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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
BEFORE THE
TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION
AUSTIN, TEXAS

PUBLIC MEETING)
FOR THE TEXAS)
WORKFORCE COMMISSION)

QUARTERLY WORK SESSION
THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2018

BE IT REMEMBERED THAT at 12:18 p.m. on
Thursday, the 14th day of June, 2018, the above-entitled
matter came on for hearing at the Texas Workforce
Commission, TWC Building, 101 East 15th Street, Room 244,
Austin, Texas, before ANDRES ALCANTAR, Chairman; JULIAN
ALVAREZ and RUTH R. HUGHS, Commissioners.

1 So I appreciate the time that you're all
2 taking to come here today and share with us some of things
3 that we had previously heard, as well as any new information
4 that you can share how we can best assist in your efforts.
5 So thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Commissioner Alvarez?

7 COMM. ALVAREZ: I want to agree with
8 Commissioner Hughs and Chairman Alcantar in thanking you all
9 for taking time out of your busy schedules to here.

10 So as you heard earlier today, though, we
11 were a little long. You could obviously tell that it was
12 well worth it. The fact that we were listening to you and
13 all of the other Workforce Boards around the State, it's
14 important to us that we take our time and that we make the
15 right decisions based on the feedback that you guys have all
16 provided us. And we appreciate that.

17 We also appreciate the fact that when we are
18 in your backgrounds that you make us feel very welcome. And
19 with that, I turn it over back to the Chairman.

20 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: We are committed to doing
21 all that we can to improve the outcomes for individuals that
22 live in our small communities all across rural Texas, and we
23 understand -- we're very proud of our system and how
24 integrated it is and how effective it's become and how clear
25 our mission is and how understanding we are of what works

1 and what doesn't.

2 We -- when we look at our rural communities,
3 there's some different challenges and how do we increase
4 access points. Where we have a touch point, how do we make
5 that experience better in terms of how we're serving both
6 the job seeker and employers and other stakeholders.

7 And so we really appreciate your time here
8 today. We -- you've been working as have a number of other
9 EDs and stakeholders with Courtney and the staff and sharing
10 ideas. But we want to hear from you directly today about
11 what we really need to consider as we contemplate additional
12 investments in time and resources and money relative to how
13 we move forward to elevate the experience and create more
14 touchpoints for individuals that need our services.

15 With that, I'll turn it over to Courtney
16 before we get into the presentations. Thank you.

17 MS. ARBOUR: For the record, Courtney Arbour,
18 Workforce Division. We were asked to have some
19 conversations that -- as you've just mentioned, Chairman,
20 with the Workforce Boards, and so we -- what we did was we
21 just made an open call to all Boards and let them know that
22 we wanted to talk about rural service delivery.

23 We didn't necessarily define rural for
24 purposes of those calls. We let them know that if they are
25 providing remote services or if they have rural offices that

1 we'd like to hear from them. And so 22 of our 28 Workforce
2 Boards joined those discussions, which just tells us a lot.
3 Even some of the Boards who serve metro areas also tend to
4 have one or more offices or locations in more remote areas.

5 And so through this, we held two calls with
6 the Boards. And like I said, 22 participated in those
7 discussions. A few -- and I know that Mary, Martin, and
8 Marin will probably share some of these same things, but
9 I'll just kind of give you a quick summary of some of the
10 trends we heard from those Boards who participated in the
11 discussions.

12 The lack of transportation bubbled up in what
13 -- in a number of the conversations. And the great thing
14 about that -- the bad thing about it is that transportation
15 is a challenge. There is not a lot of infrastructure around
16 it in certain areas or what is there is not always
17 sufficient to meet the need, but the Boards have become very
18 creative in meeting the needs of those communities where --
19 where transportation may be a barrier to actually accessing
20 services.

21 So more and more Boards have started to
22 creatively use virtual services or online services for
23 orientation, assessment, information about -- even some of
24 the workshops that they offer in-house can sometimes be made
25 available through technology.

1 Broadband can be a challenge for some Boards,
2 so online services are not the answer -- and what you'll
3 find, well, I know you know this, and what I was -- what was
4 reiterated to me is that one thing may work in one area, but
5 not for others because the -- the challenges are all so
6 different across the State. But broadband can be a
7 challenge, and so online service delivery can't be the
8 solution for everyone at this point.

9 Many Boards are using mobile units to reach
10 -- to take their services out to communities where they may
11 not otherwise have an office. What I heard from several of
12 the Boards is that they have a structured schedule where
13 they may go out and park the mobile unit at a certain place
14 a certain day of the week every week and really build some
15 consistency there. In addition, they're bringing it out for
16 special events.

17 But they'll try to develop consistency so
18 that the public knows when and where to come to access those
19 mobile services.

20 Many of the Boards -- in fact, I think every
21 Board really values the labor market information that either
22 we provide through our LMCI department or -- and some of
23 them have purchased some of their own materials. They are
24 working -- that LMI is invaluable to them in serving
25 employers and job seekers and working with their ISD so the

1 students have the information while they're selecting their
2 career pathways and their endorsements.

3 I did hear from several of the Boards that
4 they think the material might be packaged differently or we
5 could provide training differently so that it is easier for
6 a Board to make the information available to schools or for
7 the schools to draw that information directly and then use
8 -- more of a -- the easier we could package the material for
9 the Boards, the more likely the school counselors and
10 teachers are to using that material. So the -- they may
11 want to have some conversation about LMI today also.

