

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Greg Walden**  
**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology**  
**Hearing on “Progress Toward a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network”**  
**June 16, 2015**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

When we last convened to discuss FirstNet, my goal was to leave that hearing with a higher level of comfort with regard to FirstNet’s progress and confidence in the way it was conducting its business. As we all recognized then and continue to acknowledge today, FirstNet has before it an undertaking which rivals the network deployments of our largest national carriers. In fact, given its mandate to build an interoperable wireless broadband service for all of our Nation’s First Responders, its task will take it to all corners of the United States.

Early shortcomings in FirstNet’s approach to consultation with states and others interested parties had resulted in considerable uncertainty and concern among stakeholders. Confused messaging, a perceived lack of transparency, and unanswered questions regarding FirstNet’s vision for the network and even FirstNet vision for itself further complicated things. Questions like: How would FirstNet provide service; would it build a network or partner with commercial carriers; what is FirstNet going to charge; and, how does the “opt out” work each contributed to the concerns raised at the hearing and answers were far from forthcoming.

And, on top of all of the policy concerns, FirstNet was also under investigation by the Inspector General of the Department of Commerce into alleged conflicts of interest and contracting concerns when we gaveled in.

Much has happened since then. There has been some turnover in management, and with the release of the Inspector General’s report in December of last year confirming much of what we feared – that FirstNet had been operating without proper processes in place and without compliance with the laws that guard against impropriety – it is my hope that the missteps are behind us. And I believe they are.

But that is not to say that there aren’t additional challenges. On April 28th, the United States Government Accountability Office released a report on FirstNet’s progress in establishing the network – concluding that while FirstNet has made progress carrying out its responsibilities, weaknesses in FirstNet’s internal controls remain. For example, it remains unclear how FirstNet is internalizing the lessons learned from the early builder projects – the five jurisdictions that are already deploying public safety broadband networks using FirstNet’s spectrum. And while the GAO report recommends fixes, it is GAO’s succinct statement of what lies ahead that must inform our oversight – “FirstNet faces a multitude of risks, significant challenges, and difficult decisions in meeting its statutory responsibilities, including how to become a self-funding entity.”

To give FirstNet credit, it has made progress. We witnessed FirstNet’s information collections and consultation and outreach activities accelerate throughout 2014. The feedback gathered has informed discussions on deployment and brought productive debate among stakeholders.

Today’s hearing reflects the subcommittee’s commitment to continued and thorough oversight of FirstNet. We all share the goal of ensuring that our Nation’s First Responders realize the promise of truly interoperable, state-of-the-art emergency communications network envisioned by the law. With those early missteps behind us, today we look not only at the progress FirstNet has made but also what new challenges lie ahead. Our goal being to leave with a higher level of comfort in FirstNet’s progress and confidence in the way it is conducting its business.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Kennedy who can provide an update on FirstNet’s progress; put some of the pieces together, and share with more specificity developments in FirstNet’s considerations and vision for the of the public safety broadband network. I also would like to thank Mr. Davis for appearing a

second time before the subcommittee to share his experience as a State Chief Information Officer and his assessment what needs improvement and where FirstNet is headed.

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