

From the Desk of
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Governor John A. Kitzhaber, MD
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
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Governor Kitzhaber:

A month ago I sent you a request for action regarding statewide resilience. Since then, a productive dialogue regarding our disaster preparedness has begun in earnest. Fortunately, we are now far enough removed from the media frenzy associated with the earthquakes and tsunamis that wrecked havoc upon Japan to have perspective, but close enough in time to remember the destruction and loss. All of us remain aware and concerned about the ongoing challenges confronting those seeking to stabilize the Fukushima Nuclear Reactor/s. It is time to pause and reflect, for we are now better able to provide a cold-eyed assessment of our circumstances:

- Though it could have been different, Oregon suffered relatively minor damage.
- Few Oregonians suffered significant economic, emotional, and/or physical harm/hardship.
- Most people have refocused on more immediate concerns associated with family, taxes, or work.
- And yet, our preparedness/resilience – our reality – is not much different than it was the morning of the beginning of the tragedy in Japan.

As you know, I proposed several recommendations in the March 17, 2011 letter. Admittedly (and unapologetically), those policy concepts were offered knowing that either general funds and/or bond authority would be required for successful development and implementation. I steadfastly support those recommendations and believe they reflect a shared consensus within the emergency management community. Sadly, it is obvious that our budgetary circumstances will constrain our actions. We cannot implement, at least in the near-term, the capabilities Oregonians deserve.

That said, the first recommendation, "*...Establish, fund, and sustain a "Be Ready Oregon" private/public partnership*" based upon the undeniably successful program in Utah requires neither general funds nor bond authority. With a structural realignment within the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and reprioritization of resources sufficient funding is available within administered federal programs to initiate this partnership.

To this point, existing political dynamics have constrained OEM from realizing available funds. In simplest terms, the State of Oregon has been subsidizing local programming because of organizational fiefdoms and legacy allocation agreements we cannot afford. I am appealing to your call to arms for rational reform and reconstruction of the structures and systems of government to replace what we currently have in the field of emergency management, with what we need.

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In his brief tenure as OEM Director, Brigadier General Mike Caldwell and his team have identified critical weaknesses, developed strategic and tactical requirements, and have set about the hard work of rebuilding trust within the emergency management community. A decade of disinvestment along with a philosophy of reactive, rather than proactive, communication, coordination, and outreach created a schism within the emergency management community.

This divide is especially prevalent among the private sector. Since 2001, OEM has been hampered with too few staff, too many full-spectrum responsibilities. Former Director Murphy did the best he could under difficult circumstances, but OEM has never been resourced at the levels required for its mission. As a result, outreach lagged and relationships crumbled. Though TOP-OFF IV and the 2007 Hurricane taught valuable lessons, we could not maximize the opportunities from those experiences. We could not provide follow up; we could not foster the lasting relationships so vital during and after catastrophe. Therefore, the next step in refilling the reservoir of trust - with our private sector partners - is to formalize the relationship - and empower OEM to staff this priority accordingly.

In concept, the program would function as a coordination nexus. The small full-time staff would support workgroups organized in compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and aligned by Emergency Support Function (ESF). Workgroups would outreach to potential partners and target priorities within specific functional requirements. Staff would be assigned to support the executive workgroup, priority efforts, and serve as a resource for outreach for non-profit, private, and public organizations with equipment, people, and resources identified through a strategic planning effort.

Partnership staff would also function as support for a revitalized Oregon Homeland Security Council; this linkage would ensure a coordinated approach for statewide emergency protocols. I further recommend that the Partnership Coordinator answer directly to the OEM Director and function as a second Deputy. Charged with support for the executive workgroup (which, if modeled after Utah would include the Secretary of State and possibly the State Treasurer), it is vital that the coordinator be recognized as a senior leader within the OEM structure to secure sustained interest and organizational support among potential partners (both private and public).

Over the past decade Oregon has too often made decisions based upon the needs of the moment. While this approach is often believed to be more politically advantageous for decision-makers, in the end it is a roadmap for failure and an unwarranted risk given the world we know. Oregon will experience a catastrophic seismic event – there is no "if" – only a "when." We can develop, implement, and sustain a partnership for success, or wait and experience failure during the disaster we know will come. We pay some now, or more - far more - later.

This proposal requires no general funds. It requires no authority for bonds. It would end legacy arrangements that outlasted their initial purpose, and strengthen the ability of the State of Oregon to coordinate disaster mitigation, response, and recovery programs. In the end, this proposal requires little more than an agreement between the Executive and Legislative Branches of government to collaborate on making this program a priority and a commitment to working together to move this partnership forward.

Thank you for considering this recommendation. If you desire additional information on this or other matters, please contact me at 503.949.6378 or Paul@Paulevans.org.

Sincerely,



Paul L. Evans
Member, Oregon Homeland Security Council (2007-2011)