Kansas Conference Reports

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Kansas State Firefighters Association Conference, Manhattan, KS (April 26-29, 2017)

This was the 129th annual convention for this organization that represents fire departments across the state of Kansas. The Kansas fire service is mostly volunteer, with a few career departments in the larger cities. The KSFA represents both career and volunteer departments.

Kansas State Firefighters Association

Spoke to a several Board members. My primary host was Steve Hirsch, KSFA Secretary/Treasurer and NVFC 1st VP. They are very aware of FirstNet, but the reaction was uniformly, 'yeah…we need to get involved with that'. They are not aware of any effort to opt out and the only 'problem' is that there are some areas of the state that claim that AT&T has zero footprint.

Kansas Association of Fire Chiefs

Spoke at length with Chief Brad Smith who is President of the KAFC. Brad said they are actively engaged on the issue and have an active campaign underway to have individual chiefs, county EM folks, and County electeds write letters of support for opt-in directly to the Governor. I spoke with him before he made his presentation to the convention and he led off with FirstNet, made a good presentation on the current status and the pros and cons of opt-in versus opt-out. All seems positive and supportive.

Kansas Office of Emergency Communications

Most interesting discussion was with Craig Divoll who is the Public Safety Broadband Outreach Coordinator with the KOEC which is within the Adjutant Generals office. A couple of take-aways:

- They are preparing to issue a Request for Interest (not proposals). Now that they have a rough idea about timing of the state plans arriving from FirstNet, they want to have some sense if anyone else is interested in building out the state system. In particular, they are interested in how and when service will be extended to the areas outside the metro areas of the state.
- He said that there is a group of 16 or so Western states that are meeting by teleconference every other Monday to discuss FirstNet. He said that most of them are planning to also release RFIs in the next few weeks…..and they have been collaborating with each other on both the content of the RFIs as well as the evaluation matrix that they will use as they review the responses they receive. They are going to be sharing info with each other on pricing, timelines, etc. and they will be very sensitive to any perceived favoritism or special deals for one state over another.
- From a fiscal perspective, Kansas has no money to build out a system on their own, but they've been told that some other providers might do it for them at little or no cost and give them more local control than FirstNet.
- There seemed a general suspicion about FirstNet (not AT&T) as a big federal agency/bureaucracy. One of his questions was, "What purpose will FirstNet serve once the system is built out? They can just be eliminated, right? And turn everything over to the states to operate?"