



The Daily Dish

FirstNet Advances to the Senate

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As [noted](#) by Eakinomics earlier this year, in 2012 Congress created FirstNet, a public-private partnership to implement the 9/11 Commission's recommendation for a dedicated first-responders communication network. FirstNet's authorization expires in February of next year, so one of Congress' tasks this year is to reauthorize the entity.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories have voluntarily opted into the program. FirstNet uses a band of spectrum known as Band 14, which can be cleared and dedicated to emergency use as needed. (AT&T has access to Band 14 at other times.) The network operates under government supervision and there are funded plans to continue to upgrade it. In light of this, it is hardly surprising that the House passed FirstNet reauthorization with no real opposition (i.e., on the "[suspension calendar](#)" by voice vote).

The next step is up to the Senate, which faces only one real issue: Should the governance structure of FirstNet be changed? One possibility is a "clean" reauthorization. The House, however, gives the Commerce Department more of a role in oversight over the FirstNet governing authority. As reported by [Politico](#):

Skeptics of the House's governance changes include the Fraternal Order of Police, which argues FirstNet is working well, as well as some past FirstNet officials worried about paring back the independent status of the network's governing body. That FirstNet Authority has for many years operated as its own entity within the Commerce Department, largely free of administration control.

"It's clear that people don't understand the full picture here and understand what's behind the curtain," Sue Swenson, a former FirstNet board chair who objects to the House approach, told POLITICO on Monday. "Public safety really fought for that independence."

Would more Commerce involvement be a detriment by slowing decision-making? It is hard to say, but if a problem emerged Congress could easily restore its original status. At present, a timely reauthorization seems a higher priority than this level of detail on the governance of FirstNet.