



*81<sup>st</sup> Legislative Session  
State of Texas*

*City of Laredo  
Legislative Agenda*

*September 2008*

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## **Fund Tire Remediation Program**

### **PROPOSAL**

Fund the Tire Remediation Program what was left unfunded in the senate version of the appropriations during the 80th legislative session. This will help local governments with the enforcement, collection and disposal of used tires in municipalities.

### **BACKGROUND**

The importance of proper tire disposal cannot be overstated in that it is not just an environmental and sanitation issue but also a very serious health issue. Abandoned tires that hold stagnant water serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes that further pose a widespread threat of Dengue, West Nile Virus and other vector borne diseases. In 1997, the State of Texas abandoned the tire waste disposal program. Since then, each municipality is responsible for the enforcement and disposal of legally and illegally discarded tires, but does not receive any funding to administer such a program. Because of the serious health threat, the City of Laredo spends over \$100,000 a year removing tires from its jurisdiction.

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## **Designate a Texas-Mexico Border Public Health Region**

### **PROPOSAL**

Enact legislation that establishes a State Designated Texas-Mexico Border Public Health Region to receive dedicated funding for health services (Region 12). This is important because the Texas-Mexico Border health resources continue to be disproportionately distributed based on formulas and standards that do not reflect the border's public health and emerging disease control and prevention needs.

### **BACKGROUND**

Over 45% of our population is school age with one of the highest birth rates and 27% of the population is over 55 years old. Services will target both extreme age groups for health care services. To meet this need, both infrastructure and human resources are needed, yet most border communities and especially Laredo, remain designated as a Health Professions Shortage Area (HPSA) and Medically Underserved Area (MUA) for primary care physicians, nurses, dentists, mental health providers, clinics and hospitals. The disparity between need and resources is enormous and critical. Yet a constant reduction and/or level funding especially for Title V, Primary Care Prevention services and lack of adequate recruitment and retention of health care providers is a reality.

Yet we continue to get funding based on standard formulas and level funding. What this means for communities like Laredo is that we are really penalized for innovation and creativity. We are measured to everyone on the same standard but with fewer resources. We are also measured by national standards, yet for Laredo, a binational community that grows two fold by day, needs to be viewed for its reality of Laredo, a binational community should be viewed for its reality of growth, international significance and public health and health care needs, especially as it relates to security, outbreak control and public health protection.

To meet these challenges the City of Laredo Health Department (CLHD) has continued its public health responsibilities in core public health, preventive health care service delivery and in meeting the new public health challenges, such as chronic disease prevention and public health hazards preparedness. To support continuation of services, direct funding to the border as its own region will serve as a more equitable formula to support current, new and emerging public health needs.

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## **Funding for Indigent Health Care**

### **PROPOSAL**

Enact legislation to safeguard current funding and ensure that adequate future funding for preventive primary health care is provided for underserved and medically indigent persons on the Texas/Mexico border. In addition, appropriate and equitable Medicaid reimbursement of providers must be ensured for adequate health care access.

### **BACKGROUND**

Title V changed to Perinatal CHIP, the Bureau of Federally Qualified Health Centers received more funding and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has been expanded to improve health care access. In addition, the FREW lawsuit was settled to channel more Medicaid support to indigent and vulnerable children. However, for local medically underserved and indigent communities, such as the Texas/Mexico Border, this is not enough. Years of insufficient funding and resources continue to pose serious health care disparity. Until we invest in early detection, wellness and prevention as the primary effort to health care, we will continue to face health care disparity and increase a vulnerable population. In addition, the need for more clinics, health care providers and care facilities is imperative.

To fill the void public health/local health departments continue to provide: 1) primary health care; 2) early detection, screening services and acute care for maternity, well child, women's health dental care, family planning; and 3) for new and emerging sexually transmitted diseases, chronic diseases and mental health.

Medicaid reimbursement must also be reviewed to assure more equitable and adequate funding for providers. It must be based on the Texas border utilization rates and not on a state standard. Physicians and other providers along the border cover more of the expenses that come with caring for more vulnerable at risk patients than other doctors throughout the state. The current reimbursement rate policy serves as a deterrent to recruitment and retention of doctors and other providers to practice in Laredo.

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## **Funding for Public Health Preparedness**

### **PROPOSAL**

Enact legislation that is based on need and not on census data or national formulas for public health preparedness programs on the Texas/Mexico Border.

### **BACKGROUND**

The distribution of funds is still based on formulas that make it difficult for border cities to compete and receive the proper funding for potential all hazards public health threats. This formula does not take into account regional services (we serve a four county area), an international community, travelers, tourists and guests (150,000 new persons come into Laredo daily and 16,000 commercial trucks pass through one of our 4 international bridges. Laredo is the number one inland port of entry for all imports into the United States. Any potential biological, chemical, radiological or man made disaster must be handled locally. We have become a shelter hub for the first 5,000 evacuees from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a designated 250 special needs medical facility, a strategic National Stockpile Center and a Chemical Pack Storage Site, and have enhanced the Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance and initiated Interoperable Public Health Communication. We have created expertise to protect our local community, but also serve as the first line of defense for the state and nation. Yet challenges and response impact Laredo: Infectious diseases and co-morbidities-Tuberculosis Control; Rapid and efficient surveillance, communication (both interoperable and operable public health communication and mobile data exchange); testing and detection; public health equipment; and safeguarding our water and food sources to prevent food and waterborne disease.

