

## **M. Rural Structure and Infrastructure**

*Moderator: Eric Wareham, Western Equipment Dealers Association*

- a. Road Trains, *Senator Larry Luick, North Dakota*
- b. A New Way to Think About Paying for Roads, *Representative Brad Witt, Oregon*
- c. Wildfire Response, *Representative Tom Dent, Washington*
- d. Aspen Pre-Suppression Fire Technique, *Representative Stewart Barlow, Utah*
- e. Volcano and Hurricane Response, *Senator Clarence Nishihara, Hawaii*

Disaster Response, *Commissioner Sid Miller, Texas*

Rural Structure and Infrastructure

Senator Luick of North Dakota spoke first about moving goods, and how current methods are not very efficient. He spent a few minutes discussing the loss of rail access that affected much of the country with the introduction of the motor vehicle. He then highlighted his idea about road trains or platooning. He did acknowledge that such transportation options might not work in every state but they could be very useful in plain states.

Representative Witt then spoke about road use charges, often referred to as RUCs. He gave an analogy with pickups, 4x4s and older cars versus newer and fuel efficient vehicles. While most rural drivers tend to drive more inefficient vehicles, they would pay less in a road use scenario since right now many urban drivers do not pay their fair share since they drive electric or hybrids. Talked about how the history of the Oregon gas tax. Ended by noting that many western states are working together on this and that eastern states along I-95 are also working on a pilot. He noted that federal funds are available for states to help them study how it might be implemented. He also discussed during Q&A about how such a system would work when a driver would leave the state.

Then Rep. Dent of Washington and Rep. Barlow of Utah spoke about wildfire issues. Rep Dent specifically focused on increasing the number of aircraft to fight fires and the need to form rural fire protection organizations. Rep. Barlow discussed pre-suppression efforts .

Next up was Senator Nishihara of Hawaii to discuss the impact of the volcano on the big island the how the community is rebuilding. He presented a number of handouts and just those verbatim.

Volcano impact and rebuilding

Reviews handouts showing damage from volcano especially on agriculture production  
Literally just read his handout word for word

Commissioner Sid Miller of Texas was last. He began by noting how Texas grasslands have changed over time, and that shoulder high grass makes fire suppression impossible. He discussed the response to Hurricane Harvey and the associated flooding including cotton and cattle loss. Really highlighted the need to prep ahead of time. Also discussed how to funnel all the help that people outside of the disaster want to provide but all the housing and food that it requires.

Water Conservation Efforts, Water Access, Water Rights

Doug Jones – Managed water conservation to move water when its not needed to recharge aquifers. State has spent millions of dollars to support effort. Still need for additional water recharge, so they have developed private system similar to bank checking account. Pumped storage is another option but that is very dependent on the terrain.

Idaho senator Guthrie – make the desert bloom was the concept decades ago. Now its clear that wont work without recharging. East plains aquifer agreement. Ongoing lawsuits will likely continue as overtime they overappropriated water rights