

I made periodic reports to President Nixon. While I was making one such report at Camp David, he decided to visit the area that same morning. A mad scramble ensued to arrange cars and set a schedule. The president presented a check to a local university, visited a trailer camp and crashed a wedding. He also directed the White House mess staff to organize a picnic for residents the following weekend. This personal touch was a big morale booster.

Earthquake in Alaska Dwight Ink²

On March 27, 1964, the most severe earthquake ever recorded on this continent struck Alaska, lasting about four minutes and registering 9.2 on the Richter scale. Over 50,000 square miles of land either rose or sunk a minimum of five feet. In this area where about two-thirds of Alaskans lived, water and sewer systems were inoperable, many roads and the Alaskan railroad impassable, thousands of homes and business destroyed, and the economy brought to a halt. The mainstay of the economy, fishing, was wiped out as the canneries were ruined, and the fishing boat harbors were either too shallow for the boats to enter or too deep to be protected from the ocean storms.

There were other complications. Inflation, a perennial problem in Alaska, was expected to soar during the reconstruction. The Commission also decided to depart from prior disaster recoveries by adopting a policy under which we would not simply rebuild what existed before, but we would rebuild in a way that would help future development of the state, such as doubling the size of small boat harbors, a change requiring legislation before we could begin.

Our biggest challenge was the short construction season which meant that many key projects had only six months for the required (a) extensive deep soil testing to determine where it would be safe to rebuild, (b) design of new and relocated facilities, and (c) construction. We could find no engineer who believed this could be done in time to avoid large-scale evacuation of people to the lower 48 states before cold weather. These factors required us to develop unprecedented management strategies without which we would have failed. Through their use, our effort did succeed, and four months after the earthquake, the *Anchorage Daily News* headlined its editorial lauding the rebuilding as "Government at Its Best."

The following comments regard management strategies that were especially effective in Alaska:

² President Emeritus and former President, Institute of Public Administration. Former Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, U.S. Agency for International Development; Acting Administrator, U.S. General Services Administration; Director, U.S. Community Services Administration; Assistant Director for Executive Management, U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Assistant General Manager, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission; Assistant Secretary for Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Clear Leadership Role. The complexity of rebuilding, combined with its urgency, requires a clear and strong leadership role for the director. As did Mr. Carlucci, I benefited from the strength that came from a presidential appointment under conditions that enabled me to call upon the head of any agency or Cabinet department, including the Department of Defense.

Several days after the earthquake, President Johnson issued an executive order under which he reconstituted most of his Cabinet, including the secretary of defense, as the Federal Reconstruction and Development Planning Commission for Alaska, chaired by a powerful senator, Senator Clinton Anderson from New Mexico. This was the policy body. The president appointed me as the executive director to direct the rebuilding within the policies established by the Commission. I reported to both President Johnson and Senator Anderson.

A White House assistant to the president, Lee White, helped to ensure that I had White House help whenever I needed it. He also created the illusion that I was close to the President, thereby reinforcing my leverage with agency and department heads. Lee was strictly a communications facilitator, remaining out of sight and seeking no action or policy role. This arrangement placed me in a position to rapidly sort out agency roles, most of which were assigned within ten days after the earthquake struck. For example, I gave the Navy the lead construction role for Kodiak, and the Corps of Engineers the lead role for Anchorage. I also withdrew the leadership of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for restoring the Indian villages when the Bureau did not perform.

Executive-Legislative Linkage. The urgency of rebuilding is such that usual executive-legislative arrangements are generally much too slow moving. Special relationships established between the two branches expedited urgently needed legislation and greatly reduced the congressional need for time-consuming approaches to oversight in Alaska.

Because President Johnson took the unprecedented step of appointing a senator to chair the reconstruction policy body, thereby making him one of my bosses, I had a built-in bridge to Congress. This proved to be invaluable in greatly simplifying the process of dealing with the array of committees having an interest in the rebuilding. Senator Anderson would help get legislative hearings scheduled quickly and votes taken soon after. This linkage was of enormous help in passing urgent legislation during the bitter 1964 Civil Rights Act filibuster.

To further ensure cooperation between the two branches, I had four very capable congressional staff members detailed to my own staff. Although I directed their work, they also kept the key committees informed on a day-to-day basis, greatly increasing the confidence of Congress in our work and strengthening and expediting the effectiveness of the policy chairman. I kept the comptroller general well informed, and GAO staff were free to attend our meetings and had access to documents. The constant flow of information eliminated the congressional need for oversight hearings that would have diverted valuable time from the rebuilding.