12 Making themselves known in the local
13 community is a challenge. I've heard this from a number of
14 Boards that they may get some free TV or radio ads, and then
15 often times they'll have paid advertising with some of our
16 larger scale events. Their Youth Career Awareness events or
17 the Red White and You events, for example.

18 But really laying -- even though it's a small
19 area, it's not -- everybody doesn't know the services are
20 out there, so it can be a -- there can be challenges for our
21 boards, particularly who have a presence in multiple small
22 areas in making sure that everyone in those various counties
23 is aware of the services they can provide.

24 So those were some of the key things we heard
25 in those phone conversations, and I know that the -- these

1 members of the Rural Workforce Network really appreciate you
2 inviting them here today to share some of their thoughts.

3 There are six members of the Workforce Network.

4 Martin, Marin, and Mary were able to join us
5 today and sort of speak on behalf of that entire group. And
6 so if you're prepared for that, I'll go ahead and turn it
7 over to Mary to start the -- this conversation.

8 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Okay. Mary?

9 COMM. HUGHS: Very nice.

10 MS. ROSS: Thank you. Mary Ross for the
11 record, from West Central Texas. And we are known as the
12 five M's and Willie.

13 (Laughter)

14 MS. ROSS: Because everybody's name starts
15 with an M. Mona and Mike and Marin and Martin and Mary, and
16 then there's Willie, which we just have another name for him
17 that starts with an M, too.

18 (Laughter)

19 MS. ROSS: So I get to represent all of us
20 kind of collectively. Not really, but I'm going to pass it
21 off to my -- my EDs that are here today. We have -- we were
22 able to talk Marin and Mike and I had a conference call and
23 had some conversation before this, and then we -- we'll all
24 be getting together after this also.

25 And I appreciate -- I just want to say,

1 Courtney came out and spent, like, a day with me. We saw
2 Commissioner Alvarez in Sweetwater and -- who was out there
3 for a Skills Development Check presentation, so she got to
4 go see the exciting city of Roscoe and Sweetwater and Snyder
5 and -- and visit with staff firsthand. And so I appreciate
6 her coming and taking the time and -- to come out and
7 actually visit and see firsthand what it looks like in a
8 rural setting. I think that was really helpful and we
9 appreciate that.

10 I'm going to kind of say a lot of the things
11 that I said I think when we were in Odessa. One of the big
12 challenges that we have, obviously, is the distance and
13 staff that are out, you know, in small offices by
14 themselves. You know, often we have two folks, for
15 instance, in an office and it gets really difficult to
16 sometimes find quality staff, trained staff and continuously
17 train them. The -- the amount of information that they have
18 to know if there's only two people in an office and -- is
19 significant.

20 In a larger Workforce Center, you tend to
21 have people who are specialized. So they know programs.
22 They may know Choices program or WIOA eligibility, or they
23 work directly with employers primarily and somebody works
24 with job seekers and maybe somebody has specialization in --
25 in facilitation and assessments and those kinds of things.

1 In a rural office, you pretty much have to do
2 all of those things. And, you know, we -- we laugh when we
3 talk about trying to be more integrated in our larger
4 Workforce Center. In the small center, they said, you know,
5 that's -- that's the only way we can function.

6 So when you lose one of those individuals,
7 trying to replace them and get them trained in a rapid
8 manner is really challenging because there's not really a --
9 there's not really a way to do that. There's not ongoing
10 training that's available. There's not, you know, enough
11 online training. If you keep bringing them in for a period
12 of time, that gets to be really expensive and time
13 consuming. So I think that's a huge challenge for most of
14 -- of us.

15 And as we often say, working at the Workforce
16 Center is a great way to get another job, because, you know,
17 sadly we probably don't pay as well. Certainly, if -- if
18 it's for our State employees, the starting pay is not great
19 compared to what they may be able to make once they start
20 making connections with employers. And so the turnover can
21 be a challenge because we can't compete in terms of wages.

22 So that's a -- that's a big issue for us is
23 really the whole training piece of the staff.

24 And then, when you have a small office, the
25 other challenge of that is their ability to get out and go

1 actually talk to folks. Ideally, you would have staff who
2 get out and be involved in the community, contacting
3 employers, going to chamber events, and not just in the one
4 community they're in.

5 They're typically serving multiple counties,
6 so they really need to be able to get out and visit with the
7 chamber folks here and the school folks here. But if you
8 only have two staff, you can't just really leave one person
9 in the office all the time while the other person goes out.
10 I mean, we've done that, but it gets to be pretty -- pretty
11 challenging sometimes. At -- you know, and at -- at points
12 we've actually only had one-person offices. So that person
13 really can't leave because you've got to have a presence
14 there.

15 So those are -- those are kind of some of the
16 challenges we've talked about. And I know we sent you a
17 proposal I think last year about having kind of a call
18 center approach to say is there a way to take some of the
19 functions that -- that could be done over the phone talking
20 to employers, looking at job postings, a lot of those kind
21 of things.

22 And we do a lot of things where we try and --
23 and have the functions coming out of our larger office for
24 those rural offices, so they're not having to do their own
25 outreach, for instance, or their own -- you know, things

1 that might take up more time to allow them to be more
2 available to folks.

3 So that's -- that's kind of the key thing.
4 So whatever you-all can do in terms of training,
5 professional development.

