

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
HOUSE POLICY COMMITTEE

STATE AND LOCAL RESPONSE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

140 MAIN CAPITOL BUILDING
MAJORITY CAUCUS ROOM

FEBRUARY 23, 2007
11 A.M.

BEFORE :

HONORABLE JOSEPH MARKOSEK, CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE MARK COHEN
HONORABLE MIKE CARROLL
HONORABLE ANTHONY DeLUCA
HONORABLE EUGENE DePASQUALE
HONORABLE TODD EACHUS
HONORABLE FLORINDO FABRIZIO
HONORABLE MICHAEL GERBER
HONORABLE NEAL GOODMAN
HONORABLE MARK LONGIETTI
HONORABLE JENNIFER MANN
HONORABLE MICHAEL McGEEHAN
HONORABLE BARBARA McILVAINE-SMITH
HONORABLE ANTHONY MELIO
HONORABLE EDDIE DAY PASHINSKI
HONORABLE TONY PAYTON, JR.
HONORABLE DANTE SANTONI, JR.
HONORABLE TIM SEIP
HONORABLE JOHN SIPTROTH
HONORABLE TIMOTHY SOLOBAY
HONORABLE EDWARD STABACK
HONORABLE JAMES WANSACZ
HONORABLE RONALD WATERS
HONORABLE DAVID ARGALL

BEFORE (cont'd.):

HONORABLE KAREN BEYER
HONORABLE STEVE CAPPELLI
HONORABLE RUSS FAIRCHILD
HONORABLE WILL GABIG
HONORABLE RICHARD GEIST
HONORABLE MAUREE GINGRICH
HONORABLE JULIE HARHART
HONORABLE KATE HARPER
HONORABLE SUE HELM
HONORABLE DICK HESS
HONORABLE DAVID HICKERNELL
HONORABLE ROB KAUFFMAN
HONORABLE MARK KELLER
HONORABLE CARL MANTZ
HONORABLE RON MARSICO
HONORABLE DAVID MILLARD
HONORABLE RON MILLER
HONORABLE JOHN PAYNE
HONORABLE SCOTT PERRY
HONORABLE THOMAS QUIGLEY
HONORABLE DOUGLAS REICHLEY
HONORABLE MARIO SCAVELLO
HONORABLE MIKE TURZAI

SHERRI A. REITANO, RPR
NOTARY PUBLIC

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1 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Folks, if we can
2 call this meeting to order. Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Good morning,
4 everybody. Good morning. Is everybody here? Thank
5 you. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm Representative Joe
6 Markosek, chairman of the Transportation Committee,
7 majority chairman. I'd like to call this meeting to
8 order.

9 I'd like to thank you all for attending
10 here this morning and afternoon. We have an
11 aggressive schedule before us today with a very
12 diverse and experienced panel to learn about the
13 events of last week's storm and how the Commonwealth
14 can be better prepared in the future.

15 The purpose of today's hearing, as I
16 mentioned, is to learn what went wrong last week and
17 how the Commonwealth can move forward. The tone of
18 the hearing should be firm but not punitive. We all
19 agree the storm last week was severe. The State's
20 response was poor.

21 I commend the administration for
22 accepting responsibility and initiating internal and
23 external investigations immediately.

24 I would like to set the ground rules for
25 the procedure for today's hearing. Each member will

1 be recognized one at a time, each House member that
2 has a question. Upon recognition, I'd like that
3 House member to please state their name and
4 legislative district for the record. After the
5 initial round of questions if time permits, a member
6 may be recognized for a second time. Certainly
7 we're going to ask the members to keep things brief
8 and the testifiers and the people answering the
9 questions to keep things brief. Myself, as the
10 Chair, reserves the right to interrupt a member in
11 the event that discussion moves away from the
12 germaneness of the point at hand or the Chair finds
13 a question to be previously asked and answered.

14 If the members don't object, I will use
15 my discretion as chairman to first recognize and
16 take questions from those members whose legislative
17 districts suffered the most critical impact of the
18 storm and related interstate closures after which
19 all other members who desire recognition will have
20 an opportunity to speak.

21 We will not recognize as normally we do
22 in hearings -- as you know, we recognize all of the
23 members present. We're not going to. We're going
24 to do away with that here today.

25 I do want to thank the membership for

1 their cooperation. At this time, before we begin, I
2 would like to recognize Chairmans Geist, Eachus
3 Fairchild, and Melio for brief remarks.
4 Representative Geist.

5 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Thank you very
6 much. As everyone in this room knows, highways in
7 Pennsylvania are not republican and they are not
8 democrat. They're our highways and they're our
9 trust. I've been serving for the last two years on
10 the study of the formed commission to evaluate
11 PennDOT and PennDOT's needs. And all of us know
12 that those needs are many.

13 We have very limited resources in the
14 State of Pennsylvania. We now lead the country in
15 deficient bridges. We're number one at something.
16 We know that we have a maintenance problem in
17 Pennsylvania, and we know what those needs are. And
18 I would suggest that everybody read that report.

19 We also know that we had a huge failure
20 during this last storm. We know that in at least
21 five PennDOT engineering districts we had real
22 problems. And I'm very pleased to be here today
23 with Representative Markosek and other leaders of
24 the General Assembly. To get a crowd like this on a
25 Friday, there has to be almost an execution taking

1 place. This is pretty amazing in the General
2 Assembly. We can't get members during the week let
3 alone on a Friday. Maybe John has a great free
4 lunch today. I don't know. We want to get to the
5 heart of this.

6 We have a lot of information. I have a
7 tremendous amount of information that we can
8 question, and we want to move it right along. Joe,
9 thank you very much for doing this and setting the
10 ground rules.

11 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Chairman
12 Geist. No lunch today. Next is Chairman Todd
13 Eachus.

14 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Thank you, Mr.
15 Chairman. I want to thank the panelists before they
16 speak. I have the unique situation of representing
17 Hazleton which was a main lynch point in the
18 dismissal of the motorists from Rout 81 along
19 surface roads. So I have a keen interest in this.

20 We met -- I met locally in this last week
21 with my local governments. I've discussed this with
22 my county and talked to those at the highest levels
23 of state government. And I know this, that we had a
24 system failure, a lack of communication both at the
25 state level, county level, and at the local level.

1 And I think that the public demands answers of these
2 panelists today. But I say this, that -- and the
3 Governor said in his comments earlier this week that
4 the buck stops with him. He is the boss. He is the
5 leader. And he has to take responsibility for the
6 change to come after these hearings.

7 We intend to work closely with the
8 administration in a bipartisan way to find solutions
9 to the problems that were created in this storm. I
10 think the public demands us to make sure that the
11 work that we have ahead of us after this hearing
12 today that rectifies the problems and finds
13 solutions so this once again never happens again.
14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. Chairman
16 Turzai.

17 REPRESENTATIVE TURZAI: Thank you very
18 much, Chairman Markosek. It is great to be working
19 with colleagues on both sides of the aisle here. As
20 chairman of the policy committee, it's great to be
21 able to make sure that so many of our caucus members
22 particularly from the affected areas in the east
23 side of the state have the opportunity to be
24 represented here and to ask questions that are
25 germane to their constituents. And we appreciate

1 the opportunity to work with our colleagues from the
2 other side of the aisle to get to a nuts and bolts
3 inquiry here today and to perhaps take it even
4 further so that we have specific recommendations to
5 set forth before the House of Representatives and
6 ultimately before the Governor.

7 I'd also like to just call attention that
8 I'm pleased to have amongst all of my other
9 colleagues Dave Argall who is a member of our
10 Republican House leadership, our Republican Whip
11 here today among other members directly affected by
12 the problems created by last week's storm.

13 I think it is important, however, that in
14 the end we're not looking just to get more
15 government. We're hoping to find out that with the
16 existing resources that were already in play, were
17 they effectively used and did we manage our time,
18 personnel, and resources well.

19 I also think it is important and I
20 appreciate the fact that the governor took blame and
21 responsibility for this after the fact. But I think
22 as in other national and state emergency situations,
23 we need to make sure that we knew where the Governor
24 and where the Lieutenant Governor were during the
25 period of time that is in question. The Lieutenant

1 Governor is in fact in charge from what I understand
2 of PEMA. And I'd like to have some sense of where
3 they were and what they were doing and what -- you
4 know, in what way were they accountable.

5 I appreciate the opportunity to work with
6 my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. And thank
7 you very much, Chairman Markosek.

8 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Mr.
9 Turzai. And I also want to recognize Chairmen Tony
10 Melio and Russ Fairchild of the Veterans and
11 Emergency Management Committees that are here up on
12 the dais as well. Either of you gentleman have a
13 brief remark? Tony.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: Thank you, Mr.
15 Chairman. While we're in the early stages of the
16 review process, it does not appear as if
17 Pennsylvania's inefficient emergency response
18 efforts to this storm resulted from the solitary
19 incident on a part of any particular agency.

20 I think what we will find as we further
21 examine this situation, it is a combination of areas
22 where improvement can be made among all involved
23 entities. At this point it appears that our
24 technology; that is, our radio and communications
25 network operated as we had hoped it would. For the

1 most part, the snow removal equipment was adequate
2 and we had enough manpower, enough boots on the
3 ground.

4 What I think we will see more than
5 anything else is that human error was at fault. A
6 lack of proactive decision-making caused hesitation
7 throughout the stormy spots and this led to a chain
8 of events that built up to a catastrophic level. To
9 prevent a repeat performance, corrective action will
10 call for more open and consistent communication
11 between the key members of all pertinent agencies
12 and focus on staying ahead of the potential threats.

13 Even with the best of preparation, it is
14 an arduous and nearly impossible task to take on
15 mother nature. We need to fortify the weak links in
16 our strategic action plan. With the study the
17 Governor has begun, the Senate hearing held
18 yesterday, and today's hearing we will soon have all
19 of the information we need on the table.

20 With that in mind, we may want to
21 consider addressing this matter in two phases.
22 First, what can we do now immediately today to
23 address these problems? Secondly, what should we do
24 in the future? Do we need to implement and improve
25 realtime communications and warning systems? Do we

1 need to have more people on call? Do we need a
2 potential threat on the horizon? Do we need more
3 snow removal vehicles or four-wheel drive vehicles?
4 And I think this hearing will be very helpful. And
5 I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Tony.
7 Representative Fairchild.

8 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman. It's a pleasure to be here today. And
10 first I'd like to say that I really enjoyed watching
11 the results of the Senate hearings yesterday. And I
12 would like to commend those who participated for
13 your straightforwardness in answering the questions.
14 I think it is evident that after approximately a
15 week ago, that the storm really did create a
16 disaster in Pennsylvania in a time bomb. And we can
17 all be extremely thankful that no one was seriously
18 injured or a death resulted. I just think it's a
19 stroke of God's will that we didn't have that
20 catastrophic event happen.

21 With that said, I believe that we need to
22 move forward. We need to devise a better response
23 system. We have to fine tune our system, and that's
24 what we are all about here today. And that is the
25 fact-finding mission of this inquiry. And with that

1 said, I look forward to working with my committee
2 counterpart, Chairman Melio, who we share the
3 responsibilities that are assigned to us from the
4 different leadership of the House.

5 Our committee is in charge of the
6 Veterans and Emergency Preparedness. So I expect a
7 lot of these issues may fall in our shoes and I
8 expect also some -- and a lot of them will fall in
9 the Transportation Committee's shoes. With that
10 said, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding
11 these hearings today.

12 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Chairman
13 Fairchild. Just a reminder. Everybody please shut
14 off their cell phones, please. Thank you.

15 All right. We're ready to get into the Q
16 and A here. I see our first panel of people to
17 testify that they know the drill. They had been
18 through this yesterday, and I see they are ready and
19 waiting.

20 We have -- I'll just introduce them all
21 at once here and then I guess we'll let Secretary
22 Biehler start off. And, of course, Secretary Allen
23 Biehler is here, Secretary of the Department of
24 Transportation; James Joseph of the Pennsylvania
25 Emergency Management Agency; Lieutenant Colonel

1 Ralph Perandi of the Pennsylvania State Police; and
2 Major General Jessica Wright, the Adjutant General
3 of the Pennsylvania National Guard. Thank you all
4 for attending. Secretary Biehler.

5 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Mr. Chairman and
6 members of both committees, thanks for letting us
7 testify before you. I would like to set the stage
8 by providing opening remarks as I did yesterday.
9 And probably a number of you were not able to hear
10 those remarks, so I would like to just for the
11 record provide those remarks just kind of as a point
12 of reference if you would.

13 As I said yesterday, last week was not my
14 most proud day as Secretary of the Pennsylvania
15 Department of Transportation. We did not deliver at
16 PennDOT our promise to keep people moving on our
17 system. As you know, approximately 200 miles of our
18 interstate system ultimately had to be closed down
19 out of our over 1200 mile system.

20 People were left stranded overnight in
21 very, very tough conditions. As Secretary, I'm
22 responsible for the department's performance. And I
23 apologize for our failure. I deeply regret that
24 this incident happened, and I personally apologize
25 to the people who had just a terrible, terrible

1 night on our interstates. For the bulk of our
2 counties throughout the state, we were able to
3 manage the storm. There are thousands and thousands
4 of folks on our highway side of our business that
5 were out fighting the storm and doing what they
6 normally do which is to work hard and make our
7 system passable in pretty tough, tough conditions.
8 The events of last week are just plain out of
9 character for what we usually achieve for the people
10 of Pennsylvania.

11 But last week we lost control in the
12 early going of the storm and a series of dominoes
13 fell in succession that took us out of our normal
14 game plan with disastrous results for hundreds of
15 people as we know for three interstates.

16 I'll try to explain this as clear as I
17 can what I know at this point. There is obviously
18 an additional investigation going on, an independent
19 investigation. We're clearly trying to work hard
20 within the department to re-create a series of
21 pieces of information that will help us as we go
22 forward. But certainly let me say that this was a
23 statewide and a very unusual event, and especially
24 so in the eastern portion of the state. It was an
25 unusual and complex mix of snow, sleet, heavy rain,

1 followed by more snow, rapidly dropping
2 temperatures, and high winds. In the Harrisburg,
3 Reading region, snow began to fall approximately at
4 noon on Tuesday the 13th. The snowfall was followed
5 by sleet in the very early morning hours of the
6 14th, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 in the morning. Temperature
7 rose from in the 17 degree range up to 33 degrees.
8 That was accompanied by an unusually driving
9 rainstorm that was followed by dropping
10 temperatures.

11 We have reports that the pouring rain --
12 there was pouring rain during that period when --
13 during the dropping temperature period and in fact
14 temperatures in the twenties and there was still
15 pouring rain at about 8:00 in the morning.
16 Temperatures throughout the rest of the day on
17 Wednesday continued to drop. Ultimately, rain
18 turned in to some additional snow.

19 From the area north of Harrisburg going
20 toward Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, the storm retained
21 its complexity up to about Interstate 80 or
22 thereabouts. At some point above 80, the storm was
23 primarily snow and not the mix.

24 By the early hours of February the 15th,
25 temperatures were in the teens in the Harrisburg

1 region and in the nearly 5 degrees up in the
2 Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area. The wild swings in
3 temperature were followed as I mentioned before by
4 high winds and some drifting snow.

5 Snow varied in depth in the central and
6 northeastern Pennsylvania area from 6 to 8 inches up
7 to 17 or so inches by the time you got to
8 Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. The ice formed in various
9 areas especially in the lower regions up to a depth
10 of 3 inches.

11 The weather service had indicated that
12 the precipitation amounts that ranged between --
13 that precipitation amounts, just the water content
14 ranged between 2 and 3 inches was a record for
15 winter.

16 In fact, if it had all been snow it
17 probably would have been 30 inches. But the
18 variations provided an especially challenging snow
19 from a snow removal standpoint. The fact this
20 occurred based on the forecast and we knew it was
21 coming did not diminish the challenge.

22 Given these circumstances, however,
23 adequate snow removal depends on a number of things.
24 It depends on pretreatment before the storm hits,
25 the use of salt or a combination of salt and

1 anti-skid material at certain application rates
2 during the storm. This certainly includes in
3 addition to plowing. Temperatures also played a
4 role in deciding those most effective strategies.

5 In a very complex heavy storm, success
6 depends upon having the maintenance teams know the
7 game plan, having them at the right place at the
8 right time, and supplementing forces dedicated to
9 the interstate especially with forces normally
10 assigned to secondary routes if needed.

11 Continued judgment is also required as
12 the storm progresses. Keys for success and being
13 well-positioned and prepared is to in advance
14 examine the availability of our equipment and
15 operators, discuss the appropriate treatments that
16 might be necessary, and contingencies during the
17 periods of complexity, and also understanding the
18 level of experience of all of the folks in the whole
19 range from operators all of the way up through the
20 folks in the higher management groups.

21 Consistent application of all of these
22 factors with this storm was clearly not uniform in
23 all of the counties across Pennsylvania. Somewhere
24 between 63ish or so counties, we think that we were
25 mostly fighting the storm in a reasonable fashion.

1 Very unusual variations in the storm. However, in
2 District 5 most noted by Berks and Schuylkill
3 Counties and in District 4, Luzerne County, clearly
4 our efforts were not sufficient to keep pace with
5 these conditions while the storm developed.

6 And we are obviously in the middle of an
7 in-depth evaluation. But nevertheless, shortfalls
8 of some combination of these factors certainly
9 contributed to our inability to do the job well and
10 do it right.

11 On Interstate 78 in Berks County, there
12 was not enough snow removal equipment early on and
13 not enough quick follow-up treatments during the
14 critical periods and windows to address the
15 problems. As a result, we fell behind the storm
16 instead of keeping up or almost keeping up with it.
17 There were multiple truck accidents and other
18 vehicles which stopped traffic while the storm
19 continued.

20 Certainly some of our crews were caught
21 in the same jams, traffic jams and backlogs and
22 queues as the other portions of the mixed traffic
23 which further reduced our ability to respond and
24 move the mixture of snow and ice. When the fight
25 was lost, the road iced up and we could not recover.

1 Temperatures plunged, as I mentioned, on Wednesday
2 and ice built up and our inability to get heavy-duty
3 wreckers to remove the jackknifed trucks and other
4 impediments also was limited and their time of
5 arrival was delayed because of queues and road
6 conditions which we found ourselves.

7 In the cases of Interstate 80 and 81 at
8 the same time, I believe that a number of truckers
9 who were no doubt talking to each other because they
10 knew about the queues on 78 started to divert up
11 Interstate 81 and we had some additional similar
12 conditions, probably not quite as severe as on 78
13 but nevertheless severe problems.

14 As a result, the heavy influx of trucks
15 just simply helped us to spiral down and be out of
16 control ultimately on Interstate 81. And so there
17 was soon blockages and disabled vehicles on 81 as
18 well. Adding to the problems on 81 up on the
19 northern section of Luzerne County was a significant
20 crash that had developed early in the morning and
21 there was quite a backup.

22 Similar problems then cascaded to
23 Interstate 80 both east and west of Interstate 81.
24 Even after ultimately that the systems were shutdown
25 and vehicles were removed, the ice buildup was such

1 that it couldn't be removed quickly. Temperatures
2 late on the 15th of February which is Thursday and
3 early on the 16th again plunged to below 10 degrees
4 in the Scranton area and roughly 10 degrees in the
5 rest of the region.

6 Recovery from this incident was hampered
7 by the lack of accurate information from the areas
8 where traffic had snarled and left people stranded.
9 Information received at PennDOT's district and
10 central headquarters indicated that traffic issues
11 were being resolved and roads were being cleared.
12 This was not the case and frankly delayed effort to
13 deal with the stranded motorists to close off the
14 interstate from additional traffic.

15 Finally on Thursday, interstates --
16 sections of Interstate 78, 81, and 80 were closed.
17 And all of PennDOT's efforts at that point turned to
18 ice removal so that the roads could be reopened,
19 which finally they were as you know in the afternoon
20 of Saturday finally at 4:00.

21 It was a very difficult set of
22 circumstances. But nevertheless, it doesn't take it
23 away from the difficulty that my department created.
24 And I apologize for that very, very difficult period
25 for a whole host of people. There was literally

1 hundreds of people affected. The organization that
2 I head, some 12,000 people strong, is proud of the
3 work that we do on behalf of Pennsylvania. And
4 that's why frankly the events of last week were so
5 devastating to all of us.

6 I can only tell you that we are working
7 hard to make sure that we don't have a situation
8 like this again. We have certainly started efforts
9 to work with our various departments, our various
10 districts to get them apprised to make sure that we
11 are in a position to not have such an incident.

12 And in fact, last night there was an
13 example. We had a weather incident up on Interstate
14 80. I think we responded I think in that case in a
15 normal fashion.

16 In the case of Interstate 80, we had a
17 weather drop. Folks had been working on Route 80 in
18 the appropriate fashion when it came time to close I
19 think about a 9-mile section which happens when you
20 have blockages and so on.

21 I think in that case we did respond in a
22 reasonable way. We had a detour route. We had
23 folks alerted. The emergency folks did what they
24 need to do best which is to help control the
25 situation to allow our folks to properly treat it.

1 We did and we were able to re-open it later in the
2 evening. So we are in the business of looking in
3 the mirror pretty carefully at each other making
4 sure we have identified things that we did not do
5 well to make sure that we don't repeat that. We
6 have got lots more investigation we are doing to get
7 additional information. But we certainly thank you
8 very much, Mr. Chairman.

9 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Mr.
10 Secretary. General Wright.

11 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: I have no formal
12 comment at this time. I will tell you that it is my
13 responsibility, my department's responsibility to
14 protect the needs of citizens along with my fellow
15 cabinet members. There was a need to call out
16 early, and I failed that need significantly. And I
17 apologize for that and for my department's response.

18 I am proud that once they did respond,
19 that they did so many things very well as guardsmen.
20 I would like to point a few of them out.

21 We distributed over 4,432 what we call
22 shelf-stable meals. We distributed over 372 meals
23 ready to eat, over 8,000 bottles of water. We
24 distributed over 576 baby diapers to those people
25 with small children and baby formula, 36 half

1 gallons of apple juice, and 600 blankets. We had
2 over 916 guardsmen deployed at the height of this
3 emergency with over 170 vehicles. So we were out
4 there at the height of the emergency taking care of
5 those citizens that chose not to evacuate their
6 vehicles. That's my comment, sir. And I should
7 have questions.

8 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, General.
9 Lieutenant Colonel Perandi, State Police.

10 LT. COL. PERANDI: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chairman. I will defer any opening remarks in the
12 interest of trying to answer as many of the members'
13 questions as possible.

14 But I will say this as the General has
15 indicated, the men and women of Pennsylvania State
16 Police performed above and beyond the call of duty
17 through the period the 13th through the 17th.

18 We had all our available resources,
19 manpower, and equipment out and on the highways with
20 the priority of keeping those highways open, keeping
21 traffic moving.

22 And I think as we go through the hearing
23 today, it will become more clear to all of the
24 members what the duties and responsibilities of the
25 State Police were and what was being completed by

1 our people out there. Thank you, sir.

2 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. Mr.
3 Joseph.

4 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Thank you, sir. No
5 formal remarks. I know you want to get into
6 questions. However, since 2000 this team has worked
7 on at least 42 disasters or emergencies. We've
8 handled them well.

9 There is a great group of county and
10 municipal managers out there that worked well not
11 only during that 7-year period but worked well
12 during this event.