Streamlined Operations. Despite the fact that many state and federal agencies were involved in rebuilding—and that we had to contend with large geographic distances—the need for quick decisions, rapid information flows, and unprecedented speed in design and reconstruction demanded simple organizations and a drastic streamlining of critical government processes.

We did not hire permanent staff: All of us were detailed from agencies, and only three were full time. By the end of seven months, the executive director and most part-time detailees had returned to their agencies, the objective of this special commission having been accomplished. Sufficient relocation, design and construction of private and public facilities had been completed to enable Alaskans to remain in their state the following winter. Emergency legislation had been enacted and plans had been developed for further more permanent work to take place the next year, especially those designed to enhance economic development.

In keeping with our determination to keep things simple, even though every major federal and state agency was involved, I issued only one special reconstruction procedure. That was a reporting system under which agency reports from the field offices came simultaneously to me and to whatever agency recipients an agency prescribed. This way, I was kept well informed. By avoiding special clearance and other disaster-related procedures, we avoided another layer of bureaucracy. In fact, our operating strategies streamlined existing processes.

Because of the short construction season, we could not follow the detailed procedures prescribed for many of the actions we took. Largely because of our open policies, and our special linkage with Congress, I received tacit approval from President Johnson and, with Anderson's help, from leaders of the key Committees, that we could suspend any agency procedures that jeopardized our ability to do the necessary construction before cold weather closed many of our operations. I cautioned agencies to use this tool judiciously, and I believe they did. Although we did not track the extent to which this procedural freedom was used, I particularly remember asking agencies to forego public hearings that were time consuming. We had no complaints about eliminating these hearings since the decision meetings were all held in public where any group or individual could register an opinion before decisions were made.

Coordinating Arrangements. Given the involvement of so many agencies from all three levels of government, and because timing was so critical, the need for coordinating interagency and intergovernmental planning and actions was critical. Yet we could not afford to establish the typical type of committees that tend to slow operations and blur accountability. As did Mr. Carlucci in Pennsylvania, I functioned in a hands-on way that reduced the need for special coordinating machinery.

In addition to the Cabinet-level commission, several very simple coordinating arrangements were used to keep each other informed, avoid gaps and duplication and enable agencies to work in concert. In no case did these groups have authority to act or serve as another layer of bureaucracy. No coordinating clearances were required. Each group relied on the individual agency authority or special expertise of their members. It was the responsibility of the executive director to see that they expedited, rather than slowed, reconstruction.

Senator Anderson first established a Scientific and Engineering Task Force, composed of the best geologists and soils engineers in the country, to address the critical problem of where it would be safe to rebuild. No federal assistance was permitted for construction in the red-lined unsafe areas.

The commission authorized me to establish an interagency field committee composed of senior agency staff located in Alaska. An expeditor of action, not another layer of bureaucracy, it promoted cooperation in the field and kept me informed on a daily basis. The commission also authorized me to appoint eight task forces from various agencies to deal with such subjects as economic stabilization, community facilities, housing and transportation. Their reports included both policy recommendations for the commission and some operating suggestions for me, but were primarily concerned with policy issues such as earthquake insurance, low-interest loans, and economic capacity assessments.

Intergovernmental coordination required unprecedented strategies. Flying to each damaged community like an itinerant preacher, I held public meetings in which federal state, and local officials gathered around a huge table to lay out basic reconstruction plans, including agency roles and responsibilities, initial funding estimates and deadlines. We did not develop a federal plan, state plan or local government plan, simply one plan that included roles for all three levels plus the private sector. Any member of the public could speak briefly in these sessions, so the discussions were long, at times into the next morning, but this open approach saved much time in the long run. After about two weeks in Alaska, I would typically return to Washington for a few days of discussion with agency heads and members of Congress. I then would return to each Alaskan community, where we revisited and adjusted the plans.

This new intergovernmental strategy saved an enormous amount of time and slashed the amount paperwork that traditional approaches entailed. It is true that the plans ran roughshod over some of the finer points of agency sensitivities, and I am sure that more time and more analyses would have been desirable. But, the basic construction never would have been completed in time to avoid tens of thousands of Alaskans having to abandon their homes and move to the “lower 48” to find work and shelter.