



## **Presentation by Steve Cernak**

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*Readiness for Recovery: Galveston Recovery Model*

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### **Cernak**

Thank you. I'm going to start with some basic comments. It's true I'm here to talk about what the role of the Port of Galveston was in a potential recovery effort. But there were some lessons learned during the Rita evacuation and bringing the Port back online. And, but before I go there, some basic comments are in order.

There are 361 public ports in this country of which there are approximately half that are deep water; what I would call deep water ports on the coastline. And what I would say here could apply to any one of them at any given point in time. And while I'm saying this, it's also important to keep in mind that no two ports are alike. We all have different governance structures. Different financing mechanisms. We all operate slightly differently, handle different commodities. Generally speaking, though, we're all economic development engines for our community. And they look for; look to us to generate jobs.

Now, there was a comment made earlier, I believe, by the Judge that, you know, it's all about managing expectations. I would; that's true, but I would like to say that it's also about leadership. Now, I had a different perspective going into Rita. I had a chance a few weeks earlier to go into New Orleans. Literally, a day after the last resident was rescued from the Convention Center, I was there. I was bringing some supplies into my counterpart at the Port of New Orleans. I had a chance to talk with him. I had a chance to look around and see firsthand what they were going through. And it was rather sobering and rather eye opening.

So as I was getting ready to have to deal with what didn't look too good for the City of Galveston, at least at the time that I went through the steps to shut the Port down, at least I; you know, I had a little guidance from him. But there's one thing about that visit that I remember. And I was just as guilty as he was. We all went through our exercises of hurricane preparedness planning. And we all published these really nice books that we all have bound and we keep on the shelf so when it comes time we can pull it out and refer to it. And what I remember him looking at me, he said, I thought; "I was so proud of this when I did this. I thought it was the greatest thing that we had ever done." And he said, "This is all it was worth." And he just tossed it in the garbage in front of me.

And I came back from that I started talking to staff. I said, you know, we've got to review this, we've got to do this. So that process was already underway when Rita showed itself on the weather screens. And it, you know, it was one of these things where I had to sort of design it as I went along. Now, when it; when I saw

that weather map and I saw the potential tracks it was probably four or five days before the evacuation was ordered by the Mayor.

I went to my staff, and I said, "Let's shut it down." And if you can see the debate that I had with my staff, "Oh, Steve, it's not going to happen. It's not going to come anywhere near Galveston. It's going to bypass us like it always does." And I had to negotiate with my staff. And finally I just said, "No, amuse me. It's time we practice."

Now, what I remember the most about that was, we had it done fairly quick. Everything; **we have to look for projectiles**; we have to make sure **we can reopen**. We want to make sure that the **Port is not damaged**. So if something happens we can come back and be the first lifeline for the community. When the evacuation was ordered and I took a look around the Port and I saw that everything was in order, and I could go to the staff now, "Okay. Now you can go home and take care of your houses and your families and get out of here." I think they had a different perspective on my order to shut the Port down a little prematurely. And I think that that was a lesson learned for all of them.

But one thing I learned was **communication was one of the biggest problems** we had and we're still working on that today. Cell phones certainly weren't working afterwards. I had heard the stories from New Orleans about how they communicated. I knew there was a big problem there.

And looking at the military, if something really bad happened and the military had to bring supplies in, they would bring it in by; most likely by water and most likely we'd have to use the Port facilities to do that. Much like I was delivering supplies to New Orleans, when I evacuated I stayed relatively close by. I didn't go as far as anybody; everybody else did. But I found that other ports were helpful.

Once Corpus Christi was sure that they were out of harm's way, they actually sent their police up to me. And I was in Houston. And brought satellite phones. They; you know, so we tend to help each other as this all goes through. But it led to a **bigger dialog with all the neighboring ports in the area, how we would work cooperatively**.

And I think that we're making strides in that area but we certainly have a long way to go. But what's involved, really, from me in the role of shutting the Port down? Now what were the steps that we had to go through? Who did we have to interface with? And what are we faced with really when we're reopening because that's something we all have to keep in mind.