Today the City of Laredo Health Department continues to provide services that the state and federal entities should provide: training, surveillance, early disease detection, testing and response, yet resources are inadequate. We need to create formulas that are based on the specific needs of our border cities and protect services.

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## **Funding for the Obesity Reduction and Diabetes (Bienestar) Program**

### **PROPOSAL**

Legislation (HB3618) was enacted in the last session to initiate the Bienestar Program as a model best practice school based and public health effort on obesity reduction and diabetes prevention. Funding to assist the schools and local public health services was not provided. A pilot in public health for women and children's services and in the Women Infants and Children's Program (WIC) should also be conducted.

### **BACKGROUND**

City of Laredo has partnered with the Social and Health Research Center (S&HRC) to implement the Proyecto Bienestar Laredo (PBL) school-based health program in Laredo. This evidence based proven strategy has had dramatic results in weight and glucose reduction. PBL consists of a network of social support for children to decrease saturated fats, to increase fiber, to increase physical activity and to control body weight. Its components are a school cafeteria, after-school activity, health screen and family component (Family Fun Fiesta, Health and Physical Education class, School Food Service and Health Club). Through this effort we can improve health outcomes through wellness and prevention for medically underserved and vulnerable communities with high-risk children for obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. This proven strategy should be a supported effort by the Department of State Health Services, Texas Education Agency, Department of Health and Human Services Commission and the Texas Department of Agriculture. In addition, we need to include a pilot for 0-5 year olds and women in the Women Infants and Children's Program (WIC) to improve children and women's health.

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## **Support for Core Public Health Services**

### **PROPOSAL**

Protect current funding and provide appropriate adequate and equitable resources to support core public health services for disease control, prevention and wellness. This will help safeguard the border, Texas and the nation.

### **BACKGROUND**

Every year public health resources have remained level or reduced for core public health services, especially for tuberculosis control, surveillance/early detection and wellness. Laredo, like other border communities, has developed models of excellence and best practices in several of our core public health services; and only in this manner have we been able to protect against current serious public health threats, as well as, new and emerging ones (West Nile Virus, Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, Extremely Resistant Tuberculosis, Cancer and Mental Health). Yet funding continues to be measured based on national standards and formulas and not on need. Therefore, Texas/Mexico Border communities, rural Texas and underserved communities get disproportional funding and inadequate resources for some of the most vulnerable and medically indigent persons in the state.

Laredo, a binational community, should be viewed for its reality of growth, international significance, public health and health care needs, especially as it relates to security, wellness, outbreak control and public health protection.

To meet these challenges the City of Laredo Health Department (CLHD) has continued its public health responsibilities in core public health, in preventive health care delivery and in meeting the new public health challenges. Through its entrepreneurship vision and our resiliency to create and propose solutions we have developed and enhanced cooperation with local, regional and binational partners for a local response. Finally, through a strong health promotion and research agenda, we have made a positive impact on public health. Resources for program and infrastructure support for core public health services remains a pillar in improving the quality of life in Laredo and must be safeguarded with adequate resources, especially as we confront a rise in new and emerging public health issues: sexually transmitted diseases, infectious diseases, mental health, substance abuse prevention, environmental health and co-morbidities to current and established diseases.

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## **Change Threat vs. Population Based On Funding Formulas**

### **PROPOSAL**

Border area communities must be classified as a separate threat risk zone when considering funding formulas for Targeted Infrastructure Capability grants. It serves to: 1) Recognize the threats to the homeland because of our proximity to other countries. 2) Places us in a better position to be considered for funding the mitigation of these threats.

A separate threat assessment for border communities would accurately depict our vulnerabilities and the resources needed to strengthen our readiness level.

### **BACKGROUND**

Currently the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) formula for Targeted Infrastructure Capability grants is awarded based primarily on the population of a metropolitan area. Grants such as the Urban Area Strategic Initiative (UASI) or Port Security awards are out of Laredo's reach because the population minimum does not meet grant criteria. While funding is typically distributed based on population and regardless of threat assessments, unique situations such as international border proximity, must be considered.

As first responders in a community located on the US/Mexico Border, we face many unique challenges. Examples of these are the enormous amounts of commercial traffic that travels, on our streets and crosses our four international bridges as a result of being the nations largest inland port. Daily we face the possibility of chemical spill or hazardous materials release into our environment. Other examples we face as frontline emergency responders are:

- 1) We are the primary responders to incidents on the Rio Grande River.
- 2) We are the primary responders to bomb threats reported at our four international bridges.
- 3) Each year the number of emergency calls we make increase due to an ever increasing population.
- 4) The ever present threat of an outbreak as 15,000 visitors cross into our community every day.

Access to federal funding is essential to manage these threats efficiently and safely and to remain prepared for any number of emergencies that endanger our community.

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## **Funding for Emerging Technology Training for First Responders**

### **PROPOSAL**

As the need for current technology to communicate in an interoperable manner with other first responders, so does the need to train a segment of the first responder population to become versed in said technology. This is important because we, as a department, will have a better understanding of how emerging technology works, and how it will benefit our response capabilities. This knowledge will allow us to make better decisions when we invest in as well as use these types of resources.