13 As Secretary Biehler mentioned, last
14 night we went through a very similar event in
15 Clearfield County. Within that 6-hour period, we
16 had backups between 15 miles -- 13 miles and 7 miles
17 in each direction. That was cleared up. We had an
18 effective county system set up. Josh Quigley from
19 Clearfield County was on the scene and was in
20 constant communication with us along with
21 Pennsylvania State Police, Department of
22 Transportation, as well as all of our members in
23 PEMA.

24 Within that short period of time, we were
25 able to mitigate that situation because we had

1 accurate on-the-ground information of exactly what
2 was going on and we could bring the resources to
3 bear on that particular problem, much different than
4 last week. Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. I'd like
6 to recognize members now for questions, and I'm
7 going to start with the members who were in the
8 districts that were most affected by the storm. And
9 I'll try to do this in as bipartisan manner as I
10 can.

11 I'd like to start out by recognizing
12 Representative Ed Staback, a long-time colleague who
13 was one of the victims I guess of the storm.
14 Representative Staback.

15 REPRESENTATIVE STABACK: Thank you, Mr.
16 Chairman. I want to thank you, gentlemen, for
17 taking the time to be here this morning and your
18 willingness to respond to the question that both my
19 colleagues and I will have for you.

20 My question is going to center on driving
21 conditions not on Tuesday or Wednesday but rather on
22 Thursday, the day after the storm. I spent 21 hours
23 in my car before I was able to get home Friday
24 morning.

25 Leaving the Capitol at 1:30 Thursday

1 afternoon and had no knowledge of what I was driving
2 into, there wasn't any public announcement from any
3 agency that would have led me to believe that I was
4 going to be driving into any kind of adverse
5 condition on 81 going north. Yet when I hit the
6 Pine Grove area, from that area on driving was
7 absolutely horrendous.

8 Now it would seem to me that both PennDOT
9 and the State Police must have known that the
10 driving conditions on 81 North Thursday morning were
11 just as bad as they were Thursday night.

12 So my question is, why? Why did you wait
13 until 10:00 on Thursday night to shutdown an
14 interstate for the most part that should have been
15 shutdown Thursday morning? Because of the action,
16 you allowed hundreds and hundreds of cars and trucks
17 to access that interstate that simply added to an
18 already existing mess.

19 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Let me attempt to be
20 part of that response and perhaps others have
21 additional information to add. I can't see you
22 anymore, sir.

23 I think at least from my standpoint in
24 terms of information that PennDOT was using and so
25 on, actually goes back to the day before. I

1 understand what your situation was you mentioned on
2 Thursday. But unfortunately one of the weaknesses
3 that we had on Wednesday in the case of Interstate
4 78 was getting inaccurate information about the fact
5 blockages were being removed. And so at least it
6 gave me the feeling that this was an incident which
7 could be ultimately resolved. And I think the same
8 situation was going on on Thursday as we were
9 working.

10 Because at that point a number of us were
11 together, and we were providing information based on
12 the varying conditions on 81 and 80. In the morning
13 at seven or so o'clock -- I forgot the exact time we
14 closed 78 but we did not close, as you know, 80 and
15 81 until I think it was about 5:00 or 6:00 in the
16 evening.

17 The question is, why didn't we close it
18 earlier? At that point we were still thinking that
19 we could remove blockages on 81 and 80 and save it.
20 It was wrong. We should have recognized earlier
21 that it was beyond our control and shut it down
22 earlier in retrospect.

23 What we're trying to re-create in all of
24 our districts and information is exactly what
25 information we have and what time, and now what

1 we're talking about is we got to establish a
2 different protocol for making the decision to close
3 and then the procedure that surrounds that to
4 actually go through a closure process. Because you
5 have to -- in order to close, you've got to be able
6 to control the interchanges and so on and how fast
7 can you do it, how fast can you get the people
8 deployed. Once we finally made the right decision
9 to close it, then we did deployment. You're exactly
10 right.

11 In this interim period because we didn't
12 make the decision fast enough, we had people such as
13 yourself in the middle of it just caught. And we
14 have got to figure out a much better and faster way
15 to make a decision based on accurate information and
16 get it set.

17 REPRESENTATIVE STABACK: Thank you.

18 LT. COL. PERANDI: Sir, I can actually
19 give you a personal explanation on the 81 situation
20 because I was in it as you were. I talked to
21 General Joseph that morning. I was at the Hamburg
22 command post, our 78 operation at about mid morning
23 on Thursday the 15th.

24 I did a personal assessment of 78 West
25 from Exit 29 which is Route 61 all of the way out to

1 the junction with 81. And at that point I was
2 intending to circle around to the north on 81 and
3 work my way back to our command center at Hamburg.
4 When I went north on 81, 81 was open and clear as
5 far as we knew. I got to mile marker 92 when
6 basically it became a parking lot. This was about
7 probably 11:00, 11:15 in the morning on Thursday.

8 I called to our command center in
9 Hamburg, talked to Captain Rivera who is with me
10 today, talked to our people in Jonestown, and called
11 in and talked to General Joseph.

12 When I talked to General Joseph, the EOC
13 was not aware of any blockage on 81. What happened
14 was up at mile marker 104 we had a couple
15 tractor-trailers that couldn't make it up the ravine
16 hill and got stuck on that hill.

17 And in the days of cell phones and
18 instant messaging, it takes some time for that to
19 get back and for heavy-duty wreckers to get out and
20 even for our people to know there is a blockage
21 there.

22 I can tell you that if our people would
23 have known that 81 was blocked, they would have
24 warned me on the police radio immediately not to go
25 up there Which obviously didn't happen. And the

1 rate of traffic on these interstates is so heavy
2 that generally what we plan on is you get about a
3 mile or two backup per minute when something blocks
4 up an interstate. 81 that morning was actually even
5 worse because you're diverting traffic from 78. By
6 the time they could start to move those two trucks
7 up there, other trucks behind them got stuck in the
8 same vicinity. So very similarly to you from -- it
9 took me about three hours to get from mile marker 92
10 to the Pine Grove exit mile marker a hundred where I
11 was able to get off and then start to work my way
12 back.

13 In the meantime, of course, traffic was
14 backing down 81 and we had a problem. By 1:30 in
15 the afternoon, probably a little deficient trying to
16 get some information out to somebody to advise them
17 that 81 was going to be impassable the rest of the
18 afternoon or at least it was going to take them a
19 long time to get up there the rest of the afternoon.

20 But it's difficult sometimes to explain
21 how quickly these 10, 12, 15 mile backups occur on
22 the interstate system until you have a situation
23 where you actually experience it.

24 When you get a tractor-trailer or two
25 that completely blocks the highway, you're basically

1 out of luck at that point. Up at about 94, 95 we
2 had a turnaround that we were able to get some
3 people going back southbound on 82 -- excuse me, on
4 81. But as I mentioned earlier and I think several
5 of my colleagues have mentioned it, you know, the
6 Troopers out in front of that queue are always with
7 that positive kind of outlook that they are going to
8 be able to move those tractor-trailers out of the
9 way and get traffic moving again as opposed to the
10 option of shutting the interstate down.

11 Because I think we heard already from one
12 of the Representatives that that impacts very
13 heavily on local municipalities, et cetera. And
14 that's difficult to do if you can't give them the
15 proper kind of notification and time to prepare that
16 they are going to get all of this traffic off the
17 interstate.

18 As well as that fact -- and I know I'm
19 preaching to the choir here. Many of you realize
20 that you can't just put these tractor-trailers out
21 on any particular highway. There are only certain
22 highways that are going to be appropriate to
23 re-route them.

24 That's how quickly that incident occurred
25 on 81. We probably should have had something out by

1 1:30 certainly. But I can tell you at 11 or 11:30
2 that's just about when it happened up at about mile
3 marker 104, the one that you originally got stuck
4 in. And then it just continued up through to
5 Interstate 80 through the rest of the day until we
6 formally shut all three interstates.

7 REPRESENTATIVE STABACK: Thank you. Tell
8 me, if you would, who is in charge of the overall
9 responsibility of determining when an interstate is
10 shutdown.

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Let me be part of
12 that answer, perhaps others again can chime in. At
13 least from a standpoint of the road condition,
14 PennDOT plays I think a central role because the
15 question in the case of a road situation, we ended
16 up with ice pack on ultimately these three roads.
17 So we needed to be able to signal first and foremost
18 is the ice pack situation in this case so severe
19 that we can't solve it without shutting down the
20 road.

21 So I think that we play an initial role
22 in making that signal and we did not have clear
23 information that we were providing to our brethren
24 here at the front table to provide that piece of
25 information clearly until way late.

1 Now we can tell you that a number of us
2 were by the time Thursday rolled around, we were
3 both -- all in communication directly but we still
4 were getting these mixed reports whether it was
5 accident-related information or ice pack.

6 We finally got clear information toward
7 the end of the afternoon. That was our point to
8 share that information and work jointly to talk
9 about then shutting it down.

10 Because it is not just one agency
11 ultimately going through the shutdown action. We
12 really need each other's help to make a
13 comprehensive review. I don't know if there are
14 other folks who have a different feeling about that.

15 LT. COL. PERANDI: No. I would agree.
16 Generally if it is an accident situation and we're
17 looking at shutting down from one exit to another
18 and it is a relatively short kind of detour
19 situation, State Police will obviously do that
20 because we're not technically shutting down an
21 entire interstate system or a large portion of the
22 interstate system.

23 As Mr. Biehler has mentioned when you
24 start getting to where you're looking at two, three,
25 four exits, it is going to require a massive amount

1 of manpower both volunteer or possibly from other
2 state agencies. That's when we would look for a
3 more comprehensive approach.

4 As many of us know, we shutdown sections
5 of interstate highways routinely in good weather
6 when we have an accident that blocks it and we could
7 just get people off and on on some parallel routes.

8 78 is a perfect example where our
9 parallel Route 22 can handle truck traffic so we can
10 get tractor-trailers off one exit and get them right
11 back on the next one or maybe one exit down from
12 there.

13 But when you start talking about shutting
14 down 50, 60 miles of 78 or a hundred miles of 81 or
15 80, that's when we would rely on a more
16 comprehensive approach with other state agencies,
17 particularly with PennDOT, as we try to coordinate
18 that. Because we need more resources than what we
19 have available ourselves within the State Police to
20 do that.

21 REPRESENTATIVE STABACK: My last
22 question, Mr. Chairman. When you decide to shutdown
23 the interstate, what process do you utilize to
24 notify the general public of that shutdown?

25 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Once that determination

1 is made, we have a system called EAS, emergency
2 alert system, which we used approximately seven
3 times during that event.

4 We could put it across TV and -- not only
5 TV but radio stations. In fact, we just built it
6 onto another 62 cable TV stations throughout the
7 state. When we do put that out, it -- and we know
8 it went out because we had a number of calls from
9 people that were dissatisfied that we were
10 disrupting their programs. That message goes out in
11 areas or across the state depending on where the
12 disaster or emergency is.

13 We also try to notify the local media by
14 news release, going on the wire with that. And we
15 also notify the counties that we're going to do some
16 event.

17 And in this case I guess it was about
18 16 -- 4 p.m., in that area we had another conference
19 call with the affected counties. Those counties
20 were able to hear what we were about to do, didn't
21 give them a lot of time to make that decision. But
22 a decision had to be made to clear that roadway
23 because we were adversely impacting on a lot of
24 municipalities with the roadways that were 80, 81
25 and 78 being closed, opened, closed, opened. People

1 were deferring off of small roadways onto exits that
2 would not take tractor-trailers. So we had to make
3 a decision at that time what areas we would close
4 down and what areas we would try to re-route
5 traffic.

6 We did discuss that with the counties.
7 Albeit some of them weren't too happy with it
8 especially if they were receiving extra traffic.
9 But we had to have some type of roadway to accept
10 the types of traffic that would be coming off of the
11 interstate.

12 REPRESENTATIVE STABACK: Thank you, Mr.
13 Chairman.

14 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you very much.
15 Chairman Geist and then we will recognize
16 Representative Mann.

17 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Could I follow-up on
18 that one more time?

19 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Sure.

20 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: In addition there is an
21 agency called Transcom. It is a national road
22 network. We notified -- not only did PEMA notify
23 them but the Department of Transportation notified
24 them as well that we had certain roadways that were
25 either impassable, closed down, or having difficulty

1 moving traffic. We also -- that was not a test but
2 it is similar to what -- what some of the people
3 felt like when we interrupted them.

4 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Let's suspend it
5 a minute.

6 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: If I could continue.

7 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Give it a try.

8 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Thank you. We did also
9 call up all contiguous states; New Jersey, New York,
10 Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio to put
11 their sign boards on to explain what type of traffic
12 and events we're coming into it.

13 And there are -- today I got a call from
14 some of the broadcast media from last night. We
15 notified Ohio to put their -- to put their sign
16 boards on.

17 The truck traffic that comes into the
18 state originates all throughout. It may end up in
19 the northeast coming in from the southwest. So we
20 have to notify pretty much the entire state when
21 something like that happens.

22 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. Chairman
23 Geist.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Thank you very
25 much, Joe. I have a series of questions. And Mr.

1 Secretary, if you want Secretary Hogg to jump in
2 with you on some of these, that would be fine. We
3 have management transportation centers, correct?

4 SECRETARY BIEHLER: We have a
5 transportation center in the Harrisburg office where
6 we have our central information office.

7 Representative GEIST: How about in the
8 districts?

9 SECRETARY BIEHLER: In each district we
10 have communication capability in the various
11 districts.

12 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Are they hooked up
13 to the 800 megahertz system?

14 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I don't know the
15 details.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: In the General
17 Assembly we spent a tremendous amount of money on
18 this system.

19 SECRETARY BIEHLER: As I said, I'll have
20 to get you details. I'm not familiar with that.

21 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: The master control
22 room at PennDOT, who mans that?

23 SECRETARY BIEHLER: That's our folks
24 within our bureau of maintenance.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: That's 24 hours a

1 day?

2 SECRETARY BIEHLER: If activated. It has
3 the capability of being 24 hours, sure.

4 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: On the storm phone
5 line, who maintains that and who mans it?

6 SECRETARY BIEHLER: In the case of -- in
7 the case of -- I guess I have to put it in a case of
8 one of the counties for instance had trouble during
9 this period. There is such a thing as our roadway
10 information that we -- or roadway advisory system
11 that we provide. It is information that the
12 districts would gather from the various affected
13 counties. That's a good case in point. Because on
14 Wednesday the 14th when I was trying to get
15 information about the status of what in this case 78
16 was, I wasn't getting this kind of information that
17 Representative Mann frankly could have offered me
18 who unfortunately I talked to a couple of times to
19 help, you know, understand things.

20 I was getting messages through that
21 system as an example that there are blockages on 78
22 and then I would get a message that said, oh, but
23 traffic is now moving in one lane in each direction.
24 That was not true; or if it was true, it was only
25 true for a very short length of time. So I was

1 operating on information that wasn't accurate that I
2 could then make a final call.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Isn't it true in
4 PennDOT that you don't have the employee strength
5 and you use outside contractors and temporary-type
6 employees to man those phones?

7 SECRETARY BIEHLER: That doesn't -- I
8 don't believe that's the case but I'm not --

9 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: When you go back,
10 will you check?

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Absolutely.
12 Certainly we use both our own work forces and
13 contract forces in terms of snowplow equipment and
14 functions. We certainly do that, but I'll have to
15 check with the phone business.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Other than
17 Jennifer Mann's telephone, we have a system called
18 RWIS. And here is a map that shows all of the
19 locations around the state.

20 I had my staff go into the archives of
21 PennDOT to take a look at what was broadcast on the
22 day of the storm. And for instance, let's go to
23 Higgins because most General Assembly members are
24 familiar with Higgins. It is near and dear to our
25 hearts.

1 If you go on to that site, you will see a
2 notification that says sorry, there are no pictures
3 for our archive that day. If you have a select date
4 after April 2004 -- after 2004 -- it is likely that
5 the station was taken down for maintenance by
6 PennDOT on that date. Otherwise, please select a
7 date after April the 1st. Now we go into a lot of
8 these and we get that same message.

9 So then we did a little checking to find
10 out that a lot of those contracts had been canceled
11 or not executed whether it is in the Indiana
12 district that Mr. Hogg came or from Orth Rogers or
13 whether it was others.

14 We found out that you had a total lack of
15 information along these interstates where Secretary
16 Hogg should be able to go into a room at PennDOT and
17 look at the cameras and instantaneously assess the
18 situation based on the money that was allocated to
19 PennDOT to put these systems in. Isn't that true.

20 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I don't know the
21 whole history, Mr. Representative. I can tell you
22 that I certainly accessed that same system during
23 the last few days here.

24 And what we have is a system that is
25 partly in place. We can go to some portions of the

1 system. As an example, some of the folks used it
2 last night. We had an incident up on Route 80 which
3 I think was handled well but in fact that system was
4 working well up on mile post -- if I'm not mistaken,
5 it's about 111 is an example. But you're correct.

6 Portions of the system is operable both
7 in terms of there are temperature pieces of
8 information that provides both the ambient air
9 temperature as well as the roadway surface, both
10 critical pieces of information. Some of them have
11 live cameras, some do not, and some have not been
12 put up at all. Had that system been available
13 systemwide, it would have been marvelous to be able
14 to utilize.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: And contracts have
16 been canceled over the last two years for
17 maintenance. Now in my hand I have what you would
18 call the PennDOT business plan. Each of your
19 district engineers comes to you each year with their
20 district business plan, correct?

21 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Yes.

22 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: And these business
23 plans which we have copies of -- as a matter of
24 fact, this was all stuff that we were going to use
25 if we had to write our own answer for the Reform

1 Commission, which you did such a good job we didn't
2 have to. But unfortunately in the business plan,
3 there is a lot of information in here that I believe
4 that is entirely damaging to PennDOT, extremely
5 damaging. Comments about the number of trucks and
6 the reduction of trucks and how successful we've
7 been in that. Comments like that the general
8 public, this would be perceived very badly in the
9 general public. Comments about no diesel mechanics
10 available, no contracts with the garage to maintain
11 equipment.

12 Now this is your own district engineers
13 or district executives that are feeding this
14 information back. So we knew then in the last three
15 years that if a storm like this came along, we had a
16 problem.

17 SECRETARY BIEHLER: You want me to answer
18 that?

19 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Yeah, I do. I
20 think this comes to the heart of it. And I think
21 this business plan and I believe that a lot of the
22 other information that we have that we're not going
23 to go into today, but I believe that this becomes
24 the essence of our public responsibility to make
25 sure that we're prepared to do this.

1 This is not a slam at you. This is not a
2 slam at Representative -- or at Deputy Secretary
3 Hogg. This is only a slam at the person who
4 canceled the contracts to save money and didn't
5 maintain the RWIS system, didn't finish it out,
6 didn't have your control room up and running so that
7 when you get a situation like this, you don't know
8 what's going on out in the field. And that's not
9 your fault. That's the fault of whoever cancelled
10 that contract.

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: In terms of the
12 so-called maintenance contract related to the
13 roadway information system, I'm not familiar with
14 the details. So I will find that out. Absolutely.

15 Regarding our business plan, clearly we
16 go through an exercise every year to examine what we
17 think are important issues in our system. I don't
18 know that you could have taken our business plan and
19 drawn quite the same conclusion with all due respect
20 that, therefore, we would have problems on the
21 interstate system, you know, last week. I think
22 there are some different things.

23 To the extent if that's the case,
24 however, I would be more than happy to look at that
25 exact document and see if in fact that had a play

1 that I haven't considered yet.

2 We've been really working hard to
3 identify our weakness or weaknesses. We have some
4 of them identified. Some of the things you
5 mentioned, you talk about the mechanics and this and
6 that.

7 We've had a significant amount of folks
8 retire and out the door has gone a level of
9 experience. Probably in certain of those vocations,
10 that was a contributing factor. More of a concern
11 on my part is what did we do about that. Did we
12 know about it? Did we then get people positioned if
13 they had levels of training that were not as broad
14 as some of the folks who did well and did we do it
15 right then? And if we didn't, can we turn that
16 around quickly and make sure that they are protected
17 too.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Mr. Secretary,
19 your district executives almost to a tee through all
20 of these, not just one but all of them, year after
21 year cite a lack of professional engineers, a lack
22 of IT professionals, a lack of diesel mechanics, 50
23 positions short on IT. And that's right out of the
24 your own documents. These kind of statements
25 clearly show we were not prepared for what happened.

1 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Again, I'll --

2 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: When you have
3 30 percent reduction in your truck force and
4 5 percent of that equipment down and inoperable and
5 in some cases you don't have the people to fix it or
6 you don't have contracts with local garages that are
7 retainers so that those people have to fix that
8 truck immediately, it goes to the head of the line.
9 It says a lot about our inability to fund the
10 department in an adequate level so that you can do
11 your job.

12 Now I think that these guys do the very
13 best they can with what they got, but it took a
14 storm like this to show that on that management side
15 we've got a terrible problem.

16 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Again, I'll be happy
17 to look at the facts and figures you just cited
18 about, you know, the level of 30 percent trucks. I
19 really think that's not true. But if it is, I'll be
20 happy to admit that it's true.

21 Let me at least have the ability to check
22 our own figures and sit with you and review them.
23 I'd be very happy to do that.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: "Fifty unfilled
25 positions in PennDOT's bureau of information

1 services. Those positions were denied internally."

2 SECRETARY BIEHLER: All I can tell you is
3 that in terms of total complement, in the last
4 4 years the total complement has not significantly
5 changed. It just hasn't. I can also tell you it
6 certainly has been a difficult time making sure that
7 we have dealt with replacements and retirement.
8 Absolutely true.

9 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: It is
10 unbelievable.

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: One particular
12 category and is sort of a challenge but in terms if
13 you look at the maintenance side though and you look
14 at the number of people that we had available
15 4 years ago versus now, it's pretty darn close. I
16 mean within a very, very small percent. So I don't
17 think I'm --

18 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Let me wrap this
19 up. I want other people to have a chance. Mr.
20 Secretary, Deputy Secretary Hogg should have the
21 immediate commandability to have SERT people where
22 they are needed. It shouldn't take 24 or 48 hours
23 to ascertain the situation. It shouldn't take a
24 state policeman on a cell phone.

25 It should be you being able to pull again

1 to that camera right in that room at PennDOT to
2 maintain the system statewide. That failure became
3 very, very evident. But that failure was driven by
4 internal decisions not to fund.

5 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I couldn't agree with
6 you more that we did not have accurate information
7 to act on quickly. You're absolutely right. But I
8 think it is a more complex picture. But we're out
9 here --

10 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: We could go on and
11 do this for many, many hours. I don't want to beat
12 the department up. I've never been a full contact
13 partner when it comes to this.

14 But when decisions are made by people who
15 aren't engineers, who aren't competent and don't
16 know it, that really damages the department. Then
17 we, in the General Assembly, need to step in and we
18 need to step in hard if we need to. Thank you, Joe.
19 It is yours.

20 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.
21 Representative Jennifer Mann.

22 REPRESENTATIVE MANN: Thank you very
23 much, Mr. Chairman. And thanks to all of you for
24 being here today. Secretary Biehler, I know you and
25 I have spoken at length since last week's incident

1 and I appreciate the opportunity to do that. And I
2 do not want to be redundant in my comments and my
3 questions today.

