

Chairman Scott Merriner's Comments
FBCI Task Force Meeting
September 24, 2003
(Paraphrased)

I am honored to serve on this Task Force, and doubly honored to serve as its Chairman.

Going forward I will not have many opportunities to say what I personally think about the Task Force because I will be speaking on behalf of the group as a whole. As individual members, the rest of you will be more free to share your personal thoughts and opinions to whomever will listen. But as Chairman, I will mostly be speaking on behalf of the team and working hard to properly represent its collective work and conclusions.

However, since the Task Force is just now getting started, I thought I would take the opportunity today to share the top three things that I personally think and feel about the Task Force—the three things that most shape my approach to this team and the challenge and responsibilities we are undertaking. Each of these perspectives is shaped by my experiences in three different roles I have occupied over the years: historian, pastor and businessman.

1. From the historian perspective: The Task Force is simply continuing a long and venerable tradition of Alaskans helping Alaskans. This is nothing new. We need to build on what has already been done.
2. From the pastoral perspective: Many of our friends and neighbors desperately need help from more of us. Faith communities can uniquely be mobilized.
 - Alaska is #2 in alcohol abuse, #1 in fetal alcohol syndrome babies.
 - Food stamp cases doubled in the 1990s to over 5% of households.
 - Child support cases are up 90% over the last decade to around 50,000 (no wonder DFYS, now the Office of Children Services, has so many challenges).
 - Our senior population has doubled since 1990 and there has been little infrastructure added.
 - Communities all over the State are deeply scarred by disturbing levels of abuse--sexual, physical and emotional.
 - Alaska has an unacceptably high suicide rate, particularly among Native Alaskan youth.
 - All of these challenges are occurring in an environment of decreasing resources for the State government.
 - Current service providers alone are not enough to guarantee a brighter future for all Alaskans. New community initiatives are required. More people need to begin to help their neighbors.
 - Communities of faith are uniquely positioned to mobilize people into these efforts. Trust me, the untapped potential is huge! When religious leaders challenge their

people to serve the community, the people respond. No other community leaders have as much influence over as many people.

3. From the businessman perspective: We would do well as a Task Force to approach this challenge the way a team of senior managers at a multinational corporation approaches a strategic business opportunity:
 - a. Don't forget the risks.
 - i. There is a risk of lowering standards and putting people in the hands of unqualified service providers.
 - ii. There is a risk of pulling resources away from organizations with proven experience and giving it to less effective service providers.
 - b. Focus relentlessly on results.
 - i. Results aren't everything; they are the only thing.
 - c. Never lose sight of the opportunity!

Many of our fellow Alaskans face tremendous personal challenges that faith-based and community initiatives are best positioned to alleviate. We cannot allow the myriad of challenges involved in expanding these resources to discourage us from making real progress. The opportunity and need is too great!