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Federal Communications Commission**

**Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials – International
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Remarks**

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Good morning. It is a pleasure to be with you today. I want to thank APCO and your President, Wanda McCarley, for the opportunity to participate in today's conference to discuss briefly the work of the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau and recent Commission policy developments and initiatives that are important to your membership.

For those of you who don't know me, I have spent 30 years in public safety and police work. Immediately prior to joining the FCC, I served as the Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I understand the daily sacrifices that many of you make to protect the residents of the communities that you unselfishly serve.

The FCC has been in the public safety business for a long time – the first sentence of the federal Communications Act identifies promoting the “safety of life and property” through the use of communications services as one of our core missions.

To emphasize the Commission's commitment and focus on this important work, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin led the Commission in the establishment of the Bureau on September 25, 2006. Since that time, we've been responsible for 15 Commission level items, and countless bureau and division level items, including the issuance or renewal of almost 9,000 licenses to public safety organizations.

The Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, like APCO, is committed to promoting an open dialogue with the public safety community, developing effective policies that will improve emergency communication for first responders, and supporting technological advances in the communications industry.

We respect and appreciate the leadership, dedication and contributions of your 15,000-member organization to public safety and homeland security issues and value the partnership between our Bureau and APCO.

The public safety communications matters facing us are very important, and we look forward to working together to ensure that we provide the communications capabilities necessary to help protect the life of every American.

Our Bureau is charged with developing, recommending and administering the FCC's rules, regulations and policies pertaining to such public safety communications issues as 911 and enhanced 911 services, national interoperable emergency communications, the nation's Emergency Alert System and protection of the Nation's critical communications infrastructure.

We oversee the licensing of spectrum for state and local public safety organizations and the first responder community nationwide.

The Bureau coordinates with our Federal, state and industry partners on public safety and homeland security issues. We work with those partners to assess the communications infrastructure in times of disaster and to coordinate the spectrum needs of the community, first responders and the communications industry in the disaster zone.

The Bureau is also charged with serving as a clearinghouse for public safety and homeland security information.

This clearinghouse responsibility includes the development of guidance and dedicated web pages that highlight ‘best practices’ in emergency communications for various stakeholders to refer to when developing and updating their response plans.

I would now like to focus on three important issues: the digital television transition, our recent 700 MHz proceeding and the 800 MHz rebanding initiative.

Beginning on February 17, 2009, television broadcasters will only transmit digital signals. There will be no further transmission of the traditional analog signals.

It is important that the American public knows about this transition so that they can take appropriate steps to ensure that their TVs will continue to work after this date. Although approximately 85 percent of Americans have digital TVs or subscribe to cable or satellite services and therefore do not need to do anything extra to receive digital broadcasts, we must ensure that every citizen is aware of this important transition.

In our everyday, fast-paced lives, it is easy to take for granted the value of the television to provide us with access to the latest news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Equally critical is the ability to receive televised Emergency Alert System warnings and alerts. To preserve access to this important information, it is essential that the American public convert to digital television within the next 18 months.

To learn about the DTV transition you may stop by the FCC conference booth to receive relevant literature on this initiative. You may also visit our dedicated web site for more information at: www.DTV.gov.

We ask you to help us get the word out in your communities about this important transition.

On another matter of national significance, we are committed to developing and promoting policies that afford the public safety community with access to a nationwide interoperable emergency communications network in the 700 MHz band.

The creation of an interoperable communications network will provide for effective communications between first responders, not just in emergencies, but as part of cooperative communications plans that enable first responders from different disciplines and jurisdictions to work together to both respond to and prevent disasters.

A few days ago the Commission took a significant step in paving the way for the creation of a nationwide interoperable communications system when it adopted a Second Report and Order revising the rules governing the public safety portion of the 700 MHz Band.

The Order sets forth a regulatory framework for the 700 MHz Public Safety Band to support the creation of a broadband standard with a nationwide level of interoperability that will help protect not only first responders, but all Americans, nationwide.

This initiative will be supported by the creation of a public/private partnership between the Commission-selected Public Safety Broadband Licensee, which we fully expect APCO to be an integral part of, and the winning commercial bidder of the Upper 700 MHz Band 'D' Block license.