4 But I think it is important to mention
5 for everybody here that, you know, it is one thing
6 when we hear from our constituents about a situation
7 that has come about or a crisis they endured but it
8 is always a different thing when you, yourself, were
9 a part of that. And I know I'm not the only member
10 of the legislature that was caught in the stoppage
11 of traffic on respective interstates in Pennsylvania
12 last week.

13 But I can tell you that based on what I
14 saw firsthand, it was very upsetting and it was
15 disheartening. And I say that because each of us --
16 each of us knows that there are times when things
17 don't always go as they should. But I think we also
18 believe that there are people and there are
19 governmental entities that are there in the event
20 something does go wrong. And clearly what happened
21 last week in my experience on Wednesday, the 14th
22 and that really continued on through the weekend as
23 has been reported back to me by family and
24 constituents was really a letdown and a failure.
25 Because none of those motions that -- none of those

1 actions, that sequence of action that we would
2 assume would take place in a moment like that
3 occurred.

4 And certainly by the time that help
5 came -- and I respect the job that the men and women
6 particularly in the National Guard did in helping
7 stranded motorists. That help came so late.

8 I first reported a stoppage at quarter to
9 twelve on Wednesday at mile marker 34 going
10 eastbound on I-78. And when I called the local
11 PennDOT office to bring to their attention this is
12 not slow moving traffic, it is stopped and I've been
13 sitting here for a little bit, that was news to
14 them. And that was my very first concern. It took
15 some time after that for them to inform me that we
16 have reports there is a jackknifed tractor-trailer.
17 It took a couple more hours for them to decide that
18 they were going to actually try to move it and clear
19 that roadway.

20 In the meantime, those of us stranded
21 there had no idea what was going on. We saw no
22 person in any official capacity that could offer
23 assistance or information in what really was a
24 dangerous weather condition and it was worsening
25 while we sat there.

1 It became a heavy snowfall with very
2 gusty winds and rapidly dropping temperatures. My
3 story has a better ending because I got brave and
4 decided to muster the shoulder for a mile to the
5 Lenhartsville exit.

6 And I had an SUV which made me more
7 capable of doing that, provided that option. And I
8 made it and I made it to an alternate route, Old 22.
9 Which when I found it, the most shocking thing about
10 it was there was no other traffic on that road and
11 that it was passable and cleared.

12 And that brings me to perhaps my first
13 question. In a situation like that, what is the
14 protocol for trying to address the needs of stranded
15 motorists; both in perhaps emergency medical needs,
16 people running out of fuel, people needing restroom
17 facilities, people with particularly young children
18 or particularly older passengers or drivers? What
19 is the protocol for addressing those needs? Because
20 it was well into the night and almost daybreak until
21 there was any presence of emergency help.

22 What is the protocol for responding to
23 stranded motorists? And additionally, one thing we
24 have repeatedly not seen from PennDOT whether it is
25 a situation like this or traffic backups caused by

1 accidents at crashes, why there is not an effort to
2 remove these passenger vehicles off the roadway. I
3 know where I was between Exit 29 in Hamburg and Exit
4 35 in Lenhartsville, at one point around 3:00 -- I
5 think that was about shift change -- a plow truck
6 drove passed me on the shoulder with its plow up.
7 Now I'm not a traffic engineer. I'm not an expert
8 on removing snow. But common sense said to me in a
9 crisis we ought to improvise. Maybe simply dropping
10 the plow would have cleared that road enough for
11 6 miles of passenger vehicles to get off the
12 highway. Not everybody was in an SUV, not everybody
13 even had front-wheel drive to be able to venture or
14 make that attempt.

15 I just think that sometimes we have to
16 improvise. And one of the things that says to me is
17 we were so late in the game in recognizing the
18 seriousness of this situation and that really I
19 believe is the ultimate failure. I just ask that,
20 put that question out there if you can explain how.

21 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'll just answer a
22 bit of it. I'm not quite as quick on what happens
23 once the emergency is known and then you start
24 deploying folks. But others can perhaps deal with
25 that.

1 But in terms of information unfortunately
2 you are so right. And as you and I have talked not
3 only in the afternoon was I getting information that
4 there were delays and certain portions were closed
5 but other portions are moving, I got that same
6 message throughout the evening all of the way up to
7 almost 11:00 at night that in fact that there has
8 been closures and now it is open and there is one
9 lane moving in each direction and it wasn't true.

10 So I can tell you that we had inexcusable
11 bad information that frankly from my side of the
12 house, so we were not passing on useful information
13 not only to folks who were stuck in it, but we were
14 not providing useful information for people who need
15 to start the rescues.

16 Perhaps other calls were made during the
17 period and what calls were being made -- because
18 there were calls being recorded, at least been
19 reported to me in terms of police and others.

20 LT. COL. PERANDI: Yes. Representative
21 Mann, I would follow-up that it is our
22 responsibility obviously to respond, clear the
23 highway as quickly as possible, and get traffic
24 moving.

25 And that is basically the priority of the

1 Troopers who get to the front of that queue and then
2 try to work with the situation as efficiently as
3 they can.

4 Knowing that you're from the Lehigh
5 County area, I'm from the Berks County area, I don't
6 have to tell you you're on one of the most brutal
7 stretches of highway there east of 61 on 78,
8 particularly down through Lenhartsville up through
9 Krumsville, et cetera.

10 That presents a problem even for some of
11 our heavy-duty wreckers to get out there with these
12 big tractor-trailers to be able to move them
13 depending on the condition of the highway, et
14 cetera.

15 We make the decisions all of the time how
16 to try to re-route traffic. This particular case,
17 of course, you were between exits which would be,
18 you know, a problem for us because we have to try to
19 work you back to 61. 61 was a big problem for us as
20 well unfortunately.

21 So we didn't have a lot of options. You
22 didn't see a lot of traffic on 22 because we didn't
23 have a lot of options to get vehicles off at 61
24 early on in the afternoon of the 14th.

25 In fact as an example, later on in the

1 evening we actually instituted a detour on 22 right
2 around 9:00 in the evening west of you. I'm talking
3 now back towards Strausstown, Shartlesville.

4 At 9:06 -- this is unbelievable. At 9:07
5 or 9:08 we had a report from Hamburg PD that they
6 already had a gridlock situation in Hamburg because
7 of the vehicles we were taking off the interstate.
8 We then had actually a tractor-trailer become
9 disabled, and then we had an electric line come
10 down. And we lost the 22 detour by 9:53.

11 So we only had that detour even available
12 to us for about -- for a little over 50 minutes. We
13 then diverted to 183. And within 20 minutes, we had
14 a tractor-trailer stuck on 183.

15 So unfortunately, you know, those
16 highways that we normally use as our detour
17 routes -- now where you were, we were able to walk
18 down and traverse. It was clear because PennDOT was
19 able to get through.

20 There wasn't a lot of traffic on that.
21 But certainly west of where you were, later in the
22 evening was a different story. But generally we
23 have been successful in being able to clear that
24 highway and move the vehicles that are at least
25 between exits relatively quickly.

1 I think as you mentioned we had
2 deteriorating weather conditions there that made it
3 difficult not only for our people but for the tow
4 people, et cetera to be successful in this
5 particular case.

6 In retrospect had we had 61 a little bit
7 more available to us, we might have been able to do
8 some things with actually turning you around,
9 driving you the wrong way westbound, eastbound
10 lanes, you know the drill there.

11 In order to do that, we'd have to close
12 the interstate and get everybody off 61 because we'd
13 be bringing you back the wrong direction. So those
14 are some of the issues that -- I know your question
15 is more towards what actions are in place to go and
16 care for the individuals that are in that queue
17 which of course from a State Police standpoint we're
18 not anticipating it is going to be, you know,
19 hopefully not as long as it was.

20 We are pretty used to, you know, four,
21 five, six hours even in good weather sometimes get
22 that interstate blocked and it takes us that long to
23 get it completely open. But certainly we wouldn't
24 want to have a repeat of a 24-hour delay.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MANN: I would comment two

1 things. One is that if I had not ventured down the
2 shoulder for that 1 mile and gotten to Exit 35, I
3 would guesstimate by the others I knew in that
4 tie-up I would have sat. That would have me another
5 four to five hours to get home. So thank God I had
6 a little extra courage that day.

7 The other point I would make is I think
8 it was really probably unrealistic to think that the
9 tractor-trailers could have maneuvered the
10 conditions of those side roads that day. We always
11 hear in bad weather conditions, don't drive unless
12 you need to; and if you have to go out there, use
13 the major arteries, stay off secondary roads.

14 So why would we expect anything but
15 further problems by diverting tractor-trailers to
16 secondary routes? I don't know. But I will say
17 that generally speaking the men and women that drive
18 those vehicles are more often prepared for the long
19 haul. They have oftentimes accommodations, a bed,
20 even a bathroom, food, and water in their cabs and
21 are much better prepared to endure those types of
22 surprises where passenger vehicles are not.

23 So my common sense was telling me while I
24 sat there, why aren't we diverting passenger
25 vehicles off the road? Odds are they are more

1 likely to maneuver through the conditions on
2 secondary roads.

3 And as I said when I got to Old 22 and
4 found it in such great shape, I was just dumbfounded
5 that no attempt to do that with passenger vehicles
6 was occurring. Let me ask a little --

7 LT. COL. PERANDI: If I could just
8 follow-up one second. On 78 we have somewhere
9 between -- the truck traffic is about 30 to 35
10 percent of the vehicles. The problem we have with
11 that, Representative Mann, is that if we keep an
12 exit open and try to funnel passenger cars out, that
13 might be successful for a very short period of time.
14 Very shortly we're going to get two, by two, by two,
15 by two tractor-trailers that are parked there.

16 So that's why it's extremely difficult.
17 And in the weather conditions you're talking about,
18 even in good conditions it is difficult. Those
19 weather conditions for a Trooper or any emergency
20 personnel to try to do that and only divert the
21 passenger vehicles is extremely difficult, if not
22 impossible.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MANN: I do appreciate
24 that answer. Obviously, I have several more and we
25 can discuss those off line, so to speak. I know

1 there are many of my colleagues who have questions
2 for you as well, and I want to make sure they have
3 that opportunity. So thank you. Thank you, again.
4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you,
6 Representative. An announcement, an advertisement,
7 and an admonishment. The announcement is please for
8 those of you who came in late turn off your cell
9 phones. The advertisement is I've got legislation
10 to establish a 511 call system. Anybody that wants
11 to co-sponsor that, that's an informational call
12 system. And also the admonishment is we're running
13 not behind time, but I'd like to pick it up a little
14 bit.

15 So I would ask the speakers, both the
16 legislators and the testifiers and the answers, to
17 try to be as concise as they can. Representative
18 Karen Beyer.

19 REPRESENTATIVE BEYER: Secretary Biehler
20 and Director Joseph, I have this morning requested
21 of your offices copies of personal schedules for
22 Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of last week. I
23 wonder if you would provide my office those and also
24 the committee.

25 I'm going to try to be as quick as I can.

1 So I'm going to direct my question to Director
2 Joseph. I'm a member of the Veterans Affairs and
3 Emergency Preparedness Committee.

4 And, Director Joseph, on several
5 occasions you have testified before that committee
6 suggesting that the disaster preparedness plan for
7 the State of Pennsylvania is so good it is in fact a
8 model for the rest of the country and in fact other
9 states have modelled it.

10 And so I would ask you, is the road
11 evacuation part of the disaster preparedness plan of
12 the State?

13 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Thanks for the
14 question. We are proud of that disaster plan and it
15 is a model that many states have followed including
16 Florida who has an excellent track record on doing
17 this.

18 As I think was discussed, it was a very
19 bad lack of communication amongst agencies to
20 fulfill the requirements that each of those agencies
21 was supposed to perform. The plan is there. We
22 just need the information to effectively act on it.

23 REPRESENTATIVE BEYER: So there was a
24 point where this was a road problem, a traffic
25 problem, and a weather problem. And I would put to

1 Secretary Biehler that I believe this storm -- we've
2 had worse storms in this state.

3 So we live in a state where we get ice
4 and snow, and we should be fully prepared for that.
5 So I don't buy the argument that it was an unusual
6 storm.

7 I want to address it's gone from a
8 weather problem to a traffic problem to a disaster.
9 And I want to know when, at what point, PEMA made
10 the decision that they should have a role and that
11 there was a road evacuation problem and why weren't
12 road evacuation plans immediately put into place .

13 And further, let me add, why wasn't the
14 PEMA system activated to let people know that I-78
15 was a disaster? Please stay off that interstate.
16 Folks traveling from New York -- and I want you to
17 know that Interstate 78 dissects my district.

18 So traffic comes from New York. There
19 was no warning to the New York motorists coming into
20 Pennsylvania through I-78 that I-78 was even closed.
21 So I want to know why PEMA wasn't actively involved
22 and prepared for road evacuation.

23 LT. COL. PERANDI: Actually, could I
24 just? Actually, there is a message board on 22
25 westbound east of 33 that at 5 p.m. on the 14th

1 advised that 78 westbound was closed at Exit 29,
2 watch for severe delays, stopped traffic, et cetera.

3 Also, on westbound -- excuse me, 78
4 westbound at 33, same advisory. 78 westbound closed
5 at Exit 29, severe delays, watch for stopped
6 traffic, use alternate routes. And both of those
7 sign boards on 78 and 22 right east of SR33 were
8 designed to warn traffic coming out of New York that
9 there was a problem on 78 westbound.

10 REPRESENTATIVE BEYER: Lieutenant
11 Colonel, I appreciate your response but I asked
12 Director Joseph the question. So, Director Joseph,
13 can you talk to me about why road evacuation plans
14 weren't in place and why you weren't the
15 coordinating agency on that? And that will be my
16 final question, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I
17 appreciate it.

18 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Thank you. We work
19 hand-in-hand with these agencies as well as the
20 counties. When we know that there's a problem, we
21 institute a plan. And as you heard Lieutenant
22 Colonel Perandi say, not only did Pennsylvania State
23 Police put out clean messages to notify locals, but
24 the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
25 advised their system to put messages up. We also

1 coordinated with all surrounding states as well as
2 Transcon to put messages up.

3 We know, in fact, they were up on 95
4 because we received comments from them. Should we
5 have put them up earlier? Yes. And I assume and
6 accept that responsibility. But we do have a
7 system. And when it is in place, it can work. But
8 the people have to pay attention to those as well.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you very much.
11 Representative John Siptroth.

12 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you very
13 much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Secretary Biehler
14 and Director Joseph, Colonel Wright, Colonel Perandi
15 for being here today to answer some questions.

16 First of all, I have to commend our local
17 PennDOT forces in Monroe County in doing a superb
18 job in clearing of the snow and the movement of the
19 traffic until PennDOT apparently in Harrisburg made
20 the decision to shutdown Interstate 80 at the
21 Borough of Stroudsburg. Again, advanced
22 notification was not forth coming to the incoming
23 traffic into Pennsylvania. A holiday weekend on a
24 Friday, which we are enjoying, a lot of the ski
25 resorts. And what had happened was simply our

1 traffic was routed into our borough -- our boroughs
2 and came to a complete standstill.

3 Now by moving that roadblock that
4 temporary measure 7 miles to the west which the road
5 was completely open, that traffic could have free
6 flowed up Interstate 80 and either been routed to
7 the Pennsylvania Turnpike which was clear and dry
8 because I spent five hours on that going home on
9 Thursday evening myself.

10 My question number one is regarding
11 coordination of major interstates being closed. How
12 much input does the local PennDOT individuals have,
13 the county maintenance managers for the direction of
14 those roadblocks, closures of the interstates?

15 And the other thing I would like to ask
16 Director Joseph, we have a terrific resource out
17 there regarding local emergency responders. And
18 were, in fact, the local emergency management
19 coordinators and the county coordinators notified of
20 the pending closure on Interstate 80? And were the
21 local emergency responders activated to assist in
22 the distribution of the food, water, and that type
23 of thing, and information especially to stranded
24 motorists that were affected by the closures?

25 And my final request would be that a

1 committee between all four of the agencies that sit
2 at the table today, a coordinated effort be
3 established so that in the future when we have this
4 type of an emergency we will have plans set in place
5 that will activate the emergency management system
6 and provide the resources necessary to protect the
7 traveling public and allow PennDOT to do their job
8 in removing the snow.

9 Being affected by a number of floods in
10 the past few years, we've never had a situation that
11 I can recall that ever prompted the forestall, if
12 you will, activation levels. And I really can't see
13 where the breakdown may have occurred in this
14 particular instance. Thank you.

15 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Perhaps I could add
16 before others that the very first part of your
17 question, do we rely on the local area within the
18 PennDOT group to get information about the
19 interstates system? The answer is yes.

20 When Interstate 80 was closed at five or
21 whenever it was on the 15th of February, yes, we
22 were in contact with our folks. There was a problem
23 to my recollection. I'll have to go back to our
24 records to make sure I'm correct.

25 My understanding was that there was a

1 problem in the section between the sort of Route 33
2 to Route 380 section on, in fact, Interstate 80.
3 That became cleared. And later when we adjusted
4 that closing, we opened that portion from Route 33
5 to Route 380. But yes, we were in contact with
6 those folks.

7 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: I believe to follow-up
8 on that, sir, 33 at the time was fairly well open.
9 We could divert on 33 coming into the state, bring
10 them down to 78 which was open all of the way into
11 Fogelsville which was after the Turnpike.

12 So by bringing them down 33, across 78,
13 down the Turnpike, we could get those people flowing
14 south wherever they needed to go. If they went
15 further across to 380, all we were doing was pushing
16 them north and there was a problem in the northern
17 part of the state. Once they left 380, they pretty
18 much were in no man's land. That was some of the
19 discussions on that.

20 To answer your question on did we have
21 any communications with local responders or county
22 responders, yes, we did. On Monday the 12th of
23 February starting at 09 in the morning, 0900, we had
24 a series of three conference calls. We break these
25 conference calls down into areas. PEMA has three

1 areas across the state. Most of them have 22 to 24
2 counties. We break those down as we have done this
3 morning for this coming weekend's weather events.
4 All of the counties participate in those so that we
5 could have the national weather service and the
6 other state agencies on and gain some preparedness
7 and situational awareness.

8 The day that we closed down at 1615
9 hours, we had a county conference call advising the
10 counties of what we were about to do. And again as
11 I said earlier, did we give them a lot of time? No.
12 We had to make a decision to clean up those roadways
13 because we were more adversely impacting on the
14 communities because those roadways were blocked.

15 If we opened them up, we could help the
16 municipalities by getting a lot of that truck
17 traffic or other vehicles off or out of the local
18 municipalities.

19 In addition, you asked if -- your area
20 does have a rather well-established network of SUVs
21 and quads and snowmobiles and they are prepared and
22 willing to support us. So do other counties. I
23 think in the room today is Luzerne County. I did
24 ask them to support us directly.

25 The reason I asked them is based on the

1 floods that you and a lot of other people have had
2 to take in since June of this year, we
3 pre-positioned food and water in certain areas of
4 the communities -- or counties. Luzerne County is
5 one of them. They went to their storage facility,
6 got our food and water along with DCNR and a few
7 other state agencies and worked 80 and 81 to provide
8 health and welfare along with EMTs. So yes, we do
9 use them when we need to use them.

10 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: One other
11 question. Again, I would ask that, you know, if
12 there is anything that we can do as a legislative
13 body legislatively that would help in a future event
14 like that, I would certainly request that you come
15 to us and let us help you, the organizations,
16 protect the welfare of the traveling public again.

17 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Okay.

18 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you.

19 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Could I follow-up on
20 that?

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: We're trying to move
22 along.

23 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Okay.

24 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
25 Argall.

1 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: Thank you, Mr.
2 Chairman. Given the geographic location of my
3 district in Hamburg and Lenhartsville in Berks
4 County and up to almost Hazleton in Schuylkill
5 County, I've gotten it pretty hard with both
6 barrels. And in all of those irate e-mails and
7 phone calls, I think two suggestions came forward
8 that I'd like to share. I'm curious if indeed there
9 is any merit.

10 I think the one thing that unites all of
11 us today, I can certainly tell you that my mostly
12 republican constituents were just as angry last week
13 as Representative Eachus' mostly democratic
14 constituents just to the north of me.

15 So for Secretary Biehler, it is my
16 understanding that a number of the contracts with
17 private truckers in Schuylkill and Berks County that
18 used to help PennDOT deal with plowing snow and ice
19 have been dramatically reduced. I'm curious why
20 that was done. And would that have made a
21 difference last week?

22 SECRETARY BIEHLER: It's incorrect. It
23 is just not correct. What we do in terms of how we
24 handle our equipment and trucks and so on within our
25 system to be able to manage snow and ice is we have

1 various targets and standards in terms of the total
2 number of vehicles. But it is up to the district
3 and the various associated counties to decide
4 whether that complement is provided with all of the
5 department equipment or theoretically all rental
6 equipment with contracts or some mix. I can -- I'll
7 have to get the numbers for you if you're interested
8 so I can show them to you.

9 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: That would be
10 helpful.

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: You'll probably
12 see -- depending on each district, you'll see a mix
13 more often than not. Some districts have decided
14 they really want to have all department contracts
15 for whatever the reason. But no, we do not restrict
16 that one way or the other.

17 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: And the number of
18 private contractors hasn't been reduced in
19 Schuylkill and Berks Counties?

20 SECRETARY BIEHLER: There is no conscious
21 effort in terms of directions to reduce the number
22 of contracts. What the district has decided to do
23 in terms of what the mix is, I can't tell you. But
24 I'd be happy to get you those numbers so you can see
25 for yourself whatever they have done.

1 But the important thing for us is the
2 number of trucks, whether they are department and/or
3 contract to make sure that the complement is up. So
4 no, we've not consciously said you need to reduce
5 the number of private contracts.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: Did you have
7 enough trucks last week? I mean was that an issue?

8 SECRETARY BIEHLER: As far as we know the
9 answer is yes. But that's a fair question to ask,
10 did we? And we're in the process of re-creating
11 that information from all of our logs.

12 The next question is, did we then take
13 those resources and use them in the most effective
14 way? And I think there is probably some weakness
15 there from what we've seen so far. We're going back
16 and getting all of that documentation. Because I
17 think, you know, from our initial review that's --
18 that is a question.

19 What happens in dealing with the
20 interstate system, a portion of our system is
21 dedicated to the interstate system within each
22 county. And another question is as you get ready
23 for a particular event -- and I can tell you that
24 the forecast two days in advance of the event were
25 pretty accurate. They were updated the day, you

1 know, on Tuesday before the big onslaught on
2 Wednesday even though it started partially on
3 Tuesday. And I'll tell you again, they were pretty
4 accurate even in terms of the complexity. And the
5 complexity really -- I know some folks think, well,
6 this should have been a run-of-the-mill storm. It
7 really wasn't and I don't want to debate it. But it
8 really was not. It was a very complex storm in our
9 system.

10 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: Thank you. I
11 look forward to reviewing the data.

12 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'd be happy to.

13 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: The second piece
14 that kept coming through again and again and again
15 from my constituents was mostly from retired
16 colleagues of Colonel Perandi. And it is my
17 understanding that in May of 1997, the retired State
18 Troopers are telling me that the State Police
19 disbanded Interstate Troop S whose sole
20 responsibility was to patrol every -- every mile of
21 the interstate system.

