

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Realizing Nationwide Next-Generation 911”
March 29, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

This morning we convene to examine the progress in the deployment on Next-Generation 911. As a matter of coincidence, the timing could not be better. Yesterday, FirstNet, announced that it took the next step in its competitive bidding process. It is expected FirstNet will soon execute a contract to form a public-private partnership in order to deploy a single, nationwide wireless broadband network for our first responders. Nearly 13 years after the 9/11 Commission Report highlighted grave deficiencies in first responder communications, the most up-to-date communications capabilities will finally be at the fingertips of the brave men and women who protect us daily.

Today we all carry devices in our pockets that allow us to communicate by voice, by text, by email, and by video. And now that we are at the threshold of deployment of FirstNet, our nation’s first responders will have a dedicated network to do the same. But our 911 networks, which are based on the technologies of the past, do not provide a seamless connection between the two. Only by bringing IP-based technology to the Nation’s Public Safety Answering Points – the professionals that are the first voice you hear when you call for help – can we bring the full promise of modern technology to serve us in times of emergency.

In 2012, when we passed the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act, which created FirstNet, we also took steps to facilitate the deployment of next-generation 911. We engaged the 911 Implementation Coordination Office to work with state and local authorities, asked for a report on the cost of NG911, and established a matching grant program. Unfortunately, for reasons that were never made clear in response to our bipartisan inquiries, the prior administration didn’t get that funding out of the door nor did they produce the report.

Today, I hope we can get a measure of how far the transition to NG911 has come and some ideas about how to accelerate it. We understand that there will be costs involved in an effort of this magnitude. But FirstNet and its participating states have shown there are smart ways to approach such complex public safety undertakings.

Some states report that they are already NG911 capable and many others are pursuing the transition. These states should be applauded for their efforts. However, while nearly every state collects money from their citizens for 911, some states have taken monies collected for 911 and used it for other purposes. This cannot continue. Aside from the fact that this erodes the public trust, it ultimately impairs the transition to NG911 for the nation as a whole.

I look forward to hearing today's testimony. My thanks to all of you for sharing your experiences and wisdom with us today. I hope that we will leave with a better understanding of what works and how we can use these lessons to move forward in a manner that best delivers NG911 services to our nation's communities.