

**Trapped in Politics: The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the
Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council***

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Utah faces serious earthquake risk from the alignment of its major population centers with the historically active Wasatch fault. This paper identifies the origins and traces the life history of the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council, paying special attention to the partisan political shift which contributed to its 1981 legislative failures and organizational demise.

Introduction: Eighty Percent at Risk

Although California may be more famous for perversely locating such major population centers as Los Angeles and San Francisco near active faults, Utah is actually worse. *Every* major Utah population center is aligned with the historically active Wasatch Front Zone. Indeed, in excess of 80 percent of Utah's population and economic activity is concentrated along the Wasatch. As a U.S. Geological Survey report (Rogers et al. 1976, pp. 334-335) noted:

There is geologic evidence that large movements on the Wasatch Fault have occurred within the past 200 years near the cities of Ogden, Salt Lake, and Provo. These areas of relatively dense population and large urban development are within close proximity to the Wasatch ... and ... other faults where the greatest energy release could be expected.

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For planning purposes, the 1976 USGS study postulated two earthquakes and indicated that the casualties could reach 2,300 dead and 9,000 requiring immediate medical care. Dam failure above the various cities was such a concern that the USGS felt compelled to add that “the number ... could be as high as 14,000 if deaths from dam failure are included....” The worst case scenario for homeless was 60,000 people.

In 1977, the Utah Legislature created the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council (USSAC). The USSAC charge was “to provide recommendations for a consistent policy framework for seismic safety in Utah, to recommend programs to reduce earthquake hazards, and suggest goals and priorities....” In a very real sense, USSAC met its charge. Indeed, USSAC may have documented seismic safety dilemmas so well that the Utah Legislature killed it, or more precisely allowed it to sunset, four years later.

Consistent with Sabatier’s (1993) argument that public policy is best analyzed from the perspective of a decade or more, our purpose in this article is to describe and analyze the origins and then the short but eventful life of the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council. While we will pay some attention to USSAC technical work, we will focus on the politics of seismic safety in Utah between 1977 and 1981, because USSAC fell victim to a partisan shift in Utah with major lessons for public policymaking. We added an afterword, “picking up the pieces,” on subsequent developments for earthquake safety in Utah to bring the story forward into the 1990s.

Traditionally, disaster research has shied away from the overt “politics of disaster.” The reality is, however, that politics permeates all disaster phases, from prediction and prevention to mitigation and preparedness through response, recovery, and reconstruction. Despite the centrality of politics to hazard and disaster problems, only a few authors have attempted to focus at least partially on it (Alesch and Petak 1982; Drabek et al. 1983; Lambright 1984, 1985; May 1985; Mittler 1993; Olson 1985; Olson and Olson 1993; Olson et al. 1989; Wolensky and Miller 1993).

Given that politics is defined not only as “who gets what when and how,” but also “who says what to whom in which channel and to what effect” (Dye and Zeigler 1986) and that disasters involve fundamental issues of life safety and life opportunities, we as a research community must focus more often on the purely political dimensions of hazards, emergencies, and disasters.

Birth

Origins

We can identify four strands in the creation of the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council: (1) the prior existence of an *ad hoc* "Governor's Committee on Geologic Hazards"; (2) the 1974-1975 creation of the California Seismic Safety Commission, itself largely a response to the 1971 San Fernando earthquake; (3) the 1976 USGS study cited above; and (4) the 1974 election of an articulate professional geologist, Genevieve Atwood, to the Utah House of Representatives.

William P. Hewitt, Director of the Utah Geological and Mineral Survey (UGMS) from 1961 to 1973, was an early leader in seismic safety and taught the only course at the University of Utah those years on engineering geology. He regularly gave public lectures on earthquakes and earthquake countermeasures. He led a group which organized the first Governor's Conference on Geologic Hazards in 1967, dealing with the various natural hazards endemic to Utah, and the second in 1973, focusing on the planning and liability aspects of seismic safety. Between 1967 and 1973, this *ad hoc* group tried to meet every three months "to create greater awareness of Utah's seismic problem" and was ultimately recognized by an executive order of Governor Calvin Rampton and placed within a line agency (Natural Resources Department). In an important way, this Governor's Committee on Geologic Hazards legitimated seismic safety as a public issue.

