

**Representative Todd Hunter
Narrator**

**Karina Lovas
Interviewer**

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KL: Could I get you to introduce yourself for me?

TH: Yes, I am Todd Hunter. I am a lawyer and a state representative.

KL: How long have you lived in South Texas and how long have you represented this area?

TH: I came to Corpus Christi in 1978 and I've been here continuously since. I have been in office twice. I went into office first time 1989 till 1997 and then I ran again in 1998. Then I ran again in 2008 and have served since 2009 till the present.

KL: Have you experienced a hurricane at all before Hurricane Harvey?

TH: Yes in 1980 Hurricane Allen hit the area. Hurricane Allen was a water hurricane it was not as much wind as it was more of a water storm. And it hit the area. There was another hurricane that hit south, I think it was called Hurricane Bret [August 1999]. But it hit south of here, and there was some wind but not a lot of impact. The Corpus Christi Zone, Port Aransas, Corpus Christi, Aransas Pass, Nueces have really not faced a serious hurricane since 1970 when Celia hit.

KL: Okay. And that was before?

TH: Before I moved here, yes.

KL: So this was your first hurricane as an elected representative for this area?

TH: Correct.

KL: So in just a second, I am going to ask you more about that. Actually during the storm how did you hear about it at first, do you remember?

TH: Yes, and I stayed for the storm. Since Corpus Christi was not a mandatory evacuation, I felt that I should stay as a state representative and my son who is a city council member also. We asked the family and our workers to leave so they weren't here. At first, I'm pretty involved with weather, I watch it on TV, I listen to the radio, and I have all kinds of [iPhone] apps. And I've been fighting the windstorm issue for quite a while. So when we first heard of the hurricane we

watched and as it was coming, I watched and watched. But what was interesting was no one knew if it would be a hurricane forward coming down upon us until maybe Wednesday, which would have been the 23rd of August. Then we heard more about it on the 24th, which was Thursday. And the 25th they said it was category four and it was on its way that morning.

KL: So how did you prepare in leading up to that?

TH: Well the one thing I know about hurricanes is to make sure all your vehicles are fueled so I made sure all my vehicles had gas. I also did buy water. I bought continuous water. There was a question when it was first coming, would it be a wind hurricane or a water surge. We didn't know if there would be flooding or wind. So we bought a lot of water, we bought flashlights and lamps, cause I knew power would go out if it came. Then I made sure my family left and the people that work for me left. Then we boarded up the house and we got ready. On that Friday we started preparing up, we placed water bottles around the house, and we sent our animals off with the families. So everything was ready to go.

KL: What was the actual experience of the storm hitting like?

TH: Well what happened was that Friday morning, August 25th, I was downtown Corpus Christi at the emergency management center. At that point they said everybody get prepared, it's a category four, it's heading this way, you need to get home. It was interesting, the sheriff was there, explaining how they were going to have to move inmates, and things like that. It's a big operation.

KL: Yeah, you don't think about it.

TH: So we went to H-E-B [grocery store] to get some last minute things. They were on the microphone telling people we needed to hurry and get out of the store and they're having to close down at 10am that morning. So we got our stuff, we headed home. As soon as I got home, we cooked up a lot of food, just so we had it. I knew power would probably go out.

KL: And did it?

TH: Yes it did.

KL: When did it go out?

TH: We had all the TV, everything was on, and about 5 o'clock, 5pm on Friday, August 25th the power went out. And we didn't have it till I think the following Wednesday. So we got impacted pretty strongly. So it was still August 25th light, but it gets real hot, real fast. No TV, so we can't follow what's going around. So we watched as things started getting darker, we could hear a little bit about the wind. And then later that evening the wind just got bigger and bigger outside. It was like nine hours of a jet engine, standing next to a jet engine. We would look out the window, just pitch black. We just had a pin light. It was an interesting experience. I knew that when we got up the next morning, that's when you really see what you can't see.

KL: Was your house okay?

