

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. Thank you APCO for having me join you today. It is always a privilege to be able to speak to you because the communications work you do is so important. You represent the gateway to public safety. Before any police radio crackles, fire engine blares, or ambulance races—there is a call to 911. You are where it all starts.

Today I want to talk a little bit about beginnings. I want to start with how 911 began. Then I want to talk about where 911 stands now, about what comes next, or next generation 911, and the step we can take right now to speed its arrival.

As you might know, 911 starts in Alabama. Specifically, Haleyville, Alabama. Haleyville is a city tucked in the northwest corner of the state, in Winston County. To get there you can head north from Tuscaloosa for about an hour and a half or you can head west from Birmingham and shave a few minutes off that traveling time.

No one would mistake Haleyville for a major metropolis. Today, it has a little over 4000 residents and about 1800 households. It has an award-winning high school band and a brand new city hall. Right now Haleyville is noteworthy because it is the only place in Winston County that allows the sale of alcohol. So if you visit, you can get a drink.

But Haleyville deserves a place in the history books. Because it was in this little town on February 16, 1968—48 years ago—that the first 911 call took place. Rankin Fite, a state legislator in Alabama, made that first call—and made public safety history.

I think the best part of this first call is actually the paperwork. There is a typewritten work order carefully itemizing the steps the technicians in Alabama would need to take to make 911 the emergency number in Haleyville. If you read it, you will marvel at the network detail and the physical tasks necessary to install the system. But my favorite part of this work order is an unassuming scribble in the corner, where the President of the Alabama Telephone Company thanked the plant manager for his efforts making 911 come to life. His scrawl simply says “Bob: You did good.”

Did good, indeed. Because what happened in the wake of this Haleyville effort is significant. A week later—on the other side of the country—Nome, Alaska announced they too had implemented 911 service. And slowly but surely, the service reached communities across the country. In fact, by the end of the last century, 93 percent of the population was covered by some form of 911 service. Congress made a nod to the local work that brought this about when just before the turn of the millennium it pronounced 911 the national emergency number in the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act.

So now that we’ve covered the start, let’s speed to the present.

Today 911 has never been more popular—or more challenged.

There are roughly 240 million calls a year that are made to 911. More than 70 percent of them now come from wireless phones—which is an extraordinary shift in our calling culture. All of these calls are answered by emergency personnel in more than 6000 public safety answering points across the country.

I've had the privilege of visiting nearly two dozen of these public safety answering points—in California, Colorado, Alaska, Arkansas, Nevada, New Jersey, Virginia, Vermont and a whole lot of places in between. Some are big and vast, with gleaming new equipment, flat screens glowing on the desks and walls, and immaculate training facilities. Others are tiny—a single table in a quiet corner at the police station where the lighting is dim to ensure focus. But no matter the location, or size of the center, some things are constant. Emergency operators always amaze. When crises mount, they answer those calls with steely calm and help ensure that help is on the way.

These operators are everyday heroes. They keep us safe. They save lives. But by and large they are working with communications infrastructure that has not kept pace with new technology. That's because our nation's emergency number system relies on circuit-switched technology that has more in common with Haleyville history than the new networks of the digital age. We need to modernize this system nationwide—and we need to make it a national priority.

To be clear, a lot of steps have been taken to update this infrastructure. In the last two years, we have put in place a framework for texting to 911 and have adopted rules to strengthen wireless location accuracy requirements.

But there is more work to do. Our nation's communications systems are leaving the circuit-switched world and we can't allow the 911 system to fall further behind. We need next generation 911.

Next generation 911 will link call centers to Internet Protocol networks that will support voice, text, data, and video communications. For those who call in an emergency, it will mean the opportunity to offer real-time video from an accident. It will mean the ability to provide first responders with instantaneous pictures of a fleeing suspect or emergency incident. For those who take in calls in an emergency, all of this data can expedite and inform public safety efforts, dramatically improving emergency response. On top of that, there will be new opportunities for redundancy and resiliency, which will help operators do their job—and keep us safe.

But you've heard all that before. The hard part is figuring out how to get there.

The obstacles are real. Take funding. Roughly \$2.5 billion is collected each year by local or state jurisdictions. While this effort is not at the national level, as a result of the New and Emerging Technology 911 Improvement Act, the Commission reports annually on the collection of these funds. So we know that states are diverting some of this funding for other purposes. In fact, in the last year for which we have data, eight states transferred funds collected

for 911 to other purposes—including uses that have nothing to do with public safety. Stripping our 911 system of funding has a cost—and it's corrosive over time.

Or take jurisdiction. Federal authority over 911 is limited and with 6000 public safety answering points nationwide, we have a system that is vast—and vastly different in different parts of the country. There are 375 call centers in Mississippi but only 12 in Nevada. Yet both states have populations of just under 3 million. In other words, we have very different ways of managing emergency calling in different parts of the country. It makes a uniform effort hard.

In addition, we have technical challenges migrating from legacy systems to new Internet Protocol infrastructure. Compounding the difficulty, legacy systems will need to remain fully functional during the transition, increasing both cost and complexity.

So how do we get from here to there? How do we take what was started in Haleyville and bring it full-stop into the age of Internet Protocol? How do we bring the potential and opportunity of next generation 911 nationwide?

I believe the legislative long game deserves attention. It can clearly help us overcome some of the obstacles I just mentioned. But the here and now matters, too. Because I think with such a big task you have to start somewhere.

This is especially true because we have a tool. Tucked into the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 is a way to kick-start 911 modernization. This law, as you may know, authorized a series of spectrum auctions. The proceeds from these auctions are dedicated to some initiatives that get a lot of attention, like establishing the First Responders Network Authority, assisting the relocation of broadcasters in the 600 MHz band, and reducing the deficit. But there is one program these spectrum auctions fund that has not yet gotten the glory it deserves—a program for next generation 911.

Section 6503 puts permanently in place the joint 911 Implementation Coordination Office that is run by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Even better it authorizes a \$115 million matching grant program to update 911.

It is time to get this program up and running. It is the best near-term resource we have to get going on next generation 911. Plus, we are overdue. The law charges the coordination office with putting in place criteria for grants 120 days after enactment. By my count, that criteria is now more than 1400 days behind schedule.

So let's get moving. While these funds are small, I think they can make a big impact if we use them wisely. In other words, let's use them as next generation 911 models that demonstrate proof of concept in both urban and rural areas.

I have three quick thoughts about how we do this—and the framework for this program we need if we want to build a blueprint for next generation 911 nationwide.

First, we need a common definition of next generation 911. We need to ensure that when we talk about next generation 911 in one jurisdiction it means the same thing in another jurisdiction. That is not the case today. So we need to incorporate into this program nationally-accredited standards that promote interoperability between call centers.

Second, we need to optimize. There is no doubt the funding in this program is limited. But let's use it to demonstrate how public safety answering points can fully embrace economies of scale and still honor the tradition of local control. For example, statewide and regional ESInets can help with shared core network services and dramatically improve efficiency. This kind of network coordination is essential for optimizing the opportunities of next generation 911—and for managing cybersecurity challenges.

Third, we need to think about sustainability. It is not only about migrating to next generation 911, but about ensuring it is sustainable. So the model jurisdictions that this grant program funds should demonstrate they have mechanisms in place to cover future costs, including training.

But above all, we need to get going—and get this grant program underway. 911 has a storied history and a complicated present. And we can take a step right now to ensure it has a bright future. I believe that's both possible and worth the effort—and I know your help is going to help make it happen.

Thank you.