New classes that include technology based curriculum should be developed and offered to first responders. We propose that The Governor's Division of Emergency Management and the United States Fire Administration include this type of curriculum.

### **BACKGROUND**

In recent years, the fire service has evolved into a more complex emergency response discipline. There was a time when firefighting was a simple task; save lives and extinguish fires. Our training theories and culture has been based on this for many years.

Today, our firefighters are required to use equipment, resources and even data, never used before, to perform their duties. This requires revisiting the way we train in the fire service and forces us to consider incorporating new curriculum into entry level and continuing education training.

Our department invests a significant amount of effort and resources into researching new technology that may be used by our firefighters. This has resulted in the acquisition and deployment of life saving tools, such as thermal imagers for searching of victims of a fire, Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) for our response units, and updated Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software. These are some of the tools we have recently acquired to assist us in our mission of saving lives.

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## **Funding for Radio Communications and Interoperability**

### **PROPOSAL**

The Laredo Fire Department responds to emergencies not only in the City of Laredo, but also in the County of Webb. As such, there is a dire need to increase the radio communication coverage in certain rural areas of the county.

The ability to operate our radios is essential to the safe and effective response to the different emergency calls that we make on a daily basis. In addition to this, there is a need to communicate in a seamless manner with other responding agencies during a multi-agency response whether in our community or surrounding areas.

### **BACKGROUND**

Laredo, Texas is located on the US/Mexico border in Webb County. The City's jurisdictional boundaries consist of 83.44 square miles with 40% of this land area being utilized for residential purposes. An additional 43% is used for commercial, industrial, or institutional purposes according the Laredo Development Foundation. Our Fire Department's response areas include both Laredo, TX and Webb County. This equates to a 3,357 square mile primary response area.

Radio coverage is inadequate when responding in rural areas, resulting in no communication operability for responding units. Over 40% of our primary response area falls into the category of inadequate coverage, or no communications operability for our first responders.

The problem is more acute in the northeastern part of the County between Interstate Highway 35 and State Highway 44 as well as between State Highway 359 and Farm-to-Market Road 649 located in the southeastern part of the County.

These areas include populated rural towns such as Mirando City, Oilton, and Bruni.

In many instances, our dispatch center has attempted to communicate with our units and have failed to do so because of the lack of radio coverage. There are documented cases where Laredo fire crews requested assistance while fighting wild land fires in the County and were unable to communicate, endangering the lives of firefighters, because of this problem.

To illustrate the Laredo Fire Department's activity in rural area, consider the following trends. In 2006, Laredo Fire responded to a total of 105 wild land fires, 305 in 2007 and as of March 26, 2008 the number skyrocketed to 293. If this trend continues, we expect to see the busiest wild land fire season in recorded department history.

The danger is also evident when Webb County Sheriff's Deputies attempt to relay directions to our units when responding to medical emergencies. The information is transmitted from the deputies in the field to their dispatcher, who in turn conveys it to our

dispatchers who then attempt to contact our units via radio. This process adds minutes to a situation where seconds count.

Furthermore, as the nation's largest in-land port, our department is the primary Fire and EMS responder to motor vehicle accidents on our highways and roads. The daily commercial traffic count on our international bridges exceeds 15,000 trailers laden with goods, with a significant portion of these being hazardous materials.

Interoperability with other agencies is provided via radio gateways that have been applied during emergencies. This is only successful where we have proper overlapping coverage.

The National Preparedness Guidelines require jurisdictions to work together at all levels of government. Our request addresses these national priorities: Expand Regional Collaboration; Implement NIMS and the National Response Plan; and Strengthen Interoperable and Operable Communications Capabilities. The Interoperable Communications Equipment requested in this grant is a major equipment item necessary for each Homeland Security Mission Area.

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## **Funding for Regional Emergency Operations Center**

### **PROPOSAL**

The City of Laredo is vulnerable to a variety of hazards that threaten our communities, businesses and environment. Our city's management and elected officials have taken a proactive approach to keeping our community safe. One way to ensure a safer community is the creation of an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that will serve as a regional hub for disaster and emergency management.

The purpose of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is to provide a location where multiple levels of government, agencies, and organizations can coordinate decisions, resources, and public information on a strategic level. The EOC is a support element to the Incident Command structure. For all incidents, regardless of cause, response will focus on actions taken to save lives, sustain life, and protect infrastructure. Its design will be such that our public safety officials will be able to mitigate emergencies or disasters on both sides of the border. The city recognizes that a disaster that affects our neighbors to the south will defiantly affect our community. Coordination with Mexican authorities via our EOC is essential.

### **BACKGROUND**

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.

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 through Texas. Fifty percent of the trade that crosses through Laredo is hazardous material. 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 2005 data, Laredo is the number one inland port in the United States with 2,996,898 annual tractor-trailer crossings and an additional 401,569 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 367 million pounds of freight land in 2006. Laredo has an enormous potential for a disaster involving hazardous materials due to the volume of hazmat cargo, commerce, and tourism present on both sides of the border. Additionally, Laredo has over 5,075 acres of warehouse space, and at least a quarter of that space

contains hazardous materials and is highly vulnerable to terrorism and bio-chemical terrorism.