6 I think Courtney's right of package -- how
7 the LMI is packaged. In a rural community, it's really
8 tough when someone comes and asks you for city-level data in
9 a small community and the county-level data may not be a
10 great in a small county, let alone getting it down to the
11 community level. But that's what they're really wanting to
12 look at, because you have few employers, some large
13 employers maybe that dominate, and so the data is going to
14 be suppressed.

15 So what it looks like, you know, is not real
16 valuable sometimes. So trying to figure out how you can
17 share data with them that's meaningful and you often end up
18 talking about things in a regional, you know, way, which is
19 not bad. It's just that may be the only way you can really
20 share information with them about what are the high growth
21 occupations versus what's in their community. So anything,
22 you know, with labor market information.

23 We have some great tools and we appreciate
24 that you-all gave us some funding for that a few years ago
25 and we were able to go out and make some purchases of some

1 good software. But having -- having that ability to package
2 and some of the tools that are available already that --
3 that are accessible.

4 I think we, as a State, do a pretty good job
5 with things like Reality Check and, you know, the labor
6 market information that you come out with are some great
7 tools. We just need to make sure we can get that
8 information out to the schools and the businesses that they
9 are aware of those tools.

10 And -- and the other thing I would just say
11 is kind of tied to that is the technology. As Courtney
12 said, we've tried a lot of different ways of using
13 technology. And while almost every one of our job seeker
14 customers carries technology around with them in the form of
15 a cell phone, they are not real computer literate sometimes
16 and they don't understand how to do things on -- on a
17 computer.

18 We see that often when they come in to our
19 centers. It's because they either don't have a computer or
20 they don't really know how to use a computer.

21 They know how to text on their phone. And
22 we've found that to be an incredibly effective method for
23 communicating actually with our customers is doing texting.
24 They tend to pay more attention to it than e-mail. You can
25 set them up a free e-mail account and they will never check

1 it and will look at their text messages. But you can't fill
2 out applications via text messages with employers.

3 So what we see is there is a digital divide.
4 Part of it is the lack of broadband. You know, the lack of
5 high-speed access. You know, they can go to the public
6 library if one exists. They're often not open that many
7 hours in a small community. They may be open a day or two a
8 week during the middle of the day, maybe not a time when the
9 person can go and access it.

10 So there's not a lot of places that they can
11 go and access the technology, and then they're not
12 necessarily that comfortable with the technology, you know.
13 So you really have to look at how can you partner with other
14 folks. And then supporting that technology can be very
15 expensive because there's, as you know, constant upgrades
16 and improvements of software and -- and then just the cost
17 of broadband.

18 In some of our rural communities, I mean,
19 there's -- there's one provider, you know, so you're going
20 to pay whatever that provider tells you it's going to cost
21 and that may or may not be affordable.

22 So those are some of the -- the big
23 challenges. And I guess I would say the -- some of the
24 solutions -- of course, obviously, more money is always
25 good, you know, in terms of staffing and -- and to pay for

1 the technology. And then the -- the local flexibility for
2 us to figure out what works best, because it's definitely
3 not a one-size-fits-all.

4 You know, our -- we're all rural. We share a
5 lot of things in common. But what works well for Marin and
6 what works well for Martin may be very different than what
7 works well for us, you know, just based on how we're
8 configured and those things kind of things.

9 So with that, I don't want to take all of our
10 time, so I'll turn it over to Marin.

11 MR. RIVAS: Good afternoon, Commissioner
12 Alcantar, Alvarez, Hughs, Larry. Thank you all for -- for
13 having me. That sounds real loud.

14 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: No, that's good. I can
15 hear you.

16 MR. RIVAS: I'm going to come -- I want to
17 concur with all of the things that have been said. I think
18 -- I don't want to repeat everything that was talked about,
19 but I do want to basically state that what we're talking
20 about is an investment, an investment in rural communities
21 who have probably been forgotten since the beginning of --
22 of the system. And rightfully so. There's limited dollars.
23 You invest where the people are. The formulas are
24 established that way. We all recognize that.

25 However, being out there in the rural areas,

1 we're at a disadvantage. We do get less dollars. And what
2 we're talking about is it takes more funds to serve these
3 areas that we're talking about. You know, we're -- we're
4 not 30, 40 minutes to being able to touch every customer
5 that -- that we could possibly touch. We're -- we're
6 extremely far apart.

7 Forty-two percent of our population for the
8 panhandle is in the rural areas. So we've got two counties
9 that have the majority of the population with Potter and
10 Randall County, but the remaining people live in these rural
11 areas.

12 Back in 2008, 9, 10, prior to -- prior to me
13 being in my position, we came to a crossroad where we had to
14 -- as the Board, had to make a decision. Do we keep
15 investing and having nine offices throughout the panhandle
16 area or do we focus? What's going to help performance? And
17 that was -- we close eight of the offices. The only office
18 that we had is in Amarillo. Since then, we've been able to
19 kind of expand back out to two areas, but it's still -- it's
20 still a challenge.

21 What we're talking about is when you do
22 invest, there's not going to be the huge numbers because
23 it's -- it's a challenge to serve people. There -- there
24 might be some -- some opportunities through the virtual need
25 and trying to do that.

1 One of the keys, in my opinion, to, as far as
2 a need, is being able to advertise. I understand
3 advertising is limited to outreach and recruiting for
4 specific programs. How do you outreach -- advertise if you
5 need help finding a job? Which -- which program is that?
6 That's -- that's what we're talking about.

