



October 8, 2019

They Come From the Cities and They Come From the Smaller Towns...



**Cody Schulz, Director
North Dakota Department of Emergency Services
(NDDDES)**

A little ditty about a Director in America's Heartland with a passion for family, car restoration, baseball, and public policy. Emergency management may have been an accident, but for this public servant with a great sense of humor, it was truly meant to be.

What aspects of NEMA do you find most beneficial? There are many, but the one benefit that rises to the top is the relationships and networks that I have built with other State Directors and NEMA staff. It's always nice to know that there are dedicated, knowledgeable and skilled professionals that are always just a phone call away if I have a question or need resources. The fact there is collectively hundreds of years of experience to tap into at any time is comforting. And when I have engaged other Directors and NEMA staff, everyone has always been incredibly willing to step up and offer expertise and advice.

How did you originally get involved with emergency management? By accident! Maybe it was meant to be 😊. I had recently moved home to Grand Forks after attending graduate school at the University of North Dakota and was trying to decide what field or specific focus I wanted to pursue long term, I had just finished my MBA and was thinking about seeking opportunities in finance. At about that time a friend told me about a temporary position available in mitigation. I thought mitigation, I can spell that – now I just have to figure out what it means. I did my research and thought it looked like an interesting opportunity, at least in the short term until I figured out what I wanted to do long term. The people at NDDDES were great to work with and the work fulfilled a longing for public service, and now twelve years later I am grateful to have given emergency management a shot. I have worked in mitigation, recovery, finance and now as Director.

You have a unique blend in perspective for leading the state's department of emergency services as well as a Morton County Commissioner (home). How do those perspectives play out in your decision making for agency-wide programs? I

think it definitely helps me analyze financial, operational and policy decisions in a way that takes into account the local government perspective. A lot of times at the State and Federal level we look at things from the 30,000-foot view, from a more philosophic or strategic perspective. Having been an elected official at the County level for the past seven years has given me insight into the “boots on the ground” teams that actually implement or operationalize many of the decisions made at the State and Federal level. Additionally, I believe my County service has earned both me and NDDDES an increased level of respect and partnership from local governments.

Looks like you are up for re-election, Commissioner Schulz! What will be your top three focus areas of your platform for Morton County, November 2020?

Being elected to lead the County has been one the most incredible honors of my professional life, but I'm not yet sure if I will be seeking re-election. I have served two terms (eight years), and it may be time to give someone else the opportunity to lead. But some of the things that have been and will continue to be important to me are:

1. Invest in People – Build a team of skilled professionals that have the same vision and passion as you do. Train them, provide them with the resources they need, empower them, be available, and hold them accountable.
2. Use technology to communicate, engage, reduce transactional costs, increase quality and create efficiencies.
3. Encourage entrepreneurship and create a low tax environment.

What is your most memorable disaster you have worked so far? Without question, the Dakota Access Pipeline protest. It's not overstating to say that it changed my life and that of many people in North Dakota. The protest lasted 234 days with anywhere from 1,500 to 8,000 people camping outside in a pretty brutal North Dakota winter. During that time, I was the Chairman of the Morton County Commission, which meant I was the top elected official in the jurisdiction of the protest.

Some (but certainly not all) of the major challenges were making sure the protesters were safe and healthy, but also trying to handle the vocal and active numerical minority of protesters that were resorting to riots, violence and criminal activity. Law enforcement officers were shot at, had Molotov cocktails thrown at them, as well as rocks and other projectiles. The citizens that lived in the area near the protest site reported numerous instances of physical assaults, theft and vandalism. From a personal perspective, trying to lead the county and deal with death threats and approximately 8,000 phone calls and emails was particularly challenging. Additionally, my parents were doxed and began receiving harassing phone calls, which had some effect on their grandchildren – my nieces and nephews.

When you are not in your roles of Director or Commissioner, what do you do with your time? I love the outdoors, so anytime I can be in nature I try to make the most of it. I love to hunt and fish. I also restore classic cars. But mostly I like to spend time with my three nephews and one niece. The two youngest boys are playing baseball, which is a sport I'm hugely passionate about. There is a quote

about baseball from George Will that I absolutely love; "Baseball, it is said, is only a game. True. And the Grand Canyon is only a hole in Arizona. Not all holes, or games, are created equal."

Wait. You restore cars! What are you working on? My next project is a 1954 Ford pick-up. It currently is an F250, but I plan to shorten the box to the same length as the F100 and put it on a new modern frame. I also have a 1970 Chevy Monte Carlo.

What is a myth concerning North Dakotans that you would like to debunk? Probably that North Dakota gets a ton of snow. While we do have pretty cold winters, especially January through mid-March, our snowfall averages only range from 26 to 38 inches per year. **Hmmm, that's over 2 feet of snow - guess it is all relative.**

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