The City of Laredo is approximately 150 miles away from any community that has the capability to assist us in an emergency situation. Due to this, Laredo is the primary emergency response mechanism to any emergency within our region. In order to utilize incident command procedures to its fullest potential, a facility must be dedicated for mid to large-scale emergencies. When needed, the City of Laredo currently utilizes a classroom facility as an Emergency Management Center. The need for additional security and isolation measures is necessary. It is for this reason that we respectfully request the funding to assist us in the construction and implementation of a new dedicated Emergency Operations Center.

The City of Laredo is approximately 150 miles away from any community that has the capability to assist us in an emergency. Due to this, Laredo is the primary emergency response mechanism to any emergency within our region. In order to utilize Incident Command Procedures to its fullest potential, a facility must be dedicated for mid to large-scale emergencies. When needed, the City of Laredo currently utilizes a classroom facility as an Emergency Management Center. The need for additional security and isolation measures is necessary. It is for this reason that we respectfully request the funding to assist us in the construction and implementation of a new dedicated Emergency Operations Center.

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## **Homeland Security Funding**

### **PROPOSAL**

The City of Laredo Police Department has been responsible for the protection of the International points of entry for decades long before the term “homeland security” was ever coined. The City of Laredo remains the geographical main artery to the northern United States as one of the largest inland ports in the western hemisphere. With the ever mounting demands placed on the City of Laredo’s Police Department in a city that has seen a dramatic increase in its population and the explosive growth in the city’s cash crop, international trade, the Laredo Police Department is requesting continued funding of Homeland Security grant opportunities in order to maintain a minimum level of security to our border community and to safeguard the biggest front door to the United States of America.

### **BACKGROUND**

Since the 9/11 attacks, and the threat of increased violence in the streets of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, south of the US border city of Laredo, Texas, the Laredo Police Department has been proactive in establishing a bomb detection /identification/disposal unit within its department. The need to become self-sufficient became paramount in lieu of our community's over-reliance on other agencies for back-up support to this area. In response to an incendiary device call, local authorities would have to rely on the San Antonio Police Department and/or military ordinance/bomb personnel from either San Antonio or Houston, hundreds of miles away. This situation would create and exacerbate a potentially hazardous situation for all areas, leaving San Antonio and/or Houston vulnerable during their emergency responses to Laredo. It also extended the amount of time the scene had to be secured, diverting local officials from their regularly assigned duties. A Bomb Unit was established to provide adequate area-wide protection against incendiary/explosive devices and other possible weapons of mass destruction. The Laredo Police Department now has a fully-functional Bomb Disposal Unit and a Bomb Disposal Andros Robot along with other bomb disposal equipment. The equipment was funded by Homeland Security Grants for first responders. The purchase amount of the bomb equipment was approximately \$389,000.00. It should also be noted that the border violence that is plaguing Laredo's neighbors south of the border in Mexico has increased to the point that the narco-traffickers that continue their fight to control the very lucrative drug trade corridor through the "Plaza" in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, over the Rio Grande River on into the US via Laredo, Texas, makes it imperative that we continue to sustain our municipal police force ever-ready to face domestic drug terrorists with both their arsenal of armaments including caches of state-of-the-art weapons and communications systems.

The services provided by law enforcement personnel include increased security at:

- All ports of entry/international vehicular -pedestrian -rail bridges
- Interstate commerce corridors - IH-35 and US Hwy 59
- Rio Grande
- Water plants
- Electric plants

- Laredo Entertainment Center (10,000 seat multiuse arena)
- Government buildings
- Schools (including a university and community college campuses)
- International Airport
- Regional law enforcement support services

### **Homeland Security Needs**

Other homeland security issues that the Laredo Police Department needs to address include:

- **Narcotics Trafficking**  
Operation Stone Garden and Operation Black Jack were highly effective, time-specific, cooperative, multi-agency operational initiatives funded by DOJ, Extra law enforcement personnel were deployed throughout inner city and rural areas of Laredo, with the objective of intercepting illegal activity, providing criminal intelligence information for agency sharing activities, and provide a commanding presence along border crossing points, Both operations funded approximately \$1,000,000 for Laredo Police overtime, including \$727,000,00 for LPD overtime alone, Both the operations were successful in producing a bevy of criminal-intelligence information, a multitude of weapons confiscations and arrests, criminal apprehensions, including those related to narcotics charges, domestic terrorism activities, and other miscellaneous charges. Much of the money used to traffic narcotics has been linked to supporting terrorism. The Laredo Police Department actively reduces the amount of illegal drugs entering the United States, resulting in a decrease in terrorist funding.
- **Port of Entry**  
With four international bridges and a low-level international water boundary, Laredo experiences a large amount of legal and illegal immigrants entering the United States. Working in collaboration with federal authorities, the LPD also has the task of thoroughly checking these individuals for links to terrorist groups or activities.
- **Hazardous Materials**  
As the largest inland port on the southern U.S. border, a large amount of hazardous materials cross through and are stored in Laredo. Hazardous materials can be easily converted to weapons of mass destruction. LPD must have the latest training and equipment to be prepared for an emergency situation involving hazardous materials.
- **Rio Grande River**  
The Rio Grande is the primary water source for the Cities of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Contamination of this water source would have detrimental effects on both sides of the border. LPD is also charged with protecting and patrolling this important natural resource.

