

Statement of Senator John McCain
Full Committee Hearing on Public Safety Interoperable Communications
February 8, 2006

I am pleased that the Committee is focusing on this very important issue. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there may be no more important issue facing this committee than the issue of public safety interoperable communications.

The 9/11 Commission's Final Report states that: "Command and control decisions were affected by the lack of knowledge of what was happening 30, 60, 90, and 100 floors above." To remedy this problem, the 9/11 Commission recommended the "expedited and increased assignment of radio spectrum to public safety entities." Congress did so *belatedly* last year when it finally set the date of February 17, 2009, for the availability of 24 MHz of spectrum to public safety after years of wrangling with the National Association of Broadcasters.

However, public safety has long stated that 24 MHz is not enough to remedy this crisis. On September 11, 1996, 5 years to the day *before* the 9/11 terrorist attack, the Public Safety Wireless Advisory Committee released its final report, which stated that "Over the next 15 years, **as much as an additional 70 MHz of spectrum** will be required to satisfy the mobile communication needs of the public safety community. The currently allocated public safety spectrum is insufficient to meet current voice and data needs, will not permit deployment of needed advanced data and video systems, does not provide adequate interoperability channels, and will not meet future needs under projected population growth and demographic changes." If only we had listened to the public safety community in 1996, we may not have had the lapses in command and control communications during September 11, 2001.

Over 10 years later, public safety is still grappling with inadequate spectrum and radio communication systems that do not communicate with one another. And Congress sits here debating the issue.

That is why last week I announced plans to introduce legislation to provide more spectrum to public safety for an interoperable national broadband network. The network, which would be created by providing an additional 30 MHz of radio spectrum in the upper 700 MHz band to public safety, would allow first responders seamless nationwide roaming capability and real time transmission of data. I invite any member of this Committee to join me in drafting this legislation and helping move it through the legislative process swiftly.

I fought for many years to clear the 700 MHz spectrum for first responders and I do not intend to allow the February 2009 date to be delayed, contrary to media reports. Additionally, I have long believed in a competitive marketplace for spectrum, and I do not intend to change my views now. Therefore, I ask that the wireless industry, the public safety community and others review the legislation when it is introduced and start a dialog with each other and legislators so we can work together to remedy our nation's interoperable dilemma that has deadly consequences.

The federal government has made strides in developing a comprehensive, interoperable emergency communications plan, establishing equipment standards, funding the purchase of emergency and interoperable communications equipment, and belatedly making additional radio spectrum available. But none of this is enough. We must do more. We are at a watershed moment where we can provide more of the 700 MHz spectrum to solve our national public safety communications crisis and greatly enhance our emergency preparedness. If we do not act now, this valuable spectrum will be auctioned off and this opportunity will be lost forever.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to move legislation through the Committee and I thank the Chairman for holding this important hearing today.