The Order also provides for a permanent solution to potential public safety narrowband interference issues in America's border regions.

Of interest, the 'D' Block licensee will be required to offer at least one handset suitable for public safety use that includes an integrated satellite solution as a safeguard to ensure effective and efficient communications for first responders.

The public safety community and the citizens of this country expect and deserve nothing less than an advanced communications system with a nationwide level of interoperability. Having such a system will inevitably save lives.

Finally, I would like to give you a quick update on the 800 MHz rebanding process. When I came to the Commission in April, the rebanding process was behind schedule. There were a lot of reasons for this, and everyone involved in the process bears some responsibility.

To address this, both the Commission and the Bureau have been working hard with the public safety community and other 800 MHz stakeholders to get rebanding back on track.

I'm pleased to report that we have made appreciable progress in the last few months. In May, the Commission adopted the "Minimum Cost" order to help break the logjam in negotiations and resolve disputes that were costing much more to litigate than to settle.

The Bureau has since expedited the process for resolving disputed issues that are referred to us.

Since April, the Bureau has issued over 20 orders in mediation cases, eliminating our backlog, and we are now resolving cases much more efficiently.

We've worked closely with public safety, Sprint, the vendors, and the Transition Administrator to identify and eliminate procedural bottlenecks that have previously delayed the process. This is allowing us to streamline the process and proceed with rebanding in a more efficient manner.

The Bureau is committed to resolving border issues with Canada and Mexico, so that we can proceed with rebanding in all border-states in the very near future.

Significant progress has recently been made. Many National Public Safety Planning Advisory Committee licensees now have executed agreements and are proceeding with the physical rebanding of their systems, and we expect a significant number of systems to have completed the rebanding process by early 2008.

But despite this progress, a great deal of work lies ahead. We have less than eleven months until the June 2008 deadline established by the Commission. The date is important as it is unlikely that we will simply extend the deadline for anyone who asks for an extension beyond that time.

Let's be clear about what needs to happen in the next year: Everyone – public safety, Sprint, the vendors, the Transition Administrator, and our Bureau – will need to work harder and more efficiently to move this process forward.

We are facing a tremendous task, but completing rebanding as soon as possible is an incredibly important goal. Working together, we can get this done.

We remain sensitive to the concern of public safety licensees who say they need more time because they have large, complex systems and interoperability issues. So let me focus on what public safety can expect from us, and what we expect from public safety.

First, you can expect that we will hold Sprint Nextel to its obligations under the Commission's orders to fully support and pay for rebanding, and to vacate the spectrum that public safety requires to complete the rebanding process.

Second, you can expect that your relocation reimbursement needs will be met for as long as the rebanding of your system actually takes.

Third, you can expect that you will have the time reasonably needed to complete rebanding, provided work is ongoing, benchmarks are being met and progress continues to be made daily.

But in exchange, I am counting on public safety to continue to do its part, and more. Public safety licensees will not get more time if they do not use the time they now have wisely to plan, adapt and implement their systems to meet their obligations as part of this rebanding process.

You must continue to cooperate with regional planning efforts as part of their work and begin updating systems as soon as possible, including early replacement and retuning of radios.

With a dedicated effort, most of the rebanding projects can be completed by June 2008.

You simply must make this a priority within your organizations.

I fully expect that as we always do public safety will rise to this challenge, so that when we meet a year from now, we will be close to achieving our goal of finishing the rebanding process.

I am sure we would all agree that protecting our nation from disasters, and responding quickly to meet the needs of Americans in harm's way is the highest calling for each of us. Our objective is to support initiatives that provide you with the communications tools you need to get the job done.

When police officers respond to a mass casualty event, when firefighters rush into a burning building to save children, or when paramedics arrive on the scene of an accident to render care to trauma victims, it is critical that they have complete information on these incidents as quickly as possible, and are then able to respond rapidly to the scene and communicate effectively with each other while providing care and assistance to survivors.

All of us must keep this in mind when addressing these critical issues. We must never be accused of being innocent bystanders. There simply is too much at stake.

It certainly has been a pleasure being with you today and I wish each of you and APCO great success in the future. Thank you.