

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. Thank you for that kind introduction. Thank you also to the Association of Public Safety Communications Officers for the gracious reception I've received from everyone here in New Orleans. You certainly take southern hospitality seriously.

I want to start today by acknowledging that we are celebrating the birthday of two 80 year-olds. This is APCO's 80th annual conference. It's an important milestone. And back in Washington we are celebrating another 80th birthday—at the Federal Communications Commission.

The similarities, however, do not end there. Just look at the documents that got both of us started.

In 1934 APCO published a memorandum. In it, you determined that police radio had been adopted by most cities in the United States. So you decided that it was time to call the first yearly conference for public safety officials. Eighty years later that still seems like a good idea.

But in 1934 APCO was not the only prominent organization thinking about the importance of public safety communications. Congress was thinking about it, too. Because in 1934 Congress passed the Communications Act—the law that created the FCC. The very first sentence of that law directs the agency to promote “safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communication.”

So from the beginning, APCO and the FCC were made for each other. Both are built on the principle that public safety comes first. No wonder then that one of the speakers at the very first APCO conference 80 years ago was Chairman of the FCC.

So by being here today, I am continuing a proud tradition. But I also am celebrating a personal milestone. As some of you may remember, my very first speech after being sworn into office was at the APCO Annual Conference two years ago in Minneapolis.

During that first speech I committed to spend my first year in office visiting 911 call centers once a month. So I feel privileged to say I have been able to hear from so many of you personally. Each visit is a new experience. But no matter the location, some things are constant. Emergency operators always amaze. Because when crises mount, they answer calls with steely calm and help ensure that help is on the way.

So rather than ending my visits after year one, I have continued them. That means I have seen public safety officials at work from Alaska to Arkansas, California to Colorado, Vermont to Virginia—and a whole lot of places in between.

These visits have taught me that in Washington, what is trite is true—leaving town is a good thing! Sitting down with public safety officials in urban areas, rural areas, and everything in between reminds me that our policies have real impact on real lives.

You also have shown me that our present policies have gaps—gaps that deserve our attention. Places where technology is moving on and public safety communications also need to advance. By working together I know we can address these places and close these gaps. And if we do—I believe we can make every community in this country safer.

So today I want to update you on our efforts in Washington. I want to focus on three things—efforts to deploy texting-to-911; efforts to improve location accuracy for wireless 911 calls; and efforts to develop a nationwide, interoperable wireless broadband network for first responders.

First up is texting.

The challenge to the continued success of 911 has always been the increasing complexity of our communications systems. Every new way of reaching out creates new possibilities—but also new difficulties. Still, over time we have made steady progress bringing new technology into the 911 framework. We expanded 911 service to mobile phones. We made 911 an essential feature of interconnected VoIP service. We are now poised to make the same kind of progress with texting.

Texting has become second nature to millions of Americans. Many of us use our phones for more texting than speaking. We use texting to reach out to friends and family, to confirm plans, to vote in contests online and on the air, and to donate to charities and campaigns.

Later this week, the FCC is set to codify policies that make sure that providers of text messages have systems capable of supporting text-to-911 service. This means that texting services that have become so essential for so many of us can be there for everyone when reaching out in crisis.

I know how critical these services can be because I know texting-to-911 can save lives. It already has in Vermont—where I had the privilege of seeing the service in action in Burlington. I also know that texting-to-911 can be a game changer for those who are deaf or have speech difficulties. In fact, I had the privilege of seeing this up close in Frederick, Maryland, where the service is available and the Maryland School for the Deaf is located.

So I know first-hand the benefits of having texting-to-911 in place. But I also know it brings new difficulties. From my visits around the country I can tell you that educating the public matters. Because voice calling still offers a speed and response that is superior to texting. It offers the ability for conversation that a drop down menu of responses to an emergency text does not. My visits around the country also make me mindful that you have work to do and funds to secure to make texting viable. So as we work to ensure that carriers provide text-to-911 capabilities, know that you are in control. This will be deployed only when you are ready.

Getting this capability in public safety answering points across the country will take some time, but it's worth the effort. So I encourage you to take a look at the decision we will vote on later this week, give us your feedback, and then help us get this service in place—everywhere.

Second, I want to update you on wireless 911 location accuracy.

Let me start by noting that last August, I also headed south. Not all the way to New Orleans, but just north of here in Arkansas. In Arkansas, I spent my time in and around Little Rock. I talked to rural broadband providers, I saw new education technology in action at a local school, I got time to tour the 1990's at the Clinton Presidential Library. I also had my first taste of fried pickles—which are better than you might think.

While in Little Rock I visited a 911 call center with staff from Senator Mark Pryor's Office. The visit was memorable. The center was small but active. The desks were humming as calls came in. The pride the public safety officials had for their work was palatable.

But the one thing that was most memorable? I learned that in the city of Little Rock if you call 911 using your wireless phone in the corner of the 911 call center your call will not get routed to Little Rock. Instead, it will be answered by a 911 call center in North Little Rock all the way on the other side of the Arkansas River.

That's unnerving. Because when you make a 911 call location accuracy matters. That kind of imprecision from calling 911 with a wireless phone should make all of us concerned. Because when emergency strikes and you call 911 from any phone—including a wireless phone—you want first responders to find you.

This matters—a lot. Today, more than 70 percent of 911 calls are from wireless phones. That is more than 400,000 calls across the country every day. And this number is only going to get bigger. Because for roughly 2 in 5 households right now, their wireless phone is their only phone. Here in Louisiana it is a little more than 1 in 3. In Arkansas, where I was last year, one half of all adults and 60 percent of all children now live in a home without a landline phone. So wireless calling to 911 is here to stay—and poised to grow.