- **Airport Security**  
The September 11 attacks proved that airplanes can be used as weapons of mass destruction. The Laredo International Airport must maintain a high level of security to ensure this incident does not occur again. This is another area where LPD helps to augment the airport's own security staff and assists with securing this vital hub of international air cargo.
- **Communication**  
The City of Laredo has received state DHS funding to purchase a brand new, state-of-the-art communication system. DHS funding has awarded funds via the state for the purchase of a new 800 MHz digital communication system for radio interoperability and connectivity between all of the state, local, and federal public safety counterparts during any emergency crisis, most especially those that could well involve either a vulnerable foreign or domestic terrorism threat. The key to good crisis management is obviously seamless communication between all agencies. To this end, the City of Laredo has incorporated an 800 MHz (Motorola) Digital Trunk Radio Communication System which - The City of Laredo has received state DHS funding to purchase a brand new, state-of-the-art communication system, DHS funding has awarded funds via the state for the purchase of a new 800 MHz digital communication system for radio interoperability and connectivity between all of the state, local, and federal public safety counterparts during any emergency crisis, most especially those that could well involve either a vulnerable foreign or domestic terrorism threat. The key to good crisis management is obviously seamless communication between all agencies. To this end, the City of Laredo has incorporated an 800 MHz (Motorola) Digital Trunk Radio Communication System which became fully operational last summer to ensure that all agencies can talk to each other during emergency situations. The limited DHS funding received from the state along with City bond monies were pooled together for the outright purchase of both the radio systems' infrastructure and all of its related components. Agencies at the federal, state and local levels will now have instant access to seamless communication interoperability to effectively deal with any crisis as soon as inter-local agreements are in place.

LPD has since purchased the following items using federal funds:

- Purchased an Emergency Mobile Command Center.
- Purchased new E911 radio communication equipment.
- Created a bomb unit; certified two officers and a trained K9; and, purchased necessary equipment.
- Purchased Mobile Video Cameras for marked police vehicles.
- Currently purchasing more Mobile Data Terminals (MOTs) for all police vehicles.

LPD still needs (and requests) additional federal DHS funding to:

- Increase the number of patrol officers hired.
- Increase the number of patrol cars and police equipment purchased.

- Purchase an air support unit (fully equipped Helicopter)
- Purchase an additional armored SWAT vehicle and SWAT tactical vehicles for emergency high risk situations.
- Proposed Solution
- The Laredo Police Department plays one of the most important roles in homeland security. The nation depends on its gatekeepers to keep a watchful eye and eliminate terrorists from entering the country. Funding is desperately needed to hire additional police officers and purchase equipment and technology to fulfill the department's obligation to the rest of the country. Overtime funding is also needed to specifically address homeland security issues. Since Laredo is a border city, the LPD must do everything possible to ensure the rest of the country is safe from terrorism.
- Continued and/or additional funding for law enforcement initiatives that mirror CBP's Operation Cooperation; Operation Stone Garden; and/or Operation Black Jack, wherein there is serious funding for joint operational, intelligence-driven - information sharing - crime analyses; and, criminal deterrence/apprehension activities by law enforcement officers. The funding should not only cover operational activities' overtime monies but, should also include funding for the hiring of additional law enforcement officers for all agencies involved; most especially for the state and local agencies. Currently the Webb County Sheriff's Office was supposed to apply on our behalf to allocate funding through operation Stonegarden, of which they received two million dollars. There was no mention of our police department or (any other departments) in the County's budget summary or operations order. The funding is also needed crucial training initiatives to ensure that the Laredo Police Department's first responders are adequately prepared in the fields of bio-terrorism, cadaver forensic investigations, emergency preparedness and other crucial interests of criminal justice that directly affect the continued safeguarding of our ever growing Laredo community and the gateway to the United States of America.

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## **River Jurisdiction Status**

### **PROPOSAL**

The Laredo Fire Department has a long standing tradition of responding to the Rio Grande River to rescue those in need when attempting to cross north or south bound, as well as, to recover the bodies of those whose attempts are unsuccessful. In addition to this, our department is the primary responder to bomb threats, and more frequently, medical emergencies at the ports of entry. As such, the fire department's current deployable assets to these emergencies are rapidly aging after years of service.

### **BACKGROUND**

We are the primary responders to emergency incidents along the Rio Grande River from the Maverick/Webb County line to the Zapata/Webb County line. Thus, the question is raised as to whose primary jurisdiction does the river belong to. If the international boundary is considered federal responsibility, federal resources are needed to aid in the response and recovery mission.

In 2007, Fire personnel responded to well over 40 deployments to the river, a 20% increase over 2006.

### **CONTACT**

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## **Changing General Election Date**

### **PROPOSAL**

Enact legislation that amends Section 41.0052 of the Texas Election Code:

“Changing General Election Date” of the Texas Election Code by extending the allowable date for governing bodies of political subdivisions to change the general election date. The present allowable date to change the election date is December 31, 2005 and we need the date extended to December 31, 2009.

The intent is to allow the City of Laredo to move the election date as the amended City of Laredo Charter had intended. This allows us to save money by sharing the cost of the election with Webb County General Election, LISD Trustee Election, and UISD Trustee Election.

