

The Red Tape Was Cut

I first learned of the Good Friday tragedy on the car radio as I drove home from the Atomic Energy Commission, preoccupied with plans for producing cheaper electricity through atomic energy. A few days following the earthquake, Frank DiLuzio, the energetic assistant to chairman Anderson, alerted me to the surprising news that the senator might recommend to the President my designation as executive director of the Federal Reconstruction Commission for Alaska (which became known in Alaska as the Anderson Commission).

Several days before my letter of appointment from President Johnson arrived, Senator Anderson had me working full time on Alaska and his anxiety to move forward rapidly, Frank DiLuzio, and Harold Seidman of the Bureau of the Budget, had already developed with the chairman a broad outline of the way in which the commission would function.

Although my recollection of the first several weeks is filled with many people to be seen, deadlines to be set, and scores of jobs to be done immediately, my assignment was essentially two-fold. First, there was the need to recommend to the commission legislation and other steps to be taken by the federal government to help Alaska rebuild; and, second, the task of planning the effective execution of approved programs in close cooperation with the state of Alaska.

IN CARRYING out this assignment, my instructions

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from Senator Anderson were quite direct:

1. Our plans should provide for priority reconstruction work moving as fast as possible, particularly in those areas affecting the public health and safety.
2. Wherever existing programs or procedures were inadequate, new ones were to be proposed without delay.
3. The Federal efforts, although on a large scale, were to be sound and responsible from a fiscal standpoint.
4. Inflation was to be avoided.
5. The Commission's staff was to be extremely small.

With so many agencies involved and the construction season so short, it soon became apparent that in addition to recommending legislation and preparing coordinated reconstruction plans, considerable Commission effort would have to be devoted to making sure these plans were carried out rapidly. At the same time, we recognized the importance of better understanding the geology of certain areas before agreeing that Federal assistance could be given to rebuilding.

DURING MY FIRST visit to

the damaged communities, I was distressed by the plight of many homeowners and shocked by the extent to which the vital waterfront areas were devastated. Above all, I was deeply impressed by the courage of Alaskans and their determination to rebuild no matter how serious the damage. Most vivid in my memory is the flight we made in a snow storm to stricken Valdez with Governor Egan, a trip which resulted in the tragic loss of Adjutant General Carroll and a fine plane crew. That was the night the still dazed community of Valdez expressed a strong desire to move to a safer location and build a better town. When we completed our discussions toward dawn, I had begun to understand how people with a frontier spirit strive to surmount severe hardships.

In keeping with Chairman Anderson's admonition, we only placed on the commission payroll several secretaries and one very resourceful man, Bill Averill, who did a tremendous job for us. A number of people from other agencies were drawn upon for a few weeks or on a part time basis. David Finnegan, from the Department of Interior, for example, provided excellent legal counsel for us. Two very able en-

gineers, Colonels Penly and Tufts, were on loan full time from the Department of Defense and the Senate Space Committee. Burke Riley from the Department of Interior provided invaluable help as head of our field committee, composed of people in Alaska representing agencies involved in reconstruction.

NINE inter-agency task forces were designated to deal with major areas of activity such as transportation, ports and fisheries, and finance. Best known to Alaskans was the embattled Task Force 9, whose members demonstrated both courage and a high degree of technical integrity in recommending the unpopular red lined "high risk" areas in which Federal loans were withheld pending extensive soil studies.

No red tape was tolerated in our operation. Except for the necessary reporting of physical progress and dollar commitments, no procedures were established. We dealt with all levels within the agencies and quickly sorted out those individuals who could produce. Progress reports from the field were sent directly to our office simultaneously with their going to the affected agencies, since time did not permit information filtering up to us through normal governmental channels.

Considerable attention was directed toward close cooperation with Governor Egan and his staff. One of our offices was made available to Attorney General George N. Hayes, who had free access to our files and participated in many of our staff conferences and Commission meetings. Our work was made much easier by Governor Egan's later appointment of Joe Fitzgerald as state coordinator. Alaska was indeed fortunate to have this man of broad perspective who approached difficult problems in such a practical way.

