



# U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

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SENATOR TED STEVENS

PRESS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus Releases Legislative Agenda for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress *Sen. Stevens Recently Named As a Caucus Co-Chair*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senator Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), Representative Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.), and Representative John Shimkus (R-Ill.), the co-chairs of the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus, have released a legislative agenda for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The agenda includes ambitious efforts to provide federal funding for public safety access points (PSAPs), ensuring that 9-1-1 systems keep pace with rapid changes in communications technology, and establishing a national 9-1-1 Education Month and a national appreciation day for first responders. In addition, the 9-1-1 Caucus will seek to ensure that the 9-1-1 system is considered an essential part of the nation's homeland security priorities and will address some of the unique challenges deaf and hard of hearing citizens face when calling 9-1-1.

"The E9-1-1 Caucus has established an ambitious agenda for the 110th Congress because there is so much that needs to be done to make sure those who need help have the 9-1-1 system they need and deserve," said Senator Clinton.

**"Technological advances now allow 9-1-1 calls to provide more information, and save more lives," said Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska). "But more work remains to be done so that all types of voice services offer 9-1-1. We must ensure that the public safety community across the country has the technology it needs to receive caller location or other information. Working together on a bipartisan basis through the 9-1-1 caucus, we can continue to provide the necessary resources and coordination to enhance 9-1-1 services for everyone."**

"This is the most comprehensive 9-1-1 agenda ever put before Congress. We're going to fight hard to succeed in passing it," said Representative Eshoo.

Representative Shimkus said, "Citizens and first responders deserve the best 9-1-1 system possible and this agenda will help advance 9-1-1 in keeping pace with technology changes."

### **Background – Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus**

Since the creation of the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 9-1-1 issues have increased in visibility at the federal level. Although public safety access points remain largely entities that are funded and operated under state or local leadership, the increasingly national nature of communications systems requires Federal guidance. Also, the growing consciousness about emergency communications as a vital aspect of our

homeland security signify the increasing need for federal leadership in 9-1-1 and all forms of emergency communications.

The enactment of the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-81) and the ENHANCE 911 Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-494) demonstrate growing Congressional involvement in 9-1-1 issues. Also, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has asserted 9-1-1 access mandates on wireless and VoIP services. Finally, the U.S. Department of Transportation has launched an initiative to create a national prototype of the “next generation” 9-1-1 system. More work remains to be done.

The first order of 9-1-1 business for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress is to secure immediate funding for ENHANCE 911 grants and the Joint Program Office to administer these grants.

It is also important to address the reauthorization of the ENHANCE 911 Act of 2004 to ensure a national policy addressing 9-1-1 calling.

The third item of pressing importance is to provide Congressional direction to 9-1-1 calling done over Internet Protocol voice services. Consumers who take advantage of new technologies should be able to do so in a way that does not compromise their safety.

In addition, the Caucus Co-Chairs believe raising the level of awareness and education is important and thus proposes a 9-1-1 Education Month and a First Responder Appreciation day which will highlight the important role that 9-1-1 plays in everyday life.

### **CONGRESSIONAL E9-1-1 CAUCUS – LEGISLATIVE AGENDA – 110<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS:**

**Funding for ENHANCE 9-1-1 Act Grants** - Obtaining funding for the ENHANCE 911 Act grant program is a top priority to improve the nation’s E9-1-1 readiness level and ensure nationwide coverage. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171) did include a provision that would require \$43.5 million in proceeds from the spectrum auction of the 700 MHz band – set to occur before the end of 2008 – be allocated to fund ENHANCE 911 Act grants. The sooner these funds are made available to the 911 community the sooner they will begin to save lives. This and other funding mechanisms should be explored. Already, the Senate Commerce Committee has reported S. 93, the 9-1-1 Modernization Act which would allow NTIA to access the \$43.5 million in funds that were authorized under P.L. 109-171. This measure is pending as an amendment to the 9/11 Commission Report implementation legislation, S. 4, under consideration in the U.S. Senate.

