



**STATEMENT OF  
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AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR  
CITY OF LAREDO, TEXAS**



**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS, PREPAREDNESS, AND  
RESPONSE**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**FEBRUARY 19, 2008  
TEXAS A & M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
Laredo, TX**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent and Members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response --Good morning. I am Steve E. Landin and have been a proud member of the Laredo Fire Department since 1990. The Laredo Fire Department is a three hundred and forty-eight (348) uniformed personnel department. Like my father before me, my professional career has been as a first responder on the border, having worked as a firefighter and sheriff's deputy and now as the Acting Assistant Fire Chief and current Emergency Management Coordinator.

## **LEADERSHIP OF CHAIRMAN CUELLAR**

Before I begin my formal testimony, I would like to take a moment on behalf of my fellow border first responders in Laredo to thank Chairman Cuellar and this Committee for the focus you have brought to the challenges we face. Chairman Cuellar sat down with Laredo's public safety leaders to craft a US-Mexico Border Public Safety and Public Health Response paper. The conclusion of that paper, a copy of which is attached to my testimony, is there is a need for a Federal-Local partnership. While I was not a part of the committee that authored that paper, I endorse the content.

## **ISOLATION & COOPERATIVE EFFORTS**

On the border, because we are so often so isolated from any surrounding communities on the U.S. side, we understand better than most that we are on our own to address threats not only to the people, property and economy of Laredo, but increasingly to the United States. For instance, while my colleagues in New York City or the District of Columbia may rely upon joint assistance programs with surrounding communities in times of challenge, in Laredo, "our nearest U.S. support" is over an hour's drive away, despite Nuevo Laredo, a city of 600,000 being just

across the river. And while the Federal agents manning the border posts have point responsibility for security, Laredo bears the burden with respect to protection of life, health and property.

### **LOS DOS LAREDOS AND THE ROLE WE PLAY ON THE BORDER**

While the Chairman is well aware of “Los Dos Laredos,” or “The 2 Laredos” and the role we play on the border, let me take a moment to share some insights about my community with the Subcommittee. In outlining Laredo’s role on the border, I am also seeking to answer the question that many of you may have – Why should federal resources be used to support interoperable communications that are typically provided by every local government?

#### **A. Largest and Oldest Southern Inland Port**

Laredo is at the center of the primary trade route connecting Canada, the United States and Mexico. We are the gateway to Mexico’s burgeoning industrial complex. The two Laredos are actually one city, divided only by a river. Laredo became the first “official” Port of Entry on the U.S./Mexico border in 1851. (In fact, the United States Consulate in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico is America's oldest continuously active diplomatic post, established in 1872.) Today, the Laredo Customs District handles more trade than the land ports of Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas combined.

#### **B. Services We Provide Laredo and Nation**

The City of Laredo provides its local citizens and the nation a comprehensive public safety and public health response to threats at the border. Laredo provides:

- The largest communication infrastructure in the region
- A unified approach of police, fire and public health first responders to ensure safety, security and public health disease control and preparedness.

- Training, planning and support for disease control and prevention through its public health authority.
- Support for our federal and state partners in responding to the public safety hazard challenges such as primary response for river rescue and recovery as well as response to bomb threats at our international bridges to conduct searches for weapons of mass destruction.

Despite Laredo providing these national defense services, Laredo is not a direct beneficiary of any of the new DHS programs because federal funding for homeland security has been limited to US census data. Funding formulas must be changed to address threat levels and services provided to the nation by border communities. Laredo is providing the services. It is time that the nation provides Laredo with a fair share of the resources needed for these efforts.

#### **CHALLENGE**

As first responders on the US/Border we face a myriad of challenges in delivering emergency services. An example of this is our current need of enhancing our regional communications operation. Although our region has joined forces for this important task, we have a long road ahead.

Our geographical location dictates that we must consider two important aspects of our overall preparedness and response strategy:

First, we must ensure that our regional communications system is adequate and functional as well as possess the capability of communicating with other jurisdictions during an emergency.

The need for this was evident during the recent Cotulla, TX wild land fires that consumed more than 17,000 acres and destroyed twenty homes. Several fire departments, including our own,

were on the fire ground and experienced the difficulties that accompany a lack of proper communications.

