



Is Your FirstNet Expert Really an Expert?

POSTED BY: EDITORIAL STAFF MARCH 24, 2019

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Once again we have an article in another publication claiming to differentiate between “fact” and “fiction” with an individual portraying to be a FirstNet expert and claiming that they understand what the differences are between FirstNet and Verizon’s “me too” public safety offering. In this recent article this “expert” either clearly demonstrated their lack of understanding of FirstNet or they are intentionally trying to support Verizon by providing inaccurate information with the goal of muddying the waters, creating confusion with public safety.

One point that this article was trying to make is that there is nothing special about FirstNet’s Band 14 and that since Verizon has Band 13 they are the same since they are both in the 700 MHz band. They are not. Yes, they share many of the same characteristics because they are in the same band, but there are two very distinct elements that make the D Block unique which Verizon cannot replicate. First, Public Safety owns Band 14 by Congressional action assigning it for public safety use which is managed by the FirstNet Authority on behalf of public safety. Verizon owns Band 13 and it is clearly nothing more than commercial spectrum. What is key here is that there is significant oversight on how the D Block spectrum is used. It is dedicated to public safety and can be used on a secondary basis to help pay for the FirstNet network.

Another element that is missing is “where is Verizon building out Band 13? Is it being deployed with public safety in mind or is it just another part of their spectrum holdings being deployed without concern for public safety needs?”

The second key issue is that Band 14 is authorized for High Power User Equipment known as HPUE. Band 13 is not licensed for this feature. (For more information go to <https://urgentcomm.com/2019/03/18/high-power-user-equipment-hpue-can-help-bridge->

band-14-coverage-gaps-in-rural-in-building-locations/) Verizon does not have the ability to provide key beneficial features to public safety that come with HPUE because they can't do it. Both points are significant. The fact that this "expert" disregarded these points indicates he either doesn't realize their importance or he has decided to omit their significance.

The other point this "expert" tried to make is that Verizon's "private core" for public safety is the same as the FirstNet core. This is categorically incorrect. It may have similar functions, but they are not the same and the differences are critical to public safety. The FirstNet core is dedicated to public safety and built for public safety. Only primary public safety users and extended primary are allowed on this core. This FirstNet dedicated core is not shared with commercial users. When you have a partitioned core like what Verizon has done, you are sharing that computer power and that physical resource. It is not unlike having someone else use your home Wi-Fi. The more users on the network, the slower it gets. You wouldn't share your home Wi-Fi with the public. Why would public safety want to share vital care services with the public? That is exactly what Verizon is doing. Also, would you want commercial users polluting your network with their information and jeopardizing your security? You wouldn't and Verizon clearly states in their FCC filing (Nov 9th, 2012 Verizon response to Docket No. 12092850-2505-01) that public safety shouldn't do it. Let me quote a specific statement in Verizon's filing. They say that FirstNet "should not share core network components, i.e., the IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS) and Evolved Packet Core (EPC), as doing so **would undermine its ability to provide secure, high priority communications for first responders.**" I find it disingenuous that Verizon now tries to tell public safety that sharing core is okay when their own public record states otherwise.

This expert is clearly wrong. He may be an expert in certain aspects of technology, but definitely not an expert in FirstNet and public safety communications. Everyone should take note that the same points this "expert" is making are the same talking points Verizon has been using for the last six months. Anyone who has been following this subject for several years can easily see this is nothing more than a Verizon prompted article. And let me make one thing clear. I am not contending to be unbiased. I am very biased in support of public safety and FirstNet. As a former first responder and one of the handful of public safety leaders who fought for the legislation, I am offended by the fact that Verizon is intentionally trying to confuse public safety and the facts around FirstNet.

FirstNet is about public safety and meeting public safety needs. FirstNet is not just about a network. It is about public policy, governance and providing a mechanism for public safety to have a voice in public safety broadband. If Congress had not created FirstNet at our request, public safety would still be getting average service as just another wireless user. If it hadn't been for AT&T stepping up to take the risk to commit to a 25-year contract, Verizon would be treating public safety as just another commercial user. In fact

Verizon is treating public safety as just another user by doing nothing more than sharing commercial services and labeling it as public safety.

Let's not ever forget Verizon had their chance and they walked away from public safety. The lame argument stated in this article about Verizon not bidding because they didn't need 700 MHz spectrum is a smoke screen. After months of being criticized for not bidding, they came up with this marketing pitch that they didn't need the spectrum. Verizon didn't want to be locked into a 25-year commitment, they didn't want to build dedicated resources, they didn't want to take the risk and now they are coming up with fancy dialog to try and hold onto public safety customers. The ONLY reason they offer commercial service labeled as public safety like services today is to keep from losing customers. Let's also not forget they have abandoned the public safety 911 ESI market and left many PSAPs stranded. How's that for public safety dedication?

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