Gov. Perry Provides Update on State Response to Tragedy in West

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.
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This has been an incredibly tragic and difficult 16 hours for our fellow Texans in West and all of their friends and loved ones who have watched this unfold from afar anxious for information.

I want to start by saying thank you to everyone in the community local officials, first responders and neighbors who are working to take care of each other.

I have been in touch with emergency officials throughout the night and this morning.

I have spoken with President Obama and appreciate his call to offer support and prayers.

I have also spoken with local officials to make sure they have all the support and assistance they need from the state.

To that end, I am declaring a disaster in McLennan County and will request an emergency declaration from the President.

I also wanted to commend the hard work put in by Chief Nim Kidd and his team at the Texas Division of Emergency Management as they quickly responded to this disaster.

It's important to stress that at this point much of the information we have is still very preliminary and more information is coming in all the time.

I want to take a few minutes to provide an overview of the state's response.

Throughout the night state agencies were on the ground to assist and will remain on site as long as necessary.

The Texas Department of Public Safety is securing the area for law enforcement personnel to conduct business and to maintain public safety.

Texas Task Forces 1 and 2 as well as the Texas National Guard are assisting with search and rescue efforts.

The Texas Department of Transportation is handling traffic flow for the affected areas.
And we have officials from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality monitoring air quality.

Pipelines in the area are being monitored closely and the gas distribution system to homes has been disconnected.

The Texas Department of State Health Services has been on the ground with ambulance buses, a mobile hospital and other resources.

And the Texas Education Agency is working with the local school district to coordinate any immediate needs the district may have.

Last night's disaster was truly a nightmare scenario but we are blessed in Texas to have the best emergency response teams in the nation and they were certainly at their best last night.

It's important to remember that West is a community of just a few thousand people.

Anyone who grew up in a small town will understand that this tragedy will touch every family every individual in and around West.

I ask all Texans and Americans to join me in keeping the people of West and the surrounding communities and our first responders in your prayers as this situation continues to unfold.