Second, we must ensure that we can do the same with our Mexican counterparts. There are emergency situations that know no boundaries. It is crucial that we are able to maintain radio contact among responding personnel, as well as with our dispatch, when responding to emergencies in Mexico.

### **SOLUTIONS**

Federal funding for homeland security and public health response initiatives must compensate local communities that are providing protection to the nation. The easiest way to accomplish this goal is to create a border category in all funding formulas.

There are also specific steps that the Congress can take to address these challenges:

- Regional Radio Communications Infrastructure; Specifically the addition of radio towers in our region for enhanced communications capability, as well as the necessary support resources.
- Regional upgrades to 800 MHz frequency radio systems.
- Continued training for local and regional interoperability radio operations.
- Cross Border communications capabilities to include training and equipment. This should include the sharing of spectrum with our first responder colleagues and the ability to communicate several miles into Mexico.
- Training and equipping for first responder HAM radios.

- UASI should be changed to make proximity to the border a threat criterion and funding should be available for people and equipment required to meet threats to the nation's health and safety. Laredo provides more public health responders and public safety responders on the border than the federal government, yet it is not eligible for direct funding.
- The Port Security initiative must be modified to include all major ports, not simply water ports. The City of Laredo is the nation's largest inland port on the U.S. Mexico border, yet it is not eligible for port security funding.
- International Bridges should be included in the protected class of infrastructure of national significance. Their losses would have a major impact on the nation's economy.
- Creative border security initiatives such as Laredo's "River Vega" project that enhance national security by clearing lines of sight and building river retaining walls with the result being an integrated national security project should be supported.
- All other DHS and Department of Justice programs which fund first responders (i.e. SAFER, COPS) must be fully funded and the role a community plays in supporting national security must be included in the funding criteria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Laredo is the only southern border city strategically positioned at the convergence of all land transportation systems. While this location results in Laredo being our nation's largest inland port on the southern border, it also means that Laredo's public safety and health programs are heavily burdened with the flow of such commerce. Laredo is the shipping and receiving dock for the urban centers and seaports in your states. There are statistics of the amount of cargo that flows from, or returns to, your states of Mississippi, Washington, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, the Carolinas, Alabama and beyond. Laredo and other border communities strive for

healthy and safe communities. Sometimes we are asked to bear too large a burden in keeping our nation healthy and safe. We look to this committee assist us obtain the resources we need to meet that challenge.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.



**Appendix A**  
**Supplemental Testimony**  
**Of**  
**Hector Gonzalez, M.D.**  
**Director of Health**  
**City of Laredo**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Good morning Chairman Cuellar and Members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communication, Preparedness and Response. My name is Doctor Hector F. Gonzalez; I am the Director of Health for the City of Laredo. My colleague Chief Steve Landin, Acting Assistant Fire Chief for the City of Laredo Fire Department is addressing you today in person to provide testimony on our unique needs based issues as first responders and emergency care on the border. I am submitting this addenda to the Chief's testimony. I have every confidence that Chief Landin can address any immediate questions you may have on public health threats and our unified response in Laredo, a Texas-Mexico Border City.

I have provided public health care for over thirty (30) years. In contrast to private medicine, public health keeps our community disease free and promotes wellness and prevention. We want to keep people well.

**2. CHALLENGES ON THE BORDER**

Nowhere are these activities more vibrant and yet challenging than on the Texas-Mexico Border.

- Infectious diseases and co-morbidities are critical. Laredo has one of highest rates of Tuberculosis in Texas.
- There is a critical lack of access to health care (over 50% of our citizens are un/underinsured).
- There is a critical lack of access to health care professionals. We are a HRSA health professions shortage area and we lack appropriate equipment for services and adequate communication which all add to the challenges.

Yet our resiliency has assisted border communities like Laredo to flourish despite the odds. From El Paso to Brownsville, Texas first responder responsibility includes addressing infectious and all hazards threats.