THE PERFORMANCE of the press and radio impressed me greatly. To help them as much as possible, it was the policy of Chairman Anderson to keep the public currently informed both of our problems and our progress. Though we had time to draft press releases, we did meet frequently with the press and each week Chairman Anderson released to the press our "internal" progress reports, which also went to the President.

Everyone in Alaska was most helpful. Both in Washington and in Alaska Senator Bartlett gave us excellent advice, and the very dedicated Governor Egan worked tirelessly on behalf of reconstruction. Through the wholehearted cooperation of business and labor, for example, ruinous inflation was averted. Businessmen, such as Elmer Ras-muson, provided many constructive suggestions and local government officials made themselves available to help at

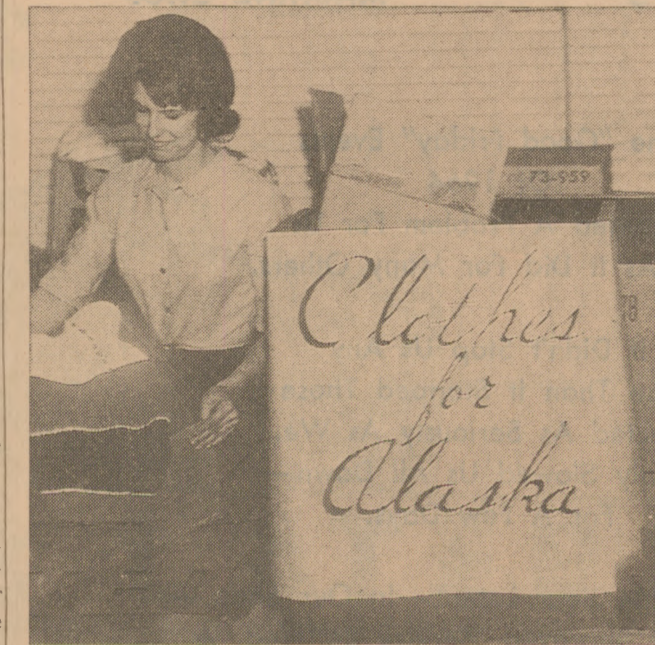


any hour. In the smaller communities, it was our practice to meet around the table with Federal, state and local officials to agree on plans and schedules, identify the principal problems, and make assignments for taking corrective action.

The Office of Emergency Planning, under Ed McDermott; Corps of Engineers, under Generals Lapsley and Wilson; and the Alaska Railroad, under John Manley; all did very fine work in helping to restore public facilities. I should like to particularly single out the effective role of Gene Foley, head of SBA, in helping restore the private sector.

THROUGHOUT our six months' effort, I was amazed at the amount of personal attention a very busy Senator Anderson was able to devote to each step of the reconstruction program. His leadership, together with the wide respect

with which he is held both most important single factor within the Executive Branch in our ability to develop a program and on Capitol Hill, was the gram of federal help which



HELP FOR ALASKA, Texas high school students were among many who responded to the emergency.

JOE FITZGERALD, left, director of the Alaska state reconstruction committee, receives handshake from Edward McDermott, formerly head of the office of emergency planning. Senator Anderson is second from left. Next to him is Senator E. L. Bartlett of Alaska and at right, Rep. Ralph J. Rivers, Alaska.

goes well beyond that ever provided in other disasters. Furthermore, President Johnson has maintained a strong personal interest in the progress of Alaskan recovery.

The initial objectives of Alaskan reconstruction have been met. Much remains to be done in carrying out the longer range plans, but I believe the progress during the first year following the earthquake has demonstrated the interest of the rest of the nation in maintaining a strong Alaska and has proven anew the determination of the Alaskan people.



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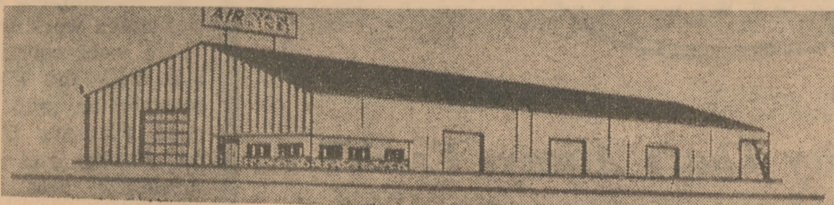
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