Post-Katrina there were four cruise ships out in the Gulf. They were all circling around looking for a place to come and discharge those passengers. So there were about 12,000 people out there just going in circles out in the Gulf wondering what happened. Two of the ships were from New Orleans. Two of them from; were from Galveston. And we had to step up to the plate and take the **role as the point of disembarkation for the people that had to get**; that didn't know what was happening to the; to their property in New Orleans, whether it be a car, a home or in their region. So we had to pick up that role.

And then there was the role of how do we **house people that are displaced?** Which led to the discussions where they were actually going to put the two New Orleans cruise ships in Galveston. We were going to berth them and provide basically a floating hotel.

But what they didn't contemplate was that the people that had spent all that time trying to escape the water wanted no part of living anywhere near the water at that moment. So ultimately they went back and they housed the emergency workers in New Orleans. And that's probably the role for the cruise ship, much like I heard earlier. But who do I have to interface with? All the negotiations. I had a daughter that was in Tulane. Here am I dealing with her displacement, getting her set up and I'm on the cell phone while my wife's taking care of it, negotiating with all the federal agents on how we're going to handle the cruise ships.

So FEMA was involved, FAA was involved, the Maritime Administration, TSA, the Security Administration was involved, the Coast Guard, the Corps of Engineers and the list goes on. And my role certainly through that period was to act as the interface to all these agencies and to the outside world. I had to provide the information. I didn't know where my staff was necessarily.

We'd heard all the horrors of how everybody evacuated and they were hours on the road. So it was one of those things where I had certain key staff that remained on the island. Predominantly my police officers on the police force and we were able to communicate and keep things moving. But certainly there's a lot more to be done. I think the community here would look to the port of the; if a disaster were to hit us here to be a point of first recovery.

They want us to preserve or protect the public health and safety of the residents for both the Port property and adjacent property owners. But we also have to have a way of recovering and rebuilding and coming up to operation real quick.

As I learned post-Rita, I had to deal with the, with the Coast Guard. They had to give an all clear on the channel. The Army Corps of Engineers had to do a survey of the channel. They wanted to **make sure that nothing blew into the channel for obstruction**. Certainly, that's all related to what we do in advance, though.

We have to make sure we **secure everything; the container cranes** that are at Pier 10, for example. If they were not fastened and secured, if we had a high wind situation they could blow into the channel and that would hinder our operations. And when I go through the list here, because I've taken; what I'm speaking from, I've taken a manual that's floating around on how we should handle these things. And I started looking at all the elements of what we have to do and; as we prepare for this. I mean, you have the cranes. But we have lots of other equipment around the, around the Port property. It's an industrial operation. Lighting, security cameras, you know, that was something new to us. What do we do?

We wound up going around and **we took all the security cameras down**. We went back to our **old way of manual patrols through this area**. The island was evacuated. We knew that we could keep an eye on it that way. But the **last thing**

**we wanted was all these high tech cameras becoming missiles**, around the community and doing other damage.

But really it came down to just, you know, establishing our communications, having good housekeeping practices, securing all of our equipment because; and it went beyond that. I started thinking I had to **secure railroad cars**. I had to make sure all railroad cars were removed from the island. It went beyond my normal purview here that I had to make sure that everything was okay.

And then we had to provide **safe haven for smaller vessels**. So we would do that; construction equipment. Actually, the causeway construction equipment was all housed in the Port facilities. We put them into some of the slips and they put barges across the faces of the slips to keep them from breaking loose. And so we had a role in the community of that role. We had to protect those types of things.

Generally speaking the big; and the last thing that I didn't contemplate was this whole security issue. Not only were we securing from a hurricane; now we were shutting down our primary mechanism for security in the post-9/11 world.

**And in order to reopen we had to ensure that we had facilities that remained secure** even though technically there was nobody on the island and technically that; it should really be secure other than any damage that may have occurred. And that became an interesting set of circumstances. So, going through that, I mean, there was a lot of elements that went into this. And then bringing it back to life certainly was the reverse steps. But I think we were all well served at the Port in learning a lesson how we would do this. I'm hopeful that we don't have to do it very often. And I'm hopeful that the community doesn't have to evacuate very often. I'm going to cut it short here at this point for the sake of time. But I want; I would encourage you to ask me questions when we have the question and answer session. Thank you very much.

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