**3. THE NEW FIRST RESPONDER PARADIGM**

After September 11 , the first responder paradigm changed. This is especially so after the anthrax attacks. No longer do we view first responder and preparedness in the same way. Nowhere is this more evident than in Laredo where the Chief of Police, Fire Chiefs and I work intimately close to respond to all hazards: biological, chemical and radiological. Yet Laredo has always worked in this manner, maximizing, regionalizing and being innovative because we have always recognized that it is our community but everyone's border to protect. Most importantly

however, resources have always been insufficient and therefore we created our own response expertise. We respond to all hazards to contain disease, prevent the spread and provide immediate care of individuals affected as well to protect the public. For us, it is routine to respond locally, regionally and internationally. We are the state and federal responders, as there is no one else to respond, and we recognized this a long time ago. On the border, issues may be international in scope, but the response to the threat will always be local! This is why we developed are own team of experts especially for all an hazards and public health response.

#### **4. LOCAL RESPONSES TO INTERNATIONAL THREATS**

Let me share a few examples of interventions.

##### **1) Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**

. During the world-wide Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) threat, there were five (5) mainland Chinese nationals traveling through Mexico City and entering the United States illegally through the Freer, Texas border post. The Customs and Border Patrol called us in Laredo to inform us that two of Chinese nationals had a fever. (Please note, it was not a Laredo Border crossing but individuals in Freer, Texas, an hour's drive.) We respond and conduct a rapid and immediate thorough investigation, instituting quarantine and isolation procedures for the prevention and protection of all. This effort included a response to protect over 30 federal agents, 25 Mexican and Central Americans (caught with the Chinese) as well the wellbeing of all Laredoans. We also had to deal with federal and state health and immigration authorities from both countries. The City of Laredo Health Department (CLHD) made it our immediate responsibility to assure the protection of all and the disease containment to prevent a potential spread of a highly communicable disease that could have impacted the nation. This was the responsibility of federal authorities but we are the only ones able to respond. While we have a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) quarantine station in El Paso that covers New Mexico and Texas, they only have 3 persons. We work wonderfully in partnership with them but in the end we provide all of the local investigations and response, training and prevention efforts not only for Laredo but for the region as we care for 4 other counties as well. Both Chief Sosa and our staff are continuously responding to all hazards including assuring the appropriate storage of Cobalt 60, assuring the safety management of illegally discarded hazardous materials and the safety of food and water supplies.

##### **2) TB**

Finally I am sure all of you have heard about the quarantine and isolation of the person with TB with XDR who traveled worldwide. The whole nation is concerned and I understand there are hearings on this matter. Well this is an everyday threat for us on the border. We don't need any exotic or biological weaponized threat; there are everyday communicable disease threats to the public that are equally lethal.

One of our cases in 2006 involved two family members (one in Laredo and one in Nuevo Laredo Mexico). We immediately intervened (internationally) since members lived on both sides of the US-Mexico border to get all family members tested, confirmed, treated and followed. When we finished the investigation, we had tested over 40 family members and 3 were positive. These were immediately confirmed, treated and followed as active TB which needs treatment for

at least 6 months with multiple medications. It is imperative to assure compliance to avoid drug resistance which is a problem today and in some cases (as in the case all of you have heard about) there is a rare extremely multi-drug resistant strain. In our situation, the 3 cases were family members in San Antonio (150 miles away) Dallas (over 400 miles away) and in Chicago. If we did not have the surveillance detection system to intervene quickly, test, confirm, treat and follow these cases, they would have gone undetected putting hundreds if not thousands of people at risk.

Yet we have faced a 30% reduction in funds over the last 2 years affecting our public health response infrastructure. Today we do not have adequate infection control response staff, equipment for services with an isolation and response vehicle and appropriate communication systems is still lacking. Our staff responds with limited resources and equipment and in their own vehicles which are not appropriate for our terrain and protection against potentially communicable diseases and hazardous exposure. This is not an appropriate response. If our staff fall and fail to protect and prevent not only is Laredo at risk but the state and nation as well.

We ask that you consider providing adequate resources for services, staff and equipment not based on formulas and standards that are used for the rest of the nation. Our United States-Mexico Border and in particular the Texas-Mexico Border, specially Laredo as the major inland port of entry, must have adequate resources to respond based on our unique response responsibilities to all threats. We must have the appropriate staff, equipment, vehicles to respond as well the proper tools to isolate and quarantine, after all what happens in Laredo affects the entire nation. If we protect and respond appropriately in Laredo, we protect the public's health and wellbeing of the country.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The US is under a constant threat of an intentional or unintentional medical or biological attack. In Laredo we say: "When Nuevo Laredo, Mexico coughs, Laredo gets the cold." Disease does not respect a border, a wall or even the most professional of custom and border patrol agents.

