

Lieutenant Governor Loren Leman's Comments  
FBCI Task Force Meeting  
Atwood Building, Anchorage  
9:00 am on Wednesday, September 24, 2003  
(Paraphrased)

Good Morning. Welcome Task Force members and other interested parties around the State. I am especially pleased to have two of my colleagues from the Legislature with us today, Senator Dyson and Senator Seekins, as well as my former colleague Senator Pete Kelly in Fairbanks.

Judith (Kleinfeld), thank you for that beautiful prayer, I was very moved. Kim (Patterson) thank you for leading the pledge. I appreciate all you Task Force members committing your time to this very important cause.

One of the first things Governor Murkowski asked me to do after we were sworn in on December 2 was to work with our faith-based and volunteer communities in Alaska to determine how we in State government—and people in the volunteer communities—can work together to better serve the needs of people. I readily agreed.

We patterned this effort after what President Bush lead in Texas while Governor. I believe that effort was inspired a lot by the work of Dr. Marvin Olasky, author of The Tragedy of American Compassion. In this book Dr. Olasky analyzes what works, and as Dr. Kleinfeld stated earlier, he demonstrates that those ministries that are closest to the people and faith-based have proven to be more effective and may be delivered at lower cost than government programs.

As a freshman in the State Legislature fourteen years ago, I suggested that a number of our social service programs really shouldn't be primarily the responsibility of government. Rather we should take on this responsibility individually—as family, friends, neighbors, social groups and churches to really care for the needy among us. That, as you know, takes personal investment.

Our method of involvement will be to strengthen private support and reduce bureaucratic barriers while maintaining the integrity of the faith-based mission. Earlier this year we held three scoping meetings – in Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks – where we learned about many exciting and successful programs. In doing that we brought attention to them and, I hope, inspired others to follow their lead.

At the risk of missing many, let me highlight a few organizations we met and learned more about through these meetings. The Department of Correction's Chaplaincy Program, Covenant House Alaska, Salvation Army, Downtown Soup Kitchen, Family Care Court, Love INC, Crisis Pregnancy Center's Let's Talk program, and Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors Initiative.

I saw early on that this FBCI effort was far bigger than I could handle alone. I decided to reach out to get help from Alaskans who share this vision—and a passion for meeting needs. I wanted a cross-section of people who truly represent Alaska – that is why I chose you. You will probably find that you are not in complete theological agreement with everyone on the Task

Force. But I believe you all agree on one thing: people have needs and this is a good way we can step up to help.

I am very pleased Scott Merriner has agreed to chair this group. He has tremendous administrative skills. Scott is a graduate of Dillingham High School, following which he went on to study at Harvard and then at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an analyst and is now the Administrative Pastor at ChangePoint and is a director of GraceAlaska, a social service organization. Scott also shares my vision on how we can be inclusive and work together to accomplish our goals.

Our purpose is not to tell faith and community organizations how to do their work. We do not want to assert more government control over these groups. We do, however, want to identify successes and celebrate them. We also want to identify what could work better if government were to make a few changes.

Alaska's constitution provides that the State is to provide for the health and welfare of Alaskans, but the State does not have a monopoly on compassion. Government does not have to be the only vehicle for accomplishing this purpose.

Alaska has had a long history of cooperation among faith and community organizations and government. Dynamic cooperation, far from offending our principles, supports our time-honored spirit of religious liberty.

Your challenge, as well as our assemblies, city councils, Legislature and Congress, is how to provide reasonable oversight while respecting religious identity. Our first amendment states we will not have an established religion. But it also states we will not limit its free exercise. Clearly, government should not exclude religious expressions or solutions.

It would be impossible for the State to handle social services by itself. Alaska *needs* faith and community organizations. This is a working task force – we have to deliver results. Draw on your experiences and knowledge of community needs and bring them to the table.

I'm grateful for your service and commitment to helping. Though results of our efforts may not be measured conventionally, if we can touch the life of just *one person* and through that contact encourage changed behavior, we will have succeeded.

I look forward to hearing your ideas.