

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Hearing on “Oversight of FirstNet – States Perspectives”  
November 1, 2017**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Welcome to the committee’s continuing oversight of FirstNet, the authority charged with deploying a nationwide, interoperable broadband public safety network. The First Responder Network Authority was an important fixture of the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. A lot of work at this committee went into reviewing the recommendations from the 9/11 commission on how to better prepare our first responders in times of crisis. Interoperability has long been a challenge for our state and local authorities, and in the wake of the recent natural disasters they have faced, its importance is as clear as ever.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today. Mike Poth (pronounced POETH) is the CEO of FirstNet. He now has both the privilege and the pressure on this huge undertaking being a success, but I can assure folks in this room we intend to be part of its successful implementation. Chris Sambar is a senior vice president at AT&T, and his company is the winner of FirstNet’s RFP to gain access to 20 MHz of the 700 MHz spectrum. Our friends from the States include – John Stevens, who is the New Hampshire Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, and Brian Moran, who is the Virginia Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. Their unique perspective of what states are thinking will illuminate how to avoid a top down approach that could lead to failure. Rob LeGrande consults now, but was the CTO for Washington, DC in building out a public safety broadband network. I’m sure he can help us sort out issues States and localities face, and perhaps can even be a bit

more granular to address challenges those in rural and tribal areas have to calculate in their decisions.

As you all know, this past September, FirstNet delivered its network plans to 53 states and territories. Part of what brings us here today is the December 28<sup>th</sup> deadline from that notice for those States and territories to elect whether they will accept the plan. Under the statute, States are permitted to opt-in to their respective State Plan, or opt-out of the FirstNet network and build and maintain radio access networks, also referred to as RAN, from other providers but still meet interoperability requirements set by the FCC. I think it's also worth pointing out that while AT&T will build the FirstNet RAN in "opt-in" states or territories at no cost to each jurisdiction, public safety entities will still be responsible for paying subscription costs and end-user device expenses, and they are not required to subscribe to the FirstNet service. We must ensure that choice remains a paramount principle as the states and territories proceed with their decision-making and implementation.

While there has been some debate on schedules of fees, subscriber levels, device availability, and whether the network will be able to deliver mission critical level services, I know the panel today can help us sort through all the issues to further everyone's goal of making this a transparent and successful process.