When you think of the potential public health threats that can cause epidemics, contaminate our water or food supply, there is no area more vulnerable than the US-Mexico Border. In Laredo, we are proud to provide a first line of defense for our community and the nation. We just need help with the resources to meet these demands.

I want to thank you for allowing me to provide this written testimony. I know Chief Sosa is providing immediate answers to any of your questions but I will glad to answer any additional questions you may have as well.

**Appendix B**  
**US-Mexico Border Public Safety and Public Health Response**  
**The Need for a Federal-Local Partnership**

**Background**

The City of Laredo provides its local citizens and the nation a comprehensive public safety and public health response to threats at the border. Laredo provides:

- A unified approach of police, fire and public health first responders to ensure safety, security and public health disease control and preparedness.
- Training, planning and support for Radio Interoperability issues.
- Support for our federal and state partners in responding public safety hazards challenges.

**Challenge**

Despite Laredo providing these national defense services, Laredo is not a direct beneficiary of any of the new DHS programs because federal funding for homeland security has been limited to US census data. Funding formulas must be changed to address threat levels and services provided to the nation. Laredo is providing the services. It is time that the nation provides Laredo with a fair share of the resources needed for these efforts.

**Solutions:**

Federal funding for homeland security, radio interoperability projects and public health response initiatives must compensate local communities that are providing protection to the nation. The easiest way to accomplish this goal is to create a border category in all funding formulas.

There are also specific steps that the Congress can take to address these challenges:

- Reinforcing regional radio communications infrastructure; specifically the addition of radio towers in our region for enhanced communications capability, as well as the necessary support resources.
- Continued training for local and regional interoperability radio operations
- Cross Border communications capabilities to include training and equipment. This should include the sharing of spectrum with our first responder colleagues and the ability to communicate several miles into Mexico.
- Regional upgrades to 800 MHz frequency radio systems.
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- UASI should be changed to make proximity to the border a threat criterion and funding should be available for people and equipment required to meet threats to the nation's health and safety. Laredo provides more public health responders and public safety responders on the border than the federal government, yet it is not eligible for direct funding.
- The Port Security initiative must be modified to include all major ports, not simply water ports. The City of Laredo is the nation's largest inland port on the U.S. Mexico border, yet it is not eligible for port security funding.
- International Bridges should be included in the protected class of infrastructure of national significance. Their losses would have a major impact on the nation's economy.

- Creative border security initiatives such as Laredo’s “River Vega” project that enhance national security by clearing lines of sight and building river retaining walls with the result being an integrated national security project should be supported.
- All other DHS and Department of Justice programs which fund first responders (i.e. SAFER, COPS) must be fully funded and the role a community plays in supporting national security must be included in the funding criteria.

## Appendix C

### DETAILED STATEMENT OF CHIEF LANDIN

#### ON THE

### **THE STATE OF INTEROPERABILITY COMMUNICATIONS ALONG THE TEXAS BORDER**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Border Security and safety is an essential component of our nation's homeland security. It is a duty that we gladly and proudly accept each time we report for our shifts. Although our task is challenging, we realize its importance, for we as first responders, are the front line of defense for our Nation against intentional or unintentional threats. A sobering reality is that the number of threats in this post 9-11 world has increased along the US/Mexico border and so has the number of incidents that can potentially escalate into major emergencies.

The County of Webb, in which Laredo is located, is the 6th largest county of the 254 counties in the State of Texas. It covers 3,360 sq. miles or 2,139,217 acres. As the second fastest growing city in the nation, Laredo has outgrown its boundaries. The City of Laredo, thru a contractual agreement, provides emergency services to all of Webb County. The County of Webb has 4 cities that the Laredo Fire Department services: Mirando City, Bruni, Oilton, and Aguilares. The Laredo metropolitan area posted the largest gain in population of any other city along the Texas border. Laredo has an approximate population of 250,000 residents and its sister city, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, has a population of 600,000 residents.

