

**Swenson named as new head of FirstNet; Ginn steps down from chairman role**

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson May 28, 2014

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker today announced the appointment of Sue Swenson as chairwoman of [FirstNet](#) board to replace Sam Ginn, who is stepping down from his role as chairman and has indicated that he will not seek reappointment to the FirstNet board when his term expires in August.

“Sam Ginn’s leadership and experience building an organization from the ground up has been invaluable to FirstNet over the past two years, and we greatly appreciate his service,” Secretary Pritzker said in a prepared statement. “FirstNet continues to make progress toward fulfilling its mission to create the country’s first nationwide broadband network dedicated to helping our nation’s first responders perform their life saving work. As FirstNet enters the next phase in its development, Sue Swenson brings to this startup effort seasoned management experience in the telecommunications field to carry out this important mission.”

Although Ginn will not seek reappointment to the FirstNet board when his term expires in August, the telecom veteran plans to fulfill the remainder of his term, which will include [next week’s FirstNet board meetings](#) that will be conducted in Colorado.

The notion that Ginn would step down from the chairmanship of FirstNet has been the subject of industry speculation for months. Swenson, who led FirstNet’s spectrum-lease negotiations with four Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) jurisdictions seeking to build public-safety [LTE](#) systems, has been serving as the [FirstNet board’s vice chairwoman](#) since December 2013 and has been considered to be the logical replacement for Ginn by industry observers.

“Over the past two years as chairman, I’ve worked hard to ensure that the FirstNet organization is laser-focused on serving the needs of our customers – public safety professionals,” Ginn said in a prepared statement. “I’m proud of the work we’ve accomplished in such a short time, and am supremely confident that FirstNet is in capable hands with Sue Swenson as chairwoman. I have been working closely with Sue over the past six months, and the timing is right to step aside and let her take the helm.”

In a [blog posted on the FirstNet website](#) , Swenson echoed this sentiment, stating that she expects a “seamless” transition as she replaces Ginn as chair of the FirstNet board.

“Since I was named vice chair in December, Sam and I have also worked closely together on all board matters,” Swenson said in the blog. “Our work together will ensure that FirstNet does not lose any momentum during this transition. Going forward, my number one priority is the implementation of our strategic program roadmap.

“We are working toward several important roadmap milestones – including consultation with the states and territories and the development of a comprehensive network Request for Proposal (RFP) and an RFP for Network Equipment and Services. In addition, FirstNet is planning multiple public notice and comment processes that focus on key foundational issues. The input we get from our stakeholders and interested parties will benefit our implementation work for the public safety broadband network.”

Today’s announcement comes at a time of significant transition within [FirstNet](#) . Last month, [Bill D’Agostino resigned as FirstNet’s general manager](#) , leaving Deputy General Manager TJ Kennedy to lead the FirstNet staff as it prepares to conduct [consultations with 56 states and territories beginning as early as July 1](#)

In August 2012, Ginn was named as the initial chairman of the FirstNet board, which had no staff at the time and was tasked with designing and building a nationwide broadband network for first responders. Since then, more than 45 full-time employees have been hired to the FirstNet staff, and the [board approved a roadmap](#) that outlines the steps it plans to take to make the much-anticipated public-safety network a reality.

Ginn’s term as FirstNet chairman has been subject to considerable scrutiny. Many public-safety representatives expressed concern when an outline of a proposed network design was unveiled during the first FirstNet board meeting in the fall of 2012 without consulting with public-safety entities. Today, some in the first-responder community have criticized the FirstNet board for not making more tangible progress toward building the network.

In addition, a little more than a year ago, [FirstNet board member Paul Fitzgerald alleged](#) that the FirstNet board failed to follow proper procurement procedures when hiring contractors, did not inform all board members equally on relevant topics, and some board members had conflicts of interest.

Ginn immediately called for an internal investigation of Fitzgerald's allegations, with the result of the first phase [finding that no wrongdoing](#) occurred. Ginn asked the [U.S. Department of Commerce's Inspector General to investigate the conflict-of-interest allegations](#), but no action has been taken publicly on those matters.

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