

**Opening Remarks for Chairman Henry Cuellar (D-TX) (as prepared)**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response**  
***“Assessing the Framework and Coordination of the***  
***National Emergency Communications Plan”***  
**10:00 A.M. on Tuesday, July 15, 2008**  
**311 Cannon House Office Building**

Good morning. On behalf of the Members of the Subcommittee, let me welcome our witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security, State and local government, the first responder community, and private sector.

At the outset, I'd like to express concern about the timeliness of receiving the witness' testimony, particularly from the Department. The Committee rules require that we receive testimony 48 hours in advance of hearings so Members will have ample time to review and develop follow-up questions. I hope this rule will be honored in the future.

On a positive note, today's hearing will give the witnesses an opportunity to discuss emergency communications and the first-ever, stand-alone inter-operable grant program at DHS authorized in Public Law 110-53, the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act" - or more simply, the 9/11 Act.

Since 2003, the Department of Homeland Security has awarded approximately \$9.5 billion to State, Territories, local, and tribal governments to help them strengthen their preparedness and response abilities before, during, and after a catastrophic incident.

Of that amount, \$2.9 billion has been spent on emergency communications, making it the single largest use of grant funds.

Although an impressive amount, the reality of the situation is that addressing the Nation's emergency communications systems may range from \$60 to \$100 billion.

In order to ensure that these grant funds are being spent in a way that advances inter-operable emergency communications, Congress required the Department of Homeland Security to complete a National Emergency Communications Plan - the NECP - as a condition to distributing the interoperability grants to recipients.

The NECP is the principal document that incorporates the Federal, State, local, tribal, and private sector input to define national goals, specify objectives, recommend solutions, identify shortfalls and provide a roadmap for achieving emergency communications achievements.

The NECP was originally due to Congress on April 2008.

Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security missed this critical deadline in large part due to the fact that DHS did not hire a permanent Director for the Office of Emergency Communications until December 2007.

In anticipation of the NECP - as was promised by DHS to reach Congress this month - this Subcommittee proposed a hearing to both congratulate DHS on meeting a critical deadline and to provide Congress an opportunity to review the plan.

Unfortunately, last Friday I was told that the NECP, although completed by the Department, is still under review by the Office of Management and Budget.

As you know, I represent Laredo, Texas—a border community—which would greatly benefit from effective coordination among the Federal, State, and local players. Clearly, the NECP would go a long way to advance communications goals for first responders as well as CBP which both play major roles in responding to border security-related threats and emergencies.

I am very concerned that this additional setback of the NECP may delay the receipt of the fiscal year 2008 Interoperability Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) – which, as you know, ends on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

My own State of Texas is anticipating the allocation of \$3.5 million.

The delayed submittal of the NECP is yet another example of the State and local governments meeting the federally imposed deadline, only to have the Federal government drag their feet.

So to move on with this hearing, I look forward to hearing from Under Secretary Jamison on what the NPPD has done to support the Office of Emergency Communications - more commonly known as the OEC – and the furtherance of the NECP.

Mr. Essid this Subcommittee is looking forward to learning about your coordination efforts to develop the statutorily mandated NECP and next steps to advancing national emergency communications at all levels of government.

Mr. Mirgon and Chief Werner, I am especially interested in how – as representatives of the State and local governments and first responder community – your perspectives were incorporated in the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans and the NECP.

Finally, Mr. Alagna will inform this Subcommittee of the role that the private sector – a key component – played in contributing to the NECP.

I look forward to a robust discussion about the Federal government’s contribution to the NECP as represented by the Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC) as well as other impacting developments.

I closing, I continue to stress the importance of adequately addressing the issue of providing first responders with reliable, redundant, and resilient emergency communications during a time of disaster—the lack thereof, is our nation’s silent threat.

We must do our due diligence now. We must work together to encourage sound governance and improve coordinated planning efforts to address the interoperability challenges we face today—not after another inevitable natural disaster or terrorist attack.

If our first responders can’t talk—lives are lost.

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