7 We -- we've got a -- we accepted a mobile
8 unit as -- when I came back from southeast that was an aged
9 unit. It's -- it's extremely large, 13-and-a-half foot. At
10 the time, I thought, perfect. Wrap this thing with our --
11 our banner and advertising. Let's get recognized. Let's
12 get it out there in the rural areas. Our problem now is,
13 and I don't know why I didn't think about it, but in the
14 panhandle, the wind blows.

15 (Laughter)

16 And when you've got a 14-foot empty truck
17 going down the highway, it poses a safety hazard. So my
18 interest in bringing up mobile units is I want a smaller
19 unit.

20 (Laughter)

21 You can't -- you know, I still want to keep
22 the old one because I think it still serves a purpose. But
23 I'm going to go and park it at the most northeast (sic) part
24 of the panhandle and -- and store it there and somebody can
25 drive their car, put it out, and use it. But the other

1 mobile is -- is doing their thing trying -- trying to cover
2 their other areas.

3 So that's what we're talking about is trying
4 to figure out a way to get and let people know that we
5 exist. That we're there. Usually the only time somebody
6 thinks about us is when they're in need. And unless it's --
7 it's coming up on TVs or we could send out flyers, but what
8 do you do with a flyer? You read it and toss it. That's
9 good. It's great.

10 But at the time of your emergency, you're not
11 remembering that flyer that you received from -- from
12 somebody three -- three months ago or four months ago. Or
13 maybe I ought to -- you know, I need a job so I'm going to
14 go look for a flyer and go to these agencies and hope that
15 they give me a flyer. So that -- that's my point.

16 I do -- you know, at the last meeting, I've
17 been talking about rural -- rural service delivery since I
18 kind of been put in this -- into this position.

19 We recently had been partnered up with West
20 Texas A&M University, who has gone out and was able to get a
21 grant for \$300,000 to do an assessment and I've got the
22 findings. So anything you ever want to know about the
23 panhandle, I've got it here that I'd like to leave that with
24 you-all.

25 But what we're -- again, what we're talking

1 about is investing in the rural customers and finding a way
2 to allow us the opportunity to serve them for many different
3 reasons. I'd like to say, you know, and -- and my heart is
4 in helping people go to work. But more so, we're about
5 helping businesses and our primary business -- primary
6 customer is our businesses.

7 Our rural businesses are screaming for help.
8 With the low unemployment rate, with the lack of a huge
9 population and a pool to draw from, they're -- they're
10 hurting. And if we don't help at least begin to -- because
11 there is no perfect solution, but -- and if we don't begin
12 to invest and try to -- to build solutions, then these rural
13 towns are going to go away. The rural small businesses are
14 going to go away or they're not going to continue to grow.

15 And that's one of the things you'll see is
16 our growth is not where I think it could be. We have a two-
17 percent growth, which is definitely below the State. But
18 somebody could attribute that to, well, I would grow if you
19 could provide me the labor. If you get give me the labor, I
20 could grow.

21 (Laughter)

22 We've got to work on this problem together,
23 and that's where I'm hoping that through -- through the
24 folks that -- through your leadership, we're able to invest
25 and -- and do some good in the rural areas where -- where

1 they have been long forgotten.

2 And with that, I'll turn it over to -- to
3 Martin. Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Thank you. Appreciate
5 your comments, Marin. Appreciate your -- appreciate your
6 comments, Marin. Thank you. Martin?

7 MR. AGUIRRE: I wanted to say good morning,
8 but it's good afternoon. Martin Aguirre, South Plains. The
9 good thing about going last, after these three, I can just
10 say ditto and amen to what they were talking about. We
11 haven't been having a lot of conversations on staff though
12 about how do we serve our rural areas, only because, yeah,
13 we've got 15 counties. We have six rural offices still out
14 there, and we have other areas that we're servicing just out
15 of the little centers, and then I've got something that the
16 other guys don't have. I've got Migrant Seasonal Farm
17 Worker funding, so that I have a couple of offices that are
18 actually supplemented by MSFW funding, and they are required
19 to be out there in Plainview, and Bailey County, and
20 Muleshoe.

21 So those offices, like Mary said, we have or
22 two people, but one person's out there in the field looking
23 for -- assisting migrant seasonal farm workers. We always
24 say it's always about money, and, yes, it always helps to
25 have a couple of extra positions to provide the stability to

1 continue the services for some of these initiatives, but in
2 our area, just like our Rural Workforce Network, you know,
3 we have a Community Workforce Partnership.

4 We get together quarterly. We talk about
5 what we're doing and how we're doing it with each other.
6 Not just the Workforce office doing this, but also the
7 schoolhouses are doing this, and the EDC is doing this, and
8 the Chamber of Commerce is doing that. We're all at the
9 same table.

10 Our discussion at the staff level back in
11 Lubbock really was about how do we use our partners in the
12 rural areas? Just like y'all use the TEA and the Higher
13 Education Coordinating Board to come up with a combined
14 approach, we all have -- I've got half a dozen EDCs outside
15 of Lubbock. Then we've got the big EDC, the High Ground
16 Economic Development Corporation that surrounds all of us.

17 And so in becoming members of those
18 organizations, using their networks to get the word out, so
19 that I get as many calls from the EDC Directors as I would
20 from the Chamber of Commerces (sic), and we do belong to
21 every Chamber of Commerce in 15 counties. I know my staff
22 looks at me sometimes and says, why? Why are we paying that
23 much in Chamber of Commerce dues?

