

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Interoperability in the Next Administration:
Assessing the Derailed 700 MHz D-block Public
Safety Spectrum Auction”**

September 16, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “Interoperability in the Next Administration: Assessing the Derailed 700 MHz D-block Public Safety Spectrum Auction.”

“Interoperable emergency communications challenges are not new issues. As a former volunteer firefighter, I know first-hand how heavily reliant first responders are on sharing a network that allows them to relay life-saving information on the scene and in real time.

In the 7 years that have passed since the terrible attacks of 9/11, I remain very concerned about the slowness of progress made to provide first responders with the resources necessary to be fully operable and interoperable during a time of disaster.

This Committee has authorized billions of federal dollars to improve our first responders’ ability to protect, defend, and secure the homeland. Congress has set aside the date of February 19, 2009 to provide first responders with the additional spectrum that they need to carry out their day-to-day tasks. We are here today to work together and provide recommendations for the future of the 700 MHz D-Block public safety spectrum.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “we are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.” Our first responders and the American public – cannot afford another delay in the process of the D-Block auction.

I am pleased that we have a panel of witnesses with broad representation from Federal, State and local public safety entities as well as industry stakeholders that will present future steps on how to implement a nationwide interoperable broadband network.

I look forward to receiving your explanations of how a regional approach or national licensee build-out will impact the public safety community. While the first auction of the D Block is commonly referred to as “Dead” or “Derailed” – this does not mean the D Block is “doomed.”

As I have mentioned in the past, the public-private partnership is crucial to a successful re-auction of the public safety spectrum. Congress expects that government, public safety, and commercial entities will cooperate fully to give first responders the additional spectrum that is needed to facilitate emergency communication.”

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