As a combined outgrowth of the California Legislature's Joint Committee on Seismic Safety (1969-1974) and Governor Reagan's Earthquake Council (1972-1974), the California Seismic Safety Commission (CSSC) provided both a precedent and a model for Utah seismic safety proponents. Indeed, one of the persons most responsible for actually drafting the Utah legislation said that he had the California law at his left hand as he adapted it to Utah with his right.

We should note that while there were many similarities between the USSAC and the CSSC, perhaps the most important was their non-regulatory nature. Early in the California legislative negotiating process, the advocates of what would become the CSSC gave up on the "powerful commission" idea, which they never expected in the first place, and the final legislation actually states that "it is *not* the purpose of this chapter [of the State of California Government Code] to transfer to the Commission the authorities and responsibilities now vested by law in state and local agencies" (Chapter 13, Section 8890). Working from the existing CSSC model, proponents of

USSAC never even broached the idea of anything but an *Advisory Council*, wisely.

The selection of the third factor in USSAC origins, the 1976 USGS study, is somewhat arbitrary because that report was simply a milestone in the long accumulation of knowledge about the earthquake threat in Utah, based especially on the work over many years of the Utah Geological and Mineral Survey and of Lloyd Cluff (at that time of Woodward, Clyde and Associates). Nonetheless, the USGS report title was arresting: *A Study of Earthquake Losses in the Salt Lake City, Utah, Area*. Moreover, the report was carefully done, in detail, by recognized and disinterested experts, and bore the imprimatur of the U.S. Geological Survey.

The final strand in the creation of USSAC was the 1974 election of Genevieve Atwood, an energetic and highly articulate professional geologist from Salt Lake City, to the Utah House of Representatives. An explication of her role, however, leads us directly into a discussion of Utah legislative history and process.

The Utah Legislature meets every year, but in the mid-1970s, only odd-numbered years were 60-day general sessions in which all types of legislation could be considered. Even-numbered years were 20-day budget sessions in which substantive legislation could be considered only if extraordinary majorities approved a "concurrent resolution." Between sessions, however, an issue or a problem could be placed on "interim study" whereby a committee of legislators, with staff support, reviewed a topic of concern, prepared a report, and perhaps formulated potential legislation. Only a fraction of the items on the interim study list, however, were ever actually dealt with. Interim study was often a face-saving device whereby legislators did not ignore or reject a concern by a peer, they just allowed it to pass quietly away.

Interestingly, while a 1975 interim study resolution was the most obvious USSAC starting point, a precursor occurred several years earlier. In 1972, a small group of seismic safety proponents, including Bruce Kaliser, an earthquake hazard specialist at UGMS hired some years earlier by William Hewitt, and then private citizen Genevieve Atwood, came together to plan "an earthquake policy council" (a la California). The idea was supported by Hewitt, Governor Rampton, and the *ad hoc* Committee. A bill was drafted and carried by Representative Lamont Judd (D) of Ogden in the 1973 general session. It failed for one major reason: A geology-seismology group at the University of Utah perceived it as duplicative of their own work and prevailed upon the new University of Utah president to lobby against the bill, which caused it to be withdrawn.

The 1977 General Session: HB 46, HB 47, and HB 48

Positive legislative momentum picked up with the 1974 election of Genevieve Atwood and the 1975 general session of the Legislature. While unable to persuade the 1975 session to deal with the issue, Atwood was able to place “earthquake threat” on the interim study list for the 1977 general session. In this case, a real committee was set up, comprising Senator Karl Swan (D), Representative Ray Nielsen (D), Senator Cliff Lefevre (R), and Representative Atwood (R) herself.

