



Kevin Thom  
Sheriff

# Pennington County Sheriff's Office

## Patrol Division

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300 Kansas City Street, Suite 100  
Rapid City, SD 57701-2889  
Ph. 605-394-6115  
Fax 605-355-3595

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### STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN TONY HARRISON FOR THE COMMERCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and to my own Senior Senator from the Great State of South Dakota, John Thune, it is an honor to be speaking with you this morning. I am Captain Tony Harrison, from the Pennington County Sheriff's Office in the State of South Dakota. Pennington County is home of the beautiful Black Hills. We are the home of many beautiful lakes, hiking trails, Badlands National Park, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and of course, Mt. Rushmore.

I have served the great citizens of Rapid City and Pennington County for 24 years. I have worked on the street as a patrol officer, spent 8 years in narcotics as an investigator, undercover operative and supervisor. I have moved through the ranks and currently hold the position of Captain in our Criminal Investigations Division where I oversee every major crime and death investigation that occurs in Pennington County. I command the largest SWAT team in South Dakota, a team that can travel anywhere in the state when requested to help assist other agencies who are typically dealing with someone in a state of crisis. I tell you this hoping to make you comfortable with my vast experience in all

aspects of Law Enforcement, which is why I am here today to talk about this important issue.

Pennington County is about 130 miles wide and nearly 60 miles tall, roughly 2800 square miles, over twice the size of the state of Rhode Island. We serve close to 115,000 residents day in and day out and in the summer months, nearly 3 million guests come to see the GREAT FACES AND GREAT PLACES of South Dakota. Throw in a little motorcycle rally called Sturgis just 20 miles down the road that draws nearly ½ million people and an occasional blizzard dumping several feet of snow (hopefully not at the same time!) and you can bet, our services are tested daily as we work to keep the citizens of our county safe.

I am here today on behalf of Sheriff Kevin Thom to talk about the FirstNet program as it relates to providing service across the country and our state for first responders. Over 50% of the Sheriff Offices in SD, the State of SD itself, 7 of the top 10 largest cities and half of the tribal agencies use FirstNet as their service provider in some capacity.

Our agency decided to switch to FirstNet almost 18 months ago because of the promise of having better coverage. After speaking with Lisa Hohn, Pam Bryan and Doug Penniston, they also committed to future build plans that will provide much more reliable coverage in the future. By the way Senator Thune, Pam went to school with you and she says HI.

Pennington County is very unique. Out east, we have rolling plains, the Badlands and farm and ranch land. It is fairly flat, but as sparsely populated as the east end of our

county is, cell signal can quickly get very spotty. The lowest elevation in Pennington County is about 2100 feet above sea level, near the Badlands. The highest spot in Pennington County is over 7200 feet, near Black Elk Peak. Mt. Rushmore sits at about 5700 feet.

You can see the vast difference from one side of our county to the other. When you get in to the Black Hills, radio and phone coverage can get very difficult. One of greatest concerns as we help to ensure the safety of everyone in Pennington County is the ability to communicate. In any critical event, the first thing to go is typically communication. Losing the ability to communicate is devastating and can lead to failed missions, whether the mission is as simple as rescuing someone who has fallen and gotten hurt in the Black Hills or an active threat in a school. FirstNet has provided the tools we need to have great communication and it should only get better.

We have spent a lot of time looking for lost and missing people in Pennington County recently, including searching for a young girl named Serenity who we have been trying to find for over a year and a half. In her search we have logged over 6000 miles of walking, thousands and thousands of man hours, and over 2 dozen search dogs as we have paced back and forth across the most rugged terrain of the Black Hills. Many times we have been in areas with no cell reception. We called FirstNet and they immediately provided their "Cell on Wheels", or COWs, which gave us the ability to communicate.

As recently as July 3<sup>rd</sup> of this year, President Trump came to our great state to watch the fireworks at Mt. Rushmore. Obviously, this was a major undertaking, having not only a large event due to the fireworks at Mt. Rushmore, but also a Presidential visit on top of

that. We knew cellular networks would be stressed. On the day prior, as I was preparing our mobile command post, we quickly realized our current cell signal was not going to be strong enough for all the equipment we needed to pipe through it. I made one call to our FirstNet representative, and within hours, he set up a dedicated band that only our command post had access to, which allowed us to manage the day's events efficiently. FirstNet was truly a lifesaver for our agency.

Is the FirstNet solution the perfect solution? It is not. But there is not a perfect platform either. In the beginning, we had billing complications, but working with FirstNet and especially Pam, we were able to work through the issues within a short period of time. I know our billing staff is much happier! This is a testament to FirstNet's commitment to their customers.

We are holding FirstNet accountable for the expanded tower network in the Black Hills. We have put our chips in on FirstNet because we saw their vision and we trust they are going to fulfill their promises of coverage across Pennington County. They have completed two towers and we have 5G coverage near Box Elder and near Wall SD due to those builds. The two towers we are most interested in right now are planned to be built on forest service land. That has added a little extra logistical work due to it being on federal land and if I have one ask, it is this: **Please help our citizens by helping FirstNet get through any of the issues that come with working on federal land.** I know we would greatly appreciate the help from your end. I've been told they will be done by the end of 2022 but we are anxious to have these built sooner because they will greatly improve our coverage in the southern Black Hills.

In closing, I am happy to report, FirstNet has been good for the Pennington County Sheriff's Office and the safety of our citizens. We are excited to see the next step in coverage and trust it will be completed in the very near future.

Thank you for having me today and I'll certainly stand for any questions.