24 Because that's the way you get your
25 positioning out to those rural communities. But even more

1 so, education. If we're really going to spend more money on
2 kids, if we're really going to be doing more with the
3 secondary schools, and we do the largest career expo in the
4 state probably in Lubbock, with our -- we have 51 ISBs in 15
5 counties.

6 You know, every year we pull in about 4000
7 kids in the fall to do our career expo, and every one of
8 those schools outside of Lubbock is sending buses to
9 Lubbock, right? So we actually have a fairly good
10 reputation with the school systems.

11 So in using -- utilizing more sites, not
12 really so much school counselors, because I don't think they
13 have enough school counselors, most of them are overworked
14 and underpaid anyway. I see it happen every day, just in
15 Lubbock schools with the number of counselors that they
16 have, but you've got important community meeting grounds at
17 the schools, and most of the schools will cooperate with us,
18 you know.

19 Most of the county judges -- in 15 counties
20 we've got 15 courthouses -- most of the county judges will
21 cooperate with us, because they see the need in serving to
22 their population. So they're, you know, they're more than
23 happy to perhaps provide some space, or at least tell us
24 where it's going to be.

25 I'll be honest with you, some of those

1 Chamber of Commerces (sic) are better at getting job orders
2 than any of our people. Because they'll call us and say,
3 well, here in my town, this little company is looking for
4 help, and we just wanted to see what y'all knew, what you
5 had, and if I see somebody I'll send them to you as well.

6 So we create that channel, that partnership.
7 But the schoolhouses all have one other commonality. They
8 all work out of the Regional Service Center -- the
9 Educational Service Centers that are set up out there.

10 And so when looking at the Educational
11 Service Centers and schoolhouses, the Educational Service
12 Center does a lot of electronic teaching and online
13 communication with their schools in the area. I think all
14 of mine, except for maybe two counties, are serviced by the
15 same regional service center.

16 It seems like our network could include the
17 relationships with them, so that advertising, you don't have
18 to pay for if everybody's doing it for you. If
19 everybody's, you know, cross pollinating the links and the
20 call me here, call me there. You know, my logo is on all
21 the Chamber of Commerce websites, because I'm paying
22 membership.

23 And so, it's out there, it's an outreach
24 function. No, we don't have a lot of advertising dollars,
25 yes, I do have a contract with Lubbock for paid commercials,

1 in addition to PSAs, but there's no television stations out
2 in rural areas anyway; they're all out of Lubbock. So if I
3 can, you know, just keep the video there.

4 One of the things that occurred to me though
5 just sitting here, because I play with my phone all the
6 time, just like everybody else, I don't have a Workforce
7 app.

8 There, see, I have to go back home and
9 develop a Workforce app, because, no, I can't text you
10 stuff, and my youth department does use texting to
11 communicate with the youth workers, but you should be able
12 to set up an app that does -- can gather all the
13 information, and then is interactive, and that people can
14 use. And they can do that at their house, regardless of how
15 far they are from you.

16 We are also fortunate in that NTS, our big
17 rural talk communications provider, has already completed a
18 fiber optic ring around us. And because we gave them a
19 letter of support for their grant request, they're actually
20 giving us free access for all of our offices to move up to
21 fiber optics. So our offices are going fairly quickly.

22 The rural workforce centers that Mary was
23 talking about, the mobile centers, yes I have one, but it's
24 not big. It's, you know, 24 foot. To me, it's just another
25 mobile billboard. When I'm not using it, it's typically

1 parked somewhere that's very visible. And it should be out
2 there on the corner saying, you know, there's a workforce
3 location.

4 But, at the same time, if I take it in, and
5 I'm one of those that is unscheduled, I believe that if
6 you're going to serve a rural community with a mobile
7 center, you're going to have to be there the same day, every
8 week, on time, you know, without fail, and have a driver
9 back at the office. You got to have a backup in case your
10 driver doesn't show up, and that type of thing.

11 Because we started funding a driver for the
12 mobile center through our contract, just so that nobody
13 tells me I can't drive a truck. And it's not so big that
14 you don't need a CDL. You can just, you know, get in it and
15 start driving it. But it's one of those kind of deals where
16 you just have to be sure that you're utilizing it correctly.

17 There are times when you're going to have to
18 take it off the road, whether it's maintenance, hopefully
19 not extended, but there's maintenance time. And there's
20 other times, like we're looking at three big locations that
21 are coming online this coming year.

22 We've got the cheese plant in Littlefield,
23 Texas that's nearing completion. That's a multimillion
24 dollar deal, but they're going to be needing employees.
25 And, you know, I'm talking to them about parking the mobile

1 center out there and using it as an adjunct to their
2 personnel office, until they have their actual office
3 complex built to take applications, and so forth.

4 The Monsanto plant there in Lubbock is just
5 north of town, north of the airport, we're talking to them
6 about a TIP Grant, and that probably will be done within the
7 year, and the plant will be completed, and that's another
8 big march because I think it's their national distribution
9 center for seed grain so it's going to be a big event.

10 And then Plainview has just announced that in
11 Hale County we're going to be building a lot more windmills
12 and joining Marion County Lights going around in the area.
13 And so energy will be talking to us about what we can do for
14 them. And I, you know, I speculate that we'll be able to
15 put a center out there, or even rent a temporary location
16 for them to use that out there. But it can't be a permanent
17 location, because you'd tie yourself down to paying rent.
18 And we're not really big on paying rent unless we have to.

