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Western States Seismic Policy Council:

“Overcoming Obstacles to Actionable Governmental Policy”

Thank you and good afternoon. We spend a fair amount of time attempting to gain the attention of decision makers in an effort to get them to do the right thing. This, today, is more than an academic discussion: it’s about saving lives and preserving our economy.

In the last couple of months since my retirement as state EMD Director, I have reflected a bit on the challenges that I experienced trying to transform the excellent research and the knowledge and expertise of so many involved in the pursuit of seismic safety into responsible and sustained action by government.

Later on, the other speakers will provide some very solid recommendations regarding how to approach lawmakers and people in

key decision roles. And if those you approach are prepared to listen, and take action, then their recommendations to you today will be pertinent. Listen to them very carefully.

At the state and local level, though, I will urge you to abandon the posture of a petitioner in approaching government decision makers. And that is because it is important at the local and state - level to convey both urgency and self interest in trying bring about what are essentially lifesaving, economically necessary policies.

Often, senior officials, and/or their staff resist doing something that is difficult even if it is the right thing to do. It's easy, within the government itself, to become impatient and cynical over the goat rope that is the decision making process for senior elected officials.

I can empathize with the frustrations of those in academia and the professional private sector world with all of us in government- but where the corporate world worries about cost accountants and risk managers and marketing teams' getting in the way of good ideas, for us in government it can be policy analysts, chiefs of staff, or senior appointed officials. More often than not, it is **not** the elected office holder, him or herself. It's that protective layer that surrounds, or encases the elected leadership that prevents or inhibits internal dialogue, and advanced decision making. Access to the leader is jealously guarded by these gatekeepers. At the beginning of an Administration, uncomfortable proposals are met with "maybe second term" – often this morphs into "not now". And, sometimes there is only silence from the executive office. And a disapproving silence can be chilling.

Recently one of my adult children introduced me to “ANGRY BIRD” – a computer game where the target is encased in a defensive position while attempts to break through are often frustrated by the defenses around the target. It reminds me of a number of my attempts to score a penetrating hit on the awareness of political leaders; and perhaps even awaken that leader’s social conscience.

Most leaders do care about doing the right thing – I’m reminded of an elected official in a vulnerable political position being confronted with a disaster impact for which costs and political liability could only soar- the initial response was to say “I didn’t need this” but it was quickly followed by the assertion “well, neither did the victims!” And then the proper decisions were made. While the need to act in a crisis is fairly evident, policy changes and new directions are not always clear cut.

In the case of planning and preparing to mitigate, respond and recover from an earthquake or tsunami it is essential that we emphasize the importance of prompt, uninterrupted action without the impetus a crisis brings. And we will need a thoughtful approach and the will to see it through to the end.

The gatekeepers and those who control legislative agendas and budgets, and those who control media attention will say “not now” – their definition of an “imminent problem” is different from ours, and perhaps emergency managers have a tendency not to push back as hard as we might.

When I retired just two months ago, two very significant initiatives requiring policy and budget investment were paramount. These were the need for public/private investment in vertical evacuation on the west coast of Washington, and the criticality of establishing in advance

of a devastating earthquake, a management structure for post disaster redevelopment of the economy and social equilibrium of the state.

These initiatives are at the core of the survival of our economy, and more importantly the survival of people who could be in harm's way.

All four elements of emergency management are in play: mitigation, preparedness and response are served by constructing high ground sites that allow people to get to safety within the few minutes they might have following a subduction zone quake off of our coast.

Recovery or restoration allows communities to resume some semblance of post-event normalcy.

Despite a relentless, budget- constrained period during which the Emergency Management Division bore the largest share of State General Fund budget cuts within the Military Department, we launched planning initiatives aimed at these two problems: and while we received minimal encouragement, at least, no one stopped us.

