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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce A National Interoperable Broadband Network for Public Safety Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet September 24, 2009

I want to thank Chairman Boucher for holding this hearing and thank all of our witnesses for agreeing to come and share their knowledge and ideas on how to achieve nationwide public safety interoperability.

This is unfinished business from 9/11 and Katrina. These matters are urgent.

Time is of the essence. As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioners recognized at our hearing last week, resolution of this issue needs immediate attention. And while the FCC will certainly play a leading role, a number of these proposals, if pursued, would require additional legislative action by Congress.

During the last Congress, I was supportive of the concept of a public-private partnership and I continue to believe that some form of a public-private partnership would likely offer the clearest path to constructing a nationwide, interoperable broadband network.

Of course, the details of such an arrangement matter, and in light of the failure of the D block auction, we need to revisit these details.

I am encouraged by the efforts of both the public safety community and the private sector to think creatively about building this network and am pleased to see that they have come up with a full range of ideas, which we will learn more about today. I would particularly like to thank Chief Bratton of the Los Angeles Police Department for appearing.

As we listen to these proposals, I have three basic principles in mind that any plan should address:

First, the network or networks must be built and built quickly;

Second, there must be a clear plan to ensure that deployment reaches all areas of the country, including hard to reach rural areas and underfunded municipalities;

Third, the plan should try to avoid distorting or disrupting the commercial wireless marketplace by giving an unfair advantage to certain carriers over others.

Chairman Boucher, I appreciate your holding this hearing to provide all of us an opportunity to learn more about this critical matter. To our witnesses, thank you for your participation. I look forward to hearing your testimony.