### **BACKGROUND**

41.00052. Changing General Election Date.

The governing body of a political subdivision other than a county may, not later than December 31, 2005, change the date on which it holds its general election for officers to another authorized uniform election date.

This proposed change was approved at the last legislation by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, but Governor Perry vetoed the bill.

The City had requested the change through the City Charter Revision Commission who made various revisions to the City Charter. Changing the election date allows the confusion among voters of too many elections in a short time span; that of having a Primary in March, a Runoff Primary in April, a General City Election in May, and a City Runoff Election in June.

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## **Coin Operated Machine Businesses**

### **BACKGROUND**

The establishment of amusement businesses, commonly referred to as “8-liners,” is booming in Laredo. The businesses are zoned and permitted through the City of Laredo as legitimate businesses. The 8-liner businesses are highly lucrative amusement establishments featuring coin operated apparatuses. The businesses are established by legitimate business owners and operators. These businesses attract a large following of retirees, senior citizens and those who opt not to travel long distances for entertainment.

### **PROPOSAL**

The City of Laredo has a population of approximately 225,000 and has 36 permitted 8-liner businesses (approx. 2,815 machines). These businesses are currently governed by local planning, zoning and permitting laws, State of Texas tax/registration through the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Office and State of Texas gambling Penal laws. The local and state permitting laws seem appropriate and are generally complied with. A problem arises now that the 8-liner businesses have become too numerous and proved lucrative. The State law that limits 8-liner businesses’ cash payout of prizes to less than \$5 is the one factor that business owners/operators are not abiding by. It is apparent that there is public demand for cash payout to amounts greater than \$5. Cash payouts are what attract customers. Business owners/operators then succumb to the demand for greater than \$5 payouts and break the law.

There is public sentiment to allow a greater than allowed payout. Likewise, there is a seemingly equal amount of sentiment against such currently illegal payouts. The lucrative and demand aspects of the equation have promoted a high incidence of owner/operator disregard for limiting payouts to less than \$5, thus violating existing law against it. At this point, the burden is cast upon local law enforcement to enforce the law as it stands. Local law enforcement has struggled to keep up with the controversy centering on the \$5 payout limit. Enforcement and penalties related to this type crime have not deterred owners/operators from continuing to violate this law. City and County law enforcement agencies have incurred considerable cost in manpower and resources to monitor, arrest, prosecute, and store evidence reference these cases. An observation on the issue is that the violation of payment of over \$5 is a criminal violation and therefore tends to attract a corruption element to the businesses, both from internal and external sources. Since businesses have a need to conceal the violation of payout, they are susceptible to a myriad of other crimes to include extortion, money laundering, etc. If the State were to establish a Gambling Commission to regulate and enforce these types of gambling businesses then the local Police could redirect their efforts toward more substantive law enforcement objectives than enforcing a less than \$5 payout limit.

### **PROPOSED SOLUTION**

The City of Laredo Police Department is proposing that the State of Texas Legislature amend the current law concerning 8-liner coin operated machines. The current law allows 8-liners to legally operate, but only allows the cash payout amounts to be no more than \$5 dollars in actual value. This issue creates a problem by tasking the local law

enforcement community with constant monitoring and enforcing of applicable gambling laws. The costs associated with building time and labor intensive prosecutable criminal cases against 8-liner businesses financially burdens local law enforcement. In the end, and due to the lucrative nature of the 8-liner business, the temptation upon 8-liner business owners/operators to payout more than the allowed amount apparently outweighs the risk of facing arrest (Class A or B Misdemeanor) or paying fines.

The Laredo Police Department recommends either of the two most obvious options. The first option of which would be to lift the limit on cash payouts, thus making it legal for businesses to payout cash amounts to match winnings. At this junction, with careful regulation and state monitoring, such as in Nevada or Louisiana, the State of Texas could potentially keep Texans from traveling outside the State for gambling endeavors and further, the State of Texas could stand to create a new and sizeable cash crop to enhance any element that best benefits the State such as: education, law enforcement, etc. The second option would be to totally ban cash payouts for any form of coin operated amusement machines in Texas. The City of Laredo does not specifically favor one option over the other.

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## **Support for Delayed School Start Date**

### **PROPOSAL**

The City of Laredo supports a delayed school start date. As a partner with the Texas Hotel and Lodging Association, the Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau supports the overall positive impact the delayed school start date has on tourism.

### **BACKGROUND**

During the 80th State Legislative session, legislators enacted a regulation that every school district should begin their fall semester on the fourth Monday in August. The new law should be maintained in subsequent sessions in order to allow for additional leisure travel time in the State of Texas. More time to travel and vacation translates to more money generated from tourism and hotel occupancy taxes.

The law is supported by the following state associations (among others): Texas Travel Industry Association; Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus; Texas Hotel and Lodging Association; and The Coalition for a Traditional School Calendar.

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## **Provide Recreational Facilities and Workforce Opportunities for People with Special Needs**

### **PROPOSAL**

To enact legislation and provide more funding that would provide recreational facilities and more workforce opportunities for people with special needs.