As a result, two vertical evacuation projects are proceeding toward completion in the near term. These include improvements to an elementary school in Westport that will also serve as a shelter. ***On April 23 voters approved the Westport project, the first of its kind in the US, I understand.***

Another is a vertical evacuation berm adjacent to Long Beach Elementary School in the City of Long Beach. The Long Beach project proposal is undergoing cost/benefit analysis now and will then proceed to FEMA for final approval. Preliminary cost/benefit analysis for the Long Beach berm suggests a 30 to 1 return on investment. That seems like a great deal.

I'm really proud that during my stewardship at the state, and with the dedicated leadership of John Schelling (Washington State EMD's Earthquake/Tsunami Program Manager) and some very savvy local leaders and state and federal colleagues, these projects moved forward. We made Hazard Mitigation Grant program funds available to communities for pilot projects like Long Beach. And we contributed the site specific tsunami inundation modeling for these locations to assist architects and engineers to develop the best designs at the best possible cost.

These activities are tangible results from a process we began years ago, when I decided that on my watch, I would not accept the proposition that policy and budget actions could not be altered until after a catastrophe occurred.

The shroud that protects the government's decision making power source is not an impenetrable barrier, and these two successful projects suggest that rather than wring our hands and curse the darkness we should light some candles, and we have done so in Westport and Long Beach. The results in those two communities can light the way forward to the rest of our state and its leaders, that we should not be leery of engaging seemingly unsolvable problems – with apologies to Senator Al Franken: his former SNL character, Stuart Smalley might say “Look in the mirror, Washington State -we're good enough, we're smart enough, and doggone it – people like us –when we lead.”

We could not have accomplished the coastal initiatives without the full engagement of local officials and the public. A key part of obtaining the necessary support at the local level is a frank, open, public discussion of the risks, the options, and the benefits of confronting the problem.

When we began, we did not know how we would find the resources to do what we have done so far in Westport and Long Beach.

With regard to restoration, that subduction zone quake that we all dread will do damage in many other places, leaving not only our state's social fabric in disarray but having an impact on other states in terms of their economic health and well-being . If we are to recover, if we are to survive with much of our essence intact, we need to plan for that now.

Let's consider: all reconstruction and recovery tasks will have to occur rapidly, and almost simultaneously. Transportation, Communications, commerce, education, rebuilding and reoccupying essential areas – none of these can wait in line for the other to be fixed. They are interconnected.

The seeds of **EMD's** Washington restoration initiative were sewn in May 2006, when a post Katrina after action conference was held in New Orleans. I invited representatives from several state agencies to accompany me and several of my Emergency Management staff to that conference, and we were allowed to tour St. Bernard's Parish.

Shockingly, it looked like Katrina had happened mere days before and not 8 months prior. Departments were wrangling over who got the proceeds from the scrap from rusted out vehicles and ships that were lying around the road- schools had not reopened and the teachers had left. The permanent parish population of 68,000 pre Katrina was estimated to be down to 6000.

Rebuilding and reoccupying was tied up in bureaucratic process. Governments, local, state and federal, all pointed fingers at each other.

We also visited Jackson, Mississippi. There we found a coordinated, bipartisan effort to try to rebuild. The strong, effective leadership of their Governor had emerged following the storms.

This tale of two states seemed to strike a chord with all of us, and particularly with me and my staff. Our Governor at the time, and one would think any Governor, would have preferred the Mississippi scenario to Louisiana's. When we returned we began planning, although once more without any new resources, to accelerate our efforts to construct a workable restoration model for Washington State.

By 2009 we had roughed out a structure that seemed to hold promise. We actually used a limited form of our proposed state government recovery process following significant floods in SW Washington in 2009.

While we demonstrated that a myriad of state agencies focusing on combined state-only missions could provide some far-reaching benefits to affected communities, it was in the end limited to a state centric recovery emphasis. The broader, larger community restoration concept was still not receiving the necessary attention and support from state decision makers. To be fair, that period in 2009 was the early stage of the worst national financial crisis of our lifetimes, and there were other important budget issues at stake that demanded the full focus of government. So, it was "not now" again.