22 I'm curious why was that done. And would
23 that have made a difference last week had it not
24 been not carried out?

25 LT. COL. PERANDI: Well, once again

1 that's inaccurate information. We had a Troop S
2 interstate troop, but they did not patrol every mile
3 of the interstate system. In fact, that was part of
4 the problem. I-81, I-80 had interstate stations
5 assigned to it. I-78 did not, never had an
6 interstate station assigned to it. I-95 did not.

7 So it was very haphazard throughout the
8 Commonwealth. So the decision had to be made do we
9 want to expand the interstate troop to those other
10 interstates or what we found to be better was to
11 combine our interstate operations with our county
12 operations as we were already doing for instance on
13 I-78.

14 That eliminated duplicative supervision,
15 duplicative command. It reduced facility management
16 and allowed us to actually put more Troopers on the
17 roads to do whatever particular action was
18 necessary.

19 For example in Hamburg's area with I-78,
20 throughout the storm period we had virtually all of
21 our resources unless they were called for other
22 duties assigned for prolonged periods of time on the
23 interstate. We have other duties and
24 responsibilities, but we can move and adjust more
25 appropriately under the system that we have now.

1 And we basically reassigned those individuals. The
2 easiest way that I could explain to members of the
3 General Assembly relative to our Troop S Interstate,
4 we get this question all of the time is there is a
5 faction of individuals, majority retired at this
6 point, who have a burning kind of loyalty to the
7 Troop S assignment that they had when they were on
8 the job and it is really hard for them to give it
9 up.

10 But the bottom line is we're much more
11 efficient, much more effective at not just our
12 county operations but our interstate operations the
13 way we have it configured today.

14 As I said if we went back on an
15 interstate, we have numerous interstates throughout
16 the Commonwealth that never had the interstate troop
17 assigned. And I don't know why that is because that
18 was before I came on the job, and I'm on the job
19 32 years. So that goes back a long way as to how
20 that was determined where an interstate would be or
21 not. In the Representative's area out in Monroe
22 County, Swiftwater, they had an interstate station
23 there on I-80. They have a station up in Hazleton.
24 So I know what we have on 80 and 81, but we never
25 had it on 78. That's part of the -- that's part of

1 the reason that we more efficiently and more -- more
2 unilaterally or equally assigned our Troopers but we
3 certainly had enough Troopers.

4 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: You had enough
5 Troopers on the job last week, that wasn't the
6 problem that we faced with this disaster?

7 LT. COL. PERANDI: Well, I mean we had
8 all our Troopers on the job. You know, I think if I
9 could just follow-up, the problem that we faced is,
10 you know, our agency started in 1905 and we had, you
11 know, two or three horses for each Trooper. Today
12 we have two or three Troopers for each vehicle.

13 So, you know, we can call in a certain
14 number of Troopers. But if we don't have marked
15 police cars to put them in, you know, then we're
16 doubling up, whatever the case might be.

17 And that's exactly -- again, I'll use the
18 Hamburg station as an example, exactly what we run
19 into in Hamburg. We basically had all of our marked
20 cars out with all of our Troopers. And any Troopers
21 that we would call in, we didn't have marked
22 vehicles to put them in. The same thing with
23 four-wheel drive vehicles, we need additional
24 four-wheel drive vehicles. Because the
25 configuration of a patrol vehicle for routine patrol

1 is different than what we have in a configuration
2 like when we have this storm.

3 Many of us know our patrol vehicles are
4 rear-wheel drive Crown Vics, and they don't move
5 along real well in some of these weather conditions.
6 So that's why you need these four-wheel drive
7 vehicles.

8 I know we want to move along. We can
9 talk about this off line. But that's probably what
10 we'll do.

11 REPRESENTATIVE ARGALL: Thank you. Thank
12 you, Mr. Chairman. Very helpful.

13 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
14 Michael Carroll.

15 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Thank you very
16 much, Chairman. I represent a district in the
17 Poconos and in Luzerne County that actually includes
18 I-80 and 81. I'd like to talk for a minute, Mr.
19 Secretary, about the mechanics of removing snow from
20 the interstates.

21 My question really is first, the Turnpike
22 employs a bare pavement policy. And do you think it
23 would be a wise idea for the department to consider
24 a bare pavement policy for hilly sections of
25 interstates?

1 SECRETARY BIEHLER: It might be.
2 However, we clearly have a different dynamic in
3 terms of the level of -- you know, level of service
4 we're able to offer given our situation. And it is
5 not trying to cry poor mouth at all. It is just a
6 fact of our system.

7 If you look just at the interstate system
8 that PennDOT is responsible for which is a little in
9 excess of between 12- and 1300 miles versus the
10 roughly 500 miles of Turnpike system, the Turnpike's
11 annual revenue is about \$600 million for that,
12 devoted for that 500 miles.

13 I'm not sure what our final numbers are
14 in terms of the amount of money we put into our 1200
15 to 1300 mile system each year. It is likely to be
16 in the 3- to \$350 million range. So you can get a
17 sense of the difference.

18 We would have to increase our revenue --
19 if you wanted to do it for all services, I know your
20 question specifically was bare pavement for
21 hillsides. We would have to have quite a
22 significant difference. I don't know the answer to
23 your question. And it's fair game to ask it and
24 we'll take a look at it.

25 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: I think it would

1 go a long way to trying to solve the problems with
2 trucks trying to ascend the hills. That seems to be
3 one of the dynamics that created the problems that
4 occurred in the course of the two or three days.

5 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'd like to think
6 that was our only problem, and I wish it was the
7 case. But unfortunately I can also tell you there
8 were sections of Interstate 78 that many were on
9 that unfortunately were not hilly that had problems.
10 So we are probably more significant. But thank you.
11 It is worth a look.

12 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Secondly, the
13 applications of salt by the department, can you talk
14 for a minute, Mr. Secretary, about the dynamics and
15 the application of salt compared with anti-skid on
16 the interstate?

17 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Sure. In terms of
18 what our procedures are and so on?

19 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: In terms of the
20 ratios. Do we through the engineering district
21 determine the ratio of salt and anti-skid or is that
22 a department policy or -- talk to me about salt and
23 anti-skid applications.

24 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Sure. We have some
25 overall guidelines generally about the use of salt

1 and anti-skid and mix. And now, however, it varies
2 depending on temperature and the severity of the
3 storm and so on. So it is really a target, a
4 moving target through a storm depending on what the
5 complexity is.

6 We start out. There are two tiers -- you
7 know, our folks talk about things like spreading
8 storms versus plowing storms, spreading being where
9 mostly you're spreading material on the ground using
10 that material as a way to control whatever is on the
11 surface versus plowing. And at some point you
12 switch over and/or use the combination of both.

13 We also have spreading rates. We try to
14 match the rate of material going on a surface if it
15 is anti-skid or ice -- I'm sorry, I mean salt or
16 some combination based on the temperature and the
17 amount of material on the snow or ice on the
18 facility.

19 We also then make changes for the
20 spreading rates through the storm if that warrants
21 it. And it is a -- now you're getting into part of
22 the real skill involved in dealing with complex
23 storms.

24 In the case of our system, we use
25 something called pretreatments as part of an

1 approaching storm as well as one of the tools if you
2 will to deal with it.

3 And in the case of Interstate 78, we had
4 pretreatment. We pre-treat with liquid brine to
5 give us a little cushion before the storm starts.
6 We also used something called pre-wetting -- and I'm
7 sorry to go through this with you. But we also
8 spray brine actually on the salt as we're
9 distributing. What that does is accelerates the
10 action of the salt mix once it finally hits the
11 ground. So there are a number of techniques that
12 you use depending on the kind of event that you
13 have.

14 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: I am a little
15 concerned about the application of brine at the
16 start of the storm and the fact that it may give a
17 false sense of security and delay the plowing
18 activities instead of relying on the brine.

19 So I'd ask that you, as Secretary, take a
20 look at the application of the brine and how that
21 is -- how effective that is and the salt ratios and
22 finally this business of bare pavement on the hilly
23 sections of the interstate.

24 I think if we did a better job at the
25 start of this, we clearly wouldn't have ended up

1 where we were. I yield the rest of my time back,
2 Mr. Chairman.

3 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. We're
4 going to acknowledge Representative Scavello and
5 then Wansacz for brief questions and then we're
6 going to take a break.

7 REPRESENTATIVE SCAVELLO: Thank you, Mr.
8 Chairman. I would like to go back to that brine
9 issue for a moment. Monroe County's 80 and 380 were
10 fine throughout that whole period of time and we
11 used the brine and used it successfully.

12 My question is, was the brine used in
13 Carbon County on 80? And I think if you look into
14 that, you're going to find that it wasn't. If you
15 travel 80, the minute you hit Carbon County your
16 problems are created. So, Mr. Secretary, I think it
17 is something to look at. You'll find that the brine
18 wasn't used.

19 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'll be happy to
20 check it out. It is certainly one of the --

21 REPRESENTATIVE SCAVELLO: It's one of the
22 most successful things of Monroe County. We've been
23 using it on our roads. And our roads for the most
24 part, our guys did a pretty good job and I commend
25 them as well.

1 Just to go back to the closure of I-80 on
2 West Main Street in my district, I have to tell you
3 folks that I don't think a fifth grader in my
4 schools would have closed it at that point, on that
5 day for what is going on in my county. I get a
6 hundred thousand vehicles coming into Monroe County
7 that weekend.

8 That's our busiest -- last busiest
9 weekend of the year especially when we haven't
10 had -- you know, because of the weather. We've had
11 warm weather. We couldn't even make snow.

12 This is our last opportunity to try to --
13 for the tourist industry, the ski resorts to try to
14 bail out shall I say. And our guys are stranded out
15 there. And not only that, but we're putting them on
16 33 sending them west where all of the activity is in
17 Monroe. And right in the middle in Tannersville
18 there is Camelback. The Crossings, Camelback, and
19 the ski resorts are up there in 940. And we've got
20 them stranded on roads, and we've got them going in
21 ten different directions.

22 How in the world -- I can understand that
23 under normal situations in the middle of the week or
24 whatever else, but to do this on a holiday weekend
25 and pretty much close Monroe County down. I-80

1 should have been closed at 380 if the problem was
2 where it was and have 940 as an option. You could
3 have taken 940 out to those ski areas. You still
4 had 611 as an option and 81 was fine at the time
5 that this thing was going on. I was on the phone
6 all morning on Friday and I spoke to the Secretary
7 as well. We finally were able to get it open.

8 But you had to see what was happening.
9 Cars were going down 209 to 33, turning around
10 thinking that stretch of 80 was fine, coming back on
11 33. 33 was a roadblock coming back to 80. There
12 was no direction out there. I don't think anyone
13 was talking to each other.

14 But it really pretty much crippled a
15 county that did the right thing. Do you know where
16 our guys were, our PennDOT guys? They were out on
17 80 trying to help the folks in Carbon which is the
18 right thing to do. Questions, you know, I just told
19 you what happened. I don't need any responses. But
20 that's what happened. That's the story.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.
22 Representative Wansacz.

23 REPRESENTATIVE WANSACZ: Thank you, Mr.
24 Chairman. My name is Representative Wansacz. I
25 represent parts of Lackawanna, Luzerne, Wyoming, and

1 Susquehanna Counties. And I'm just going to tell
2 you a little bit about what happened to myself. I
3 along with Representative Staback was caught in
4 that. Wednesday night we were calling back home
5 finding out that it was pretty bad, don't go out,
6 don't risk yourself, don't go out on the highways.
7 So I left Thursday morning.

8 I left Thursday morning here at the
9 Capitol at about 10:30. I realized it was pretty
10 good. I got on Interstate 81. And as I'm driving,
11 I noticed a lot of trucks pulled off to the side on
12 just a regular shoulder, no rest areas, just pulled
13 over. That was before the 78/81 split. So as I'm
14 sitting there, I'm thinking, okay, why is that
15 because the roads are fine.

16 I'm moving on. I go passed the Fort
17 Indiantown Gap. At this point, this is when I
18 realized that, jeez, I should have got off at
19 that -- that's how I remember this -- get gas, get
20 something to eat.

21 Things are going well and then all of a
22 sudden right around probably 10:45, 10:50, I get
23 stuck on 81. This is where I'm stuck. So I get on
24 the phone trying to find out what is going on,
25 what's happening.

1 I did contact PEMA. I did speak with
2 John Comey to let him know. He wasn't aware of it.
3 He was asking where at this point were you. I
4 couldn't see the mile markers. I said somewhere
5 between Fort Indiantown Gap and Pine Grove which you
6 can abide by at that time. So I worked my way up
7 probably about three hours later to get to Exit 100
8 to Pine Grove.

9 At this point I realized that the traffic
10 would go for about two-tenths of a mile, stop for an
11 hour, go two-tenths or whatever. Moved on up and
12 navigated off the back roads, 16 miles later I get
13 myself back on Interstate 81. I look and make sure
14 it is open. It seems like cars are going by.

15 So I get on 81 and I'm going for I don't
16 know how many miles until it stops again. And at
17 this point, this is when I'm noticing plow trucks
18 broken down on the side of the road. I'm noticing
19 tractor-trailers cannot climb the steep incline.

20 So I get off again -- and thank God I did
21 because Representative Staback stayed on and it took
22 him 21 hours. I believe it was Route 54. So I'm
23 not sure what exit it was. But that route, as some
24 of you may know, is straight downhill, curvy, windy
25 roads. This is where I find it was difficult as

1 well. And this is where we need a better detour and
2 management plans. There was also traffic on a
3 two-lane road, coming through small towns on
4 steep -- when I'm talking about steep inclines,
5 these could be ski mountains, these roads. And they
6 were stuck because they couldn't climb the gradual
7 incline of 81 let alone these steep inclines. So
8 luckily I was able to get off.

9 Again, I'm on the phone trying to find
10 out what is happening, letting people know where I'm
11 at, calling back home to see what is going on on
12 Interstate 81. Nobody knew anything. Everybody is
13 saying it looks like Interstate 80 is open. Make
14 your way there.

15 So I try to work my way through Hazleton
16 on 309 and I find myself detoured in every which
17 direction trying to navigate. On 309, I notice
18 coming down all of the traffic was stuck coming up
19 309 because cars couldn't make it. I literally
20 watched a pickup truck push a car up the road.
21 Buses, tractor-trailers could not make the 309 steep
22 increases.

23 So I finally worked my way, again, before
24 I got on Interstate 80 which it is now probably 6:00
25 at night. I asked. I said, What is going on? As

1 soon as I got on Interstate 80, I got on the 309
2 exit in Hazleton. I've been on there two minutes.
3 Oh, they just closed Interstate 80. Up until that
4 point they were telling me if you can make it to
5 Interstate 80, it is fine, go ahead and get home.
6 But then on 80, now the weather is starting to get a
7 little bit worse. And that's where you're noticing
8 the trailers again could not make the incline. And
9 I noticed tractor-trailers getting out, putting
10 chains on their tires to try to make it.

11 And this is where you start paying
12 attention. Because now it is in your mind, am I
13 stuck here. When you stop on a gradual incline and
14 now you're looking ahead and see tractor-trailers in
15 both lanes, you're stuck.

16 Okay. But the rest areas were not even
17 plowed so anybody could get in at Interstate 80. I
18 noticed that as well. There was no communication.
19 I was on the phone back home with people who were on
20 the web sites, were checking out what they are
21 saying. We don't know what is going on. According
22 to the web sites, we have no idea if it is open, if
23 it is closed.

24 But when I made it to the Turnpike at
25 Lake Harmony, it was clear. There was no problems

1 at all. So I'm going to also express the same thing
2 as Representative Carroll did, is I heard from my
3 people back home that we were not plowing the roads
4 bare and the Turnpike did that. And I think that
5 caused the major problem. Not only did it cause a
6 problem on Interstate 81, but it caused a problem on
7 our off routes off of 81 on our State roads.

8 So what I'm wondering is for all you is,
9 why, first off, was the Turnpike in better shape
10 than Interstate 80 or 81? And also how if 81 was
11 such a mess were cars allowed to get back on
12 Interstate 81? Why did we not keep them off as far
13 as the exits?

14 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Well, I can add
15 perhaps part of that at least from PennDOT's
16 standpoint. Frankly, we were having difficult
17 information flows on 81. I'll tell you that. And
18 that included not only on Wednesday but also
19 Thursday, trying to get verification of the exact
20 condition to try to make that ultimate decision
21 which we didn't make until way too late. And the
22 same was true on Interstate 80.

23 In terms of the so-called bare roads
24 question, that's a question of the level of
25 resources that we put on our snow removal. And we

1 don't -- we have not had a bare roads policy. We
2 try keep it as passable and reasonable as possible.
3 In this particular case, we did not attack those
4 sections that we closed in my opinion as well as we
5 should have. And now the question is, what did we
6 do versus what should we have done? In the case
7 of -- unfortunately one of the trickiest areas was
8 78.

9 And Interstate -- a portion of Interstate
10 78 in Lebanon County was facing a similar tricky
11 storm. And somehow we were maybe on the edge a
12 couple of times trying to make that passable, but we
13 were able to do it.

14 So the question is, what did we do there
15 that we didn't do in other locations? And I think
16 that's the real -- for us, the thing that we've got
17 to look squarely in the eye and make sure we
18 document carefully what we did and what we didn't do
19 and then get ourself in a better position.

20 We've identified some weaknesses already,
21 and we're in the process of really looking at it
22 carefully. We just can't -- can't have bad
23 information and we just can't have non-uniformed
24 approaches here in our system.

25 REPRESENTATIVE WANSACZ: I'm sorry. Does

1 anyone else have anything to add to that?

2 LT. COL. PERANDI: I would add very
3 briefly that unfortunately when you're in one of
4 those queues, it sometimes appears to be a sort of
5 like permanent blockage when in fact at the front of
6 the queue it is not. And that one on 81, that's
7 exactly what was happening. And that's why you go a
8 mile or two and stop again. Because we're clearing
9 from the front of the queue. We're not putting up
10 the white flag and saying, listen, our
11 recommendation is to shut this highway. We're
12 dealing with that particular location as well as
13 other locations on 81.

14 But as you move vehicles from the front
15 and you think you have it cleared -- and as the
16 Secretary said, he's getting information one time it
17 is blocked and the next time it is open because
18 that's what is happening. It is opening for a
19 period of time.

20 Now you get another tractor-trailer
21 stuck. Now you also start to run into the problem
22 with your heavy-duty wreckers because they're tied
23 up taking the first two trucks out. And you have a
24 limited number of heavy-duty wreckers. You can see
25 the situation. So now you have to make a decision

1 whether you're going to keep your people on the
2 interstate and try to keep the interstate open which
3 is our priority as opposed to start to deploy to
4 different exit ramps, et cetera, and to get into
5 more of a closing the highway type of strategy which
6 we did get to later in the day. And we needed the
7 General's assistance to do that because we didn't
8 have the people ourselves to do it.

9 REPRESENTATIVE WANSACZ: I'm not blaming
10 you. And obviously, I was stuck in it. So I saw
11 the conditions between back driving, trucks couldn't
12 climb roads, to just a storm that came on very
13 strong.

14 But what I'm saying is that we need to
15 look at this. We need to learn. We need to make
16 sure that this doesn't happen again. And I think
17 there was a lack of communication amongst all of the
18 parties involved.

19 But we have got to make the decision to
20 close down the interstates or the roads, letting
21 people know where to go. Because when trucks get
22 off at those detour routes as well -- and they are
23 from out of state, they don't know the gradual
24 steepness of it. They can't make that as well. And
25 that just I think backed up every small town around

1 81.

2 LT. COL. PERANDI: I can tell you from a
3 State Police standpoint, we would make the
4 recommendation to General Joseph and to Secretary
5 Biehler that we close interstates sooner in these
6 kinds of weather conditions given this experience.

7 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Okay. Thank you very
8 much. We were going to call a break. I have some
9 of my fellow chairmen up here asking for more
10 questions. So how does the panel feel? Do you need
11 a short break or do you want to push ahead?

12 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Go ahead.

13 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Push ahead. Are you
14 okay?

15 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Keep going.

16 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Okay. Let us know if
17 you need a break. You know, it is a democracy and I
18 did want to recognize all of the people that need to
19 speak here today. Representative Chairman Russ
20 Fairchild.

21 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you, Mr.
22 Chairman. I will be brief. About four years ago I
23 understand that PEMA called together a -- basically
24 worked on a plan for incident command and how the
25 process works.

1 And I would just be interested in if you
2 could go back and review that plan -- and perhaps
3 submit to us in writing, that will save time here
4 today -- on the basics of that plan and was it
5 instituted during this emergency. Finally, I have
6 just a short question.

7 It seems like what we've said was that
8 there was such a lack of information that really
9 kind of led to the meltdown of the correct response.

10 And I think everyone has testified kind
11 of to that both yesterday and today. But given that
12 Thursday was a clear day, I believe it was a windy
13 day. What kind of area resources were used by the
14 State Police -- and General Wright, I don't want you
15 to feel left out of today.

16 But it seems to me that with the
17 testimony of Secretary Biehler, that we were still
18 experiencing this need to know the information on
19 Thursday and Thursday afternoon and Thursday evening
20 that we could have used a lot of air resources to
21 simply fly over the site to get a firsthand look by
22 a qualified incident manager that could then have
23 been relayed to PEMA, in which case for the benefit
24 of the audience, the TV audience, all of you are
25 part of the PEMA organization. And that information

1 could have been used for not only your responses to
2 the issue at hand but also to inform the public whom
3 I think was inadequately informed through the whole
4 process.

5 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, the National
6 Guard did fly several recon missions. I think there
7 were three in total, two during the height of the
8 emergency and one afterwards when we were going to
9 open up the highways so we could understand the flow
10 of the traffic. We recorded that information back.
11 The issue is that it was always, always changing.

12 So by the time we reported it back to
13 PEMA, it was changed again. And we -- you know, it
14 takes about 40 minutes to fly a UA60 from Fort
15 Indiantown Gap up through the Wilkes-Barre area
16 and/or from Fort Indiantown Gap over through the
17 Allentown area on 78. So to cover all of that --
18 the flight path and report back, there are some
19 changing incidents there or some changing
20 information of what we see and then what continues
21 to happen. But we did fly three different recon
22 missions at the request of PEMA.

23 LT. COL. PERANDI: We had -- and we had
24 our helicopter up at 11:00 that morning. About
25 10:30 actually we had the helicopter up and so we

1 were getting a view from the air as well.

2 I would just reiterate what the General
3 indicated, that all of the information we were
4 getting back even from a helicopter visually looking
5 at it was fluctuating.

6 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Just to add to that,
7 the reason that they were up on Thursday, it could
8 not get up on Wednesday because of the weather
9 conditions.

10 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: So still even
11 with the direct observation by qualified
12 individuals, we still couldn't get a handle on what
13 was happening because of the changing climate?

14 LT. COL. PERANDI: Yeah. I think we
15 started to get a handle on what was happening, and
16 it was difficult to get a handle whether you wanted
17 to close the interstate system to allow PennDOT to
18 do their -- our priority was to allow PennDOT to be
19 able to move in conjunction with traffic to get the
20 highway cleared. Until probably mid afternoon on
21 Thursday, we recognized that Secretary Biehler's
22 recommendation was we needed to at some point look
23 at shutting down the highway, clearing the highway
24 so they could get the job done.