In addition to a background report on the earthquake threat in Utah, the study committee drafted three pieces of legislation for the 1977 session: HB 46 (Atwood carrying), calling for the creation of a Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council; HB 47 (Nielsen carrying), calling for a state program to review potentially earthquake-vulnerable dams; and HB 48 (Swan carrying), calling for a mandate to the Utah Geological and Mineral Survey to conduct hazard mapping and critical facility site evaluations.

HB 48 was an amendment to the law creating the UGMS and was intended to allow that organization:

to assist local and state government agencies in their planning, zoning, and building regulation functions by publishing maps delineating appropriately wide special earthquake risk areas and, at the request of state agencies or other governmental agencies, review the siting of critical facilities.

Despite its seemingly uncontroversial nature, HB 48 engendered considerable opposition, primarily because several legislators perceived it as “state meddling in local affairs.” The first House vote took place January 25, 1977, and the bill failed by lack of constitutional majority (thirty-eight votes aye):

Ayes, 35 (Democrats, 27; Republicans, 8)

Nays, 34 (Democrats, 7; Republicans, 27)

Absent or Not voting, 6 (Democrats, 2; Republicans, 4)

This failure was the result of a bold attempt by Representative Atwood to secure passage of the bill with an authorization of \$85,000 for the next fiscal year without first working through the appropriations (Revenue and Taxation) committee. Enough House members believed it “out of line” to cause them to vote against HB 48 at that time.

A few weeks later, on February 18, after the Revenue and Taxation Committee had included it (at \$48,000) in the proposed state budget, Representative Atwood asked the House to reconsider the bill and vote again. This time the bill passed:

Ayes, 51 (Democrats, 29; Republicans, 22)

Nays, 16 (Democrats, 4; Republicans, 12)

Absent or Not voting, 8 (Democrats, 2; Republicans, 6)

There was a surprising partisan cast to these votes. The “aye” votes were bipartisan, but the “nays” (or the not voting, which worked out the same, because thirty-eight votes were needed to pass) were overwhelmingly Republican. On March 9, the Senate concurred by voting twenty-four to nothing in favor of HB 48, with five senators absent or not voting.

HB 47 was a proposed amendment to Utah dam safety laws removing the exemption of federal Bureau of Reclamation dams from approval by the Utah State Engineer. The success of this bill can be attributed to the fact that (1) most Utah cities have numerous large dams right above them in the Wasatch Mountains; and (2) highly critical official reports were appearing on federal dam safety procedures in the aftermath of the June 1976 Teton dam disaster, which killed eight and injured eighty in the neighboring state of Idaho. The House vote on HB 47 was as follows:

Ayes, 57 (Democrats, 32; Republicans, 25)

Nays, 12 (Democrats, 1; Republicans, 11)

Absent or Not voting, 6 (Democrats, 2; Republicans, 4)

HB 47 had a more difficult time of it in the Senate. Although reported out favorably by the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, HB 47 was defeated on the floor:

Ayes, 12 (Democrats, 9; Republicans, 3)

Nays, 13 (Democrats, 5; Republicans, 8)

Absent or Not voting, 4 (Democrats, 3; Republicans, 1)

This defeat was based on the concern that it was legally problematic and politically conflictive with Washington for the state to regulate federal dams. Nonetheless, two senators who voted against the bill “served notice that they would ask the Senate to reconsider its action on HB 47 on the next legislative day.” Actually, HB 47 was sent back to committee and returned to the Senate for a March 7 vote, when it was passed unanimously. The proponents of HB 47 “had given it up for dead” when it went back to committee, but the post-Teton revelations about federal dam inspection inadequacies came out in early March and moved the committee to report the bill back to the floor favorably. As one senator told us, “We had these dams all over the place, and it turned out that the feds didn’t have their own house in order — and admitted it.” Indeed, after the Teton disaster, the Bureau of Reclamation ultimately encouraged the state to set up an independent review capability.

HB 46, the bill to create the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council, laid out the *Utah earthquake safety policy problem*:

The Legislature finds that a preponderance of evidence indicates that communities in Utah, particularly along the Wasatch Fault, are in a high seismic risk area. There is a pressing need to provide a consistent policy framework and a means for educating the public and private sectors. There must be a means of coordinating the earthquake related programs of agencies at all governmental levels and their relationships with elements of the private sector involved in practices important to seismic safety. This need is not now being met by any state government organization.

