

JUL 1 2 1972

Organizing for the Disaster Recovery Program

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I had originally argued for relying on our existing machinery for dealing with the current flood recovery effort, without ruling with the possibility of adding to this arrangement later if it proved inadequate. In view of the President's strong interest and commitment, I am now inclined to believe that this machinery is somewhat inadequate.

Despite some obvious differences, the Alaskan experience is emerging as more parallel in a number of respects than I had anticipated. The Alaskan disaster also occurred in an election year, and involved a very wide-range of Federal programs with a heavy emphasis on both speed of reconstruction and innovative approaches. The political push came heavily from the Northwest, particularly Jackson and Magnuson, and from California which also suffered loss of property and life in the Alaskan earthquake that affected a tremendous span of geography. The physical damage was smaller because of the sparse population. Originally estimated at about \$1.5 billion, later estimates successively reduced that amount to around \$.5 billion.

With the thought that the organizational arrangement used in Alaska might be of interest in considering possible supplemental steps for our current undertaking, I will outline the approach used in that disaster:

1. Policy Commission

By Executive Order the President appointed a Cabinet level Commission for the reconstruction and long-range development planning in Alaska. In a very unusual move, Senator Anderson was appointed Chairman in an effort to avoid delays through disagreements between the executive and legislative branches.

This Commission was very useful during the first few weeks when we were developing legislation and setting our basic reconstruction guidelines. For example, this forum was a good one in which to discuss the question of whether we should build back to the standards of pre-earthquake construction or to conform with newer and more expensive standards. It was also useful in the determination to redline hazardous areas in which federal aid would not be permitted. As we moved into the construction phase, there was little need for the Commission.

Although I do not yet regard it as necessary, the President could designate a sub-committee of the Domestic Council to serve a similar role. Although a current counterpart for the Senator Anderson role is inappropriate, the importance of a very close liaison with Congress is essential, and I would suggest that Bill Gifford and Bill Timmons consider what that mechanism should be. Scott possibly regards himself as the mechanism, but this is not adequate.

2. Executive Director

Although sometimes referred to as a "czar", the Executive Director had absolutely no authority over any agency. However, he was appointed by the President, and was regarded as having the support of both the Commission and the President. Therefore, although PR concerning the Executive Director was very low key, he was in a position to generate rapid response from the agencies and to coordinate quickly both the interagency planning and their program execution.

The Executive Director had one professional and two secretaries on the payroll of the Commission. In addition there were 20 people detailed part-time from other agencies. Most of these were physically located in the contributing agencies but were on call to participate in special reports or analyses.

Each member of the field committee sent in weekly reports jointly addressed to the Executive Director and their agency headquarters. These reports gave the status of progress in each community and were supplemented by frequent in-depth visits to Alaska. I divided my time about evenly between directing the rebuilding in Alaska and developing legislation and policy proposals in Washington.

3. Field Committee

The Executive Director appointed a Field Committee which consisted of the principal Alaska based field representatives of the participating agencies. This group included the Governor's coordinator for State reconstruction and development planning. OEP was represented on this field committee as well as the Cabinet level Commission.

4. Task Forces

A group of nine interagency task forces were appointed by the Executive Director. The Transportation Task Force was very effective in developing the overall planning for rebuilding of highways, the Alaskan railroad and airports. The Ports and Fishing Task Force concentrated on rapid restoration of the ports which were the life-blood of the Alaskan economy and were ruined by the earthquake which either lifted the harbors so they were too shallow or dropped the port facilities into the ocean. The Economic Stabilization Task Force, among other things, developed a special system for voluntary wage and price controls which was very effective (but easier to manage in Alaska with a small population).

The Housing Task Force was extremely important, but required extensive supervision. We found it necessary to make a special housing survey because the damage estimates we were receiving from SBA and other sources were very uneven and frequently inflated. The innovative housing legislation was developed in part through this group.

A particularly crucial task force was the Scientific and Engineering group which had the very difficult

task of making extensive soil tests 20-100 feet deep through residential and business areas to determine relative risk of rebuilding in view of the prospect of future earthquakes and tidal waves. We drew from the best scientific expertise available not only in the U.S. but also in Europe and Japan. We did not provide any Federal assistance to those who insisted on rebuilding in high risk areas. One special problem in Alaska was the widespread uncertainty property lines because of uneven shifting of ground.

5. Community Plans

Basic to our modus operandi was the community plan. This was a highly flexible and informal type of plan which included each step the Federal, State and local governments needed to take to respond to the needs of that community. As Executive Director, I would fly from community to community, typically spending a day in each community together with key State and Federal people. We would first make an on-site inspection of the planning and construction progress. We would then sit around the table with the local officials and review as a group where everyone stood in meeting his schedule, both time and dollars. All elements of the rebuilding were planned and executed in concert. These were the plans of each individual community, not something imposed by the Federal government, even though we clearly provided the overall leadership. The meetings were open to the public, and businessmen participated extensively.

This mechanism provided the concepts for much of our present interagency coordinating machinery of today. Because the approach used in Alaska turned out to be very popular, both with Congress and with the people in the affected areas, I thought this rundown might be of interest to you.

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OMSD Chron
OMSD:DAINK:bjs 7/12/72