

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AS PREPARED FOR DELIBERY
'50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST CALL MADE TO 911'
AT NENA: THE 911 ASSOCIATION '911 GOES TO WASHINGTON'
WASHINGTON, DC**

FEBRUARY 16, 2018

I want to start by taking a moment to offer my condolences to those in Parkland, Florida. After the senseless act of violence that took place two days ago at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the victims' families and friends are in terrible pain. This is a sad time for that community and for our country. But in the midst of the horror was also heroism. Assistant football coach Aaron Feis died shielding students from the shooter. And local law enforcement and other emergency first responders showed decisive courage in quickly apprehending the alleged shooter and coming to the aid of those injured or harmed. They are reminders of what Americans do for each other in moments of need.

Such moments are what bring us together today. For this is the 50th anniversary of the very first call made to 911—the first time someone called that number that we now all know so well. Thank you to NENA for hosting this celebration, and for inviting me to be a part of it. I'm honored to precede Congressman Aderholt. He happens to represent the district that's home to Kansas—that is Kansas, Alabama.

Most important, I want to thank the thousands of public safety professionals here and around the nation—the telecommunicators, first responders, engineers, technicians, and everyone who keeps our 911 system running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You make our communities safer and America stronger. I've seen that for myself. I've been to small call centers in places like Clay, West Virginia. And just this morning, I had the pleasure of touring the Office of Unified Communications here in our nation's capital. I met Director Karima Holmes and some of her dedicated staff. Thank you, Ms. Holmes, and congratulations to you and your stellar team here in Washington on receiving this year's NG9-1-1 Awareness Award.

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Ken Sunseri, the Mayor of Haleyville, Alabama, is here with us today. He's here for a good reason. Fifty years ago today, the first 911 call was made from the Haleyville City Hall to the city's police station.

Why did this call take place in rural northwest Alabama? Well, an executive from the Alabama Telephone Company had read that AT&T planned to place the first 911 call in New York City, and decided that 'Bama could beat the Big Apple to the punch.

Appropriately, the phone used to make the call was a red telephone, which Haleyville has enshrined in its local 911 museum.

Although the Haleyville 911 call was ceremonial and not an actual emergency call, it was a watershed moment in our history.

It was the first step toward giving the public a quick and simple way to call for help. And it was the first step away from requiring Americans to be familiar with a variety of local emergency numbers used in different communities.

I've come to appreciate 911 all the more since traveling abroad. During a visit to India a few years ago, for instance, I learned that there were multiple three- and four-digit numbers used for emergency calling. There was a different number depending on who you were—a senior citizen, a

child—and why you were calling—traffic accident, fire, and so on. It makes you appreciate how fortunate we are to have a single number, so deeply embedded in our culture.

Despite the clear benefits of a single nationwide three-digit number, not everyone was on board when 911 was launched back in 1968. Some of the reasons cited by critics at the time still have a familiar ring. (Yes, that pun was intended.)

Local governments were worried about the cost of implementing 911—who would pay for new phone systems and call-takers?

In some communities, 911 was a victim of rivalries and turf fights among public safety agencies. There were disagreements among police, fire, and other emergency agencies about which agency would answer the calls.

Some public safety officials argued that the great strength of 911—its brevity, ease-of-use, and uniformity—could be a disadvantage. They worried that 911 switchboards would be flooded with non-emergency calls that would waste time and resources needed to respond to real emergencies.

These were understandable concerns, and some still echo today. And 911 expanded slowly at first. But over time, it became the national system that those early pioneers envisioned 50 years ago.

The FCC was an early supporter of a national 911 system.

My predecessor at the time, Chairman Rosel Hyde, commended the telephone companies for working to make a single, simple three-digit emergency number available nationwide.

But the most memorable praise may have come from Commissioner Lee Loevinger. He told *The Wall Street Journal*, “9-1-1 is going to be better remembered than 007.” Despite my best efforts to top it, that still stands as the best pop-culture reference in FCC history. And despite the fact that there have been 20 Bond movies since then, Commissioner Loevinger was still right.

Fifty years later, 911 is the most recognized three-digit number we have. Calling “9-1-1” is one of the first lessons we teach our children. And people apply that lesson frequently—roughly 650,000 times daily. Those calls for help are answered in over 6,000 call centers throughout the United States.

To make those calls, Americans today use a wide range of wireless, wireline, and IP-enabled devices, most of which bear little resemblance to the red phone in the Haleyville museum.

No doubt, we have made remarkable progress over the past 50 years.

But this progress has given rise to major challenges: migrating from legacy technology to Next Generation 911; recruiting, training, and retaining 911 telecommunicators; finding adequate funding for PSAPs and ending the shameful diversion of 911 fees; and maintaining reliability of the 911 system during disasters like hurricanes.

