Prepared Remarks Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission

Public Safety Briefing
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Good morning. In the Recovery Act, Congress tasked the FCC with developing a strategic plan for our country with respect to the future of broadband.

The National Broadband Plan will fulfill the promise of broadband to connect America and all its people to a bright future, and it will include a series of recommendations for how broadband can help address national priorities.

One key national priority that Congress and the President specifically required, and that I personally believe is paramount, is a strategy for public safety broadband use.

I'd like to spend just a few minutes to highlight some of the working recommendations related to public safety and homeland security that will be addressed in the National Broadband Plan.

The Chief of the Commission's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau Admiral Jamie Barnett will expand upon these working recommendations, but I want to begin by underscoring the importance and seriousness of this task, and the ways in which it is personal to me, as it is to so many Americans.

During college I trained and was certified as an Emergency Medical Technician, served on ambulances, and taught CPR. One of the main reasons I have enormous respect for the vital work that first responders perform in protecting us and in saving lives is that I saw it first hand.

In addition, when the planes hit the World Trade Center on 9/11, I was not far away, and my wife was closer. My brother, who worked very near the World Trade Center, had traveled in the subway under the Towers shortly before they fell.

So when I read the 9/11 Commission recommendations, including the recommendation for an interoperable public safety network, I see them in this light.

Our goal is to develop the best short-term and long-term plans for America's first responders. Public safety must have consistent and prompt access to secure, robust networks of the highest quality and first responders should be equipped with state-of-the-art devices and applications that are 100 percent interoperable and easy to use.

Early in my tenure as Chairman, I directed the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau to look at how we can best serve public safety for both day-to-day advanced communications capabilities and critical communications services during a time of crisis.

As with other aspects of the Plan, staff was directed to begin anew, not take anything for granted, be data-driven and creative, and come up with the best policy recommendations to achieve success.

Under Admiral Barnett's leadership, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, working closely with other FCC Bureaus and Offices, and the entire Broadband Team, has done just that. They have developed a comprehensive gameplan for public safety as part of the National Broadband Plan to address vitally important issues and propose real solutions.

The public safety portion of the National Broadband Plan will address three general areas relating to public safety and homeland security. The Plan will:

- Recommend concrete steps for the deployment of a nationwide interoperable wireless broadband network for public safety.
- Focus on increasing cybersecurity and critical infrastructure survivability of broadband networks.
- Propose measures to advance Next Generation 9-1-1 services and new public alerting initiatives that leverage broadband technology.

I would like to briefly address what we see as the top priority for public safety -- ensuring that public safety has nationwide access to interoperable broadband wireless communications.

As you know, this is a very difficult and complex issue, where the Commission's first effort was not successful. Therefore, I asked Admiral Barnett to lead the effort of taking a fresh and critical look at all options to achieve the goal of deploying a nationwide interoperable public safety broadband wireless network as soon as possible, including the role that the D Block should have with respect to public safety.

I believe they have done so. The recommendations in the Broadband Plan will lay out a course to will achieve our national public safety goal -- a goal that is long overdue.

The Plan that the team has developed is the best and shortest path to a nationwide interoperable broadband network for public safety. The Plan:

- Ensures that broadband wireless communications for public safety will be fully interoperable across all geographies and jurisdictions.
- Ensures nationwide coverage.
- Provides for funding for the construction, operation and evolution of the public safety network.
- Provides for reserve capacity and needed redundancy and reliability through roaming and priority access on commercial broadband networks.
- Ensures that public safety will have available to it cutting-edge technology, including handsets, at consumer electronic prices.

How does the Plan do it?

First, one of the essential recommendations in the public safety portion of the Plan is for the creation of an Emergency Response Interoperability Center (ERIC) at the FCC to establish a technical framework that will guarantee nationwide interoperability from the start.

Second, to ensure that we have nationwide coverage and the public safety network is redundant and resilient, there is a need for a significant funding commitment both initially and over time.

The Plan will recommend that Congress consider significant public funding -- $12-16 billion over 10 years -- for the creation of an approximately $6 billion federal grant program to help support network construction and additional funding for the operation and evolution of the broadband network.

This is important. We have gone too long with little progress to show for it.

The private sector simply is not going to build a nationwide, state-of-the-art, interoperable broadband network for public safety on its own dime.

Local municipalities and states can certainly contribute some amount to sustaining any network that is built.

But the bottom line is that if we want to deliver on what our first responders need to protect our communities and loved ones, public money will need to be put toward tackling this national priority.

It is in this context that the Broadband team is recommending that we move forward with a D Block auction.

And in order to ensure sufficient reserve capacity for the network, as well as redundancy and resiliency, the Plan envisions that public safety will be able to access not just the D Block spectrum, but the entire 700 MHz band through roaming and priority access arrangements.

Rather than solely focusing on just the D-Block, through the Plan, public safety isn't limited to 10 or even 20 megahertz of spectrum, but could have access to as much as 80 megahertz under these arrangements.

Fourth, we must ensure that the public safety community has access to a competitive environment to ensure the deployment of their network. To that end, our approach does not limit the public safety community to one potential partner. Instead, public safety can select any commercial operator it determines it is appropriate or, if it prefers, a systems integrator to partner with.

Finally, we recognize that in the long run, we will need to identify additional spectrum for broadband as demand increases. The Broadband Plan therefore proposes a medium and long-term strategy to obtain additional spectrum resources for broadband use.

I recognize that public safety users and first responders, like commercial users, may need additional broadband capacity over time – particularly in major markets -- and the Plan anticipates this. While that does not include a recommendation of reallocating the D Block at this time, I am committed to identifying additional spectrum resources for public safety broadband as the need for broadband grows over time.

It is critical that we get these policies right for the country. This is why the team has dedicated so much time and so many resources to carefully evaluating the network requirements for first responders. In this process, the team received valuable input from many different sectors, including, of course, particularly from the public safety community, our federal, state, tribal and local partners, the communications industry and the public.