25 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Let me just add, Mr.

1 Representative, I appreciate your question. We were
2 getting finally underground digital camera pictures
3 which would verify the level of ice pack on the
4 system. And that's when we then had -- we said we
5 had to close it because otherwise we couldn't just
6 start dealing with it and getting it off. That's
7 when we closed it.

8 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.

9 Representative Goodman.

10 REPRESENTATIVE GOODMAN: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chairman. I will be brief because I believe we are
12 getting to the point now of redundancy. We're
13 asking the same questions and receiving the same
14 answer.

15 I do want to comment on something, a
16 question that Representative Argall brought up.
17 Shortly after I was elected in 2003, I asked to sit
18 down with PennDOT officials in Schuylkill County.

19 I represent Schuylkill County. Route 81
20 goes right through the heart of my legislative
21 district which probably was one of the most impacted
22 districts of the storm in relationship to Route 81.

23 I'm looking back at the briefing that
24 they gave me which was very comprehensive. It had
25 to do with personnel and repaving and maintenance

1 and everything.

2 When you get to the middle of it, it has
3 available winter fleet. Apparently in 1995,
4 Schuylkill County had 75 vehicles. Now in 2007,
5 they have 42. You don't have to be a mathematician
6 to figure out how the storm got away from us. This
7 was a very unique storm.

8 By listening to the testimony, I can
9 visually see how the dominos began to fell. All of
10 us -- I live on 81. I'm 76 miles away from the
11 Capitol, 74 of those are on 81. I know if you have
12 one accident, the whole thing backs up.

13 But I remember when I was speaking to
14 PennDOT officials back in 2003, the department -- in
15 1995 they had 75 vehicles. In 2007, they had 42.
16 In 2003 the department had 44 of its own vehicles,
17 and they were allowed to have 22 rental vehicles
18 which were contracts that were made with local
19 vendors who could come to the aid of the department
20 in the case of an emergency. I think that's what
21 Representative Argall was alluding to, these 22
22 rentals.

23 As of 2006, we are down to 42 trucks and
24 zero rentals. Now in my opinion the local county
25 emergency or local county manager for PennDOT did

1 not have the necessary resources at his disposal to
2 handle this storm in a proper way. And I would like
3 PennDOT to go back and look over these numbers.

4 I know you don't have them readily
5 available. So I don't expect you to be able to
6 answer this. But since 1995, we've gone from 75 to
7 42. That's 24 trucks left. In that same time
8 period, we've had the opening of Highridge which has
9 brought 13,401 trucks per day and 3,260 cars --
10 these are people that work in Highridge -- per day.

11 In fact in my notes here, I distinctly
12 remember saying to PennDOT, are you making these
13 cost cuts for budgetary purposes? And the answer --
14 they would not give me a yes or no answer.
15 Basically they said these are the numbers that are
16 being recommended to us by Harrisburg and Allentown.

17 I think we got caught off guard, but I
18 think we were illprepared by downsizing. I do
19 believe that we have a fiscal responsibility to our
20 taxpayers to have a leaner and more answerable
21 government but never at the cost of public safety.
22 And I think that's what happened here.

23 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Wait, sir. One
24 second. First of all, thanks. We'll look at those
25 numbers very carefully. I can certainly tell you

1 that in 2003, the period that I'm aware of, there
2 was a very comprehensive evaluation of snow removal
3 equipment.

4 And absolutely we looked at it very, very
5 hard and tried to look at past standards and how
6 they were calculated and more modern standards given
7 the different levels of equipment and so on. But
8 I'd be happy to look at your numbers and compare
9 them to where we were and share that whole
10 evaluation with the committee if that's of interest.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GOODMAN: Yeah. And I'm
12 taking it right out of the PennDOT booklet I was
13 given.

14 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Sure.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GOODMAN: I'm one of those
16 guys that never throws anything away. It drives my
17 staff crazy, but it actually proved to be very
18 helpful here. I'm not going to be redundant.

19 But I am going to say with this, also
20 though, as one of the areas that was hit the
21 hardest, I honestly do believe that the employees,
22 the state employees in Schuylkill County would do
23 anything within their power to keep those roads
24 open. Sometimes you're just dealt a hand that you
25 can't win. And I think this is what happened. But

1 under no circumstances should this happen again.

2 I mean pre-warned is prepared. And I
3 think that the steps that we take today should help
4 us out in the future. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Thank you, Mr.
6 Representative. The next testifier will be Julie
7 Harhart from the Lehigh Valley.

8 REPRESENTATIVE HARHART: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman. You know, I think one of my -- I'm from
10 Lehigh and Northampton Counties. And I think one
11 of my worst fears is when I drive 78 into 22 -- 80,
12 78 to 22. My worst fear is being caught in
13 something like that.

14 Because too many times I miss that by a
15 hair. There's been an accident or, you know, some
16 situation that had occurred. So I feel very
17 thankful that I was not caught in that.

18 But I'll tell you, we have a lot of
19 constituents in my area. And in the Morning Call --
20 it was Friday's Morning Call, they have a lot of
21 questions on their minds.

22 And I guess, you know, some of their
23 questions are: Who is in charge of all of the
24 PennDOT offices? Is there an executive in charge of
25 the maintenance division and where was the person

1 during the storm? Why did something less than a
2 blizzard cause these many problems? Why wasn't the
3 Governor -- why wasn't Governor Rendell aware of the
4 issue until 7 p.m. after someone called him at his
5 home? These are the questions that are on my
6 constituents' minds. And I think they really need
7 to be answered.

8 And also, Governor Rendell's secretary
9 Katie Phillips has stated that the Governor's
10 investigation revealed that problems in preparation
11 work were a big part of the breakdown.

12 So what were the preparation problems?
13 And whose responsibility should it be to formulate
14 those preparations immediately leading up to such
15 circumstances such that happened on Thursday --
16 Wednesday and Thursday of that week?

17 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Let me just say your
18 questions are absolutely fair. And we had -- we
19 clearly didn't prepare properly in my opinion. Now
20 let me also tell you that to be fair to everyone
21 because some of the counties did a decent job, I
22 mean they just did and others did not.

23 The question is, can we pinpoint exactly
24 what it was in terms of whether it is a manpower
25 issue, whether it is an equipment problem as others

1 pointed out, whether it was simply getting the
2 troops ready? And I think some or all of those
3 factors were at play.

4 Your questions are absolutely right and
5 it is absolutely part of this evaluation. We're
6 doing one internally as you can imagine. But also
7 there is the external firm, Witt Associates is doing
8 their own version of that. And it will be
9 interesting to see if we come up with the same
10 conclusion.

11 The most important thing is to re-create
12 that and see what our shortcomings were and make
13 sure that we don't have that again. But I would be
14 less than honest if I didn't tell you your questions
15 are exactly right on point.

16 REPRESENTATIVE HARHART: Can you respond
17 to some of the questions that my constituents have
18 had as far as why did it take until 7:00 until the
19 Governor responded or until he found out?

20 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I can tell you --

21 REPRESENTATIVE HARHART: It was on the
22 radio. It was on TV.

23 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Well, it wasn't on
24 TV. There are some of those things I think -- I beg
25 to differ with you. There was a lot on television

1 the next day. And perhaps others can re-create
2 that. In the middle of the issue on 78 when the
3 temperatures were dropping and the ice pack was
4 forming, I'm not -- my information is that folks
5 weren't on television.

6 But let me just tell you that I can't
7 speak for them. I can only speak from what I know.
8 I can tell you within the information that I was
9 receiving related to Interstate 78, I was getting
10 information that said we have blockages, we have
11 delays, we have short closures and it is open, one
12 lane in each direction is open.

13 As late as 11:00 at night, 10:58 was when
14 one of the reports came in that finally there was
15 two lanes or there was a lane in each direction
16 moving. It wasn't accurate.

17 It may have been true for a short
18 stretch. Because some of what General Wright found
19 when she finally had her folks -- troops in place
20 was that we would see short blocks where there were
21 gaps, where there were gaps where there was no cars.

22 But those gaps were short. So they may
23 have been given some incorrect information. The
24 bottom line is my information was not accurate. And
25 so as a result, we weren't -- at PennDOT's side we

1 were not feeding others accurate information. I
2 mean it is not -- it's an explanation. It is not
3 the right answer, but it was what we knew at the
4 time.

5 It is not right and we just can't have
6 that and we will find out what the situation is and
7 make sure that we've got on-the-ground verification.
8 And that's the key and I didn't have it. I'll tell
9 you not only do I feel terrible from the standpoint
10 of how we treated the public, but we just -- we just
11 did not have correct information.

12 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Let me follow on to
13 that to answer your question on why didn't the
14 Governor know until later on. Because of that
15 information going back and forth, I didn't have all
16 of the facts to give him. In retrospect, I should
17 have called him at 4 or 5:00 just to tell him, boss,
18 I think we have a problem and this is what I'm going
19 to do about it.

20 It's -- in retrospect that's what I
21 should have done, but I needed more information.
22 That won't happen again on my part.

23 REPRESENTATIVE HARHART: Okay. I thank
24 you for your testimony, and I know this has been a
25 grueling two days for you. But we certainly do hope

1 that we can rectify this and that this will not
2 happen again. And I certainly don't want this to
3 happen again. And again, thank you.

4 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
6 Reichley.

7 REPRESENTATIVE REICHLEY: Thank you, Mr.
8 Chairman. And let me first express my appreciation
9 to Chairman Markosek to allow members of our
10 Transportation Committee to appear here with you
11 today and ask questions.

12 Because the situation as it has unfolded
13 in this matter has concerned many of us throughout
14 Pennsylvania. I represent parts of Lehigh and Berks
15 County which is sort of on the tail end of where
16 this climbing began on the eastern edge of I-78.

17 With all due respect to you four, you're
18 so to speak the spear catchers in that the blame is
19 being thrown out. I understand people said that the
20 responsibility ends with them.

21 We're here to answer the questions. And
22 as much as each of you have congratulated or
23 commended the members of your own department, I
24 think there has been some disconnect. Colonel
25 Perandi, you said to Representative Beyer about

1 two hours ago that the message boards were working
2 at 5:00 on Wednesday the 14th. In the February 21st
3 edition of the Morning Call says that's correct.
4 They were not working until 5 p.m. last Wednesday.
5 The following day's edition, the Berks County
6 communication center, the emergency management
7 director of Berks County said he first received a
8 911 call at 12:26 p.m. but that the State Police
9 dispatcher in Norristown charged with handling the
10 911 calls for I-78 didn't let the state emergency
11 operations center know of the worsening crisis until
12 4:33 p.m. At 5:22 p.m., almost an hour later, Mr.
13 Gottschall tried to reach the State Police at the
14 Hamburg barracks. He was unable to because the
15 electricity and the phone service was out at that
16 barracks.

17 In watching the testimony yesterday,
18 Senator Vance -- I saw her later on -- was able to
19 relate to me that you folks were down to one cell
20 phone -- hold on. I'm not done yet. Because there
21 is a lot to go over here -- with one Trooper.

22 LT. COL. PERANDI: Well, if you'd allow
23 me just to address that because that -- the
24 Commissioner made the statement as far as initially
25 obviously. But we were down to personal cell phones

1 that the Troopers were utilizing very quickly on.

2 We did lose power and communications off
3 and on at the Hamburg barracks for almost eight
4 hours because of these storms. We had our command
5 center located there because that's really where we
6 needed to be geographically with the interstate --
7 you're familiar with it.

8 We couldn't get a mobile command center
9 out there, and we chose based upon our indication
10 that we would be up and running in a reasonable
11 period of time which I don't know what is reasonable
12 and what is not reasonable.

13 But the command center in Hamburg ended
14 up working very, very well for us. However, shortly
15 before Mr. Gottschall made that call is when the
16 electricity and communications went down there --
17 the phone communications.

18 REPRESENTATIVE REICHLEY: Let me follow
19 up on that statement. As much as you're all more or
20 less on the page, Secretary Martz, Secretary of
21 Administration quoted in yesterday's Pittsburgh
22 Gazette -- I'm sorry, which paper is it?
23 Pittsburgh. Martz said, The State Police were in
24 the best position to assess the problems on the
25 roads, did not effectively and quickly communicate

1 those problems to the highest levels of state
2 government.

3 Now, I watched testimony last week where
4 your superiors appeared before the Senate Law and
5 Justice Committee about a pilot program to shutdown
6 the Skippack barracks at 4:30 in the afternoon and
7 on weekends. And yet you said to us here today, you
8 had enough Troopers last week.

9 You said you had enough vehicles. But in
10 this year's budget, your vehicle purchase
11 requirement was cut 15 percent. The request for
12 additional Troopers has been cut by \$23 million.
13 And with all due respect to you, I kind of find it
14 hard to understand with those kind of cutbacks how
15 we can reconcile this saying we had enough resources
16 available. Either it is more Troopers or more
17 vehicles or something else. And in a budget where
18 \$15 million was allocated last year for World Trade
19 PA in this budget as well, \$30 million the last two
20 years and you're losing 23 million for additional
21 Troopers, who is setting the priorities here?

22 LT. COL. PERANDI: Well, I know that we
23 have a complement increase that we're training our
24 Troopers as fast as we can train them right now,
25 about 350 to 400 a year.

1 Our complement increase was authorized by
2 270 here in the last year or two. So we do have --
3 what I was referring to specifically was to whether
4 or not we had enough Troopers available out on the
5 road on February 14th as opposed to a more general
6 kind of question about the number of Troopers
7 available statewide.

8 And I was relating to the fact that more
9 vehicles for those Troopers on the 14th, they would
10 have been able to go to different locations.

11 As far as the question relative to
12 Skippack, that's really a -- that's a whole separate
13 issue in combination with the central dispatch
14 center. So I don't know exactly what your question
15 is relative to that.

16 REPRESENTATIVE REICHLEY: I'll try. My
17 question is, what would appear to be an uneducated
18 person -- I'll put myself in that situation -- that
19 with more Troopers available and more vehicles
20 available, the level of backup perhaps could have
21 been alleviated. I understand that you had the
22 signs working as of 5:00.

23 If there were more Troopers available to
24 have been able to divert traffic at a further point
25 east so we didn't have a backup, we'd have had more

1 vehicles to be able to come into play to help remove
2 the tractor-trailers. You said the heavy wreckers,
3 you didn't have enough of them. Why aren't we
4 making more requests for heavy wreckers than at
5 least in this area? We'll reallocate resources.

6 And Secretary Biehler, you said here
7 today that you don't know how many trucks you had
8 out there last week. Well, you've been through one
9 internal investigation by the administration.
10 You've got Mr. Witt coming in. You had the Senate
11 hearing yesterday.

12 And yet here we are a week after the fact
13 and you don't know how many trucks we had out on
14 I-78 to do the road clearing.

15 LT. COL. PERANDI: I'll address the heavy
16 wrecker situation. That obviously is a private
17 vendor question. And, you know, it's a heavy --
18 it's a pretty expensive investment for people to get
19 involved in that operation.

20 I can't answer why only a certain number
21 of individuals are willing to invest in heavy-duty
22 wreckers and be available to us. We use all
23 available. We go by a nearest available kind of
24 process. But we use all available heavy-duty
25 wreckers that are out there. That's private

1 sector availability. As far as our manpower, again
2 it is -- no State Trooper is going to argue that
3 more manpower wouldn't be beneficial.

4 What I was referring to was the fact that
5 we had manpower available to get out that particular
6 day. If we had more vehicles, we could have gone to
7 additional locations. With that said, even over and
8 above that if we had more Troopers and more
9 vehicles, absolutely we could do more. All of us
10 could do more with more. That's the question that
11 we always deal with every budget cycle.

12 MR. REICHLEY: Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.

14 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Excuse me. Regarding
15 the question of vehicles, we have in excess of 2,000
16 vehicles. I can't cite you chapter and verse how
17 many vehicles are in each county and each -- we have
18 also something called reporting stockpile as you may
19 know where we actually deploy our folks.

20 We're going back into the level of that
21 detail as part of the investigation that is being
22 done independently which is I believe my
23 understanding is to have some information in the
24 next two to three weeks.

25 We're absolutely in that process of

1 getting information. Not only what was supposed to
2 be there, but what was actually on point and in
3 service. So that's -- you know, we're trying to
4 make sure that we have exact documentation.

5 REPRESENTATIVE REICHLEY: I know we're in
6 a tight time constraint. Let me make one final
7 observation. Mr. Joseph, you said you didn't notify
8 somebody until 7:00 I suppose to activate the
9 emergency operations center. That begs the question
10 that every one of these situations seems to be an
11 issue of command and control over information. And
12 the question a lot of us have is, why wasn't the
13 highest level of the executive branch further
14 involved in this process? Really frankly, the
15 governor's office. Where was the Governor in this?
16 Why were you not communicating to either the deputy
17 chief of staff or somebody else like that, and when
18 did they have the information to be made available
19 so that this all could have taken place at an
20 earlier point in time? I'm hopeful that seeing how
21 many questions and how many members we have, both
22 the Transportation Committee and the Emergency
23 Services and Veterans Committee will find it useful
24 to hold further hearings on this. Because there is
25 a lot more to be found out on this. Thank you, Mr.

1 Chairman.

2 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you very much.
3 Representative Millard and then Representative
4 Mantz.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MILLARD: Thank you, Mr.
6 Chairman. And thank you to the Secretaries,
7 Directors, and the Officers that are here this
8 afternoon. I guess in an effort to not be redundant
9 here, I'll just give you some statistics on volume
10 of e-mails and calls. And it has been tremendous
11 through our office.

12 We have as Representatives and as you
13 found out in the Senate are the front line of
14 defense also in our districts receive the brunt of
15 comments concerning this.

16 I think that what we need from you so
17 that we can work as a team here is we need some
18 legislative contacts from your office that we can
19 forward these e-mails to. Because I believe that
20 these individuals who sent us all of these e-mails
21 took the time to explain all of the problems in the
22 situations that they were in, deserve at the very
23 least to have a response back. So I've asked that
24 from each of you.

25 The second thing here is I think that

1 pretty much all of this boils down to communication.
2 And I think that at the very least again that we
3 have to recognize the fact that all of these e-mails
4 and phone calls that we received -- and I got them
5 at home from people on I-80. All though I'm in
6 Columbia County, the problems in Luzerne County, the
7 domino effect came over to Columbia County.

8 But I believe that as we achieve this
9 root cause, what caused this, that we have to ensure
10 that this never happens again. And that we have a
11 job ahead of us here, all of us, to reestablish the
12 confidence not only in our constituency and the
13 people who travel our roads but the people who come
14 in through our state to pass through. And I think
15 that working together we'll be able to do that.

16 So I just leave you with those words of
17 advice, and that we are here to cooperate with you.
18 Tell us what you need and let's work together.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you
21 Representative Mantz.

22 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ: Yes. Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman. Secretary Biehler, I represent the
24 187 legislative district which straddles Berks and
25 Lehigh Counties. That district includes the sector

1 of I-78 that extends somewhat east from its
2 intersection with Route 100 at Fogelsville in Lehigh
3 County on into the northern tier of Berks County
4 just to the east of the Krumsville, Lenhartsville
5 exit.

6 As I recall during your opening statement
7 and your opening marks, you made the statement that
8 PennDOT was not prepared to adequately react to
9 remove the accumulated snow and ice and remove the
10 jackknifed tractor-trailers in the Berks County
11 sector of I-78. Why was that the case?

12 SECRETARY BIEHLER: Well, we're still in
13 the process of trying to understand all of the
14 details. My feeling is that when you're dealing
15 with the -- first of all, with this kind of an
16 event, a snow event and the various complexities in
17 the period between the 13th and the 15th really,
18 mostly the 14th, the question is, have you done
19 enough pre-planning, did you do enough
20 pre-treatments initially? In the case of the
21 sections of Berks County that were assigned to
22 maintain the interstate, typically you start out
23 with a certain plan to be able to have so many
24 trucks assigned to the interstate routes.

25 Also because the interstates are

1 theoretically a priority, we have the ability then
2 if necessary to pull vehicles from our secondary
3 routes if we have to try to keep the interstates
4 open.

5 My belief -- and it is not yet confirmed.
6 My belief is we did not start and recognize the
7 severity of the event soon enough to be able to work
8 hard enough in the early morning period of the 14th
9 to be able to at least if not catch up with the
10 storm, at least stay partly -- or not get ahead of
11 it but at least stay even.

12 It is contrasted in some of the other
13 nearby counties that were somehow able to muddle
14 through. I have to tell you, my belief is that they
15 were able to do it but it was really -- they were
16 really teetering on losing it as well because it was
17 so difficult.

18 What they were able to do is establish
19 plow trains in a very short window from probably I'm
20 going to guess around 7 or 8:00 in the morning up to
21 around noon. They were using some plow trains to
22 take the slush -- because the temperature had warmed
23 up for a bit of the time, we were in this big
24 rainstorm. They were able to push off the slush and
25 then drop enough salt and anti-skid material to

1 avoid having it refreeze to turn to black ice by the
2 afternoon because of dropping temperatures.

3 I believe what happened in Berks County
4 is we did not clean it off quickly. And in fact
5 when vehicles then got stuck, we couldn't clean it
6 off. So I believe it was really the early
7 preparation and the early stages I think when we
8 lost it.

9 Now having said that, that's my
10 hypothesis. And we're now going to -- what we're
11 doing is giving you a sense of it to try to really
12 uncover the exact situation during the process. How
13 many vehicles then actually were assigned, you know,
14 from these various segments of the interstate? Did
15 we call for secondary help early on or didn't we?
16 And to the extent we know the application rates and
17 so on will help us re-create that.

18 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ: Would this be a
19 matter then of fine tuning or more adequately tuning
20 the emergency operation plan that you have in place?

21 SECRETARY BIEHLER: One or both I would
22 say, yes.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ: And you are taking
24 measures to get that done?

25 SECRETARY BIEHLER: We sure are. It is

1 not only at the local county level, the question is
2 were our district folks working with the counties
3 appropriately and the right preparation. Those are
4 all fair game questions because we just can never
5 let this happen again to the extent that we can
6 prevent it.

7 So I think a lot of it we will find is
8 how we approach it early on. So we are very anxious
9 to really be a lot stronger here and, you know,
10 it's -- for us it's -- our focus is to look at our
11 shortcomings and really be smarter as opposed to
12 poke some of these out.

13 I think Representative Geist said it
14 right, that you need strength and character to do
15 that and really show ourselves up. If it's
16 equipment, we need to say that. If it is manpower,
17 we need to say it.

18 I know earlier there were questions about
19 manpower. I don't know that it's an issue of
20 manpower.

21 In 19 -- in the year 2003 in just our
22 maintenance areas -- now this is for statewide -- we
23 had 7,900 -- 7,891 people, actual personnel, in our
24 maintenance group statewide. In February '07, this
25 month, we have 7,900 -- 7,876. It is a difference

1 of 15 people statewide. It is not that difference.
2 The question is now it may come down now to look at
3 it from a county-by-county standpoint to see if
4 those numbers were about even or was there some
5 unusual circumstance. And varying degrees of
6 experience clearly will come into play. So that's
7 going to be an issue for us to look at hard.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ: Thank you very
9 much.