The FCC remains dedicated to supporting the 911 community. That’s in keeping with not just five decades of tradition but also our founding statute, section 1 of which instructs the FCC to “promot[e] safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communications.” We have taken measures to make 911 more reliable, accurate, and accessible for the public, and to give public safety professionals better technology to do their jobs.

I’d like to highlight just some of the 911-related initiatives the Commission is pursuing right now.

One of the most important pieces of information to convey in a 911 call is a basic one: where are you? That question has taken on growing importance as the public increasingly relies on wireless phones to call 911. Over 70% of 911 calls now come from wireless phones, and they originate from both indoor and outdoor environments.

That's why the FCC is focusing on location accuracy. In January 2015, the FCC strengthened its existing E911 rules. It adopted location accuracy standards for wireless 911 calls indoors, and established a timetable for improvements over time. Three years later, we are seeing progress. Industry has launched the location technology test bed, with new and innovative location technologies being developed and deployed. The National Emergency Address Database is being established. And later this year, carriers will propose for our consideration a vertical measurement—a so-called “z-axis accuracy standard”—to help locate 911 calls in multi-story buildings by floor level.

More recently, we've also moved to improve 911 in enterprise-based communications systems that serve environments such as hotels, office buildings, and campuses.

As you know, I have a deep and long-standing interest in this issue. That's because of the sad story of Kari Rene Hunt, who was attacked and killed by her estranged husband in a Marshall, Texas hotel room. Her then-nine-year old daughter tried to call 911 four times, as she had been taught to do. But her calls for help never went through because the hotel's phone system required guests to dial “9” before calling 911.

Her father, Hank Hunt, made this his personal cause. Soon after her death, Hank started a petition to change phone systems to allow direct access to 911. A few weeks later, I spoke to him. A month later, I started an initiative to encourage hotels to enable direct access. A year later, Hank and I stood side by side in Marshall and reported on our progress. And ever since, we've advocated for federal legislation on this issue—known as Kari's Law—to be passed by Congress.

How gratifying it is that last week, on what would have been Kari's 36th birthday, Congress did in fact pass Kari's Law. How wonderful it is that less than an hour ago, Hank and I stood together in the Oval Office and watched the President of the United States sign this bill. Thank you to everyone here who worked to make this happen. And most important, thanks to Hank. I've had the privilege of working with him for almost five years to get to this point. I'm so impressed with his dedication. And one part of his legacy will be ensuring that Kari didn't die in vain.

But when it comes to enterprise-based 911 calls, we need to do more. This past September, the FCC began to examine what steps need to be taken so that a 911 call in these buildings will be routed to the correct PSAP and the PSAP will receive accurate location information, ideally including the caller's building address, floor, level, and room number.

Another issue that's been front-and-center during my Chairmanship has been 911 resiliency during major disasters. Throughout the 2017 hurricane season, we saw the best of the 911 system in action. And we also saw the challenges faced by PSAPs and first responders when a large-scale disaster strikes. I still vividly remember visiting with first responders and emergency managers in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. We're seeking public input to learn how we can improve communications availability and reliability, including 911, during disasters and restoration afterwards.

One more issue on our public safety agenda is the transition to Next Generation 911. The 911 system will be increasingly at risk the longer it relies on outdated legacy technology. NG911 networks can support greater resiliency, redundancy, and reliability than legacy 911 networks. NG911 will also provide the public and PSAPs with improved communications capabilities, including text, data, and video as well as more reliable voice communications. This will give first responders more complete information about emergencies before they arrive on the scene and will lead to faster and more effective response.

We also need to think about how to integrate NG911 with other key elements of the emergency communications ecosystem, including FirstNet and emergency alerts and warnings. Last fall, I visited 911 centers in Noblesville, Indiana, Harrisburg, Illinois, and Wichita, Kansas, and was impressed by the work those communities are doing around these issues.

Now, underlying almost all of these issues is the question of resources. And unfortunately, some of the resources that should go to 911 don't. For too long, the FCC has been too quiet on the problem of 911 fees being diverted by state governments for purposes completely unrelated to 911. This has been going on for more than a decade, so this is not a new problem. For the past nine years, the FCC has put out a report quantifying the problem. The latest iteration found that in 2016, five states—Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and West Virginia—diverted \$129 million. (And we were able to find that a sixth state, New York, engaged in fee diversion even though it didn't bother responding to our request for information.) This likely understates the problem, since seven other states didn't submit data. The persistence of this problem tells us that transparency isn't enough to halt this practice of theft from the public safety community. I stand ready to work with my colleagues and Congress to make sure that 911 fees go toward strengthening the 911 system we all rely on.

In sum, this birthday party for 911 is well-deserved, and we should all take pride in its success. But even as we blow out the candles on the cake, we need to think about how we can make the next 50 years of 911 even better.

We've got work to do. Looking across this room, we have the will and the talent to do it. So let's enjoy this moment. And then, let's get to work.