### **BACKGROUND**

The City of Laredo Parks and Leisure Department wants to meet the needs of the community it serves. As such, the funding of recreational facilities for people with special needs would be a tremendous benefit to these individuals and the community. Additionally, people with special needs are left with few options to pursue after they graduate or leave high school. With this in mind, the City of Laredo would like to encourage legislation that would create more opportunities for these individuals. Some options to consider are on-the-job training programs and/or grants to businesses who hire people with special needs. Indeed, providing more recreational facilities and offering job training and assistance would help create a better quality of life for these individuals.

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## **Local Option Residence Homestead Exemption**

### **PROPOSAL**

Proposing to change Section 11.13 (n) of the Texas Property Tax Code in order to allow a governing body of a taxing unit to adopt a set appraised value exemption of his residence homestead, as opposed to a percentage, thus giving all taxpayers an equal reduction in the property tax base. This change does not require any funding.

### **BACKGROUND**

Section 11.13 (n) states “an individual is entitled to an exemption from taxation by a taxing unit of a percentage of the appraised value of his residence homestead if the exemption is adopted by the governing body of the taxing unit before July 1 in the manner provided by law for official action by the governing body. If the percentage set by the taxing unit produces an exemption in a tax year of less than \$5,000 when applied to a particular residence homestead, the individual is entitled to an exemption of \$5,000 of the appraised value. The percentage adopted by the taxing unit may not exceed 20 percent.” Making the proposed change will give all taxpayers an equal reduction in the property tax base.

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## **Periodic Reappraisal of Real and Personal Property**

### **PROPOSAL**

Clarify language in Section 25.18 (b) of the Tax Property Tax Code. While Section 23.01 (a) states that all taxable property is appraised at its market value as of January 1; Section 25.18 states that the reappraisal plan shall provide for the reappraisal activities at least once every three years. This gives the perception that the appraisal district has the option to choose how often they will reappraise the property. In addition, if the intent is to allow an option of reappraising property every one, two, or three years; include an option for the governing body of a taxing unit to be able to choose which option they prefer without it affecting the other taxing entities. This change would not require any funding.

### **BACKGROUND**

Section 23.01 (a) states that all taxable property is appraised at its market value as of January 1.

Sec. 25.18. Periodic Reappraisals states:

- (a) Each appraisal office shall implement a plan for periodic reappraisal of property approved by the board of directors under Section 6.05(i).
- (b) The plan shall provide for the following reappraisal activities all real and personal property in the district at least once every three years.

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## **Bus and Facility Capital Funding**

### **PROPOSAL**

Recommend a special State General Revenue provided fund of \$15,000,000 per year for bus and bus facility capital purchases in 2010 and 2011. These General Revenue funds would come from the estimated state surplus for the 2010-2011 biennium. Legislative action and funding is needed.

### **BACKGROUND**

For many years, Texas has been unsuccessful in obtaining federal discretionary program funds for vehicle capital replacement. This has resulted in an increasingly old and high mileage fleet of vehicles that are difficult to maintain and create safety concerns for transit agencies and their customers. In 2007, TxDot estimated the cost of replacing the small urban and rural fleets at \$80.5 million. Replacing only vehicles that were at or above 150% of their normal useful life was estimated at \$34.7 million. A needs survey conducted by the Texas Transit Association in 2008 estimated a vehicle replacement need of \$15 million per year.

Laredo needs to replace 36 heavy-duty buses within the next four years. Laredo is within 120 days to construct a new administration and maintenance facility to meet current and future growth.

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## **Eliminate State Sales Tax Cap for Transit**

### **PROPOSAL**

Elimination of the transit tax from the state sales tax cap. Legislative action is needed to hold a referendum for Laredo, Texas.

### **BACKGROUND**

Laredo has reached the maximum sales tax level allowed in Texas. El Metro could have a sales tax as high as 1 cent; however, it is limited to the current  $\frac{1}{4}$  cent because of the cap. When the census indicates that we have exceeded a population of 200,000, we will no longer be allowed to use FTA money for operations. The capital funds will be plentiful; but in order to replace the Federal operating grant funds, we will need to hold a referendum to raise another  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cent tax. Laredo will need an exemption from the state tax cap law to accomplish this.

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## **Cuatro Vientos**

### **PROPOSAL**

The City of Laredo supports the full funding of the Cuatro Vientos Project.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Cuatro Vientos Road is an on-system roadway which will parallel US 83, beginning at SH 359 on the north, at the intersection of Loop 20, and extends 7.25 miles south to connect with US 83, a Texas Trunk System Road. The road will alleviate congestion along US 83, resulting in better roadway system capacity through increased average peak operating speeds, and reductions in travel times and accidents. The proposed corridor will allow residents in South Laredo and nearby communities to access jobs and centers of trade.

The project is currently estimated to incur costs of approximately 104 million dollars.

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## **Dedicate Aviation Sales Tax for Airport Development**

### **PROPOSAL**

Seek legislation that provides for the dedication of aviation sales and franchise taxes in support of airport development throughout the State of Texas. Both general aviation and commercial service airports would be eligible to receive state funding.

Increased state funding would contribute greatly to airport safety, security, maintenance and development and make Texas airports more competitive for federal grants.

And increased investment in airport development would serve to enhance the ability and capacity of Texas airports to serve as catalyst for local, regional and state wide economic development.

### **BACKGROUND**

Reference: City of Laredo Resolution No. 2008-R-028 approved by Mayor and City Council on April 21, 2008 and on July 14, 2008 the Webb County Commissioners Court approved a resolution supporting the City's resolution.

