

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

Good morning, welcome to Amarillo. Thank you for coming. My name is Rick Tull and I am employed by the Panhandle Regional Advisory Council as the Hospital Preparedness Program Coordinator for Trauma Service Area A. The Panhandle Regional Advisory Council teams with twenty two hospitals and forty eight ambulance services in the Panhandle region to increase trauma care preparedness for disaster events. I just briefly wanted to comment about charge #3 and specifically trauma care preparedness and the challenges we face in this region to prepare for a catastrophic event.

Most disaster preparedness funding is allocated by population so obviously cities like Houston, Dallas and San Antonio receive the bulk of trauma care preparedness funds. Historically, areas like the Panhandle region have not received a lot of preparedness funding which has put us at a disadvantage. What I ask the Senate Committee to consider is the out of state population that visits this area for their trauma care. Hospitals in the region consistently care for visitors from New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado. During a pandemic influenza event, we expect a significant influx of patients from surrounding states seeking help in regional hospitals. It is extremely likely that in a time of crisis, out of state visitors will rapidly use up the limited resources and assets we have in this area for residents. The recent H1N1 event showed us that our preparedness supplies would not support the regional population as well as a large influx of patients from surrounding states if we see a larger pandemic influenza event. We simply do not have the preparedness funds available. I ask for consideration that the Mexico border is not the only border that needs attention.

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In addition to out of state visitors, please consider the disproportionately high number of undocumented migrant workers that reside in this area. This special needs population is rarely counted when preparedness funding allocations are considered which also adds challenges to our preparedness work. Many of the state preparedness efforts over the past few years have been concentrated on hurricane preparedness along the Gulf Coast. Obviously this is important, but it has been done at the expense of areas like the Panhandle region. We are a somewhat isolated part of the state so when disaster strikes, we know we will have to be self sufficient for a period of time before help can arrive from the southern part of the state. There are lots of assets and resources in Texas but it will take days to move those resources into this region due to the long travel distances from the areas that maintain those assets. Our trauma care system may not be able to withstand a catastrophic event without help. I would like to see additional resources like ventilators, mass patient care shelters for use as alternative care sites and ambulances moved into the region in preparation of disaster events so patients do not have to wait for days before resources arrive to help. Please consider our need for federal Homeland Security funding to improve trauma care preparedness for this area as we prepare to help not only Texans but also our neighbors as well.

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