

**REMARKS OF
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FCC FIELD HEARING ON BROADBAND & PUBLIC SAFETY
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER
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Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here with this distinguished group today talking about a problem that has been crying out for solution for a long time, that has generated much discussion and even some action-oriented efforts, but still...no grand solution. Eight years out from that awful September 11 and more than four years beyond Hurricane Katrina, our country still waits for an interoperable broadband public safety network adequate to the challenges of Twenty-first century protection. Indeed, some now believe that a grand solution is as far away as ever, maybe farther—an already steep cliff made nearly vertical by a down economy. This group convenes today, I hope and trust, to counter that negativism with a commitment to combine our collective expertise, experiences and judgments to finally get us moving toward the network we want and the network we need.

Before I go any farther, let me thank all the good folks at the Georgetown University Medical Center for providing us with today's venue. We very much appreciate your hospitality.

As many of you know, I have worked for a long time to make sure the FCC keeps its public safety responsibilities front-and-center. We have made some progress. In the last Commission, working with then-Chairman Kevin Martin, we were able to create a separate bureau at the FCC, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, to focus on ensuring that communications networks stay up and running in times of emergency and to work on plans for building an interoperable broadband public safety network. We also established a clearinghouse where public safety experts from around the country could come to share experiences and learn from what others had done—what they had done right to show others the way, what they'd done not-so-well so folks wouldn't go down those roads. This work not only continues—it is building up steam under the aggressive leadership of our new Bureau Chief, Admiral Jamie Barnett. I am already impressed at the work he is doing to move us ahead on these crucial issues. And I commend our Chairman, Julius Genachowski, for the high priority he has already demonstrated across the gamut of public safety issues.

With this new commitment and with the team we have, along with the direction provided us by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we have, I believe, as good a shot at getting a broadband public safety network up as we're going to have for a long time. Note I didn't say a perfect shot—I said as good a shot as we're likely to have for quite some time. We have a February 17 deadline to present our national broadband plan to Congress, and my hope and expectation is that we will then have some real compass direction on how the spectrum should be used to bring our public safety network hopes to reality. There's still a lot of work to be done and I doubt we'll be in a position

to cross all the t's and dot all the i's so soon, but I would hope for the security of those who rely upon it, that the public safety network is acted upon swiftly.

That brings urgency to the discussions here. This is the time for your best and brightest thinking. This is the time for public safety to be crystal clear (and data-supported) on the configuration and components of a workable public safety network. This is the time for economic analysts, both within and outside the Commission, to give us their best real-world evaluation of what is economically and commercially do-able in the environment we will be working in. And it is time for the closest-possible federal, state and local discussions and coordination. It is a time to pull together united by a common goal, and everyone needs to understand that goal is pretty simple—it's to enhance the safety of the American people.

My first preference has always been that public safety is a public responsibility and that public funds would be the quickest and probably the best way to get this system built. I believe we lost an important opportunity to go down that road eight years ago—and it's a harder road to get on now. Absent that, we focused on private-public partnering to get the job done. But our action plan fell short, for many reasons, and now the economic downturn adds new obstacles to the many that already existed. I hope we can still find a way to a public-private partnership to build and operate this system. But getting from here to there is daunting, to say the least, hugely compounded by the state of the economy. I think we at least understand better than we did the range of options, and the weeks ahead should be dedicated to getting a real grip as to their individual pros and cons. That's the effort Admiral Barnett is leading and that you are participating in today—and, I hope, going forward.

So, again, I am hopeful that the Commission will soon have the opportunity to state some concrete recommendations for ensuring that the public safety community has access to the broadband tools it needs to protect American lives and property. The two panels earlier today highlighted the ability of broadband technologies to bring exciting new applications to emergency medical responders and public safety officials. For example, improving diagnostic data transfer between remote accident sites and hospitals to help ensure that patients receive the most appropriate care as early as possible in the treatment process—and can literally mean the difference between life and death. At the Medical University of South Carolina Hospital a few weeks ago, Commissioner Clyburn and I saw what these new technologies are already doing to transform health care delivery.

The potential for public health and public safety and public just-about-everything-else is so great-- we simply have to figure how to get this done. I'll tell you what we **cannot** afford to let happen. What we cannot afford to end up with is a fragmented network—where our emergency responders, whether from different jurisdictions or from departments in the same jurisdiction, are unable to communicate with each other. What we cannot afford to end up with is individual public safety entities going in dozens of different directions without assurances that their individual systems can work seamlessly

with other systems when the safety of the citizens depends upon the coordination and ability of public safety responders to communicate over disparate areas of the country.

Some jurisdictions have—understandably, given the time this is taking—requested waivers to proceed with building their own local networks. That is another option, but it strikes me that without guarantees that these systems can become part of a nationally-connected and interoperable system sooner or later—preferably sooner—such an approach falls far short of the potential for broadband to create something that really delivers for the safety of the people. So this kind of option would surely require explicit standards to guarantee interoperability. Here our challenge becomes agreeing on such standards when we still don't have the configuration of the broadband public safety system clearly in mind.

So we've got our work cut out for us, don't we? But we've got folks like you to work with. We've got high expectations from Congress and the Administration. And we have 300-plus million citizens counting on all of us pulling together to get this job done. That said, I'm here to listen, so I'll listen.

Thanks a lot.