19 But I really think that my salvation in the
20 rural area is going to be the partners that we deal with.
21 It's going to be the chambers and the EDCs and the
22 schoolhouses, and it's going to be the county judges,
23 because they have a very vested interest in making sure that
24 their populations are being served. And every time I go out
25 there and say, what is it you need? It's always, you know,

1 I have these companies, this company's doing this, I want
2 you to be able to help them, so.

3 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Thank you, Martin.

4 MR. AGUIRRE: That'd be what -- seconding
5 everything else, you know.

6 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: I want to make sure that
7 we have time. Actually, I have a hard leave in 15 minutes,
8 so I want to make sure that he has time for some questions.
9 Commissioners, do you have questions for the -- for our EDs?

10 COMM. ALVAREZ: So I have just -- I just have
11 -- Commissioner Hughs did you want to go first?

12 COMM. HUGHS: Go ahead.

13 COMM. ALVAREZ: Okay. I have some questions,
14 and we've been repeatedly hearing the concerns you have
15 regarding transportation and the lack of broadband service.
16 You know, I was looking at the Governor's, which I do
17 repeatedly, the Tri-Agency Report that, obviously, we put
18 together in 2016, June, and there is no reference of
19 broadband service in there.

20 The closest thing to there is on page 8,
21 where it references adult learner. And it talks about the
22 increasing population of those that are not going into
23 college continues to rise, for those people in rural
24 communities and those people affected by -- that are in poor
25 communities, which many of you represent.

1 Let me tell you, so we have done some
2 extensive research on broadband.

3 We know, for example, that USDA grants are
4 not available for populations that serve many of the
5 communities that you currently oversee, because of the
6 population. That's beyond our control. That's a federal
7 thing that you would probably have to -- to be working on,
8 which is something that we're doing from our office. I will
9 tell you, so that's an obstacle there.

10 We also know that TEA, along with the
11 Governor's office, initiated a 25-million dollar grant that
12 was given to the schools, and that provides broadband
13 service, but it does a great job for K-12. And just like
14 you mentioned, Marin, the K-12 are served.

15 If you want to go to and learn, or if you
16 want to use access to broadband service, you've got to
17 actually park your vehicle right outside the school and do
18 it from 8-5.

19 My concern, like many of you, is to
20 facilitate the need for those that are adult learners, those
21 that fall into the 25 to 34 year olds. Those that are,
22 after work, those that are older, are wanting to continue
23 some type of certification that cannot get to a mobile unit,
24 or get to a, you know, a satellite office.

25 Some of the proposals -- or some of the

1 recommendations that I've been looking at -- are possibly
2 maybe somehow leveraging something similar to the High
3 Demand Grant, where we have -- where I know the EDCs, and
4 Martin you just talked about the relationship you have with
5 them -- opportunities where we could leverage funding with
6 the local EDC to provide to provide what we consider
7 hotspots.

8 We know that hotspots are working in some
9 parts of Texas and rural communities, where they're actually
10 allocating 50 hotspots, which would allow 10 devices to
11 actually work from one, and check them out either through
12 the library or through the school district.

13 Because, as the Chairman has referenced in
14 the past, the last thing we want to see, especially when I'm
15 in a town like Rockdale, is to see a young adult doing his
16 homework at 11:00 at night outside of McDonald's. And so
17 that's the last thing we want to see.

18 But there are solutions, but they're going to
19 take -- we're going to have to take baby steps. And some of
20 those, like I said, some of those are federally beyond our
21 control, because they're at the federal level, with USDA and
22 the way they've identified rural communities, let's start
23 there.

24 But there are initiatives. We also know that
25 there was an initiative through FirstNet and AT&T, which

1 allowed Homeland Security Offices to have access to
2 broadband. That way, in case there was another 9/11, it
3 would free up the broadband service. What we want to see is
4 the existing broadband service or the infrastructure that's
5 in place, if we could have that one-mile connectivity.

6 So between the time when you're not using it,
7 allow us the ability to use that service. You see what I
8 mean. So in other words, the infrastructure has been put in
9 place, it's just not being utilized because there's not a
10 natural disaster.

11 So we would like to see if there was any --
12 any way we could connect to that. So there are ways. The
13 Federal Reserve has put out a report as well, to show that
14 they want to be engaged in these conversations. And so
15 they're just looking at creative ways of working through
16 your offices, to see how we could do that.

17 But like I said, this approach has been
18 looked at by, you know, by many folks. And I know that it's
19 been a -- certainly it's been a concern of ours since my
20 first day here. And so I come from a rural community, but
21 because of the definition of rural, that makes it very
22 difficult.

23 So like you, Martin, talking about working
24 with the local EDCs, I do know that there has been interest,
25 where they are willing to match dollar-for-dollar the

1 ability for us to have either hotspots, or the capability of
2 using existing towers that are in rural communities that you
3 have now. So it's just being a little creative.

4 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Commissioner you --
5 Commissioner Hughes?

6 COMM. HUGHS: Thank you. Thank you all for
7 what you shared in identifying how we can help and
8 specifically what the needs are. I think you've really hit
9 on a lot of the key areas, with respect to staff,
10 technology, marketing, we heard advertising a couple of
11 times, and outreach.

12 I am curious to just hear maybe some of your
13 best stories, in terms of what does work and what has worked
14 in your communities that you might want to highlight while
15 we're here, so that we can make sure if we have further
16 opportunities to expand in those areas. We can not only
17 address the needs, but also continue to support what has
18 worked well.

