

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
***EN BANC* HEARING ON**
PUBLIC SAFETY INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
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Thank you to all of our panelists for coming out today and to Chairman Martin and the FCC staff for organizing this critically important hearing. I'm here to listen and learn today. Because the truth is that we still have a steep learning curve ahead of us if we are going to succeed at long last in building an interoperable wireless public safety broadband network. It's no slam-dunk we'll get there—but we're risking the safety of the people if we don't. And that safety is always our first obligation as public servants.

In this great city, seven years later and maybe a mile from where the Twin Towers once soared, hopefully, none of us needs reminding that our country still faces great dangers. And the sad truth is that none of us who work in the field of communications need much reminding, either, that our current public safety systems just are not up to the task. For far too long, beginning even before 9/11, the FCC gave sorely inadequate attention to the shortfalls of America's public safety communications. Now, finally, we are getting serious about building the network we should have built years ago.

That's the good news—we have a Commission willing to take this issue on headfirst. But even though we have the will, do we have the way? I am afraid the answer is: Not yet. There are still very basic, unanswered questions. Like: What *purpose* should this network serve? Is it mission-critical voice? Non-mission-critical voice? Video? Data? A backbone that connects existing voice networks? Or a whole new, built-from-scratch network that can do it all? What are the construction and operational costs of each? How does each of these choices impact the financial feasibility of a public-private partnership? Should licenses be regional or national? What is the appropriate build-out level and time-frame for deployment? How can the Commission be sure that states and localities across the nation will actually make use of this network if we manage to get it built? How can the Commission be sure that the rules it selects will actually produce a bidder this time around? The list goes on....

We should be further along in answering these difficult questions than we are. To answer them correctly, however, we need a solid base of engineering and financial analyses. We don't have that. We're not even close, even though this phase of the process has been underway for several months by now. And I use the term "we" broadly, because government, public safety and our communications companies each have to do better than they have been doing. I am concerned that the FCC *still* doesn't have the level of technical and economic data and expertise we need to sort this all out. There are aspects of this project that are new to the FCC and we need to build the in-house, technology and advisory teams that can deal with them. I am concerned that the public safety community is of many different minds—too many—when it comes to approaching this great challenge. And I am concerned that too many of the people involved in this entire process are spending too much time jockeying for position and placing blame, with

too little spent doing the hard work of information gathering, analysis, reaching out, compromise, and developing new ideas. I am impugning no one's good faith. There is a lot of dedication and commitment here today, and I salute that. It's just that the goal here is so daunting and the level of cooperation required so extraordinary. Our challenge goes miles beyond merely tinkering around the edges of default penalties and reserve prices (though of course we need to address such questions). The goal—if we are to succeed—must be about answering all the hard questions that were put off before the last auction and haven't been squarely confronted since then.

I'm still for the public-private partnership. But we all must recognize that with the state of our economy right now, it's going to be even harder to do than it was six months ago. I'm still for expeditious auction and action, but only after we get it right. Only after public safety demonstrates what it really requires and explains who and what it brings to the table. Only after the private sector has waded into what works and doesn't and laid out a clear path that holds the probability of attracting a viable commercial partner to build a viable public safety network. Only after the FCC builds its expertise and exercises the leadership it must in order to shepherd this through to success. So, yes, I want to get this done, done right and done soon. But please don't anyone here expect me to be a part of settling for less than this. That's just not going to happen.

Maybe today we'll learn we're getting on the right path. I hope so. At a minimum, this hearing will help us take stock of where we are and what we need to do differently or better or both. This get-together can be a critical juncture in the road for all of us. So I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say. I thank all of you for coming today.