10 SECRETARY BIEHLER: But your comments are
11 right on point. Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: We have two more
13 questioners briefly, Chairman Marsico and then
14 Representative Gabig, and then we'll take a break.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: Thank you, Mr.
16 Chairman. Thank you for your coming here today and
17 providing information that we've asked you.

18 I know it's been a grueling week for all
19 of you. The question is as I listen to your
20 testimony and read yesterday the reports, it is
21 quite obvious that there is a lack of central
22 command within the state organization of State
23 Police, PEMA, PennDOT as well as the National Guard.
24 There is no central commander. There is no leader
25 to make those tough decisions: Decisions to first

1 of all close down the highway system; secondly,
2 bring in the National Guard; third, bring in more
3 State Troopers if needed; and, fourth, the other
4 things, notifying the public.

5 The question is, where was the Governor?
6 Where was the Lieutenant Governor when all of this
7 was happening?

8 As I look at this whole thing just
9 yesterday, the Patriot News did an article on what
10 went wrong is the headline on the front page. And I
11 guess in addition to that, it should have said who
12 was in charge. And as I looked at this -- I thought
13 about this a few days ago.

14 As you look at this photo, you see the
15 backlog, the traffic, stranded motorists, and
16 someone handing someone a bottle of water. In
17 that center here is concrete -- it looks like
18 removable -- barriers. Okay.

19 And looking east or west on the other
20 lane, the opposite lane, it looks to me as if the
21 highway is pretty wide open. Now, the question is
22 this: Why weren't these removable temporary
23 barriers or even if they are not temporary,
24 permanent, removed to allow the traffic to go
25 through and to exit on the other side of the

1 highway? I mean it seems to me that if I would have
2 been there, maybe I would have thought about that,
3 maybe I wouldn't have.

4 But looking back, it would seem to me
5 that that would be a possible option. And that with
6 all of the technology and resources that we have
7 today, that the National Guard has, why wasn't the
8 National Guard brought in with more equipment? You
9 have tanks there. You have equipment there to --
10 backhoes to major equipment that perhaps could, and
11 PennDOT as well, move those barriers and then bring
12 in troop carriers, troop trucks to move the people
13 out.

14 It's not like this was not -- excuse me.
15 It is not like this is a highway up in the northwest
16 part of Alaska in some wilderness between two cities
17 without every other exit right outside of Harrisburg
18 between Allentown. And it's just amazing to me. It
19 just boggles my mind that that wasn't considered.

20 You leave people stranded there for
21 almost 24 hours in the cold and giving them food and
22 blankets. Why not try to get them out?

23 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Good question. Mr.
24 Secretary.

25 SECRETARY BIEHLER: From the information

1 that we had now as we tried to re-create the
2 incident, looking at the State Police reports in
3 terms of the number of disabled vehicles as well as
4 crashed vehicles that were scattered and ultimately
5 we ended up with quite a different pattern
6 throughout the day, into the evening, until the
7 early morning hours of different blockages. We had
8 sections that were completely blocked up like you
9 saw in the newspaper. I believe that was -- I'm
10 going to guess that was a picture that was taken on
11 the next day because it was sunny. It wasn't sunny
12 the day before.

13 But in the section -- and we had various
14 sections both eastbound and westbound where there
15 would be a section that was blocked and not blocked.

16 The question is -- and I don't know the
17 answer about whether you could get access to the
18 other side. It looks like it is wide open. But the
19 question is, was it open to the next interchange? I
20 don't know the answer as to whether it was or
21 wasn't.

22 Secondly, if you now open it up, can you
23 get a truck pulled out through that activity as
24 well? The next morning if my report is correct from
25 Secretary Creedon who was also stuck in that block

1 overnight, by the next morning -- and I don't know
2 what time it was but I'm going to guess the block
3 was moved probably in the 9:00 range because he was
4 reporting that he was then traveling. His car was
5 then moving by 10:00 or so and finally got out of
6 it. He had been there all night long.

7 So my guess is at that point various
8 blockages in fact were completely removed. I
9 suppose in hindsight had we been able to the night
10 before somehow get in at one of the exits or
11 entrances, removed the median barriers in some
12 fashion, and pulled people out would have been a
13 perfect answer. But I can't tell you the status of
14 the various blockage sections throughout the day.

15 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, I'd like to
16 address the National Guard, if I can.

17 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: All right.

18 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: We were activated at
19 1945 on the 14th. And as you well know because
20 you're very familiar with our organization, we're
21 19,000 strong but we're in 93 communities across
22 Pennsylvania and three large air wings. You also
23 know, sir, that we are not a -- we're citizen
24 soldiers. So the majority of our soldiers and
25 airmen have full-time jobs in other places. So our

1 response time that we have worked with always is a
2 four hour block of time.

3 So by the time we were called in, we were
4 there sooner than the four hour block of time. But
5 part of the issue was our trucks, our vehicles were
6 also hampered with the very dramatic snowstorm that
7 we had.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: Do you have APC
9 vehicles there, tanks, sort of like those kinds of
10 vehicles, tractors?

11 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, we do have
12 Bradleys. They are the newer APCs if you will.
13 They were not called out at that particular time.
14 Our trucks were. They are track vehicles. They
15 probably wouldn't have helped as much as the trucks
16 would.

17 And we would have had to bring them from
18 Fort Indiantown Gap where the other vehicles were
19 closer to the particular site because the
20 communities were -- it was up and down the highways.
21 We activated the armories that were closer to the
22 soldiers -- to the people that were stranded.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: You have
24 four-wheel drive vehicles?

25 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Absolutely. We

1 activated our Humvees which are four-wheel drive
2 vehicles. We had 170 vehicles on the road, sir.

3 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: Was it given any
4 thought to evacuate people?

5 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Absolutely. That was
6 our very first mission. We were -- we went in and
7 we asked individuals if they wanted to evacuate. I
8 will tell you that the majority of the people did
9 not want to leave their cars.

10 So then our follow-on mission was to
11 bring them the basic life needs where at the
12 beginning of my testimony I reported on how much --
13 how many things we delivered to them.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: Thank you. That
15 answers most of my questions. I just have one more
16 question that probably the panel won't be able to
17 answer. I'm going to ask this question.

18 Why did the Governor hire an independent
19 consultant at a fee which I'm sure was pretty
20 reasonable to conduct this investigation into last
21 week's response when the Office of Inspector General
22 has historically done these kinds of investigations
23 and duties? And historically under Governor Casey,
24 Governor Thornburgh, Governor Ridge, and Governor
25 Schweiker. It would seem to me that this would be

1 the function, one of the functions and
2 responsibilities of the Office of Inspector General
3 and not to hire someone from the outside from the
4 president's administration way back.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative --

6 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'll try to answer
7 that. James Lee Witt has subject matter experts in
8 every one of our fields; police, engineers, both
9 military and certainly in emergency management.

10 We wanted a clear, unbiased investigation
11 not by anybody that could be associated with the
12 legislature or the Governor. He wants accurate
13 answers so that we can fix a problem if that problem
14 exists.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MARSICO: Well, that's
16 fair. I just was wondering because the Inspector
17 General has staff of 400 investigators many
18 experienced in law enforcement, public safety. And
19 that's just a comment and I appreciate your
20 response. Thanks.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.
22 Representative Gabig and then we're going to have a
23 short break and shift the folks around a little.
24 We're going to have the Turnpike next.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Thank you, Mr.

1 Chairman, and thank you and the other Chairmen that
2 organized this very important meeting. And I thank
3 the panelists here.

4 General, I think one of my colleagues
5 referred to you as Colonel and I certainly think it
6 was inadvertent. And I want to commend the Guard in
7 my area. As you indicated, they were called out
8 late. They left their homes, families, duties, and
9 reported to the armory in my area prepared for duty.

10 So the Guard in my area did their duty I
11 believe in this case. You tried to take a little
12 bit of bull I thought in your opening remarks saying
13 that you should have called out earlier.

14 But I'm not an expert in this area. You
15 don't call out the National Guard for emergency
16 situations. The Adjutant General doesn't have that
17 power and authority, do you? Do you have to wait
18 for somebody to declare some sort of situation
19 first?

20 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: The Adjutant General
21 does not call out the National Guard. However, my
22 opening comments were intended to mean that I should
23 have been more aware of the situation and
24 recommended the call out of the National Guard, sir.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: All right. Now

1 who is it that makes that decision?

2 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Me.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: And that is as
4 director of PEMA; is that correct?

5 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Correct.

6 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: And you have a
7 crisis center for these type of situations; is that
8 correct?

9 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: State Emergency
10 Operations.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Who is the head of
12 PEMA?

13 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Me.

14 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Does the
15 Lieutenant Governor have any function in PEMA?

16 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: The Lieutenant Governor
17 is the Chairperson of the Emergency Management
18 Council.

19 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: I thought that
20 Representative Beyer laid out a good sort of time
21 frame. I think that you all agreed that it started
22 off as, you know, we're going to have a snowstorm
23 and then it became sort of a traffic crisis and then
24 it became sort of a disaster situation out there. I
25 thought everybody agreed to that. Does anybody

1 disagree with sort of the outline of how it went
2 chronologically? Anybody disagree with that? No
3 response meaning affirmative response as they say in
4 a courtroom.

5 Did the Lieutenant Governor come to the
6 crisis center to participate in the decision-making
7 that was so important at the top command and control
8 level? That would be a yes or no. I'm not trying
9 to poke any eyes or any blame. I'm just trying to
10 get facts on the table.

11 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: The Lieutenant was not
12 there.

13 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: How about the
14 Governor?

15 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: The Lieutenant Governor
16 acts at the Chairperson after we declare an
17 emergency.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: That's right. Did
19 the Governor come either before as you were trying
20 to make decisions whether to declare it an emergency
21 and disaster and call out the Guard, et cetera? Did
22 the Governor ever come to the Crisis Management
23 Center? Yes or no?

24 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: No. He wasn't aware of
25 the situation because I didn't call him.

1 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: At some point I
2 thought you said you did call him.

3 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: He was made aware of it
4 at about 8:00, 2000 hours on the night of the 14th.

5 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So he was unaware
6 of this crisis situation until 8:00 on the 14th; is
7 that what you're saying? You're saying that's when
8 he was informed. You don't know whether he was
9 aware or not I guess. When you talked to him, was
10 he aware?

11 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, he called me at
12 about 1945. And at that point in time he asked me
13 if I was aware. And that's when I think he
14 initially found out through his Trooper that the
15 incident was so significant. At that point we got
16 on a conference call with General Joseph.

17 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Where were you,
18 General?

19 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: I was at my home. I
20 will tell you I did not go to General Joseph's
21 command center. I have my joint operations center
22 at Fort Indiantown Gap. And if I do go to his
23 command center --

24 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Okay. That's
25 good. I got you. The Chairman wants to move

1 quickly. So you were up at Indiantown Gap and
2 Chairman Joseph was down at the command center. Mr.
3 Secretary, where were you?

4 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I was at my home on
5 my cell phone.

6 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: And I guess PSP
7 was at their location; is that correct?

8 LT. COL. PERANDI: We have
9 representatives in the command center.

10 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So all four of you
11 report though directly to the Governor; is that
12 correct? You have no charge over each other.

13 SECRETARY BIEHLER: That is correct.

14 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: That's correct.

15 LT. COL. PERANDI: That's correct.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So going back to
17 Representative Staback -- I'm the last but he was
18 first as I recall -- who was in charge of this major
19 operation that started off sort of as routine and
20 became a crisis disaster? Isn't -- wasn't the
21 Governor in charge and where was the Governor
22 telling his team that is standing before us or
23 sitting before us, where was he? Didn't he go to
24 Pittsburgh the next day?

25 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: When -- if I may answer

1 that. When the event turns into a full blown if you
2 want to call it disaster or event, I'm in charge of
3 all of these people as a resource provider, as a
4 coordinator for all State agencies.

5 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So you make the
6 decisions? You could tell PennDOT, the State
7 Police, and the National Guard what to do in terms
8 of shutting down the roads and not to shut down the
9 roads and to leave exits open and not leave exits
10 open? You were in charge of all -- you could tell
11 all of these other agencies what to do; is that
12 correct?

13 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, I get my
14 mission --

15 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: General, I
16 appreciate -- I really do and I admire the work of
17 the National Guard. I can't tell you how much. But
18 I have a question and I have limited time.

19 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: I coordinate all of
20 their agencies when --

21 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Not coordinate,
22 in charge? Were you in charge? Could you give
23 them orders and tell them to shut down 81 and shut
24 down --

25 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative, let

1 them answer the question. They are trying to answer
2 your question.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Okay. Maybe I
4 didn't ask it fairly.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Ask one general
6 question perhaps.

7 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Were you in charge
8 was the question. I was going back to
9 Representative Staback. Who was in charge of this
10 major operation that was going on; not coordinating,
11 recommending, talking to? Directing, commanding,
12 ordering, was that you, Director Joseph?

13 DIRECT JOSEPH: When I fully implemented
14 the command center or the EOC, I took charge. I
15 missioned the Adjutant General. I missioned the
16 State Police. And I could mission PennDOT as well,
17 sir.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: You were in charge
19 of them then I guess; is that --

20 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Once I put it into
21 effect, yes.

22 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: When was that?
23 When did you become in charge?

24 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: 2000 hours.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: What day?

1 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: 14th. 8 p.m. on the
2 14th of February.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Okay. Who called
4 out the National Guard?

5 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: I missioned the
6 National Guard to go on a number of missions based
7 on requests from the PEMA.

8 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Did the Governor
9 have any involvement with that?

10 DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Yes, he did.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Where was he? Was
12 he in Philadelphia?

13 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: May I answer it?

14 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Yes. Sorry.

15 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Yes, sir. He was in
16 Philadelphia and we were in constant contact with
17 him on conference call. And so that's how that --

18 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Okay. I
19 appreciate that.

20 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: -- got involved.

21 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Do you think that
22 there was a breakdown in the command and control
23 that led to any of the problems that we had on this?
24 Does anyone think that there was a breakdown in
25 command and control at the top levels here in

1 Harrisburg? Yes or no.

2 SECRETARY BIEHLER: I'd be happy to
3 answer if I'm allowed to give more than a two word
4 answer. The answer is -- I can tell you from
5 PennDOT's standpoint the answer is yes, because we
6 were not giving people enough accurate information
7 for them to make logical decisions.

8 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So there was a
9 breakdown in command and control in your opinion,
10 Mr. Secretary?

11 SECRETARY BIEHLER: In terms of
12 information which is part of the command and
13 control, absolutely. Because we had not been giving
14 people proper information. We are all part of a
15 team providing information so that people can make
16 those decisions.

17 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: I understand that.

18 SECRETARY BIEHLER: We did not have
19 accurate information.

20 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: And so at the
21 highest levels I'm talking about, amongst you was
22 there a breakdown in command and control?

23 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, I submit to you
24 that once we had the accurate information, there was
25 not a breakdown in command and control. We all

1 worked very well together.

2 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: So you disagree
3 with the Secretary that just said there was a
4 breakdown?

5 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: No, sir, that's not
6 what he said. He said that we did not have
7 information building up to the scenario. Once we
8 all received the same information, then the Governor
9 was involved and he activated the National Guard.
10 But in the meantime, the State JEOC was activated
11 also. It was brought to a robust activation.

12 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative, we've
13 really --

14 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: I understand.
15 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm just going
16 to ask a final question.

17 This was a big operation. And I'd like
18 to know -- and this is another question that can't
19 be answered but people can get back to the committee
20 on it.

21 I would like to know how big of an
22 operation it was. Because of its
23 multi-jurisdiction, I would like to know how many
24 people. I know all 12,000 people for example in
25 PennDOT weren't there. I know that not every single

1 Trooper was there or every National Guardsman. How
2 many people were involved with this operation? And
3 how much money did it cost? During the course of
4 your look backs in your rearview mirrors on things
5 like that, if we could get a state government wide
6 answer to that question.

7 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I think I can answer
8 that question. They will look into that and report
9 back to us. We are going to move on. We do have
10 one more speaker it turns out which is my fault.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GABIG: Thank you very
12 much, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence.

13 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. This is
14 my fault. We did have one more member who wanted to
15 ask a short question. Representative Tim Seip.

16 REPRESENTATIVE SEIP: Thank You, Mr.
17 Chairman. I have two questions actually, one on
18 shelter operations that we did not discuss or at
19 least not at any length and also a follow-up on the
20 State Police vehicles.

21 First, I just want to thank everyone who
22 responded and assisted with the efforts in my
23 district in the face of this overwhelming natural
24 weather event. And I do want to just mention and
25 thank General Wright for personally being on the

1 ground in my district. And I thank her for her
2 efforts and also for having her soldiers, some of
3 which were on the verge of days or even hours of
4 being deployed overseas in national defense efforts
5 foregoing those last couple of days with their
6 families to assist us with this situation in the
7 Commonwealth. So thank you very much for that.

8 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: You're welcome, sir.

9 REPRESENTATIVE SEIP: My question has to
10 do with the shelter operations at Pine Grove Area
11 High School. The school district working with the
12 Red Cross opened up a shelter at Pine Grove. I
13 think they did it as best as they could with the
14 cards they were dealt.

15 Would it have been possible for those
16 folks to be routed back to Fort Indiantown Gap where
17 maybe better facilities would have been available
18 for those stranded motorists, people in that
19 situation?

20 MAJ. GEN. WRIGHT: Sir, that was a
21 possibility that we considered. But to get to Fort
22 Indiantown Gap, they would have had to use 433. 433
23 was a very treacherous route. That was the route I
24 drove up in my four-wheel drive vehicle to get to
25 the Pine Grove interchange. So for all safety

1 purposes, we thought that Pine Grove High School was
2 the best place for them to be at the time.

3 REPRESENTATIVE SEIP: Thank you, General.
4 And as a follow-up to the question on State Police
5 vehicles, it was discussed before that there just
6 aren't enough for all of the Troopers that you have.
7 Would it have been possible for the State Police to
8 secure vehicles either from the National Guard or
9 from the Department of General Services or some
10 other State agency?

11 LT. COL. PERANDI: That's exactly what we
12 did. We borrowed as many -- not just vehicles but
13 appropriate vehicles obviously needing four-wheel
14 drive vehicles. And we had those from the National
15 Guard, from other county resources, et cetera. So
16 that's exactly what we did on a temporary basis.

17 GENERAL JOSEPH: As a follow-up on that,
18 DCNR, fish and boat, game commission, there were at
19 least four or five other State agencies that
20 provided quads, snowmobiles, and four-wheel drives
21 in addition to the numerous different county and
22 municipal agencies that provided that support as
23 well.

24 REPRESENTATIVE SEIP: Thank you. Thank
25 you, Mr. Chairman.

1 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.

2 Representative Eachus.

3 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Thank you. I
4 would just like to dismiss the panelists and thank
5 them for their testimony today. It has been long,
6 long over schedule. And we appreciate your time.

7 But I have to tell you from my
8 perspective that working with the Majority Policy
9 Committee Chairman, Representative Turzai, we look
10 forward to the work ahead. That our standing
11 committee chairmen and your offices, we look forward
12 to working with you on trying to fix these issues.

13 We want to work with you on legislative
14 opportunities to rectify the problems that we have
15 addressed. If there are issues within this year's
16 budget that need to be rectified in the context of
17 the next few weeks or months before we get to the
18 budget process that relates to reallocation of
19 resources or additional resources that are necessary
20 from the findings of the Witt report, we want to
21 make sure that we're able to add those in before we
22 get to our June deadline. So I want to thank you
23 all for coming. We know it has been a difficult
24 two days, and we really appreciate the opportunity
25 to have you before the full House.

1 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
2 Turzai.

3 REPRESENTATIVE TURZAI: Thank you very
4 much, Chairman Markosek. Great, great panel. We
5 appreciate your coming to answer tough questions and
6 thanks for being patient.

7 We had members come from all over the
8 state and they really needed to make sure that they
9 had an opportunity to ask the questions that they
10 are getting back from their constituents.

11 I would tell you -- and if you need an
12 incisive leader to get right to the heart of it,
13 make sure you make use of Chairman Geist here. Rick
14 understands this stuff inside and out. And, boy, I
15 know we all rely on him and my other good colleague
16 Chairman Fairchild. They are a one two punch on our
17 side of the aisle. Make sure you use them. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you very much.
20 I'd like to thank the panel and dismiss the panel.
21 Thank you very much. We're going to take a 5-minute
22 break, and we're going to have the Turnpike folks as
23 well as Allen Pugh from Luzerne County Emergency
24 Management all together on the same panel in
25 5 minutes.

1 (Break.)

2 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Could we have
3 everyone's attention, please? Take your seat, turn
4 your cell phone off. I feel like the school marm
5 here today scolding everybody about their cell
6 phones.

7 Our next panel, first of all we have
8 representatives from the Turnpike, Joe Brimmeier who
9 is the district director of the Turnpike; William
10 Capone who is the director of communications with
11 the Pennsylvania Turnpike; and John Stewart who is
12 the director of maintenance is here. And also we've
13 combined two other -- another portion of our hearing
14 as well, Mr. Allen Pugh. And I will let
15 Representative Eachus introduce him because he's
16 from his area.

17 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Thank you, Mr.
18 Chairman. I recognize that Allen Pugh is one of the
19 brave EMA guys out there as our staff calls them to
20 make some phone calls around the region. Lots of
21 people were busy and unavailable.

22 Mr. Pugh was willing to come and talk
23 about his personal experience as EMA director of
24 Luzerne County which was at the heart of the
25 crossroads of 80 and 81 in northeastern

1 Pennsylvania. So I'd like to recognize Allen and
2 thank him and the County Commissioners from Luzerne
3 for allowing him to take the time to come with us
4 today. If you'll start off.

5 MR. PUGH: Thank you very much,
6 Representative. You have my written statement. So
7 I'll be brief here. I'd like to say that we all
8 know this was a large event. Luzerne County
9 Emergency Management Agency was activated on 0800
10 hours on the 14th and continued operations until
11 1700 hours on Friday the 16th.

12 In addition, personnel were out there
13 assisting on the interstate along with local, state,
14 and emergency providers. We did deliver thousands
15 of bottles of water and food to people who were
16 stuck in the interstate system and were responsible
17 for relaying messages and communications as they
18 came in throughout the county. With that, I will
19 take further questions.

20 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: If I can follow
21 up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Can you talk to me
22 about whether you -- you heard the testimony of the
23 panel before. Do you think there should be what
24 some members indicated more of a command structure
25 from Harrisburg that should have activated this

1 emergency management plan earlier?

2 MR. PUGH: Well, I think we would always
3 like to get as much information as quickly as
4 possible. It helps make intelligent decisions.

5 And, you know, just seeing this
6 particular storm, it tended to catch a lot of people
7 off track and stranded a lot of motorists. All the
8 colleagues we've worked with in the past with the
9 numerous emergencies we've had in Luzerne County
10 over the past 14 months, and the relationship has
11 always been well.

12 This snow event just bogged down our case
13 efforts actually to move our vehicles in to assist
14 once we became aware of it. But certainly anything
15 that can be done to improve, we're certainly willing
16 to look at.

17 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: I appreciate your
18 testimony. Other members may have questions. But I
19 look forward to the work ahead with you, our County
20 Commissioners, and the State trying to develop a
21 plan that works just as well in the mountains of our
22 region as we have an actual plan for the valley
23 communities. Having grown up in the Wyoming Valley
24 in Wilkes-Barre, I can tell you, as you know, our
25 problems. We'll never flood but this will be our

1 problem in the future. So I look forward to working
2 with you to come up with a plan that helps to
3 develop and immerse in Luzerne County.

