilience of the

Internet. As we rebuild New Orleans and the affected regions, we would be foolish to ignore technology already on the table.

In times of crisis, communications is critical for a successful and speedy recovery. The Internet is an incredibly resilient and redundant network. This is exactly the kind of performance we need in a crisis, and exactly what we need from the communications and 911 networks of tomorrow.

Our hearts go out to families affected by this disaster. Mr. Chairman, we look forward to working with you and the Committee to improve our response capability in the future.

Thank you.