

Responses to Written Questions Submitted by Honorable Rick Scott to Robert Thun

Question 1. During my eight years as Governor of Florida, I saw firsthand the destruction left behind by multiple devastating hurricanes — Michael, Irma, Hermine, Matthew.

During these times of crisis, it is critical that our emergency management leaders and law enforcement have the ability to share life-saving information with our communities before, during and after the storm.

If STELAR is not reauthorized, how would that impact the communication of this information to our communities, especially in our rural areas, in emergency situations?

Response. Without STELAR, satellite customers will have less access to critical network news during times of emergency. For example, STELAR allows DIRECTV and DISH to import distant network signals to provide network programming, including news to customers in “short” markets. These are customers, usually in rural areas, left behind by local broadcasters and missing one, two or even all four major local broadcasters. As a result, the only way that these satellite customers can be provided satellite network programming and news during times of emergency is through the distant network signal.

We would also like to take this opportunity to restate AT&T/DIRECTV’s commitment to providing customer’s weather and emergency information during national disasters. That is why, during recent weather events, DIRECTV has added a dedicated Severe Weather Mix channel in affected areas. That channel provides national storm coverage from local broadcasters in the area, as well national news and weather channels (e.g., the Weather Channel, Weather Nation, CNBC, Fox News, and CNN). The Severe Weather Mix switches local affiliates as a storm moves, to provide viewers with up-to-the-minute coverage.

Question 2. How can Congress streamline regulations to improve your ability to communicate with our communities, especially in times of natural disasters?

Response. At AT&T, we are in the business of connecting and communicating with our communities each and every day. During periods of natural disaster, AT&T provides dedicated external-facing websites with essential information for affected communities, including current network status. Depending on the disaster and the communities affected, AT&T communicates with its customers through a variety of vehicles including websites, broadcast e-mails, individual emails or phone calls from AT&T representatives, and Interactive Voice Response systems. Methods of communication vary based on the severity and proliferation of an event.

Additionally, AT&T provides a webpage that describes to customers how we prepare for hurricanes and offers customer tips about how they should prepare for hurricanes, and makes its Business Continuity Preparedness Handbook available to its customers at all times. While AT&T has not encountered significant regulatory impediments to these communication efforts, Congress should consider making it clear that wireless carriers may use the location information of customer devices in any area affected by a natural disaster to send targeted communications to those devices related to the specific emergency.