4 MR. PUGH: Absolutely.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you,
6 Representative. Mr. Pugh, one of the legislators
7 does have a question of you, Representative
8 Fairchild. However, before he asks this question, I
9 just also want to mention that Mr. Elam Herr is
10 here. He was also scheduled. He did hand in
11 comments for the record. He is in the room.

12 He represents the Pennsylvania State
13 Association of Township Supervisors. And
14 essentially the long and short of his written
15 remarks were that in many cases some of the local
16 municipalities were not notified of the crisis by
17 either PennDOT or the National Guard or PEMA.

18 So he wanted me to -- asked that I make
19 that point. And we will bring that up certainly
20 with the previous folks here. Representative
21 Fairchild, question.

22 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you, Mr.
23 Chairman. Just a couple quick questions. On the
24 county level, you have the authority to activate
25 your county command system?

1 MR. PUGH: Yes, we do.

2 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Is that under
3 your purview?

4 MR. PUGH: Yes.

5 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: What I'm
6 trying to do is understand the coordination with the
7 State EOC, et cetera.

8 MR. PUGH: Okay.

9 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: So you
10 activated it at around 8 a.m. Thursday morning?

11 MR. PUGH: Correct.

12 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Then you feed
13 that into the State hubs so to speak?

14 MR. PUGH: Yes.

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: You hope you
16 get that -- it goes both ways?

17 MR. PUGH: Well, the EOC is there at all
18 times. We also declared a state of emergency in
19 Luzerne County. On 2 p.m. it went into effect on
20 the 14th also.

21 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Who declares
22 the county?

23 MR. PUGH: That comes from our
24 commissioners.

25 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: And

1 municipalities can also declare a state of
2 emergency?

3 MR. PUGH: That is correct.
4 Municipalities did declare some before that, some at
5 the same time.

6 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Okay. What
7 kind of feedback are you getting on the roads at
8 8:00 in the morning?

9 MR. PUGH: We did not get feedback until
10 approximately 4:00 or 5:00 that evening that there
11 was someone stuck. That came in. We actually got a
12 call from a resident into the EOC that their child
13 was stuck on the interstate and in danger of running
14 out of fuel.

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: The State
16 Police when they -- when they're investigating an
17 accident, jackknife or whatnot, would you -- would
18 they be reporting to the hub in Harrisburg or would
19 they be reporting through the county and then the
20 county goes to the State or is it shared
21 information?

22 MR. PUGH: Typically with the State
23 Police, the County 911 center, they receive the
24 call. We patch that directly into PSP and the
25 caller will be handed off for instance on the

1 interstate. If additional resources are typically
2 needed from the county, a call is usually placed
3 back to us indicating that; or if it was something
4 that required fire and EMS response, then we would
5 more likely be aware of it.

6 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: It just seems
7 to me that perhaps that is part of the overall
8 problem. I understand from prior testimony
9 yesterday and today there were a number of
10 conference calls made with county. But if the
11 county didn't have that information to begin with,
12 it would be pretty darn hard for the counties to
13 report on what is actually happening out there.

14 MR. PUGH: That would be correct. From
15 our staff members and what they have informed me as
16 they put this together, it was very quiet overall in
17 the information coming into the center that day.

18 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Amazing.
19 Thank you very much.

20 MR. PUGH: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.
22 Representative Melio has some questions, Mr. Pugh.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: I just wondered in
24 my district, our volunteer firemen and medical
25 service people have periods where they run like a

1 test wherein cases of an emergency they know how to
2 respond. Is there any simulated action taken by the
3 group that would put themselves in that position in
4 case they had a problem so that maybe they could get
5 together and say you're in command or this is going
6 to happen or this is what we need? Is there
7 anything like that done?

8 MR. PUGH: Yes. Yes, sir. There is
9 multiple items that have been done by the County
10 EOC. We just ran a nuclear power plant drill which
11 brought together different municipalities. There is
12 actually a weather exercise scheduled in March for
13 the capacities of the EOC along with PEMA that has
14 been scheduled.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: Anybody else want
16 to respond to that question?

17 REPRESENTATIVE EACHUS: Do you have an
18 emergency response drill?

19 MR. BRIMMEIER: Yes, we have a number of
20 contracted services that we have through the entire
21 length of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. We contract
22 one with towing operations and two fire and EMS
23 services through the entire length of the Turnpike.

24 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: Okay. Thank you.
25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 much.

2 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: We have
3 Representative Carroll.

4 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Mr. Pugh, you
5 mentioned that the County declared a state of
6 emergency at 2:00 on the 14th. What was the reason
7 for the declaration?

8 MR. PUGH: The reason was the
9 deteriorating conditions. We had a roof collapse at
10 the Hoyt Library. We saw other collapses and just
11 general road conditions even on the local roadways.
12 And the County itself has 128 miles of road that it
13 is responsible for.

14 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: So when a
15 declaration is made, that is then transmitted down
16 to PEMA to let them know the County has made a
17 determination that the roadways in particular
18 reached the point where the declaration is
19 necessary?

20 MR. PUGH: Yeah. The information is put
21 into our peer's report and it is filtered down there
22 when this happens.

23 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
25 Longietti for comment.

1 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: I just have I
2 comment having sat through the previous panel. I
3 envision the system where there would be field level
4 people personnel who were gathering information on
5 the condition of the roadways, et cetera, reporting
6 that back up to the command and eventually that
7 would reach the folks in Harrisburg, like the folks
8 that were seated before us a few minutes ago.

9 I was a little bit surprised when Colonel
10 Miller testified that at a certain point in the day
11 he actually went out and made an assessment himself.
12 He actually decided to go onto the roadways, drive
13 along Interstate 81, and to make an assessment.

14 And I know he's not here to answer that.
15 But it just triggered in my mind why he found it
16 necessary to make that assessment himself and it
17 made me ask the question is there confidence or was
18 there confidence in the system in terms of the
19 people that were supposed to be on the ground making
20 the field assessments and reporting that back.

21 It seemed to me that as a high level
22 person, you wouldn't want to be making those
23 assessments yourself. You would be in the
24 communication center receiving that information from
25 someone else. And it just begged the question

1 whether there was sufficient people out there making
2 this assessment or was there a problem with
3 communication of those people. But there had to be
4 some problem on the ground for someone in his
5 capacity to decide I'm going to drive the roads
6 myself and see what the problem is.

7 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. We have
8 the Pennsylvania Turnpike here, representatives I
9 mentioned. Mr. Brimmeier, would you like to start
10 off and make some remarks?

11 MR. BRIMMEIER: Chairman Markosek, other
12 Chairmen, and members of the various committees,
13 good afternoon. And I am -- I'll forgo my opening
14 statements, but I just want to say that the
15 Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and PennDOT have
16 had a tremendous cooperative relationship at least
17 for the four years that I've been the CEO and Al
18 Biehler has been the Secretary of Transportation.

19 I would be remiss if I did not say that
20 I'm very proud of the tremendous job that the
21 employees of the Pennsylvania Turnpike did last week
22 in what is now turning out to be a very historic
23 perfect storm. These employees last week used
24 skills that they have passed down from generation to
25 generation for the last 66 years since the Turnpike

1 opened on October 1st of 1940. Gentlemen, we are
2 here to answer your questions. So I think the best
3 use of time would be to answer the questions that
4 members of the committee have.

5 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative
6 Fairchild.

7 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you, Mr.
8 Chairman. This may be a question for Mr. Capone as
9 Director of Communications. But first let me make a
10 statement.

11 I was on your web site as I compared web
12 sites trying to visualize myself finding out what is
13 happening, what is open, what is closed, et cetera,
14 et cetera. And I found two web sites that I thought
15 were pretty impressive. One was the Pennsylvania
16 Turnpike Commission's and the second was the award
17 winning Maryland site which I think we're going to
18 hear more from before the end of the hearing today.

19 But how did -- could you give us a little
20 background on how you developed that interactive
21 system? I think it is called the Pennsylvania
22 Turnpike Commission realtime conditions map.

23 Can you give us some background on how
24 that came about, perhaps how much resources both
25 effortwise and moneywise you put into that? And

1 really how does that work? Do you get a lot of hits
2 on it from people contemplating traveling on the
3 Turnpike?

4 MR. CAPONE: We do. The current web site
5 that you saw has been in development for about the
6 last year, year and a half so we could actually make
7 it a true interactive map that provides information
8 in realtime.

9 Basically, that web map is fed. We have
10 an operation center which is basically our traffic
11 control, emergency dispatch control center in the
12 Highspire administration building. All of the
13 information that comes in from the field about any
14 event, accident, incident --

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Is your mic
16 on? Put it closer.

17 MR. CAPONE: The light is on.

18 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Pull it closer.

19 MR. CAPONE: Sure. Any event with
20 respect to an accident, weather event, or anything
21 that goes on on the Turnpike, that information comes
22 through our central operations center. From there
23 our operation center duty officers would --
24 obviously after they respond and answer it by
25 dispatching the appropriate services, the first

1 thing they do is try to put that information out.

2 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Excuse me. We're
3 having a hard time hearing. Maybe it needs closer.
4 I'm not sure.

5 MR. CAPONE: How about now?

6 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Here we go.

7 MR. CAPONE: Again, because we have a 24
8 hour, 7-day a week, 356-day a year operation center
9 in our administration building in Harrisburg, we
10 have the ability to track everything that is going
11 on in our system with regard to incidents,
12 accidents, weather events. That information is
13 reported through there.

14 And after our operation center responds
15 to those incidents by dispatching the appropriate
16 services, the next priority really is to get the
17 information out via our web site and other advanced
18 traveler information devices that we have in the
19 system.

20 The way our web site is set up is that as
21 soon as that duty officer goes in and types in
22 specific information about that incident, it will
23 feed into our web site.

24 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Who types that
25 in?

1 MR. CAPONE: We have what is called
2 operation center duty officers.

3 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Who reports it
4 to them?

5 MR. CAPONE: From our personnel in the
6 field. The other advantage the Turnpike has is we
7 have our own radio network. We have our own
8 microwave radio system. So we can communicate from
9 our operation center with any radio equipped vehicle
10 or all of our facilities along the entire length of
11 the Turnpike.

12 We're able to get that information. Also
13 all of our emergency service vehicles and State
14 Police that patrol the Turnpike have radios?

15 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Do you tie into
16 the AM system?

17 MR. CAPONE: We do not. We certainly
18 will once that is up and running. Right now we
19 don't have the ability to communicate outside of the
20 Turnpike system with any other county or State
21 police or CEC.

22 But basically the information is sitting,
23 typed in, automatically goes to our web site. And
24 in addition to that just last week, of all weeks, we
25 activated an automated telephone system which

1 converts the text information as typed in and fed
2 into our web site into an audio message on the phone
3 system where customers can call about any section of
4 the Turnpike and get realtime information about the
5 conditions, traveling advisories, et cetera.

6 MR. BRIMMEIER: Representative, just to
7 add to your question, the four-day period that we're
8 looking at we had roughly 19 million hits to our web
9 site compared to roughly a million and a half of the
10 same period last year.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Slow day.

12 MR. BRIMMEIER: To add to what Bill said,
13 we take great pride in this. We have a total
14 communication system where even Turnpike employees
15 that use the road a lot, you know, our construction
16 inspectors, myself, Bill, John, we all have those
17 radios in our cars.

18 We can communicate with our 24-hour,
19 7-days a week operations system that if we see a
20 dead deer on the road, pieces of tire, et cetera, et
21 cetera we can call back and communicate and have
22 those types of things removed right away. So we do
23 have an elaborate communication system at the
24 Pennsylvania Turnpike.

25 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Why wouldn't

1 that work for instance on the interstate system
2 other than 76 or the Turnpike?

3 MR. BRIMMEIER: Why wouldn't our system
4 work on their system?

5 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Why shouldn't
6 we have the same system or identical system or use
7 the same methodology on our other interstates in
8 Pennsylvania?

9 MR. BRIMMEIER: I can't answer that.
10 That would be a question for PennDOT to answer, sir.

11 MR. CAPONE: If I may, I think the intent
12 of the 800 megahertz system is a statewide system
13 where eventually all statewide agencies can
14 communicate with each other via the two-way radio.

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: I wasn't
16 trying to trap you.

17 MR. BRIMMEIER: Oh, no, no, no. I know
18 that.

19 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: I was trying
20 to see if there was a valid reason that you thought
21 it can't be deployed statewide.

22 MR. BRIMMEIER: I mean if they wanted to
23 spend the money and equip their vehicles and have an
24 operation center like we do, then obviously they
25 could have the same system.

1 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Just one more
2 little follow-up. Just so I understand, what you're
3 saying is any employee of yours has the authority to
4 essentially call your operations center and whether
5 there's a deer on the road or something, and that
6 would be posted realtime?

7 MR. BRIMMEIER: Correct.

8 MR. CAPONE: That's correct.

9 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: That's pretty
10 significant. According to the testimony that we've
11 had that we heard yesterday and today as far as who
12 has the authority to report these types of things --
13 and obviously for you people it works very well.
14 And I think we should take a further look into that.
15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you.
17 Representative Keller.

18 REPRESENTATIVE KELLER: Thank you, Mr.
19 Chairman. Mr. Brimmeier, in your opening remarks
20 you referred to thanking the employees for the
21 excellent job that they had done and actually
22 keeping the Pennsylvania Turnpike open and clear
23 without any problems.

24 My question is the fact that from that I
25 understand or I'm assuming -- that's why I want this

1 cleared up -- that even you being the CEO looks to
2 the expertise of those individuals that are
3 physically out there doing the job and that it
4 worked down through the years of expertise that they
5 have with it in making sure that it is done properly
6 and basically it's in their hands.

7 And it kind of falls back onto where
8 Representative Fairchild was with the fact that each
9 employee has somewhat of an input how things really
10 fall into maintaining the openness of the Turnpike
11 in a situation like the storm that we just had. Is
12 that a correct statement?

13 MR. BRIMMEIER: Well, there is no
14 question about that, Representative. I mean you
15 can't gain the knowledge that -- through books or
16 anything else that a person has that has worked
17 through Somerset and Donegal through the last 25
18 years. They know storms. They know how to handle
19 them.

20 John himself has 35 years plus at doing
21 this. They know how to fight these storms as
22 firemen know how to fight fires. It's that simple.

23 REPRESENTATIVE KELLER: What we're saying
24 here is in the Turnpike's expertise and knowledge,
25 they use -- rather than trying to re-create, they

1 use the expertise of those employees to actually
2 help call the shots on how things are to fall out in
3 cleaning the roads?

4 MR. BRIMMEIER: Absolutely. If I can say
5 something, it was going to originally be part of my
6 opening statement. But again, I have to say it.
7 I've watched these men and women. There's a
8 tremendous sense of pride. There's a rush of
9 adrenaline. There's a rush of teamwork that helps
10 us, you know, complete the mission on a snowstorm
11 like we had last week.

12 REPRESENTATIVE KELLER: If I may make one
13 last comment, Mr. Chairman. I would ask that we
14 might be considering some questions in that field to
15 the department, that would be the Pennsylvania
16 Department of Highways. So thank you very much.

17 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Good suggestion.
18 Thank you. Representative Tom Payton.

19 REPRESENTATIVE PAYTON: Thank you, Mr.
20 Chairman. And thank you PennDOT for coming forth.
21 And I just want to first commend you for doing an
22 excellent job on the Turnpike. I was able to get
23 home safely in a very efficient way on
24 February 14th.

25 And just a couple of quick questions.

1 First, you have a very sophisticated communication
2 system that is great and working very well. What is
3 the total cost of that per year if you have that?

4 MR. CAPONE: Well, we have -- there are
5 so many aspects to our communication system. Just
6 for our interactive web site we spend roughly about
7 \$220,000 annually to maintain that site. But beyond
8 that, we have advanced travel information systems
9 along the highway that include message signs,
10 highway advisory radio, and closed circuit
11 television cameras at most of our major interchanges
12 that allows us to monitor conditions along the
13 system. So you're talking about systems in the
14 millions of dollars obviously to operate and
15 maintain those things.

16 REPRESENTATIVE PAYTON: Also, is the AM
17 radio station used only for the Turnpike or can
18 PennDOT utilize that system?

19 MR. CAPONE: That is strictly limited to
20 the Turnpike system. We have antennas at all 39 of
21 our interchanges that cover the Turnpike system.
22 And you can receive that signal off of the Turnpike
23 with the idea that if you are approaching the
24 Turnpike before you get on if you do tune in, our
25 objection is to try to inform you of a Turnpike

1 condition, a block or traffic condition before you
2 get on. Because the biggest complaint we get from
3 our customers is why did you let me enter when you
4 knew there was a problem down the road that I was
5 eventually going to encounter.

6 REPRESENTATIVE PAYTON: Thank you. And
7 one last thing, is GIS an integral part of your
8 implementation strategy over the next couple of
9 years?

10 MR. BRIMMEIER: Well, we have a GIS
11 system.

12 MR. CAPONE: It is something that I
13 believe -- I'm not intimately familiar with it, but
14 I believe it is still in development within the
15 Turnpike system.

16 REPRESENTATIVE PAYTON: Also
17 Representative Curtis Thomas from Philadelphia
18 introduced a bill, House Bill 36, and would like
19 your support on that. Thank you very much, Mr.
20 Chairman.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. Before I
22 introduce Representative Siptroth for a question, I
23 had a question of my own. What is the difference
24 between your snow removal and PennDOT's? Your
25 policy, your program? Do you do it differently than

1 they do? I know as a long-time Turnpike user
2 between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, it's always
3 great. I don't like to be caught on the Turnpike
4 during the storm. But give you guys about an hour
5 and it's clear.

6 MR. BRIMMEIER: Well, Joe, I can answer
7 that but I'll let the guys doing it for 35 years
8 answer it.

9 MR. STEWART: I'm the crusty 35-year
10 veteran of the Turnpike. I'm not an expert on how
11 PennDOT does its snow removal, and I don't figure I
12 can answer that question from their side of the
13 equation.

14 But the 35 years that I've been here
15 fighting snow, we've been doing it pretty much the
16 same way. We have been looking at these events as a
17 challenge to keep the roadways as clear as possible.
18 We stay with that storm until it is done. We make
19 sure it's cleaned up afterwards.

20 And I appreciate the comments from you
21 folks thanking me, but it is really the personnel
22 out there that we rely upon to do anything and they
23 do an excellent job. I have the luxury of having --
24 besides being the crusty old man I am, supervisors,
25 foremen, and quite a few of our personnel out there

1 are long-term employees. This is business as usual
2 for them to take care of these storms. This was a
3 particularly nasty storm, one of the worst one's
4 I've encountered as opposed to blizzards. But you
5 have to stay with it. And by our bare pavement
6 policy, we feel it was the right thing to do for our
7 customers and the safety of our travelers.

8 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Very good.

9 Representative Siptroth.

10 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chairman. And again, gentlemen, thank you. Being a
12 past maintenance foreman myself for the Delaware
13 River Toll Bridge Commission and being actively
14 engaged in the snow removal process, I appreciate
15 again your efforts.

16 What I'd like to ask though -- and this
17 is a follow-up to Representative Markosek's
18 question. Do you have a comparison for the number
19 of vehicles and maintenance personnel on the roads
20 at any one given time during a snow-related activity
21 or snow removal related activities in comparison to
22 PennDOT? So that we -- that's what I'd like to --
23 you know, if you have that information per
24 maintenance individuals and vehicles per mile that
25 you maintain versus what they would maintain on the

1 interstate?

2 MR. BRIMMEIER: I don't believe,
3 Representative, we have that comparison right now.
4 We obviously will be working with Secretary Biehler
5 and his people about that comparison.

6 But off the top of my head, we roughly
7 have about 420 equipment operators that drive our
8 trucks, use the front-end loader to load the
9 material into the trucks. We have what, about 275
10 trucks?

11 MR. STEWART: Yes, sir.

12 MR. BRIMMEIER: About 275 trucks that are
13 comprised of some single axle plows and some tandem
14 axle plows. We use mostly single axle dumps.

15 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: What's your
16 spread rate on salt?

17 MR. STEWART: Of course, that again
18 depends on the storm conditions and roadway
19 conditions. It could be anywhere from 200 pounds
20 per lane mile to 800 to a thousand. It just depends
21 on what we need to do. So as the storm progresses,
22 that varies. We leave that up to the operators and
23 the foreman out there to do that. I don't demand
24 that they follow my instructions to the T. They
25 have to deal with what they have in front of them.

1 So we acquiesce to their knowledge and what they
2 need to do out there to make sure that the roadway
3 is in the proper condition for the customer.

4 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you very
5 much. I appreciate that last statement because I
6 know that PennDOT has implied that there are
7 criteria regardless of the storm itself as to the
8 application rate. And I think that's another issue
9 that for the record should be taken into
10 consideration as they do their investigation.

11 I'm sure we'll have a transcript of this
12 hearing as well as the Senate hearing. I thank you
13 gentlemen very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you,
15 Representative.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: One quick comment
17 on that map when you show everything, would it be
18 possible to show us the instantaneous locations of
19 radar?

20 MR. BRIMMEIER: We'll reserve comment.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: With that bit of
22 levity, we will end this portion of the hearing.
23 Gentlemen, thank you all for attending. You've been
24 most cooperative and I appreciate it very much. You
25 are excused. And I would like to introduce our last

1 two --

2 MR. BRIMMEIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: You're welcome. I'd
4 like to introduce the last two people to testify,
5 Mr. Alvin Marques and Mr. Russell Yurek, the
6 operations manager and director of maintenance
7 respectively of the Maryland State Highway
8 Administration, I-95 Corridor Coalition.

9 I'd like to welcome them to Pennsylvania.
10 They made it over the Mason Dixon line here today,
11 and I trust that our roads were fine and clear when
12 you came here to Pennsylvania.

13 MR. YUREK: Absolutely.

14 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I'll just -- as soon
15 as you get settled there, if you'd like to make some
16 comments and we'll see if any of our members have
17 any questions.

18 MR. YUREK: Mr. Chairman, thank you for
19 the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the
20 benefits of the I-95 Corridor Coalition and how it
21 relates to the Maryland Chart Program.

22 Our administrator, Neil Peterson, has
23 asked us to provide a Maryland perspective as he's
24 also busy preparing for budget hearings with the
25 Maryland General Assembly.

1 With that, I would like to turn it
2 over -- we have some prepared remarks -- to Alvin.
3 He's the operations manager for the Chart Program.
4 And I'll let him describe what we do with the Chart
5 Program and how it relates to the Maryland
6 Coalition -- Corridor Coalition.

7 MR. MARQUES: Thanks, Russ. Thanks for
8 having us up here. It is a pleasure and an honor.
9 I believe there was some materials sent down ahead
10 of our getting here about the I-95 quick clearance
11 policies. They wanted me to kind of touch on that.

12 But when I got to do a little bit of
13 homework last night, it looked like we might want to
14 kind of shift gears and see how maybe the Maryland
15 program relates to some of these issues.

16 And being unfamiliar with the format and
17 a little bit short notice, I've prepared basically a
18 bullet summary of what we do in normal operations,
19 moving into kind of a snow operation, and then how
20 we elevate throughout the storm situation or from
21 normal operations.