**The authorization of the ENHANCE 9-1-1 Act** is set to expire in 2008. One of the pressing agenda items for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress with respect to E9-1-1 is to extend the authorization of this Act. The current Act established a joint program office as well as created a new grant program to fund implementation of Phase I and Phase II wireless E9-1-1 technologies. With funding, this ENHANCE 911 Act serves to ensure that our nation has a comprehensive plan for achieving an up-to-date 9-1-1 system that leverages technology to save lives.

**VoIP and 9-1-1** - Legislation was passed by the House and reported by the Senate Commerce Committee last year that addressed portions of the 9-1-1 issues related to VoIP services. Through this process, consensus emerged between industry and public safety on key provisions. It is incumbent that the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress continues this effort and address outstanding policy issues. The most urgent need with respect to implementing 9-1-1 in all VoIP systems is the liability protection provision. This provision is broadly supported by public safety and industry and does not appear to generate any opposition.

In addition, the provision requiring the Joint Program Office established under the ENHANCE 911 Act to create a migration plan to an IP-based 9-1-1 system enjoys broad support and appears to be non-controversial.

**National 9-1-1 Education Month** - Educating our children, the elderly, and the general public about how to use, and the appropriate use of 9-1-1 as the emergency call number, is one of the best investments that could be made to save lives. Currently, there is no national effort to ensure that 9-1-1 education is a priority. Congressional designation of a National 9-1-1 Education Month could help encourage local schools, PSAPs, and first responders to reach out to every elementary classroom in the country to educate children about 9-1-1. Congress should designate a National 9-1-1 Education Month as a means to foster comprehensive education about 9-1-1 throughout the country.

**First Responder Appreciation Day** - The men and women whose jobs are to stand ready to respond to an emergency – big or small – do not get the recognition they deserve. Congress should establish a day in which all Americans can pay tribute to these brave men and women for their dedication and service.

**Coordination with other Grant Programs** - To ensure that 911 capability continues to receive the priority it deserves, Congress should review various funding sources to see if more 9-1-1 funding is needed or where 9-1-1 capability might be included as part of grant criteria for communications system funding.

**Access to E9-1-1 in Office Buildings** - One often over-looked area where E9-1-1 is not available is on MLTS or PBX systems like those frequently employed in office buildings. Many people who work for large organizations that have their phone systems set up on MLTS do not have E9-1-1 capability, including some federal agencies. As the Caucus supports migration to next generation E9-1-1 platforms it must ensure that the technical capabilities and requirements do not overlook these types of environments.

**9-1-1 and Homeland Security** -The 9-1-1 system plays a vital role in homeland security events. It is imperative that the 9-1-1 system continue to work in the face of disasters. The nation's federal homeland security policy should take into consideration the critical role of 9-1-1. Issues of redundancy and interoperability also apply to 9-1-1.

**Advancing Access to 9-1-1 for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing** - The deaf and hard of hearing community stand to greatly benefit from a next generation 9-1-1 system capable of receiving text and video. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires users of teletypewriter (TTY) devices to be able to access the 9-1-1 system like any other citizen. However, a growing number of deaf individuals are replacing their TTYs and using mainstream text communications devices, IP-Relay Services and Video Relay Services (VRS). VRS services allow the consumer to communicate with others using American Sign Language (ASL) which is translated by an interpreter over a video link. These text and video based technologies are very popular among deaf users, but they are not currently able to connect directly to 9-1-1 due to limitations in the current 9-1-1 system. As technically feasible solutions are identified, regulations ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing individuals can be efficiently connected to 9-1-1 must be immediately implemented.

***About the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus*** - Established in 2002, the Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus seeks to raise public awareness and educate policy makers on the importance of the nation's 9-1-1 system and to advance the availability of E9-1-1 services throughout the county. The Caucus works closely with the public safety community, industry and citizens to ensure that the best technology is available for emergency communications and that the call centers and emergency networks are adequately funded.

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