19 MR. AGUIRRE: One of the things that we've
20 done in the rural areas with education, is we were housing
21 the adult learning in our centers --

22 COMM. HUGHS: Uh-huh.

23 MR. AGUIRRE: -- and actually had the extra
24 computers and everything set up, and had instructors being
25 paid for by the AEL Program to come over to us and teach in

1 the -- like Muleshoe. Muleshoe had a half dozen extra
2 computers up front.

3 The other thing that we also know, talking
4 back to hotspots, is these mobile units that we run, they
5 don't rely on wires and anything else. They're running on
6 Wi-Fi, you know.

7 And any time they drive into a community,
8 they probably have more technology on board than most of the
9 other places in town, except perhaps the schoolhouse.
10 Because they have to keep the schoolhouse so it has some
11 connections back to the service center. But it is -- it is
12 something that we would pay attention to, and so we're
13 hoping to work with them on getting some more access on the
14 hotspots and stuff, and make sure that that does work for
15 us.

16 COMM. ALVAREZ: Martin, technology changes
17 all the time --

18 MR. AGUIRRE: I know.

19 COMM. ALVAREZ: -- and we know that.

20 MR. AGUIRRE: I know.

21 COMM. ALVAREZ: Technology is changing, so
22 even to talk about broadband and infrastructure that's going
23 to cost millions and millions of-dollars -- lets not even
24 talk about that. I agree.

25 MR. AGUIRRE: Well, just like in Plainview,

1 when we closed the Excel plant a couple of years ago and we
2 laid off those, you know, several thousand workers, we got
3 an EDA Grant --

4 COMM. ALVAREZ: Uh-huh.

5 MR. AGUIRRE: -- to build the extension for
6 the community college in that community. We weren't part of
7 it, other than to be part of the community group that
8 actually supported the grant, and, of course, those are down
9 here out of Austin.

10 MS. ROSS: I guess I would say, we have tried
11 lots of things over the years. We've tried, you know, the
12 call center kind of approach, the virtual approach, but
13 again that takes a person that knows everything; really
14 challenging. You know, because you can't have five staff
15 committed to that. The thing I think that we did a number
16 of years ago that we thought worked pretty well, was what we
17 called an RFP, which was a Request for Partners.

18 COMM. ALVAREZ: Uh-huh.

19 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Uh-huh.

20 MS. ROSS: And we didn't give people money,
21 necessarily, what we did was try and give them access. So
22 what we were doing was paying. If they didn't have high
23 speed internet, then we were paying for that, or helping pay
24 for that, and putting a computer in. So we were looking at
25 community-based organizations, chambers, you know, schools

1 in some cases, health and human service offices. Places
2 that were going to be open to the general public.

3 And the deal was, okay we'll have a phone out
4 there, you can call a toll free number, you have a person
5 who will help when a customer comes in. You're going to
6 have a designation. We put a little, you know, logo
7 somewhere that tells people, we start marketing. And we
8 literally had probably 20 of those. We tried to have
9 something in every single county.

10 We have 19 counties, but 60 percent of our
11 population is outside of Abilene, so it's definitely all
12 outside of our rural area, yeah. And we have 56
13 communities, so a lot of places. What we had to have
14 though, was a person. Because it was not realistic to think
15 that those partners were just going to do all that by
16 themselves. There had to be a person. And so we had a
17 staff person, who trained the staff at those, you know,
18 partner organizations, who went around regularly, made sure
19 that they had the brochures, had the information, etc. You
20 know, but that is a significant investment for the travel.

21 You know, because it is really about building
22 relationships, and it is about, you know, you have a person,
23 they leave, well then you have to go out, you know. With
24 the challenge of that being that sometimes when you had a
25 change in management or leadership, then they didn't always

1 see the value of that partnership, because it wasn't
2 financial.

3 But it was a fairly good strategy, because we
4 could actually promote that we had multiple locations. And
5 there was some place in your community that you knew, and
6 had some awareness of, and that you could go there and know
7 that somebody was going to help you do an employment
8 insurance claim online, do your Work In Texas registration,
9 connect to somebody on the phone.

10 You know, and now with Skype technology, etc,
11 we said, you know, there's ways that you could certainly
12 improve on that to have more face-to-face access. But I
13 think those kind of things --

14 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Uh-huh.

15 MR. ROSS: -- building on what Mark said,
16 where it's partnering and leveraging. You know, but that
17 still does take a certain amount of resource to manage that.

18 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: So what I'd like to do is
19 -- I agree, and there are fundamental issues in terms of
20 infrastructure, but what I'm trying to get to, for next
21 week, ideally, for Monday, is some ideas, tangible ideas,
22 investments, within using the statewide dollars that we have
23 available, for things that will have an impact.

24 Whether it's mobile units, whether it's a
25 training academy, to talk about the training issues that

1 you've highlighted, whether it's virtual services. And if
2 we're talking about mobile units, you know, how do we create
3 -- use those as moving hotspots, and how do we -- what do
4 you call it? I don't want to use -- how do we enhance our
5 capabilities, so that whatever things are there can be used
6 for other purposes, like these mobile hotspots.

7 MR. AGUIRRE: Uh-huh.

8 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: You know, so that
9 whatever things are there can be used for other purposes,
10 like these mobile hotspots.

11 MR. AGUIRRE: Uh-huh.

12 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: You know, there are
13 things that are doable while other, bigger issues are being
14 solved, whether they involve our federal partners or the
15 different considerations there. Those have been ongoing for
16 -- for years, and it's not something that's going to be
17 solved immediately.

