



BRIAN SCHAEFFER
FIRE CHIEF

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Mr. Postman and Ms. Westall,

I received a message from Tara Lee indicating that Washington State has decided to create a separate RFP for a high-speed, wireless broadband data network dedicated to public safety instead of opting-in and cooperating with the Nation's FirstNet Program. To say that I am disappointed with the decision is an understatement, especially after so many of us in the first responder community have been working diligently to secure Band 14, educate legislators relentlessly, and secure funding and support so that our personnel and communities can have a higher level of safety.

I never thought that this project was part of a political agenda or an unrealistic goal. I honestly believe that government does have the ability to utilize technology that can communicate across jurisdictional boundaries of any magnitude. We owe that capability to our community, and it must be a part of something that has no respect for any jurisdictional line—it has to be National.

I have been the incident commander and on the command staff on a number of large incidents involving Federal, State, and local assets and have needed the technology—as recently as a couple of weeks ago at the Freeman School shooting. At that incident, we were forced to wait for satellite communications due to the overwhelmed networks and an immediate loss of data capability. At the incident we had incoming and on-scene resources with critical communication needs from the ATF, FBI, State Patrol, Border Patrol, and nearly every other public safety agency in our region—all with the immediate need to communicate. Unfortunately, we could not. Our land mobile radio service worked wonderfully for the local resources that had the ability to use them (local fire, EMS, and law), but all of the incoming non-Spokane County resources rely on an overwhelmed cell phone network. FirstNet should have been available to the responders in this case, and so many others this summer.

I have traveled our State serving in a number of different committees praising the work of FirstNet and promising the elected officials and members of first response agencies that a solution to everyone's challenges is near. After our fire season, the flooding in Texas, hurricanes on the East Coast and myriad of other disasters it is implausible that we are delaying the opt-in process. At this stage in the process we should not be attempting to re-invent the wheel or to add a redundant system that would be limited to two states, or that would require more dollars to patch or connect into a national system.

My overall purpose in writing is to say that I am disappointed in the process and additional delays. Our first responders look to us for leadership, and I feel that we have seriously let them down with this outcome.

Sincerely,

Brian Schaeffer
Fire Chief