TH: When we woke up it was about 7:20AM and I got right up and you could tell it was very dark and still breezy. You could tell the severe winds had gone, power lines down every place, roofing down, fences down, broken branches and debris, lot of metal sheds down. It was a big mess. I did drive over to Aransas Pass, they had power lines across the street where I could get under with my little car. They couldn't get any one into Port Aransas until late morning, cause they had to take down power lines from the roadway, and it looked like we got hit.

KL: Do you wish that you would have left?

TH: No, I felt a responsibility. I didn't want anybody to say that here I ran for office, and I didn't stay with the people that had to stay and didn't have any place to go. We weren't under a mandatory, so I felt obligated to stay. And I'm glad I did, so that I could explain the story to others.

KL: Oh, okay good. So were you able to keep track of the storm at all on your phone or anything while it was actually hitting or did you lose kind of all contact?

TH: No actually the cell service stayed.

KL: Well that's good!

TH: In Corpus Christi the cell service stayed so we are able to follow Twitter and Facebook and people could text us or call us. So we didn't ever lose that. Now in Aransas Pass and Port Aransas they had no cell service. But in Corpus Christi we never lost that. That is how we kept track of what was going on.

KL: Do you think that that was helpful or did it sort of make it more stressful for you?

TH: Yes, very helpful. Cause you had no TV, no radio, no power, and it was hot. Here it was in the 90s, with 100 percent humidity. Yeah it was just tough but the Internet and the cell service helped.

KL: Okay, good. So is there a memory of anything you saw after the hurricane that really stays with you the most?

TH: Well, there's several. I talked with one of the superintendents and after the hurricane, it was a couple of weeks after the hurricane, I was meeting with the area's superintendents and one of them told me a story. He said, Todd, I think one of the issues you need to address next time you meet in the legislature is children's mental health. I said, well can you explain? He said before Hurricane Harvey our elementary school kids had toys and clothes and then during the storm they lost their toys and their clothes. And he said that thanks to the charitable help from all the people, they got toys and clothes back. But he said over the last few days, we've had a lot of rain in his area and some flooding, minor. But it's the noise in the homes. He said our children, this morning, have been really disruptive, and concerned, and panicky, and these are elementary school kids, who say they want to go home because they don't want to lose their clothes and toys

again. They wanted to take their clothes and their toys and put them on their beds and dressers and then come back to school. But it sends the message that folks don't realize that it doesn't matter whether you're a child or an adult, a storm impacts you. And there are a lot of good stories and sad stories and some funny oriented stories. But that one there really sent home something that regularly don't hear.

KL: So is that something that you want to take up in the next session?

TH: Well I think there's going to be a lot, the windstorm and windstorm insurance issue, catastrophe management issues, and no doubt the education impact, be it on the health side or the administrative side.

KL: Definitely. So what were the first steps that you began to take to help with recovery, even of your own property?

TH: Well, the very first thing that I did was when we got up my son and I got in the car, cause I thought somebody needs to see the damage. I started photographing and sending it out on Facebook and Twitter because a lot of people didn't know what had happened and they hadn't seen it. So I thought the visual education was important. I then went downtown to the emergency management office to make sure that everybody was okay. We were getting reports about problems in Rockport. We didn't get a lot of reports from Port Aransas because I mean it was just completely cut off. But then I went in, and there was a hospital that got shut down in Aransas Pass on Sunday. And on Saturday morning I went over there to try and help them. I went over to Port Aransas area, I went into the San Patricio area, I went all over our community, just making sure, we could help get debris out of the way, and help. Again we had no ice, there was no power, so people were kind of scrambling. And if you're a coffee drinker, there was no place to go get coffee.

KL: So what were the first groups that saw on the scene initially to help with those services?

TH: There really wasn't any. It was very interesting. When I woke up, I knew about catastrophes that there would be shock. So I get up, there weren't many people around and on the roads. There were people looking for gas, and the pumps were not working. So I went around mainly to see what the damage was, and to see if anybody was about that we needed to help. And I didn't see a whole bunch of people but I think that people had either left or they were just getting up themselves. It took until late afternoon that day. H-E-B opened back up, for a little bit, not totally but for a few hours on generators. But what I was really trying to do was to find out who survived, and to make sure no one needed help out in the streets. I actually went downtown, lot of debris downtown. So the first was visual in getting the word out and to get the photographs to people to show them what had happened.

