

Senate Committee on Transportation and Homeland Security
Public Hearing – June 8, 2010
Amarillo, TX

Good Morning, my name is Walt Kelley and I am the Emergency Administration Manager for the City of Amarillo. I am going to limit my comments today to charge #3 and in particular, best practices and gaps in regards to disaster preparation. Prior to my current assignment with the City I was the City's Emergency Management Coordinator having served in that capacity from 1982 until moving into my new position in 2007. I have served, at all levels (Local, Regional, State, Federal), on numerous Emergency Management boards, committees, advisory groups, organizations and working groups. I am a past President of the Emergency Management Association of Texas and am the current Chair of the Panhandle Regional Emergency Management Advisory Committee.

During my 27 plus years of Emergency Management experience, I have seen the best and the worst of Emergency Management Preparedness and Programs in Texas. I have participated in making Texas one of the best prepared States in the Country but I feel strongly that we still have a long way to go. Many of the preparedness efforts of the past several years have been concentrated on a single threat (Hurricane) along and near the Gulf Coast. Preparing the Gulf Coast for a catastrophic hurricane is extremely important yet it must not be done at the expense of other regions in Texas. All the efforts, plans, procedures, teams, equipment, training and exercising that has gone into Hurricane Preparedness must be duplicated, to the extent necessary based on specific hazards, throughout Texas as every region has the potential of having a catastrophic event either man made or naturally occurring.

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One of the greatest accomplishments in the past few years has been the regionalization of Emergency Management preparedness. Using Council of Government (COG) regions for emergency planning makes a lot of sense, especially when coupled with the funneling of Homeland Security funding to local and regional needs. Strong regional plans, emphasizing Coordination not Command need to be continually updated, exercised, and improved. Funding for planners at this level is an absolute requirement. A means for program and equipment sustainability, especially during a time of shrinking federal Homeland Security Funds must be found and made available to all the regions in Texas. This funding needs to be based on the completion of regional hazard and infrastructure assessments done with all sectors in mind. I somewhat agree that the larger the population the greater the threat hence the greater need for funding but many other factors must be considered to ensure Statewide preparedness for any type of event. A local Infrastructure protection example would be, Agriculture resiliency – in our area much needs to be done to prepare for a purposeful or naturally occurring animal health issue which may or may not have human health consequences. The region wide loss of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's) would be the Panhandle's Katrina – not in terms of loss of life or damage but in the economic loss that would happen not only to our area but to the State and Nation as well.

One of the things we do well in this area is Regional response coordination between local, state, and, federal responders. If it works well here it should work well throughout the State and every effort must be made to foster these types of relationships. There are

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several Metropolitan Medical Response System programs in Texas including Amarillo. The MMRS programs are local programs with major Regional responsibilities and need to be incorporated in all regional plans. We must have continued support of Regional Medical Operations Centers to ensure coordination of all Medical resources in a region to provide efficient and effective support for the healthcare community, especially during times when resources are limited or not available. Also of importance is the continuation of the program to develop Inter-regional response teams such as a new Texas Task Force Three – an urban rescue team being conceptualized between the COG's that support the Amarillo and Lubbock areas. Regions must support adjacent Regions if we ever hope to succeed in protecting our citizens. Funding for these types of relationships and teams is an absolute necessity.

A major concern of local officials in areas such as the Texas Panhandle is the ever increasing threshold of eligibility for federal public assistance funds based on the overall Texas Population. The State Disaster Fund needs to be funded to a level that will bridge that gap to assist communities that cannot rebuild infrastructure following a local catastrophic incident.

In closing I would like to suggest a way forward. It was my honor to be called Friend and Advisor by the late Chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management, Jack Colley - a mutually shared feeling. Many of you on this committee also knew and I would guess respected his love for Texas. He had a dream of how to best serve and protect our

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Citizens when it came to Emergency Management – my request is that this committee continues to do all it can to see that Jack's Dream continues to set the standard for Emergency Management Preparedness, Response and Recovery in Texas.

I thank you for your time and for the work you're doing for the State of Texas

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