

Frankness At Federal Level

The open frankness with which Ralph D. Burns, Natural Disaster Coordinator of the Office of Emergency Planning, explained the functions of that office and the fields of eligibility here Thursday was, coming from a Federal official, highly refreshing.

Mr. Burns was at times blunt, but never rude, and when the session was over there were few, if any, who did not know just where they stood.

Burns made it clear that the Federal government steps in with the Office of Emergency Planning only when requested by state and local governments to do so. This, he said, is the way the OEP likes it; the way it should be in order to keep state's rights paramount. That statement alone from a Federal officer was almost of bombshell calibre.

Burns also was candid about some of the delays in certain projects, assuming for his own office the responsibility, but with a clear and logical reason.

That reason, he stated, was the time necessary for the OEP to determine that the specific project or operation was requested and desired by the state and local governments, in keeping with the OEP policy.

In matters of immediate urgency in the saving of life or property, the Office of Emergency Planning has the authority to act at once, and did. One little known but outstanding example of such instant action is the dispatching of the aircraft carrier USS Bennington here with its cargo of Marine Corps helicopters and emergency supplies, including medical personnel.

Few are aware that Burns personally made the request for the Bennington and its complement in a telephone call to Washington, D. C., on the night of December 21—the very night the flood disaster first struck!

It is entirely within reason to assume that many residents of the county owe their lives to the instant and decisive reaction of Mr. Burns to the emergency at hand, and the Humboldt Standard extends the thanks and appreciation of this entire region to him for it.

We do not, of course, downgrade the men of the Bennington nor of any of the other disaster personnel who arrived with it. Their work was of heroic proportions. Let us forever remember that all of the helicopter crewmen who came with the carrier did not leave with it. Three remain somewhere in the muddy torrent of the Eel River, or have been swept to sea.

The working session, as Burns himself termed it, here Thursday gave the first clear picture of what the Office of Emergency Planning can do and cannot do, removing many doubts and fears on that subject.

We also liked the frankness of Mr. Burns when he stated that some requests for aid "will get a flat no, and that will be the end of it." It leaves no loose strings dangling, and saves precious time in the recovery program.

Another enlightening point raised by the Disaster Coordinator was that his office, through experience, could point out to local government many fields of endeavor which are eligible for Federal financial aid which the local governments themselves probably would not recognize as such.

Certainly, when we realize that the Office of Emergency Planning will be footing the bill for millions of dollars of emergency work, with Mr. Burns' office responsible for accounting for the expenditures, it takes a bold man, a strong man, and a man who knows what he is doing to assume that accountability—doubly so when he tells us, "If it has to be done, do it!"

Mr. Burns, our congratulations.



Thanks And A Request

A special information release from the office of the Humboldt County Assessor is intended for all property owners who suffered loss of property or damage to property as a result of the flood.

Heige Paulson, Assessor, expressed on behalf of his staff and himself their appreciation to all property owners for their understanding, patience, and assistance.

The Assessor and staff are making every effort to cover all of the damaged areas as rapidly as weather and road conditions permit. Many areas are not yet open to travel.

It is not necessary for property owners to request the Assessor's office to send appraisers to inspect property. Surveys have already been made of the entire county, and all properties will be checked on an individual basis. Totally destroyed properties and those not fit to rebuild will be given priority. Lost land, and heavily silted or debris covered land will be given proper consideration.

Because of the limited number of appraisers, it will be necessary to make appraisals on a scheduled basis, and it will be greatly appreciated if property owners refrain from making individual requests by mail or phone for appraisers to call. Such requests can not speed up inspections of property, but merely add to the work load of the staff.

Ferry Pass System To Be Changed

Klamath ferry passes came under a new operations procedure in an attempt to cut down long waiting periods, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors announced last night.

After passes which have already been issued for ferry crossings today have been used, all future passes will be stamped with the date and time for crossing. At present, vehicles waiting to use the ferry have usually been strung out for miles on each side of the river, and have been forced to wait for hours before being able to use the ferry.

All passes are being issued by the sheriff's office in the basement of the courthouse in Eureka and Crescent City.

The supervisors also announced a regular schedule of timings which are identical for each side of the river. Under the schedule, four trucks with trailers will cross per hour, and 12 vehicles per hour of all other types, making a total of 32 vehicles per hour in both directions.

The new schedule may be modified at any time by river conditions. Yesterday the allowable tonnage per trip was upped to 25, whereas it had been as low as 11 because of fast currents.