

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 14, 2006

The Honorable Joshua Bolton
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Carlos Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Gentlemen,

Section 3006 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-171) authorizes and appropriates not to exceed \$1,000,000,000 to facilitate interoperable communications by public safety agencies. The provision requires the National Telecommunications and Information Administration within the Commerce Department to operate a grant program to assist public safety agencies in acquiring, deploying, or training for the use of interoperable communications systems. It should be clear from the specific text of the law and the legislative history that grants for this program can be used for purposes other than purchase of new 700 MHz communications radios. Specifically, the Administration should seriously consider grant proposals to purchase and deploy solutions that make all public safety radios and other communications devices interoperable, provided that such solutions interoperate with future 700 MHz systems.

Advances in technology, specifically the utilization of Internet Protocol (IP) convergence technology, have made it possible for all existing public safety radios to interoperate in multiple spectrum bands. Several communication service providers currently offer functional technologies that eliminate the need to prematurely replace most public safety communications equipment in order to achieve interoperability. By converting analog communications to IP, emergency personnel operating on disparate systems will be able to communicate within a locality or with surrounding state, local, tribal, or national emergency communications officials. Whether stationary or ad hoc, which can allow for equipment using dissimilar waveforms to interoperate automatically, meshed IP networks can increase reliability during emergency situations by being able to easily migrate or relocate command and control communications to a protected location as needed. In sum, the dynamic gains in efficiency and functionality provided by these technologies would significantly enhance public safety.

The use of IP networks is also sound fiscal policy. Estimates for the cost of purchasing new communications radios for use in the 700 MHz band have run in the tens of billions of dollar range. Alternatively, estimates for an IP-based network are a fraction of this cost. Given that the Deficit Reduction Act represents a one-time funding source as it is

reliant on analog television spectrum auction proceeds, we must allocate available resources on solutions that will bring the greatest level of interoperability to public safety systems, as quickly as possible.

We respectfully request that the Administration strongly consider all opportunities to take advantage of the benefits of IP networks and the flexibility contained in the statute when implementing this program.

Sincerely,

John E. Summer
Conrad Burns
Joni deMint

George Allen
Bill Nelson
Jim Talent