



STATE OF ALABAMA
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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PRESIDENT

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A Day Alabamians Will Remember – Lee County, March 3, 2019

By Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh

Certain horrific events occurring during the course of our lives seem to leave etchings in our memory as a result of the emotional impact on us. Whether acts of terrorism, natural disasters or accidents such as the Challenger explosion, we remember vivid details about each day.

While serving as President of the Alabama Public Service Commission, my first-hand observations of the devastation from tornadoes and the aftermath of major gas explosions have left permanent imprints on my memory. While pale in comparison to the feeling of loss felt by loved ones of the victims, I still found myself emotionally drained after seeing the immense destruction while I was in Lee County last week.

This tornado that blew through a large swath of east Alabama was an F4 that packed 170 mph winds. Many did all they could to survive, but it was simply not enough. Seeing the aftermath left behind was tough, and I was humbled by how small and how helpless we can be in a severe weather event.

I cannot emphasize enough how much we all need to take heed and take cover every time there are weather warnings issued. Know where your safe place is, go there and cover yourself with the right materials. Flying debris during a tornado becomes deadly shrapnel. Be prepared so you can protect your family.

The devastation in Lee County is real, it is heartbreaking, but as the Governor said, Alabamians are resilient. However, we can never replace the 23 precious lives lost on March 3, 2019, so let us continue to pray for these grieving families.

Rebuilding the hardest hit areas started almost immediately, and the dedication of the people involved deserves commendation.

Alabama's first responders arrived on the scene quickly and prepared to do what they do best. First and foremost, they were tasked with the rescue and recovery of storm victims and caring for those that needed medical attention. At the same time, men and women worked tirelessly to

clear debris to allow for safe travel. Utility teams completely rebuilt power lines and cell towers to allow for communication and reconstruction of demolished homes and buildings.

Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones and his department, working with ALEA, are doing an outstanding job. I am always in awe of law enforcement's commitment to our state and our citizens.

These first responders have daunting tasks in the most difficult environment, and yet it is amazing to see these teams work. They are focused, determined and get their jobs done quickly. Within 36 hours, the roads were passable, cell phones were working, and power had been restored to all that could receive power. I have been assured that Alabama Power will continue to have a presence in the area as cleanup work continues and homes are able to take power. That is their job, and my job is to ensure Alabamians have reliable utilities. Count me as impressed with the speed and efficiency with which they worked.

To understand the severity of the damage, let me share with you what this meant in terms of power outage and damaged structures: 11,700 homes in Lee County lost power; 140 power poles were snapped in half; and 226 spans of power wire were on the ground. A large transmission structure in the middle of the small community of Marvyn was severely damaged. There were 669 Alabama Power personnel and contract crews on the ground in the county helping wherever they were needed.

The negative visuals after a catastrophe stay with you; however, there are also beautiful moments in the chaos that I like to remember. In Alabama, we can argue about politics, football and even religion, but there is one thing we all agree on: Alabamians are a close-knit family who help one another get through the tough times. It has been heartening to watch the stories of kindness develop throughout this tragedy. It was touching to see the folks in Tuscaloosa reach out to those hurting in Lee County, the home of the Auburn Tigers.

Alabama is beautiful for many reasons, not just our mountains and beaches, it's our caring people.

May God bless Lee County, Alabama.

This editorial was written by Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh who currently serves as President of the Alabama Public Service Commission.

The positions set forth in this document are those of Twinkle Andress Cavanaugh and are not intended to reflect the official position of the Alabama Public Service Commission.