We decided to focus on those tasks that were within our power to manage. With John Schelling's leadership, we revitalized the Seismic Safety Committee to include academic, private sector and public sector subject matter experts. That committee piloted a survey of school building vulnerability in two state school districts that yielded valuable

data for the consideration of their respective school boards. And in 2012 we published a **Resilient Washington** report with 10 major recommendations that have been presented to the new Governor and his gatekeepers. The new administration appears to have welcomed that report.

From 2006-2013 we also developed and cultivated some of the most sophisticated relationships and interactions with private industry anywhere in the country – **not for show**, but so that we could interact as needed before, during and after a disaster. How do you recover without a tight link to 85% of your state's economy?

The answer is - you don't. The private sector outreach and interaction places industry representatives in our EOC on a routine basis when we activated, and allows for 2 way dialogue on a daily basis between industry and emergency management. These exchanges provide a regular opportunity for cross sector collaboration on many issues.

Why have we emphasized vertical evacuation and restoration planning when speaking to decision makers? Because if we can anticipate the events that might happen following a devastating earthquake - and we can, and thus be aware that there are both immediate and long term measures that need to be taken, then we can build an incontrovertible case for both vertical evacuation to save lives and long term post disaster recovery to restore our communities and our state. And decision makers should get behind that for either moral or politically expedient reasons.

Applying a sense of urgency to these two enterprises is tricky, because those gatekeepers believe they already see clearly where their urgent challenges exist - in the legislature, in the Congress, with labor and the

media, etc. In short, they'll deal with a crisis when it confronts them, and thus far they have failed to grasp or even consider that we may be in the preliminary stages of our next disaster. If we are to persuade them to share our vision of what needs to happen, we need to understand their reluctance to peek around the corner because their eyes are fixed on the immediate path ahead.

In Washington State, we have done in advance, without a great deal of high level support, the hard, largely unsung planning and organizing work so there would be a sound basis for the hard, unyielding charge that needs to occur going forward. But, with all of that effort to date, we still have to demonstrate to a wider audience –elected officials – the media –and their respective gatekeepers - the types of post disaster challenges we might have to face if we are going to have them sign up for the difficult choices – and by that I mean investments- that the pursuit of seismic safety will require.

We always have discussed immediate protective measures with citizens in training and in exercises. The need to seek high ground on the coast led to our focus on *creating* high ground where none exists – hence vertical evacuation sites. And in the 2012 Evergreen Exercise Series we illuminated the challenges of recovery and the necessity for planning for the enormous task of restoring the economy and the social fabric of our communities and state. The impact of a successful and prompt restoration of our state will be felt wherever the state does business.

The 2012 Evergreen Quake Exercise Series highlighted those restoration issues that we would have to confront 30 days/180 days

after that catastrophic event that could occur at any time. As I said to our former Governor at a public forum she held last summer:

*“I know what you will do following a major earthquake, because every one of your fellow governors has done this following a major disaster. You’ll appoint someone you trust to lead the recovery effort; you’ll plead with Congress to release funds and to set aside the politics of demanding offsets in order to provide immediate relief (**a somewhat prophetic observation, given New Jersey Gov. Christie’s experience months later**) . . . If delays in needed support persist, the press and the people will become upset: the nearest elected targets will be the governor, the mayor, county executive - criticism will grow-worse, the confidence of our people in their government’s capability will erode quickly.”*

Even though Mississippi had the right idea after Katrina, it still took almost **three years** before they had the requisite organization and legal authorities in place. They urged us to stay on our proposed path of designing, **in advance**, the restoration structure that **we** want to have in place; to select the leaders the governor would feel comfortable assigning to head that effort; and then practice through exercises the process of grappling with issues as they arise. If additional legislative authority is necessary, for example, ask the legislative stakeholders who should be part of any restoration planning group to help you get that authority.