22 Is there any special area I should touch
23 on or just kind of go through this presentation?

24 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Just briefly. I
25 think we've heard a lot about snow removal today,

1 and I guess anything that we would be really
2 interested in is anything that you see that we could
3 be doing differently having sat through this or
4 something that perhaps you're doing that we're not
5 that you would suggest to us to do or perhaps let us
6 know if you heard some things here that you thought,
7 hey, we're doing it right, it's good.

8 MR. YUREK: If I can with hearing some of
9 the testimony earlier, Maryland has also stubbed its
10 toes in different events. I personally worked in
11 maintenance for the past 30 years. I think I've
12 missed about 2 or 3 snowstorms in the last 30 years.
13 And we faced very, very similar situations.

14 There are some lessons that we've learned
15 that we probably worked on especially in the
16 Baltimore/Washington corridor. I don't know if
17 those lessons learned -- we actually have a few of
18 those in here that you might be interested in
19 hearing.

20 One of the things that we learned in this
21 came out of the 1987 Veterans Day winter event where
22 we had very similar situations. What we did was we
23 recognized that the Maryland State Police has
24 authority to clear abandoned vehicles from the
25 roadway. They are overwhelmed during the winter

1 events. What we have done in the metropolitan areas
2 is we have gone out and we've contracted our own tow
3 trucks.

4 And what we do when we have abandoned
5 vehicles when they are first noted on the system,
6 our maintenance shops call the local State Police
7 barracks.

8 If they are overwhelmed and don't have
9 the ability to move it right away, we have come to
10 an agreement, a policy between State Highway and the
11 State Police where we will go out and remove the
12 vehicle with their understanding that we're moving
13 the vehicle to the closest parking lot or wherever
14 we can get it just so we can get the roads open so
15 we can go do our jobs. And I think that has worked
16 extremely well for the last decade plus for us.

17 Other things that we've done, we've
18 increased the number of contractual hire trucks,
19 especially on the interstate system. And that
20 decreases the number of lane miles that any one
21 truck is basically responsible for clearing.

22 We're actually capable every time we make
23 a pass on the interstate system, we clear all lanes,
24 all shoulders, anything paved from guardrail to
25 guardrail every pass. And we also keep an adequate

1 salt supply, you know, that availability to salt
2 roads behind the plow operation. I think the
3 biggest thing -- I think this is probably what Alvin
4 would like to talk about the most is I oversee the
5 emergency operations center. That is the
6 coordinating effort of the districts within the
7 Maryland state highway.

8 We are totally integrated with the
9 statewide operation center which is the Chart
10 Program. We kind of take over the one back wing of
11 the area. And it's a vital, vital link to
12 communications within the agency itself.

13 I'm sorry. I thought it was on. The
14 maintenance shop level, we have snow routes. And I
15 heard this here earlier where we categorize the
16 interstate, primary, and secondary system. We have
17 re-deployment plans available where we can turn
18 around and move vehicles from the secondary system
19 at the drop of a hat to the interstate. I heard
20 that comment earlier.

21 Again, you have to know the condition of
22 what is going on, recognize the severity of it. And
23 the sooner you pull that switch, the better off you
24 are. The other comment I heard was staying with the
25 storm. The previous gentleman with the 35 years

1 about, the type of storm. I'm assuming that at the
2 height of the storm you had a freezing rain event,
3 more of an ice storm, not a snowstorm. And your
4 salt application rate has got to increase during ice
5 storms. Because of the nature of the event, the
6 rain is simply washing the salt brine off the road
7 almost as quick as you could get it down. It is
8 just a constant battle.

9 We try to keep our plow trains on the
10 interstate. We look at cycle times. A cycle time
11 is from the time they would leave a salt dome to the
12 time they went out and made a whole loop and they
13 came back in. We reload and they are ready to leave
14 again.

15 We try to keep the cycle time within 90
16 minutes during ideal conditions of a storm.
17 Naturally you get hung up and gridlock, your trucks
18 can't move. Your cycle time is going to increase.

19 But we feel that if we can make a pass at
20 least once every two hours across the interstate, we
21 should be able to keep it clear. But, you know, at
22 the same time, you've got to increase your salt rate
23 during these types of events.

24 MR. MARQUES: Just to add to some of the
25 things that I heard the limited time that we were

1 here was information flow. And that's one thing we
2 worked on for many years among many various
3 agencies. We do have a 24/7 statewide operation
4 center which is really our information gathering and
5 dissemination hub. As Russ mentioned, during winter
6 operations the EOC is activated with maintenance
7 folks in that facility.

8 Also in that facility, we do have a State
9 Police liaison whose office is in that facility.
10 And she actually is the conduit between us and the
11 State Police to keep information flowing to
12 breakdown the barriers and keep our policy together.

13 We also have State Troopers that come in
14 during the morning and evening peak periods to staff
15 a position at one of our consoles, to assist with
16 the overload during the peak periods, and also to
17 keep that information flowing between agencies.

18 We also have along with that three
19 full-time operation centers; regional center traffic
20 operation centers. We call them Baltimore
21 metropolitan area, Frederick metropolitan area and
22 Washington metropolitan area to pick up the Monday
23 through Friday major peaks.

24 Of course, again, that information is all
25 being put into what we call chart light system. Our

1 information system which is entered in from the
2 statewide operation center, from any of our regional
3 centers.

4 We also have the Maryland Transportation
5 Authority who operates all of the toll roads and
6 bridges in the state. They operate off of our same
7 operating system. We are all part of the same
8 program.

9 So anything on their roadways, all of
10 that information is also captured in the system.
11 They currently have two full-time centers,
12 24-hour-a-day centers. And they are looking to open
13 up a third for the northern part of the state.

14 The software that we have or operating
15 system that we have is a distributed type of
16 architecture. So we are actually able to get it out
17 to a lot of different facilities across the state.

18 We currently have about 60 different
19 locations that have our work stations in them. And
20 they basically range from the Maryland State Police
21 barracks, Transportation Authority facilities, our
22 state highway maintenance facilities; MEMA, Maryland
23 Emergency Management Agency. We are also into our
24 local DPWs, local 911 centers, EOCs, MIMs which
25 handles all of the medivac helicopters and the

1 medical applications throughout the state. They are
2 also at other state centers such as VDOT, Virginia
3 DOT, and DC DOT. For us, an information center
4 across the border is also critical especially in the
5 Washington, Virginia area because we share a common
6 boundary, the Capital Beltway.

7 So there is a lot of information flow
8 going on. We also have our DOT traffic patrols that
9 are out. During winter storms we step them up a
10 bit. We run them on -- we put them on two 12-hour
11 shifts to work around the clock.

12 They are actually out there trying to
13 keep the road clear as an every day function but
14 even more so during snow to get to the folks that
15 might be stranded or more importantly to get anybody
16 off the road. An abandoned vehicle, pull it off the
17 interstate, get it to a parking lot. Expedite
18 incident, accident clearance, and try to keep the
19 road as clear as we can ahead of the plow trains.
20 We want those to keep running without slowing down.
21 And that's kind of one of their major goals.

22 We have a lot of interagency agreements
23 with the Maryland State Police and other agencies.
24 Open roadways on an urgent basis and share
25 information realtime. The barracks are required to

1 call us pretty much any time something happens on
2 the interstate system to make sure we're aware of it
3 whether we're needed or not so we can activate
4 motorist information devices, as well as maintenance
5 policies.

6 We open the roadway on an urgent basis.
7 There is a policy to dispatch front-end loaders and
8 sand trucks should there be a serious truck
9 incident. Again, trying to get all -- get the
10 roadways open as quickly as possible.

11 We have pre-planned detour routes with
12 support trailers for every interchange movement
13 throughout the state, a movement program.

14 We work very closely and support law
15 enforcement crash investigation teams so they have
16 procedures and the latest equipment to keep the
17 roadways open. Agreements with the coroner's
18 office, again to speed up major collisions and
19 trying to get the victims relocated from the travel
20 portion of the roadway so we can get that open. A
21 lot of motorist information devices which I'm sure
22 you're aware of.

23 Again, realtime information flow to the
24 media for us is critical, getting that information
25 to the public. Transcom is another good mechanism

1 for doing that to hit the trucking agencies, courier
2 services up and down the coast, our web site. I
3 heard mention of that.

4 It sounds like the Turnpike operation is
5 pretty similar to us. As soon as we enter something
6 in, it's hitting the web site. We have the ability
7 to put a lurch.

8 We have a very robust paging system to
9 make sure that the chain of command is notified of
10 various types of accidents.

11 As Russ said, we go from a normal
12 operation to an EOC operation. They enter in all of
13 the data from all of the maintenance facilities in
14 what we call the emergency operation reporting
15 system which can actually be viewed, the status of
16 our storm at any given time; costs, salt supplies --
17 and if I'm rambling, just cut me off. So at any
18 given moment if an elected official or anyone wanted
19 to get a report, they could.

20 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Okay. Thank you.
21 I'm going to open it up for some questions if you'll
22 stand for some questions, please.

23 MR. MARQUES: Yes, sir.

24 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative Mike
25 Carroll.

1 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Just one
2 question. Does the Maryland DOT and your agencies
3 have a bare pavement policy?

4 MR. YUREK: Yes, we do.

5 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL: Thank you.

6 MR. YUREK: And our bare pavement policy
7 doesn't necessarily mean that the pavement has got
8 to be bare a hundred percent of the time. It means
9 we're going to fight with the resources that we have
10 and we're going to stay at it until we gain bare
11 pavement.

12 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative Mark
13 Longietti.

14 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Just a
15 follow-up to that question. Can you explain why an
16 agency would not have a bare pavement policy? What
17 would be the philosophy or the rationale behind it?

18 MR. YUREK: I'm not sure. Having
19 30 years of experience in the State of Maryland and
20 working within a bare pavement policy, that's all
21 I've ever known in my career.

22 Now I will relate that in the far western
23 portion of the state, Garrett County averages 140
24 inches of snow a year. Their interpretation of bare
25 pavement especially on a secondary system is

1 probably a little bit different than in the
2 Baltimore-Washington corridor. So they may not
3 fight at it constantly, but they are also set up to
4 work in shifts. They recognize almost an inability
5 under some conditions to be able to get to bare
6 pavement.

7 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Just so I
8 understand it better, you hear things and you think
9 at some point in time you might be getting
10 misinformation.

11 One of the -- the word passed around was
12 that PennDOT doesn't have a bare pavement policy.
13 They admitted that. They claim they more finely
14 manage their system. I'm not sure exactly what that
15 means.

16 One piece of information was that PennDOT
17 doesn't lower their plows enough to go -- to clear
18 the road completely on the theory that it would
19 cause damage to the roadway and damage to the
20 equipment. I'm not sure that that's correct
21 information. Does that sound correct or is that --

22 MR. YUREK: I'm not necessarily here to
23 critique PennDOT. But I will tell you my own
24 personal experience -- and I started this labor with
25 the Maryland state highway 30 years ago and I worked

1 virtually every level between labor and Director of
2 Maintenance. And we have always put our plows down
3 on the pavement and plowed the roadway. Does that
4 cause more damage to the plow or to the roadway or
5 is that not an issue?

6 MR. YUREK: We do especially in
7 metropolitan areas. If you hit a bridge abutment or
8 if you hit a curb, if you hit a manhole that is
9 raised up even an inch, it can cause very severe
10 damage not only to your plow but also to the front
11 end of your truck. And that is an issue.

12 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: But you've
13 made at least a judgment call that it is more
14 important to make sure that the road is as clear as
15 possible than the damage that could happen?

16 MR. YUREK: Yes.

17 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: All right. Thank
18 you. Chairman Russell Fairchild.

19 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you,
20 gentlemen, for coming north this morning. I'm not
21 sure exactly when you got here. We had quite a
22 discussion on who was really in charge.

23 And both yesterday's hearing and today's
24 focused in on that aspect. You have -- obviously
25 you have an emergency management agency in Maryland.

1 MR. MARQUES: Yes, sir.

2 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Given the
3 circumstances of a declared emergency or disaster,
4 how does your organization interreact with them? Do
5 they have command and control?

6 MR. YUREK: I'm not going to say that our
7 MEMA, Maryland Emergency Management, does not
8 necessarily have command and control over the
9 Maryland state highway nor the Maryland Department
10 of Transportation.

11 When MEMA activates -- and this last
12 storm they had a very low level partial activation.
13 But when they partially activate, I actually have
14 individuals from my staff that will go to MEMA and
15 staff at MEMA itself.

16 This last storm that we had, I not only
17 had my deputy administrator and the administrator of
18 the State Highway Administration EOC, SOC, we also
19 had a visit by our Secretary and the Deputy
20 Secretary of the Department.

21 Now if there would have been a full
22 activation at MEMA -- and we've had this previously,
23 most recently Presidents Day storm 2003. The
24 Secretary is generally in direct contact with the
25 Governor, and that's where we get our orders from.

1 But MEMA itself as far as I know does not have
2 command and control over how we direct our
3 operations.

4 MR. MARQUES: They pretty much act more
5 of a coordinating type of agency among the different
6 locals and actually funnel the request once they
7 declare a state of emergency for us to be able to
8 help out a local government. Once we are in that
9 type of situation request, I do have to chain to
10 MEMA.

11 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: I understand
12 that. But it seems to me the fundamental difference
13 is that in Maryland at least you operate more of a
14 direct drive between the respective cabinet
15 secretaries and the Governor.

16 MR. YUREK: That would be my
17 understanding of it, yes.

18 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Representative --

20 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: Excuse me.

21 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I'm sorry.

22 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: I circulated a
23 memo to my fellow members highlighting your chart
24 system. And I don't know if you got any hits on it
25 from Pennsylvania over the last two days. I was

1 really impressed. That's why I sent it. Let's see
2 how a system should work. And I'm interested in
3 pursuing that.

4 So I just would like to ask you a couple
5 questions on the interactivity of that site. That's
6 a realtime site?

7 MR. MARQUES: Yes, sir. Everything
8 entered by the operator hits immediately.

9 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: You heard my
10 question to the Turnpike Commission. Who can report
11 an accident, any employee?

12 MR. YUREK: Any employee, what we call
13 any credible source which is any employee, any law
14 enforcement agency, fire department.

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: And that's
16 just from a working standpoint. Let's say there's a
17 needed temporary lane closure, somebody reports that
18 there's a breakdown or a deer on the road or
19 something. Is that same employee responsible for
20 saying when it is opened back up?

21 MR. MARQUES: Yes, sir. That's very key.
22 Yes, sir. That way we can activate any motorist
23 information devices to support that operation also.

24 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: About how much
25 does that system cost to -- it seems like -- I don't

1 want to put words in your mouth. But it seems like
2 what you have there is a very, very comprehensive
3 system involving a whole lot of different avenues.

4 MR. YUREK: We don't have a definitive
5 number, but we could probably get you one. We've
6 been working on building this program probably since
7 the mid '90s. That's when the operation center
8 opened.

9 MR. MARQUES: '94.

10 MR. YUREK: '94. And there is actually
11 two sources of information that kind of feeds the
12 web site. One is what they do with the chart
13 program. And Alvin also referred to the emergency
14 operations reporting system. What that does is each
15 of our maintenance shops, they put information in,
16 live data what is going on at their shop. And they
17 are required to update that data every two hours.

18 So they are going to tell us how many
19 people they have working, how many trucks they have
20 working, how many hired trucks they have working,
21 very brief weather description as far as it is
22 snowing, it is 32 degrees.

23 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: That is
24 external and internal management?

25 MR. YUREK: Yes. But the other key thing

1 is here is the ability to put in weather-related
2 road closures. If they were to put in a
3 weather-related road closure, that would also
4 populate on the web site.

5 Now we've struggled as an agency
6 getting -- having a high level of confidence in all
7 of the data that has been put in at the 28
8 maintenance shops across the state.

9 And we've actually backed off that a
10 little bit and we prefer them to call into the
11 SOC/UOC. Between Alvin's staff and my staff, we try
12 to populate web site information.

13 And then we will call the shops back if
14 we see the road is still closed a number of hours
15 later. We will just call and talk to an individual
16 and say, look, we want to get an update because we
17 know it is going out to the web and we want people
18 to have good information. And that's part of what
19 our staffs do at the central location.

20 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: My final
21 question is a very short one. It's referred to as
22 an award winning site. What award in a sentence or
23 two?

24 MR. YUREK: Agencies --

25 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: What makes

1 this such a damn nice site?

2 MR. MARQUES: I guess we were very
3 innovative and we have been very innovative with our
4 program, very forward thinking. That was one of the
5 very first interactive sites to include video and
6 the realtime data information. We do have in-house
7 designer consultants that stay there and design our
8 internet site.

9 All of our software we have custom built
10 in-house using consultants. So we own all of the
11 code. So anybody that wants it, any other state
12 that wants it, it is pretty much free. Here it is.
13 Take what pieces you want. Other states have taken
14 us up on that offer. It's --

15 REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCHILD: We should be
16 there Monday morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
17 Thank you, gentlemen.

18 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: The Chair would like
19 to thank our award winning Chairman Fairchild for
20 those questions. Speaking of award winning,
21 Representative Siptroth.

22 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you, Mr.
23 Chairman. I'm not quite sure what award I've won,
24 but thank you very much.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Shortest question.

1 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Representative
2 Geist, I'll make this very brief. I posed the same
3 question to the folks from the Turnpike regarding
4 the number of snow removal pieces of equipment that
5 you have per lane mile.

6 If you know that information today,
7 that's fine. But if you could get it to us, we
8 would appreciate that. It will become part of the
9 record.

10 And also, do you have a specific
11 application rate of salt with your bare pavement
12 program? PennDOT from what I understand has a do
13 not exceed rate. Okay. Now I would pose that
14 question in that frame so you understand where I'm
15 coming from. Thank you.

16 MR. YUREK: The State of Maryland we do
17 not necessarily have set rates because we recognize
18 every storm is different. But I can tell you what
19 our average application rate is.

20 Last year we put down on average across
21 the whole state 800 pounds, roughly 800 pounds per
22 inch of snow per lane mile. And I can't tell you on
23 this last -- this past winter or the winter we've
24 experienced so far in tracking that rate because we
25 had virtually all ice storms across most of the

1 state. My current salt rate is closer to
2 1200 pounds per lane mile per inch of snow.

3 Now when we do our calculations,
4 naturally an inch of ice is not equal to an inch of
5 snow. And the scientific equivalent is one-tenth
6 inch of ice is equal to an inch of snow for these
7 parts.

8 REPRESENTATIVE SIPTROTH: Thank you very
9 much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Chairman Melio with
11 the last question.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: Thank you, Mr.
13 Chairman. Mine is on communication. I know you
14 communicate on the corridor. But do all of your
15 agencies share the same communication system and
16 what is it?

17 MR. MARQUES: No, we don't. We're on a
18 mixed batch of communication systems where we're on
19 a low band type of frequency, most of the public
20 safety agencies with the exception of Maryland State
21 Police are usually on the 800 megahertz type
22 systems.

23 But what we do have is in our operations
24 center we monitor all the other frequencies. We
25 also have direct communications with the Maryland

1 State Police from any one of our facilities. We
2 also have just finished installing what we call
3 Warwick consoles which allows us to tap in and take
4 over the whole communications array at any other
5 center and from any other agency with that type of
6 console. And one of those agencies is our Maryland
7 Emergency Management Agency.

8 So even though we operate off a low band
9 system, we're slowly trying to migrate to an 800
10 megahertz. But it is very cost prohibitive to do it
11 all at one time.

12 We can actually transmit and communicate
13 with other agencies over the 800 megahertz by
14 patching directly in and taking over MEMA's 800
15 megahertz patches.

16 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: You haven't had
17 any problem with that system?

18 MR. MARQUES: We've got many towers
19 around the state. I'm an operations guy but for the
20 most part communications seem to work very well. We
21 do use a lot of -- have a lot of Nextels out to a
22 lot of our folks where we do lack some of the radio
23 coverage.

24 But the coordination between the agencies
25 is very critical to us. And the relationships that

1 we form with the different agencies through
2 interagency trading programs and by having the
3 regional operation centers and our folks actually
4 working together on a day-to-day basis whether it be
5 at an incident scene or whatnot.

6 MR. YUREK: Due to a lack of -- the State
7 of Maryland itself does not have a statewide 800
8 megahertz radio system. One of my divisions is
9 communications and we handle communications for
10 Maryland State Highway.

11 We've been trying to partner with other
12 state agencies and local county governments in
13 building a statewide network of tower
14 infrastructure. Right now we're probably roughly
15 about two-thirds of the state is covered in that
16 infrastructure.

17 What we've done in the partnering
18 agreement is if a county is putting up an 800
19 megahertz system, we have asked that they turn
20 around and provide like our state highway
21 administration, our maintenance shop, the ability to
22 have a call upon system go out and we'll purchase a
23 handful of the hand-held, the portable devices, so
24 that our resident maintenance engineer, our
25 assistant resident maintenance engineer, and our

1 team leaders would have the ability to talk directly
2 to the local DPW, their counterparts per se. And at
3 the same time, it gives us some interoperability
4 with the local police department.

5 And then we also in the vehicles of our
6 resident and assistant resident have two-way radio
7 communications that we put in their vehicles. They
8 also have -- because the State Police also are on
9 the low band frequency like we are, we have the
10 State Police frequencies programmed into the radios
11 for them.

12 So they can switch over and talk to the
13 State Police and then switch back to the State
14 Highway within our vehicle. So we're trying to do
15 something in the interim, but we don't have an 800
16 megahertz system.

17 REPRESENTATIVE MELIO: Thank you, Mr.
18 Chairman.

19 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you. And the
20 gentlemen from the great State of Maryland, thank
21 you for being wonderful and informative guests. I
22 hope that we are just as good as hosts for you
23 today. We appreciate you coming by and sharing your
24 information with us.

25 I'd like to thank Chairman Geist and the

1 other Chairs that are here and some have left. For
2 final remarks, Chairman Geist.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GEIST: Thank you very
4 much, Joe. I just want to compliment you on a great
5 job of herding cats today. I think you've done a
6 great job. And I want to thank Chairman Eachus for
7 calling this rendezvous today on a Friday. And I
8 think that what came out of it was a need to learn a
9 lot more.

10 I think that the General Assembly needs
11 to get up to speed and we have -- I hope we have the
12 time and fortitude to actually do it as we also have
13 the responsibility to adequately fund our Department
14 of Transportation. I think that goes hand in hand.

15 I think Joe had done a great job, and I
16 want to thank him and all of our members and the
17 policy committee people and our staff people and
18 everybody that's worked on this.

19 CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I'd also like to
20 thank all of the members who attended here today and
21 also a big thank you to the staff of all of the
22 various committees and both parties that worked very
23 long and hard here to put this together.

24 And finally, I want to thank the
25 Pennsylvania Cable Network for covering this and

1 sending this into the homes of all Pennsylvania
2 citizens. With that, meeting adjourned.

3 (The hearing concluded at 3:03 p.m.)

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1 I hereby certify that the proceedings and
2 evidence are contained fully and accurately in the
3 notes taken by me in the proceedings of the above
4 cause and that this copy is a correct transcript of
5 the same.

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Sherri A. Reitano
Notary Public

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