KL: So overall, how have your constituents been affected?

TH: My district was hit, my whole district was hit. I think I may be the only house district that had everything hit. I had Port Aransas and Aransas Pass and Corpus Christi. I used to represent Aransas County and San Patricio. They're doing good. We've got resilient folks, strong people.

But they need help. We were the first to be hit, everybody forgets nationally, internationally, we were the first to be hit. I think a lot of people think we were also the first to be forgotten. And so we've got to do what we can to give people hope and back them up. When they need some assistance, do what we can to give it to them.

KL: So how have you interacted with the Texas government and the legislature and the federal officials who have come into this district and area?

TH: There's been a lot of meetings, lot of calls, it's basically telephone calls, texting, meetings. It was constant, the first two weeks, constant. We had President [Donald] Trump here, and Vice President [Mike] Pence here.

KL: Did you meet with him?

TH: Yes, I did. I met with both of them. Governor [Greg] Abbot was also here.

KL: Yeah, I saw a picture of you with him.

TH: Yes. It was an interesting bit of folks. And I met with all of the area public officials.

KL: So how has that changed your role as a representative? Has it made it more difficult?

TH: Not more difficult, I feel more responsible. I also think it is my duty to help the area, make sure we are not forgotten and that we need the assistance that were are there fighting for it.

KL: So is there anything that other people should be aware of, anything that we should be doing to keep bringing in that support?

TH: Well, the first thing we need to do is to make sure people realize that we're not back to normal. Second thing, we got hit by a category four, that's a big deal. And you know, we have a lot of other states and a lot of other areas but let's not forget this one. So I think the real key is to educate others on the importance of the area, the need's of the area, and to remember us.

KL: Awesome. So is there anything else that you remember about the storm that you want us to know, or anything else that you want to say?

TH: You know, we have one funny story, that shows you the irony of the hurricane. In one of our communities, a liquor store was just collapsed down. But in the front yard were all the liquor bottles, and not one broke. That shows you the funny irony of the storm, building down, bottles okay. Also I think what people need to understand is that as a hurricane, we were wind. We were not flood, so it was the power of the wind. Our damage is different than Houston. Houston was a flood zone. We were a complete hit by wind. A lot of people don't realize that this has a different type of damage. Port Aransas had a huge impact, it was like a giant broom hit them and swept them. Rockport, Fulton, it looked like a bomb blew up. I remember a few days after the storm, I was in Rockport and gas mains were still on.

KL: Oh, no!

TH: And you know, I didn't have power until Wednesday [after the storm]. And one thing, I tell people personally, you've got to remember this is end of August, it is extremely hot. It's in the 90s, there's no air conditioning, no circulation, and 100 percent humidity. When it gets dark, it's pitch black, you still don't have power, you can't turn on anything. So you're using flashlights and you hear outside your house, noises, cars driving around slowly, you don't know if people are scoping out your houses.

KL: Was that a problem after the storm?

TH: I think there were some incidents but I think overall, law enforcement did a pretty good job in neighborhoods, and neighbors on watch did good. But it's still a weird feeling when it's eleven-thirty at night till one thirty in the morning and you're hearing slow driving around and all you've got is a flashlight and a lamp.

KL: Anything else that you want to talk about with this?

TH: One of the interesting things is that we always had the Internet, and Twitter. I will say it was kind of interesting, probably hard to manage for some people, but you would watch and each day electric power was brought back. But what it did was, it made some people happy and some people sad because there's still wasn't on. So you'd get anxious because each day yours was not turning on.

KL: So yours was one of the last?

TH: Yup, so you're one of the last. But you've got to be patient because there are some people that really need it. But what people also need to know is when you have a hurricane like this and the wind, there's no hospitals, your services are shut. We've had some hospitals close down and now we have them that they're back up. So I feel good right now.

KL: Good! Well thank you so much.

TH: Sure!