

December 12, 2006

It is not at all obvious why an earthquake in far-away Alaska many years ago should be of interest to us today as we review the sad story of Katrina. I will provide several of my thoughts:

1. First, the Alaskan recovery was the most complex between the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and Katrina. It involved the most federal agencies and federal programs of any disaster prior to Katrina, presenting an unprecedented interagency and intergovernmental challenge. It occurred in pre-oil Alaska, devastating the limited finances of the state. Unlike Katrina and other hurricanes, there was no advance warning.
2. Second, because of its short construction season, the Alaskan recovery (after the initial provision of food, water, and shelter) was the most urgent of any disaster in our history.
3. Third, unlike Katrina, the federal government's Alaskan effort overcame the difficult obstacles it faced, and was quickly regarded as a great success. See the two testimonials.
4. Many innovative management strategies contributed to the Alaskan success, some of which could be adapted, not adopted, in future major disasters requiring a strong federal leadership role. Other Alaskan innovations should at least stimulate future leaders to think more outside the box. Disaster recoveries are no place for business as usual. Unprecedented Alaskan strategies include:
 - a. Presidential action. President Johnson quickly established a cabinet-level commission chaired by a powerful senator, Anderson, an unprecedented action. Other presidents are unlikely to make the same arrangement, but Alaska illustrates better than any other recovery the importance of a president taking immediate presidential action of some sort to demonstrate the depth of his/her concern and the priority that needs to be given to rapid recovery.
 - b. Streamlining of agency processes. The current trend of DHS and the federal planning is toward more complex structural and procedural arrangements for major disasters. Alaska took the opposite approach. We secured presidential and Congressional support for drastically streamlining agency processes, resulting in great savings in time and cost of most recovery operations.
 - c. Transparency. All operational decisions were made in public with state and local involvement, and open to public questions and opinions. This openness, combined with special linkages with Congress, provided the executive director and his staff with an unusual degree of management freedom, greatly expediting the recovery.
 - d. Congressional Linkage. In addition to the special role of Senator Anderson, four Congressional engineers, previously detailed from NASA

and the Corps of Engineers, were detailed to me as Executive Director. This constant flow of information to Congress eliminated the need for oversight hearings or other inquiries.

- e. Intergovernmental Arrangements. Our unprecedented intergovernmental arrangements, fostered very close cooperation, and saved an enormous amount of time and money.
- f. Oversight. Within 24 hours of my appointment, I asked the comptroller general to immediately assign staff to follow our work and flag for me emerging problems so that I could correct them before they became serious. GAO had complete access to my files, and was welcome to attend my staff meetings. This was another source of a continuous flow of information to Congress, further increasing Congressional confidence in our work. An interesting aspect of this was the fact that although Congress learned immediately of our setbacks, they also learned of our immediate remedial actions, eliminating any need for inquiries and the time required for us to respond and explain.
- g. Access to President. The Director must have access to the President, even though he will want to use this access sparingly in view of all the burdens a president has. In my case, although I had whatever access I needed, I actually needed very little. The White House staff created the illusion I had more contact with the president than I did.
- h. Career Role. I drew upon political appointees for development of recovery policies such as low-interest loans, special insurance, tax alleviation, etc; but I used only career professionals for operational roles, unlike DHS. The same was true of Frank Carlucci when he later handled the Pennsylvania recovery from Hurricane Agnes.

This is not a complete listing, but I hope these items will illustrate why I believe it is worth looking at management strategies used in Alaska, even though the disaster occurred some years ago, and it was not as large as Katrina. I do not suggest adopting our Alaska strategies, but I am convinced that some adaptation of them could save time and money in addressing future disasters or terrorist attacks of a catastrophic nature. By the way, I have been very well served by adapting these same strategies in a variety of assignments for seven U.S. presidents over the years.

I would be happy to meet with Committee members of staff, and would be delighted to testify at any hearings.

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