

Chairman Grueneich and members of the committee, I am Art Hagebock from LaMoure. I currently am an EMR driver for the LaMoure Volunteer Ambulance and have recently retired as the fire chief after fifteen years as chief or assistant chief.

I own three newspapers in Southeast North Dakota. I sit on our nursing home board, our economic development board and numerous other boards.

What I have to say here is in no way representing the ambulance service or fire department of LaMoure. I did receive guidance from both entities for their input on matters that they deemed important.

First and foremost we as a group need to establish what we want and can afford for primary ambulance service. There is a reason that every small hospital in North Dakota is not a Level One Trauma Center and does not have a Life Flight helicopter at each one. It is all about money. Multiple businesses and agencies are now advocating for a separate taxing district for each ambulance service. This in turn will allow them to collect mill levy money to run the ambulance service. To understand what impact this would have on local property taxes, Ransom County Ambulance District is asking voters for eight mills to cover a private, for-profit business to operate in the county. The entire road budget for LaMoure County is twenty mills. We need a stronger plan than simply taxing people for a good cause. When a private service is hired to cover the ambulance service for the district, there is no bid process, no competition at all. Whatever the service is going to charge, that is how many mills that need to be assessed on the taxes. There are private individuals that sit on these district boards but they do not have the financial expertise in ambulance services to rebut any claims the private service would have.

What we need to know is that most ambulance services in the rural areas are Basic Life Support Service. What this means is that we load and go. If it is a critical incident, there is always an Advanced Life Support Service to call on the way to the hospital.

We as a group need to come up with a plan that will support our local volunteer services, not hinder them. We need to find ways to do our training locally which will in turn put less stress on our volunteers' time and help with morale in the service.

The state needs a different formula for distributing the ambulance grant so that every service gets their fair share.

The state needs to make sure they have labor laws in place to where we do not have to pay "On Call" time minimum wage.

On the fire side of things. I do believe that the fire service recruitment and retention starts at the local level. The leadership needs to cultivate the landscape to not just include the firemen who are all gung ho with the service but also take into consideration all aspects of the firemen. We have had a full roster of thirty men on our department since I got on twenty-seven years ago.

We need to take another look at what deems a distressed ambulance service other than someone declaring it. There needs to be a set of parameters and steps taken before it is declared and also the consulting mechanism needs to be addressed.

I am now open to any questions you may have for me.