18 I mean, there are groups that are looking at
19 new technologies, using the unused white space and RTVEs and
20 so forth. Those things hold great promise, but they are
21 regulatory burdens. But if you can work with Larry and
22 Courtney on really prioritizing some of the things that we
23 need to do. I've heard about mobile units. It sounds like,
24 very likely, we could use one. We've heard from others that
25 maybe not.

1 MR. AGUIRRE: A small one.

2 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: But it sounds like you
3 need a customized one; and we just need to know and
4 understand what that looks like, you know. And how do we
5 share those things, in terms of how do we create more
6 effective access points, with looking at some of the work
7 that's been done by Heart of Texas and other areas, in terms
8 of their partnerships. What does that cost, and how do we
9 do more of those? Courtney, do you have a quick comment?

10 MS. ARBOUR: I had -- quickly, I had a
11 conversation with Anthony, and, honestly, Anthony's model
12 has been very successful. They've just been working
13 primarily with libraries, and there, so far, has been no
14 cost. I asked him in follow up if there were any costs that
15 he could let us know, but they've just been working with the
16 library partners in their various counties, and anyone who
17 is willing.

18 They also are trying to work and make sure
19 that they have materials available and have a cross-referral
20 system set up. But they have a number of access points set
21 up through libraries in that way.

22 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: And so those are easy to
23 bring on --

24 COMM HUGHS: I'm sorry, but also with Heart
25 of Texas, I think they've spent a lot of time on the

1 transportation issue and trying to figure out routes that
2 are responsive to different businesses, and different hours
3 that people keep. And, you know, I think that that's
4 important to do in rural communities.

5 COMM ALVAREZ: Uh-huh.

6 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: I would agree. And then
7 with -- within the capabilities, in your -- what do we call
8 the most fundamental one-stops; auxiliary one-stops? What
9 is the base level? Anyway, we have these base-level one-
10 stops --

11 MS. ARBOUR: Ancillary.

12 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: -- ancillary one-stops.

13 MS. ARBOUR: And there's a network of service
14 providers, and you can have points within the network of
15 service provider. There's no easy answer with WIOA on this.

16 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: So using that, how do we
17 enhance the capabilities with those? So even if -- even
18 within those, because I've visited some of those, there are
19 capabilities that are not there. They don't have some of
20 the most current tools that have been developed by the
21 State. They don't have some of the capability and sort of
22 issues of training involved there, and that's where the
23 training comes in, Mary -- Marin.

24 And so, what can we develop so that we go to
25 you, or you know, we have quarterly things where you send

1 them to us, and we talk about how that's covered. And the
2 vendors come in to play here, too, because, you know, if
3 vendors are -- if these are employees of the vendors, they
4 have a stake in investing in some of these employees of
5 theirs that represent the brand.

6 And what does that look like? If we could
7 have a starting point for a discussion on Monday, Courtney
8 and Larry, relative to what a package might begin to look
9 like.

10 I really would like to, as Marin says, it's
11 been a long time. And we've been talking about it; we've
12 been having discussions. Let's try to get something started
13 early next week. Anything else you want to leave us with?
14 You know, we really appreciate your time today. Marin?

15 MR. AGUIRRE: No. I'd just like to thank
16 everybody of at least listening to our concerns and trying
17 to help solve extremely challenging issues. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: I -- I know that I'm
19 committed to making an additional investment. It's going to
20 be a longer-term process, and one that's going to take a lot
21 of diligence to really solve this, but I think we need to
22 demonstrate our commitment by starting something, at least
23 the framework, the shell for what this is going to look
24 like.

25 And I appreciate all your guidance to us, and

1 to Courtney and the rest of the team. Commissioner Hughes,
2 anything you want to close with?

3 COMM. HUGHS: No. I just want to thank you
4 all for your time, and I'm glad to know that Courtney is
5 going to get some more information, to see what we can do to
6 move forward. Thank you.

7 COMM. ALVAREZ: I, as well, just thank you
8 for being here today, taking time out of your busy
9 schedules, and sharing this information with us. Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Larry, do you have
11 anything for us before we close? Courtney, anything you
12 need?

13 MS. ARBOUR: No, but we will -- I'll have
14 more conversation with him. If we could at least get some
15 up-to amounts to you by Monday, if that would work, and if
16 you all are prepared to sign off on that, then we can flesh
17 out a better plan for what some of that looks like.

18 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Even if it's just a
19 discussion of just what the funding items might look like?

20 MS. ARBOUR: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Commissioner do you guys
22 agree with that?

23 COMM. ALVAREZ: I'll agree with that.

24 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Okay. Just to continue
25 the discussion. Thank you.

1 COMM. HUGHS: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Do I have a motion to
3 adjourn this?

4 COMM. HUGHS: I move that we adjourn.

5 COMM. ALVAREZ: I'll second that.

6 CHAIRMAN ALCANTAR: Thank you.

7 (Proceedings concluded at 1:09 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF TEXAS)
COUNTY OF TRAVIS)

I, Kimberly C. McCright, Certified Vendor and Notary in and for the State of Texas, do hereby certify that the above-mentioned matter occurred as hereinbefore set out.

I FURTHER CERTIFY THAT the proceedings of such were reported by me or under my supervision, later reduced to typewritten form under my supervision and control and that the foregoing pages are a full, true and correct transcription of the original notes.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 4th day of August, 2018.

/s/ Kimberly C. McCright
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Certified Vendor and Notary Public

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