

Opening Statement for Senator Tom Coburn
“Lessons Learned from the Boston Marathon Bombings: Preparing
for and Responding to the Attack”
July 10, 2013

Thank you, Chairman Carper, for holding this hearing today.

My state was changed forever when Timothy McVeigh decided 18 years ago to blow up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Oklahomans will always remember that on April 19, 1995, 168 people lost their lives and 680 were injured in this attack - our hearts were broken, but Oklahoma recovered.

At the time, I went to the House floor and said that any response to these attacks “should be measured and based on facts and not on emotion.” That is still true today and I hope it is the tone of our committee’s inquiry as we consider the important lessons learned.

The Boston Bombing first responders were heroic in minimizing the loss of life, but a number of fortunate (and unrepeatable) circumstances contributed to the successful response. The state, city and first responder community engaged in extensive planning to support the Marathon every year. This included preparing for mass casualties among the runners; maintaining a heavy police, EMS, first responder, and volunteer presence; and running a table top exercise each year prior to the event to practice responding to different types of scenarios.

On top of that, Boston is also home to some of the best medical infrastructure in the world. When we consider lessons learned today, we need to understand not only what worked well in Boston, but what *can* work well in other places.

More important, we need to understand whether the current tools at our disposal, including FEMA’s grants, are set up to effectively implement the valuable lessons learned outside of Boston. I am concerned that FEMA’s grant programs do too little to ensure that grant funding is spent to address the highest threats and risks on proven activities that we know are effective.

Many witnesses will cite the use of FEMA grants in improving preparedness, such as funding for the Urban Shield exercise performed in 2012. There is no doubt that grant funding played a role in the successful response, but we have a responsibility to look not just at a few good examples, but at the grant programs as a whole.

There are two big concerns with using examples to infer the value of the preparedness grants more broadly. First, according to data provided to us by Massachusetts, the majority of grant funding under the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) program in recent years went to equipment and planning. Significantly smaller amounts went towards the training and exercises we have been hearing about, such as Urban Shield. At a time when grant dollars are shrinking, this begs an important question as to whether we, and FEMA, need to do more to target the use of grant funding towards concrete activities that work.

The role of fusion centers in preventing and responding to this attack remains questionable, along with our progress in information sharing generally. In briefings for the committee, as well as during a trip to Boston, we have repeatedly sought to understand the role that fusion centers played in sharing information prior to, during, and after the bombings.

Commissioner Davis and Under Secretary Schwartz have both highlighted the efforts of the states' Commonwealth Fusion Center and the Boston Regional Intelligence Center. I hope today to get a clear understanding today of the fusion centers' roles before the bombings and during the response, including the extent to which the fusion centers provided services or information that was not already moving through other channels.

I want to thank the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, City of Boston and FEMA for responding to my follow-up information requests. However, I remain concerned that this hearing is being held without the benefit of the completed after action reports and analysis that would provide a more comprehensive picture of what worked and what didn't. In the weeks, months, and years that follow, I look forward to continuing to work closely with all of the witnesses at this table to translate lessons learned into real

reforms that improve our safety and security, and I ask for your continued cooperation in that endeavor.