



The Need to Audit The Ambulance Response System

“There’s a Tsunami coming and we are not prepared.” That is the phrase I used in letters to key city officials in the spring of 2006 regarding the unprepared-ness of the Denver Election Commission to conduct elections in 2006. We had undertaken a performance audit of the Commission earlier that year, and I was so concerned by our initial findings that I took the unusual step of communicating my concerns early in hopes of heading off the problems I foresaw. Unfortunately, my concerns were dismissed. Don’t worry I was told, everything is under control. Well, everything was not under control. The lesson: Simply saying that everything is fine, does not make it so.

We have undertaken a comprehensive review of the City’s ambulance response system. This includes the Denver Police Department in their role as the administrator of the 911 system as well as Denver Health and the Denver Fire Department in their respective roles in emergency response. (It is unfortunate that some critics of this performance audit were not well-enough informed regarding the audit and chose to couch their criticism on misinformation stating that we were only looking at Denver Health and not the Fire Department. This sort of misinformation does not serve the public well).

As with all our audits it is being conducted with objectivity, independence and with the highest professional standards. Per our Denver Charter authority to conduct audits it is being done in conformity with generally accepted professional standards as stipulated by the Comptroller General of the United States in what is known as the ‘Yellow Book’.

However, there are those - good friends of Denver Health’s administration - that are questioning the need for this audit. “Denver residents can breathe easy,” they say. Don’t worry we have one of the best systems in the nation. Everything is fine, this audit is unnecessary.

Well that is indeed déjà vu all over again.

It is what we heard about the Election Commission.

We don’t know exactly the state of the City’s ambulance emergency response system. We won’t know until the audit is finished. We can’t know definitively at this point whether the system is performing at its best, whether there are flaws, or if there are

improvements that may need to be made. It may be that the system is working at 100% efficiency and does not need any recommendations for improvement. It is because we don't know any of that definitively and verifiably that we do an audit.

Perhaps the greatest value of the audit will be to explain the complexity of the system and to identify more tangible performance indicators linked to timeliness, to present alternative models used by other municipalities, and to identify, if any, systemic inefficiencies with the current approach since there are three organizations involved in this process (DFD, DPD, DHA).

We are continuing with this audit because it is important to the citizens to know that a truly independent and unbiased eye looked at the system. If it is functioning optimally they can have confidence that is the case. But if there are ways to improve then we will have provided the City and the entities involved some recommendations for improvement and the citizens can be confident in that as well. It is after all about the safety of our citizens.

And because it is about the citizens, let me stress that we don't make audit decisions based on biases from newspaper columnists, fire unions, or any other entity. We make our decisions with no agenda in mind other than to serve the needs of Denver residents.

Denver Auditor
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