The State of Texas is among the very few states that does not have a dedicated source of funding for airport development. Currently the Texas Department of Transportation provides limited funding to its Division of Aviation in the amount of \$16.0 million per year from the non-dedicated portion of Fund Six for airport development. There are 300 plus general aviation airports in the current TxDOT airport funding program and due to limited funding, no state funds for capital improvement projects are available for commercial service airports.

The State of Texas annually collects approximately \$54.0 million in sales and franchise taxes from aviation and air transportation related goods and services and deposits this revenue into the State General Fund. The state sales and franchise taxes on aviation and air transportation goods and services would provide a dedicated funding source for the states' airports and would provide a close link between the tax and how that money is spent. The State of Texas has set precedence when it approved the dedication of sales tax revenue collected from sporting good to be dedicated to funding the state's park system.

### **CONTACT**

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## **Railroad Noise Abatement Program**

### **PROPOSAL**

Establish and capitalize a Railroad Noise Abatement Program for projects such as grade separations, safety devices, noise mitigation efforts, and the creation of quiet zones.

### **BACKGROUND**

Laredo is serviced by two major railroads: the Kansas City Southern Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad, both of which have operated in Laredo and used the city as a crossing point between the U.S. and Mexico for over a century. Residential populations and industrial facilities have grown around the railroad right of way, creating conflicts between the needs of the railroad industry and the needs of the residents. Today, there are 135 miles of track and over 80 grade crossings within the corporate city limits. With Laredo's population growing at almost 5.2% annually and an astonishing increase in operations by the rail companies, it is evident that inter-modal conflicts will only worsen. The number of rail cars handled by the Texas-Mexican Railway Company, for example, more than quadrupled from 2,000 a month in 1994 to 9,000 in 1998. By 2000, the figure was over 10,700 rail cars per month. The report, "Application of GradeDec-the Laredo Case Study," prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration determined that:

*"The long closure time at the crossings due to slow and frequent train movements causes severe congestion and delay for the cars and trucks that use these crossings... These queue lengths often cause stopped delays for as high as 30 minutes or more for a single vehicle at one time."*

Federal legislation currently allows local governments to ban audible warnings. Under the rules, local governments can establish quiet zones in areas where there is a low risk of collision, or to make specific upgrades to lessen the risk where hazards are greatest. The upgrade options include the installation of interlocking gates that block both lanes of traffic in either direction and/or a median to prevent drivers from crossing lanes to go around a lowered gate.

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## **Support for Transportation Corridor Projects that Positively Impact the Port of Laredo**

### **PROPOSAL**

Support the creation of any transportation corridor project that positively impacts the Port of Laredo.

### **BACKGROUND**

Tolling for many regions of the State may not provide the means for enhanced mobility due to economic wellbeing and affordability. The State should continue to identify alternative resources to meet Texas mobility needs. Further, non-tolled facilities must remain and be maintained to current standards.

### **CONTACT**

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## **Amend Utilities Code Regarding Telecommunication Providers and a Municipality**

### **PROPOSAL**

Amend Utilities Code to make telecommunication providers fiscally accountable for relocation of resources to any public infrastructure within a municipality. The City of Laredo would like to amend 54.203 (c) to change “widening or straightening of a street” to “any public infrastructure.”

### **BACKGROUND**

Currently, the Utilities Code (Section 54.203) grants municipalities the authority to require a telecommunications provider to bear the expense of relocation if the purpose is to accommodate street widening or straightening. However, because “street widening and straightening” are often misinterpreted by telecommunication providers, the City of Laredo would like to amend the code to require telecommunications providers to bear the expense of any public infrastructure thus helping to end confusion between the two entities.

Utilities Code 54.203 reads as follows:

§ 54.203. SERVICE IN ANNEXED OR INCORPORATED AREA.

(a) If an area is or will be included within a municipality as the result of annexation, incorporation, or another reason, each telecommunications utility that holds or is entitled to hold a certificate under this title to provide service, or operate a facility in the area before the inclusion, has the right to continue to provide the service or operate the facility and extend service in the utility’s certificated area within the annexed or incorporated area under the rights granted by the certificate and this title.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, a certificated telecommunications utility has the right to:

(1) Continue and extend service within the utility’s certificated area;

(2) Use roads, streets, highways, alleys, and public property to furnish retail utility service.

(c) The governing body of a municipality may require a certificated telecommunications utility to relocate the utility’s facility at the utility’s expense to permit the widening or straightening of a street public infrastructure by:

(1) Giving the utility 30 days’ notice; and

(2) Specifying the new location for the facility along the right-of-way of the street.

(d) This section does not limit the power of a city, town, or village to incorporate or of a municipality to extend its boundaries by annexation.

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## **Communication Between Municipalities Regarding Water Resources**

### **PROPOSAL**

Support legislation that ensures municipalities such as Laredo, are notified when any actions affecting the water supply and/or water resources upstream are communicated to the municipalities that are downstream.

### **BACKGROUND**

The City of Laredo's source of drinking water is the Rio Grande River between the Texas and Mexico border. With this in mind, the City should be informed about any news or information from municipalities with water resources upstream that could have an impact on Laredo's drinking resource and other resources downstream.

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