Doing restoration planning, or assessing the financial and social requirements of developing vertical evacuation sites in our coastal areas, requires policy changes, and that requires a concerted, coordinated push from government, the private sector, and the

academic/scientific sector. A Governor, no matter how enlightened and savvy, needs political cover for a bold and very likely expensive initiative.

But the public is way ahead of the government on many issues, including this one. Now is the time to share with them some complex problems that we might face - before we have to face them for real. And we need to ask questions of them, and consider their answers. For example:

Are they determined to be rebuilt wherever they were before, regardless of cost to the rest of us?

Some other questions worth exploring in plain sight:

What are their expectations of all levels of government?

What expectations can the government properly have of its citizens- certainly membership has obligations as well as rights.

What can the private industry provide? What will they need?

What will constitute an acceptable restoration, or post disaster redevelopment effort? Will we allow the federal government to determine when we have sufficiently recovered? Or is that our call?

There is no end of significant questions we could pose.

The key, unused player in the restoration dialogue is the public itself. We forget to include them at our peril.

After 9/11 and the World Trade Center attacks and the subsequent anthrax incidents, no one had to be convinced that there were bad people out to hurt us as a nation. But, in throwing money at a

recognized problem, our leaders in Washington, DC failed the nation by neglecting to analyze what was broken in our protective capability. The reaction to the attacks threw priorities out of balance with other hazards that were also not only possible, but likely. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated the folly of the Department of Homeland Security's single minded emphasis on just one threat – terrorism - between 2001 and 2005 at the expense of more frequent and predictable hazards.

Now, there remain threats to the security of our homeland, be they cyber or what we have sadly just seen in Boston. Terrorism still merits attention but not to the exclusion of seismic hazards.

Seismic security advocates can learn from Homeland Security's error: we must include the American public on our team, trusting them with information about their threats, risks, hazards and the strategy for addressing same with respect to seismic threats. Homeland security never has done that very well. We can.

There is a chance, and there may be time, to communicate policy and budget requirements to effect change before Nature nails our coast, or cities or our heartland.

Earthquakes DO NOT occur without warning. Anyone paying attention to Thailand or Japan or other seismic events has been sufficiently warned, or should have been.

I believe that one way or the other we must capture the attention of those who are the gatekeepers for elected and appointed executive leaders, and dare them, if necessary, to go on record as understanding

the threat and supporting measures to meet it. They have to feel compelled to say to their principal: “we cannot ignore this.”

The clock is ticking: is anyone here confident that we can afford to wait any longer to propel this discussion into the policy councils of cities, counties and states? And let’s not forget the living rooms and the boardrooms in our communities while we are at it.

In Long Beach and Westport Washington we’ve done what we can do with limited resources – it should serve as a beacon for actionable government budget proposals coupled with private initiative. We must insist that the seismic threats to our region be addressed in a comprehensive way, and with a sense of urgency. Our leaders need to explain how **they** will remove obstacles to action, and if they try we need to give them the support they will need to stay the course.

Those “outside” of government can be tremendously helpful to our friends within government. Working together, we can convey and sustain the sense of urgency that is required for action.

Listen carefully to the “how to’s” today, but remember this:

To some extent we can work around the inattention of political leadership, as the examples in Westport and Long Beach attest; but, ultimately we **will** need their support. In the end an unavoidable appeal for action must come from all sectors, and in the process we need to “clue in” the American people to the urgency of the situation.

When we opened the Recovery conference as part of our 2012 Evergreen Quake Exercise Series last October, I said this:

“We know our hazards. What we don’t know is when the ground under us will start to move in a destructive manner, ushering in a whole set of challenging circumstance- changing our lives personally and professionally and testing the public’s faith in us profoundly.

We don’t know when that will happen, only that it most assuredly will happen to us, our children or grandchildren. You can bet that someone will ask leaders then – what did you know, when did you know it and what did you do about it?

So, our question to our leaders and the gatekeepers must be: knowing what we know, and what is at stake, when can we expect action on this matter?

“Not now” won’t be the right answer.

Thank you.

