MEMORANDUM

TO: Anoka County Board of Commissioners and Staff

FROM Anoka County Election Integrity Team (ACEIT)

DATE: September 12, 2023

SUBJECT: What is FirstNet Authority & FirstNet? Why does the federal government or other players need live access to election data?

PRESENTER: Sue Peterson

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**Introduction**:

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) was created by Congress in 2012 in response to problems with the emergency communications systems in use during 9/11. It’s purpose was/is to oversee the buildout, deployment and operation of a dedicated nationwide high-speed wireless broadband network called FirstNet. FirstNet was created specifically to become the nation’s communication network dedicated to first responders. FirstNet’s purpose has since grown to include other organizations involved in critical infrastructure.

**Analysis:**

In January of 2017, the DHS designated U.S. election systems as part of the nation’s critical infrastructure with cybersecurity assistance & protections being a priority through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Election infrastructure is defined as: “*storage facilities, polling places, and centralized vote tabulations locations used to support the election process, and information and communications technology to include voter registration databases, voting machines, and other systems to manage the election process and report and display results on behalf of state and local governments*.” 1

FirstNet awarded a public/private contract to AT&T to build & operate the dedicated network.

By the end of December 2017, all 50 states, 5 US territories and Washington DC joined FirstNet. And why wouldn’t they? After a FirstNet presentation, governors were allowed 90 days to decide if they were to opt-in or out to FirstNet plans. Choosing the “opt-out” option required the state to submit an alternate plan to the FCC and get their approval; complete an RFP; apply for grant funding from NTIA; apply to NTIA to lease FirstNet spectrum; connect to the FirstNet Core and still pay user fees to FirstNet. Then be responsible for building and maintaining the Radio Access Network (RAN) for the next 25 years.

Fast forward to 2020 & beyond. In Wisconsin, voting machine log tapes listed several non-approved IP addresses. Data was received from one address with a location in Toronto where Dominion is headquartered. Funds from a non-profit were used to pay for FirstNet connection for election equipment in Kenosha County. A Dallas County Texas network diagram for election sites show the epoll books and tabulators connected to a cellular network with a two-way connection using FirstNet certified equipment. During the 2022 midterms in St. Johns County Florida the same cellular network was found to be serving all 15 voting locations. 2

**Conclusion**:

We believe FirstNet is yet another example of how the federal government is intruding on our elections through electronics.

**Attachments**:

1. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/01/06/statement-secretary-johnson-designation-election-infrastructure-critical>
2. <https://joehoft.com/bombshell-exclusive-nationwide-cellular-network-connects-election-equipment-and-gives-federal-government-access-to-election-systems-at-the-precinct-level/>