While all local governments have security issues, border communities have special challenges. Consider Laredo, Texas, the largest land port in the United States for people and goods arriving from Central and South America. Every day, 13,000 trucks bring parts and supplies across the border, and 30,000 people cross its four bridges, a process that takes one and one-half hours on a normal day.

Our frontier community is a booming one, having doubled its population in the past 10 years, from 100,000 to more than 200,000. Nuevo Laredo, our sister city across the border in Mexico, has a population of 600,000. During a serious emergency, the closest support from any U.S. locality, state government, or federal government agency is 150 miles away. An existing bi-national aid agreement between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo includes an understanding of hazardous-materials responses, bomb threats and SWAT tactics among other public safety disciplines. Historically, the aid provided has been to assist Nuevo Laredo emergency agencies to properly mitigate threat in our sister city. Also we experience an average of three or four bomb threats each week at our international bridges.

## **CHALLENGES**

As first responders on the US/Border we face a myriad of challenges in delivering emergency services. An example of this is our current need of enhancing our regional communications operation. Although our region has joined forces for this important task, we have a long road ahead.

Our geographical location dictates that we must consider two important aspects of our overall preparedness and response strategy:

First, we must ensure that our regional communications system is adequate and functional as well as possess the capability of communicating with other jurisdictions during an emergency. The need for this was evident during the recent Cotulla, TX wild land fires that consumed more than 17,000 acres and destroyed twenty homes. Several fire departments, including our own, were on the fire ground and experienced the difficulties that accompany a lack of proper communications.

Second, we must ensure that we can do the same with our Mexican counterparts. There are emergency situations that know no boundaries. It is crucial that we are able to maintain radio contact among responding personnel, as well as with our dispatch, when responding to emergencies in Mexico.

In outlining Laredo's role on the border, it is important to answer the question that many of you have: Why should federal resources be used to support what are typical services provided by every local government as well as other special services that may not be typical to other jurisdictions? Listed below are two reasons why:

### **A, International**

- *Largest and Oldest Southern Inland Port*

Laredo is at the center of the primary trade route connecting Canada, the United States and Mexico. We are the gateway to Mexico's growing industrial complex. *Los Dos Laredos* (The Two Laredos) are actually one city, divided only by a river. Laredo became the first "official" Port of Entry on the U.S./Mexico border in 1851. (In fact, the United States Consulate in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico is America's oldest continuously active diplomatic post, established in 1872.) Today, the Laredo Customs District handles more trade than the ports of Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas combined.

### **B. Domestic**

The City of Laredo is a hub for emergency response with assets and expertise to manage emergencies in a 150 mile radius. The City has executed mutual aid agreements with several jurisdictions to offer aid in the event they should be needed. Local resources could be quickly exhausted should there be a need to respond to a major emergency. As a Border community we face a wide variety of threats given our strategic location and as such we must recognize that emergencies in our sister city could lead to a potential emergency in ours.

- **Structure fires**

With 60 million square feet of warehouse space to protect on our side of the border, we must consider the vast amount of warehouse space to the south. The limited means of our counterparts puts our community at risk should a fire in their commercial/warehouse districts become uncontrollable. An existing bi-national agreement with Nuevo Laredo would require our fire department to render aid.

- **EMS**

Laredo Fire Department Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responded to close to 17,000 calls in 2006. Many of these were responses to our international bridges to render aid to patients coming in from Nuevo Laredo. The patients arrive to our bridges via personal vehicles or by foot. Additionally, many attempts by foreign nationals to cross our borders illegally generate a response by our EMS system to render aid in the hostile terrain that surrounds our community. These patients become dehydrated or suffer trauma while attempting to cross via rail car or by vehicles transporting illegal aliens that are involved in accidents.

- **Mass casualty incidents**

In addition to offering protection to our community from mass casualty incidents, we consider other factors that increase the potential for these types of incidents. A major corridor named IH-35, passes through our city and so does a tremendous amount of traffic. This includes passenger buses as well multi-occupant vehicles. This highway is also a major thoroughfare for the transportation of illegal aliens. Many times while chased by law enforcement, these vehicles become involved in accidents with as many as 50 people. Recently, the fire department was called to assist a neighboring border county, Zapata, when a passenger van transporting 50 aliens rolled over killing one. This incident placed a significant burden on our resources as several ambulances were dispatched to assist, render aid and transport the injured back to local hospitals.

