

**Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space**  
**Hearing on a Proposed “NET Guard”**  
**Sen. Ron Wyden, Chair – Suggested Remarks**

Today the Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space of the Senate Commerce Committee begins a series of hearings to examine technology and science issues stemming from the events of September 11, 2001.

Just as John F. Kennedy gave America’s youth a forum for public service, I believe now is the moment the government should throw open its doors to the ideas, the creativity and the energy of our best scientists and technology experts willing to fight the terrorist threat. It’s time to mobilize a generation raised on information technologies to respond to terrorism, and even to use the latest innovations – like biometrics – to help prevent acts like those of September 11.

The Subcommittee’s first hearing will focus on information technology. When terrorists struck New York and the Pentagon, telecommunications and information networks were flattened by the blow. Landline and cellular communications were hit hard by an incredible spike in volume as well as strikes to key assets such as cell towers on the Trade Center and the Verizon hub near Ground Zero. Many wireless calls, including those of rescue workers, simply couldn’t get through.

As emergency workers moved in, they were also hindered by the fact that their communications systems were incompatible and simply couldn’t work together. In a hearing before this Subcommittee, a fire chief responding to the attacks of 9/11 said that at times his only means of communicating directions to firefighters on the front lines were handwritten notes delivered by runners on foot. These courageous emergency workers have told us that the communications breakdowns made their job more difficult and more dangerous.

There were also organizational challenges: the inability to track to which hospitals victims were sent; the inability to match would-be volunteers with needs; and the lack of backup systems for organizations overwhelmed with information.

A true hope for overcoming these obstacles is to tap the potential of scientists and technology experts. The government must create a clear structure to accept and implement a treasure trove of technological counsel, state-of-the-art equipment, and hands-on help. The nation’s technology leaders tell me they can contribute most effectively if they have organization and a clear chain of command. Key federal agencies say they’re willing to establish a single point of contact for tech companies and a consistent, government-wide policy for creating that necessary organization. I am determined to hold this Congress and this entire government accountable to get this job done quickly.

There are a variety of ways to tackle this. I believe the government should consider establishing the technology equivalent of the National Guard. I describe it as a National Emergency Technology Guard, or NET Guard, a cadre of volunteers with extensive technology expertise to move in at a moment’s notice – not just to fix what’s broken, but to create whatever systems are needed most. That could mean repairing and recreating compromised communications systems, setting up command centers, or setting up databases to track the missing and the injured.

There are other roles that such a volunteer force could play. This group could help establish and maintain a Strategic Technology Reserve. Companies could commit to lend their latest and best hardware and software whenever disaster strikes, with trained volunteers able to set it up and implement it in minutes. A Strategic Technology Reserve would be a virtual, as well as physical, stockpile.

This volunteer force could play a preventive role as well, offering local officials advice on how to set up their computer and communications systems to minimize vulnerability to hacking, and physical attacks. They could also assist in creating and executing emergency drills, and maintaining an ongoing database of volunteers and their scientific and technological expertise.

There are other policy issues to consider. This Subcommittee has been told that federal rules prohibit some

government agencies from accepting donations of state-of-the-art equipment – no matter how urgent the need to fight terrorism. We have learned that there are restrictions on private companies sharing information, even in a crisis. We have learned there is an urgent need for policies that encourage compatibility between emergency communications systems – to keep first responders from having to use runners when disaster strikes.

It's time to create a high-technology reserve – a talent bank that serves as a new force to confront a new threat. This can be done without creating big new bureaucracies, with an ultimately modest role for the Federal government. This Subcommittee will work on a bipartisan basis with the Administration and our colleagues in the Congress to help our scientists and technology experts marshal their ingenuity and talents to respond to terrorism.

We have a distinguished panel of witnesses here today: Joe Allbaugh from the Federal Emergency Management Agency; Dr. John Marburger, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy; Craig McCaw, a pioneer of the cellular telephone industry; Julie Coppernoll of Intel; Joe Sandri of WinStar; Stephen Rohleder of Accenture; and Roger Cochetti of VeriSign; Ms. Sarah Roche, of Upoc; and Will Pelgrin, the Executive Deputy Commissioner of the New York Governor's Office of Technology.