But our rules that provide first responders with information about where we are when we call 911 are stranded in calling practices of the last century.

So today, under the FCC's rules, if you call 911 from a wired phone, first responders know where you are and where to send help.

If you call 911 from a wireless phone outdoors, the FCC has standards that help ensure first responders can locate you and send assistance.

But if you call 911 from a wireless phone indoors, you should cross your fingers and hope and pray, because no location accuracy standards apply.

This is an unacceptable gap in our policies. It does not reflect the way we depend on wireless service today.

Fortunately, this issue has caught the attention of some powerful people. People like Senator Pryor, who has become a champion on this issue. He has called for efforts to improve location accuracy for 911 calls made from wireless phones—not just in Little Rock, but across the country. In fact, he held a hearing earlier this year in the Senate to explore the challenges of location accuracy. You might remember, because one of your own—APCO President Gigi Smith—testified at the hearing. She was a great witness and a terrific spokesperson for first responders.

Hearings have consequences. So on the heels of that hearing—and after a little cajoling on my part—the FCC started a rulemaking to narrow this gap and fix this problem.

But APCO and its membership did not sit on the sidelines. You heard the call and you did what you do best. You brought together public safety officials, equipment manufacturers, and wireless carriers to have a frank dialogue about closing this gap and improving wireless location accuracy.

So I am excited to report that APCO has worked with CTIA, myself, and others to develop a set of four core principles that are supported by the wireless carriers. I believe these four principles are the foundation for a solution. Dispatchable, verifiable, flexible, and reasonable time.

First, *dispatchable*. The gold standard for location accuracy is dispatchable location—the actual floor plus office suite, apartment, hotel room, or classroom.

Second, *verifiable*. Any solution must include verifiable targets to measure accuracy.

Third, *flexible*. Technologies advance rapidly. A solution must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate technological advancements like next generation 911.

Fourth and finally, *reasonable time*. The perfect cannot be the enemy of the good. While we must continue to strive towards achieving dispatchable location, we must be honest that this goal could take some time. So we need solid interim benchmarks along the way.

To be clear, we are not there yet. We still have work to do. But thanks to APCO, we are on track to reach a solution for wireless 911 location accuracy. So stay involved as our rulemaking continues—because we are on our way to making wireless 911 more safe.

Finally, I want to end with the First Responders Network Authority. You probably know it as FirstNet. FirstNet is the independent authority charged with developing a nationwide, interoperable, public safety wireless broadband network using spectrum in the 700 MHz band.

Now compared to institutions like APCO and the FCC, FirstNet is still in its infancy. There is nothing eight decades old about it. In fact, I would call it a public safety startup.

Because I recently had the opportunity to visit their headquarters and I can tell you that they are bringing a little slice of Silicon Valley to Reston, Virginia. The offices are a bit sparse, but just like the most successful startups the place is teeming with energy. You feel it when you walk in the door. They are doing something big.

It's also clear that this vigor comes straight from the top. The new Chair of the Board is Sue Swenson. She brings years of communications experience to her new role—and a passion for public safety. Plus, General Manager TJ Kennedy is one of your own. He can run the show at the office in Reston, but he can also regale you with stories of swinging from helicopters as a police officer.

These are the right kinds of people for the job. Because this is a bold undertaking. Developing a nationwide network for public safety is not a task for those who think small. Getting it done will require grit, gumption, and moving beyond the conventional wisdom. But historic efforts usually do.

Next up for FirstNet is outreach. Because the most important input FirstNet gets is not from Washington. It is from those on the front lines. FirstNet has already met with more than 20,000 stakeholders. That's a lot. But to take their work beyond the startup phase, they will need to double down on reaching out. So I hope you will get involved and offer your insights.

This Fall, there will be lots of opportunity to do so. Because FirstNet just launched what are called Initial Consultations under the law. This is an essential step in the development of state plans. FirstNet started with Maryland but has already planned these consultations in Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington—and there are more to come.

But that's not all. FirstNet is in the development stages of preparing a draft request for a proposal. This is the beginning of the critical process to identify a comprehensive network solution for the nationwide network.

And on the engineering front, the technical team in Boulder, Colorado has been hard at work recruiting experts in network development. This is the team that will facilitate the technical aspects of the network build. In fact, this hiring is only a small part of the bigger picture. Because the organization as a whole has plans to rapidly mature with regional outreach positions to be hired. These new members of the team will serve pivotal roles in messaging and education efforts.

So, it looks like FirstNet will be busy over the next few months.

Again, get involved. Because FirstNet cannot do it alone. Remember this is more than a nationwide public safety network built on public-private partnerships. This is your network. Make it yours by providing local input, know-how, and support. Now will there be real challenges? Of course. But are you up to it? I think you are. Because first responders perform Herculean acts every day. And with the people in this room from every state behind it, FirstNet can become a real force.

So there you have it. We are making progress. We are modernizing 911 by bringing on board texting-to-911. We have work underway to enhance wireless 911 location accuracy. And we have a small startup poised to do big things with FirstNet.

So for 80 years old, I think this conference community is looking pretty good. We are pretty active, too, at the FCC. But for all that draws attention to the agency, I am proudest when we put public safety first. I know you do that every day. I am grateful for the work you do—and excited by the good things we can do together.

Thank you.