- **HAZ-MAT Incidents**

Laredo is the main NAFTA corridor for the United States and correspondingly in Texas for international trade. Laredo has four International Bridges and is currently in the process of applying for a Presidential Permit to build a fifth International Bridge. Laredo carries 50% of all NAFTA related trade. It is further estimated that fifty percent of the trade that crosses through Laredo is hazardous material. The United States, Mexico, Central and South America's economies depend on secure bridges (the artery through which life flows for the business-trade sector). Terrorist actions or any disruptive situations would be detrimental to local, state, national and international economies. According to Laredo Development Foundation's 2001 data, Laredo is the number one inland port in the United States with 2,772,537 annual tractor-trailer crossings and an additional 350,620 rail car crossings through our single railroad bridge. Almost half of the cargo that travels through the Laredo Corridor by land and rail carry Hazardous Materials. The Laredo Airport, a former U.S. Air Force Base, had 226 million pounds of freight land in 2001.



The situation our community faces today is the increasing volume of commercial traffic with hazardous cargo passing through our city via road and rail. In addition, we are experiencing an expansion of commercial warehousing that store the hazardous materials transported by commercial traffic. This reflects an increase for calls our department makes to hazmat incidents.

Of note are recent emergency calls that posed a threat to our community and contained all of the necessary elements to escalate to a major disaster.

- A tractor- trailer overturned on Hwy 359 spilling a significant amount of highly toxic sodium hydroxide. The highway was closed for several hours. Prevailing winds threatened to carry fumes towards the City.
- A tractor-trailer was found to be leaking an unknown chemical. The trailer contained several pallets of AG Oxycom, an oxidizer corrosive that causes irritation of the respiratory track when inhaled.
- A train derailment caused several boxcars containing petroleum alkalate and benzene 10% to burn exposing one boxcar with tetrachchloroethylene. Residents in the immediate area were evacuated. Wind conditions threatened to carry fumes towards a populated area.

There is also the challenge of rail yards in the midst of a heavily populated area of town. These boxcars transport a huge amount of cargo throughout the day at the risk of derailment.

All these numbers translate into a single conclusion: Laredo's Fire Department must be prepared to address a hazmat challenge due to the volume of Hazmat cargo, commerce, and tourism present on both sides of the border. Data compiled from the U.S. Department of Commerce indicates that in 2004, the total share of U.S.-Mexico trade passing through the port of Laredo was 58.9%. All other ports on the U.S.-Mexico Border totaled only 41.1%. This commercial traffic has only increased over the past decade as more commerce is utilizing the Port of Laredo's strategic location. The significant increase has offered many opportunities for the potential of a major hazardous material incident that would affect the lives of many families on both sides of the border as well as those that reside in the surrounding communities. Additionally, Laredo has over 60 million square feet of warehouse space and at least a quarter of that space contains hazardous materials and is highly vulnerable to Terrorism and Bio-Chemical Terrorism.

- **River Rescue and body recoveries**

The Laredo Fire Department is the primary responder to river rescues and body recoveries along the Rio Grande. As the increase in attempts to cross our border illegally so do the number of rescues and recovery of drowning victims. We lack the equipment and training to safely conduct these services on international waters.

- **Bomb Threat at bridges**

911 Dispatch receives on average 3 bomb threats a week to our international bridges alone. The Fire Department responds to these bomb threats and conducts a search for any suspicious packages and explosive devices without any protective equipment or ordinance training.

Despite Laredo providing these national defense services, Laredo is not a direct beneficiary of any of the new DHS programs because federal funding for homeland security has been limited to US census data. Funding formulas must be changed to address threat levels and services provided to the nation by border communities. Laredo is providing the services. It is time that the nation provides Laredo with a fair share of the resources needed for these efforts. Additionally, we would like to mention some of the other challenges we face along the border:

### **Additional Services We Provide Laredo and the Nation**

The City of Laredo provides its local citizens and the nation a comprehensive public safety and public health response to threats at the border. Laredo provides:

- The largest first responder communication infrastructure in the region.
- A unified approach of police, fire and public health first responders to ensure safety, security and public health disease control and preparedness.
- Training, planning and support for radio interoperability
- Support for our federal and state partners in responding public safety hazards challenges such as primary response for river rescue and recovery as well as response to bomb threats at our international bridges to conduct searches for weapons of mass destruction and emergency response to the region when needed.

### **SOLUTIONS**

Homeland security is about the integration of a nation, everyone pledged to freedom's cause, everyone its protector, and everyone its beneficiary. It's about the integration of our national efforts, not one department or one organization, but everyone tasked with our Nation's protection. To accomplish this task, federal funding for homeland security, radio interoperability projects and public health response initiatives must compensate local communities that are providing protection to the nation. The easiest way to accomplish this goal is to create a border category in all funding formulas.

There are also specific steps that the Congress can take to address these challenges:

- Regional Radio Communications Infrastructure; Specifically the addition of radio towers in our region for enhanced communications capability, as well as the necessary support resources.
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- The Port Security initiative must be modified to include all major ports, not simply water ports. The City of Laredo is the nation’s largest inland port on the U.S. Mexico border, yet it is not eligible for port security funding.
- International Bridges should be included in the protected class of infrastructure of national significance. Their losses would have a major impact on the nation’s economy.
- Creative border security initiatives such as Laredo’s “River Vega” project that enhance national security by clearing lines of sight and building river retaining walls with the result being an integrated national security project should be supported.
- All other DHS and Department of Justice programs which fund first responders (i.e. SAFER, COPS) must be fully funded and the role a community plays in supporting national security must be included in the funding criteria.

Additionally, we would like to respectfully submit the following points:

- 1) The City of Laredo has been a major contributor of resources to create a regional mutual aid agreement. As the largest source of assets and experience in our region, we are looked to in the event of a significant emergency occurring in any of the participating jurisdictions. Support and training for regional preparedness is essential to our border communities.
- 2) Our City has invested heavily in the creation of a state of the art Fire and Law Enforcement training facility. This facility has trained first responders from around the globe. Students have trained here from different parts of Mexico, Central and South America, Europe and Canada. Another benefit to first responders from around this region is the close proximity and accessibility to world class training. Standardized training for public safety officials on both sides of our border is essential for a uniformed response to an emergency that would affect communities on the US/Mexico Border.
- 3) We must be recognized as a hub for public safety and homeland security for the region and for the front gate of our nation. Although we are the largest community in the region with public safety assets, it is important to remember that we are the closest entity for emergency response in 150 miles.
- 4) UASI should be changed to make proximity to the border a threat criterion and funding should be available for people and equipment required to meet threats to the nation’s health and safety. Laredo provides more public health responders and public safety responders on the border than the federal government, yet it is not eligible for direct funding.
- 5) The Port Security initiative must be modified to include all major ports, not simply water ports. The City of Laredo is the nation’s largest inland port on the U.S. Mexico border, yet it is not eligible for port security funding.
- 6) International Bridges should be included in the protected class of infrastructure of national significance. Their losses would have a major impact on the nation’s economy.
- 7) Creative border security initiatives such as Laredo’s “River Vega” project that enhance national security by clearing lines of sight and building river retaining walls with the result being an integrated national security project should be supported.
- 8) All other DHS and Department of Justice programs which fund first responders (i.e. SAFER, COPS) must be fully funded and the role a community plays in supporting national security must be included in the funding criteria.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Laredo is the only U.S./Mexico border city strategically positioned at the convergence of all land transportation systems. While this location results in Laredo being our nation's largest inland port on the southern border, it also means that Laredo's public safety and health programs are heavily burdened with the flow of such commerce. Laredo is the shipping and receiving dock for the urban centers and seaports in your states. There are even statistics of the amount of cargo that flows from or returns to your states of Mississippi, Washington, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, the Carolinas, Alabama and beyond. Laredo and other border communities strive for healthy and safe communities. Sometimes we are asked to bear too large a burden in keeping our nation healthy and safe. We look to this committee assist us obtain the resources we need to meet that challenge.

Every day, we work to make our border and America more secure. Every day, the memories of September 11th inspire us to live our vision of preserving our freedoms, protecting America, enjoying our liberties, and securing the homeland