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported the bill out favorably on January 18, 1977. After numerous semantic amendments on the floor, it came up for a vote January 25, and it passed:

Ayes, 50 (Democrats, 26; Republicans, 24)

Nays, 19 (Democrats, 6; Republicans, 13)

Absent or Not voting, 6 (Democrats, 2; Republicans, 4)

HB 46 then went to the Senate, where it was assigned to the Committee on Natural Resources. That committee reported it out favorably on February 4, but expressed “the intent that it be amended on the floor,” a trouble sign.

For a number of senators, HB 46 posed the specter of creating a new government bureaucracy, and when it came time to consider final passage, the Senate resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole. It then took the occasionally used step of hearing pro (Representative Atwood) and con (Representative Ted Davis) arguments on the bill.

After the Senate returned to order as a legislative rather than a hearing body, two key amendments were made: (1) As was the old Governor’s Committee on Geologic Hazards, USSAC would be placed *within* a regular line agency, again the Department of Natural Resources; and (2) Most importantly, a new Section 10 was added, to read “the full force and effect of this act shall terminate June 30, 1981.” Representative Atwood’s personal concurrence with the sunset clause enabled passage of HB 46:

Ayes, 22 (Democrats, 12; Republicans, 10)

Nays, 3 (Democrats, 1; Republicans, 2)

Absent or Not voting, 4 (Democrats, 4; Republicans, 0)

Interestingly, when HB 46 returned to the House for supposedly routine repassage (because of the amendments), it did not fare nearly as well as before:

Ayes, 39 (Democrats, 22; Republicans, 17)

Nays, 23 (Democrats, 6; Republicans, 17)

Absent or Not voting, 13 (Democrats, 7; Republicans, 6)

While HB 46 had been working its way through the Senate, opposing House legislators played on the theme that "USSAC will somehow become permanent, just you see." As it was, HB 46 barely passed with thirty-nine votes.

In short, HB 46 hardly sailed through the Utah Legislature even with the amendments. Its approval was primarily the result of three factors: (1) Many legislators personally liked Genevieve Atwood, respected her professional credentials, and accorded her high credibility on the earthquake issue. Moreover, they wanted to "give her a program, something she could point to"; (2) Atwood repeated her commitment to the bill's sunset clause, ending USSAC after a four-year run. One especially key actor said that the sunset clause swung the Senate and kept the House coalition more or less intact; and (3) The fiscal picture was reasonably bright that year, with sufficient funds to support a number of these modest government programs.

Analyzing the House votes on all three bills (HB 46, 47, and 48), we see a pro-seismic safety core group of thirty-one legislators (eighteen Democrats, thirteen Republicans) who voted "aye" on all three bills. On the other side, we find a core opposition group of ten (one Democrat, nine Republicans) who voted "nay" on all of the bills or who did not vote. Interestingly, four years later (in 1981), only *nine* of the thirty-one pro-seismic safety House legislators still served, but five of the ten in the opposition group remained.

Life

Doing the Job

In addition to the broad charge given USSAC by HB 46, the bill also specified the membership slots. Interestingly, and unusual for such bodies, all of the appointed people stayed on the Council for the four years:

Harvey L. Hutchinson, Chair, Utilities

Genevieve Atwood, Public-at-Large

Jerold H. Barnes, Planning

Winfred O. Carter, Structural Engineering

Stanley W. Crawley, Architecture

William J. Gordon, Geotechnical Engineering

Bruce N. Kaliser, Geology

Harvey W. Merrell, Utah Association of Counties
Joyce U. Miller, Utah League of Cities and Towns
Donald J. Peck, Public-at-Large
Robert B. Smith, Seismology

While the expected professions (engineering, seismology, planning, etc.) were represented, three other aspects of the membership are worth noting. First, the "Public-at-Large" category included Representative Atwood. Second, two of the most influential interest groups in the state had formal seats, the Utah Association of Counties and the Utah League of Cities and Towns. Because so many seismic safety policies fall to local government for actual implementation, these latter two were extremely important. In Utah, the support — or at least the neutrality — of the Association and League was necessary, and their input was made a formal part of the USSAC structure. Finally, "seismology" was actually a University of Utah seat, healing that early rift.

The Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council met monthly and worked with a small, five-person staff. Early on, USSAC decided to avoid a large staff and instead use funds for contract and consultant work on specific issues. Rather remarkably, USSAC followed its workplan and finished in the allotted four years.

USSAC conducted or commissioned numerous studies, sponsored meetings, issued reports, and in other ways attempted to raise the salience of, and deal with, the earthquake threat in Utah. The USSAC products were of excellent quality, but the future hinged on five proposed pieces of legislation to the 1981 general session of the Legislature:

1. HB 29 (Nielsen carrying), requiring that "all new construction for buildings that are to be open for public occupancy shall, in addition to all other requirements imposed by city, county or state building codes or regulations, meet or exceed the minimum earthquake safety provisions of the code adopted by the state building board for application to state building construction."
2. HB 30 (Nielsen carrying), amending the zoning power of cities and towns, stipulating that their comprehensive plans include elements designed "to secure safety from earthquakes and other geologic hazards."
3. HB 31 (Nielsen carrying), doing the same thing as HB 30, but for Utah counties.
4. SB 190 (Swan carrying), a complicated amendment requiring that new school construction or significant (more than \$20,000) altera-

tions include earthquake resistance standards, and that school districts “shall furnish to the state Board of Education at the conclusion of construction of each building project a statement signed by the general contractor for the project certifying to full compliance with plans and specifications, including material strengths and placement of structural elements that may be hidden from view.”

5. HB 92 (Nielsen carrying), creating an “earthquake safety officer” in the office of the State Planning Coordinator (in effect, the functional continuance of USSAC).

The fate of these five specific legislative proposals not only was important in itself, but also effectively reflected the decidedly cool reception given the post-session, fifteen-volume USSAC *Final Report* (which disappeared through an “interim study” trapdoor). For that reason we want to spend some time explaining what happened to the bills beyond their simple bottom line, namely, that they all died quickly and quietly in committee, never making it to the floor of either House or Senate. The earthquake officer bill (HB 92) was especially interesting and important.

Death

The Charge of the Light Brigade

An unfortunate combination determined the fate of the USSAC legislative proposals: (1) a political cultural trend, or pendulum swing, which produced an exceptionally hostile Utah Legislature, (2) a political decision by Genevieve Atwood that appeared promising initially, but turned out to be a disappointment, and (3) an “apolitical” USSAC strategy.

The political spectrum in Utah is a truncated version of the national one, with very little to the left of center and the center of gravity definitely to the right. As one veteran Utah legislator said, “I’m seen as a fairly liberal Democrat here. Elsewhere I’d probably be a moderate Republican,” a point which must be kept in mind when discussing any aspect of public policy in Utah.

The Republican Party in Utah had been in marked ascendancy since at least the mid-1970s. As can be seen from Table 1 below, and looking at the Utah Legislature as a whole, the 1977 session could still be called “shared,” but the 1979 session was clearly Republican-dominated, and the critical 1981 session was veto-proof Republican-controlled.

Table 1. Party Composition of Utah Legislature, 1971–1981

General Session	HOUSE		SENATE	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
1981	58	17	22	7
1979	51	24	19	10
1977	40	35	12	17
1975	35	40	14	15
1973	44	31	16	13
1971	31	38	16	13

Moreover, and logical given the partisan shift, a large group of freshmen legislators (mostly Republicans obviously) entered in 1979 and 1981, many of whom had campaigned on some sort of “Proposition 13” (California’s tax limitation initiative) or “less government is better” platform. One Democratic survivor of the 1978 and 1980 elections called the 1981 session “impossible to deal with, because the Republicans didn’t have to deal.” Apparently, the Republican legislative *party* caucus made most important decisions in 1981.

We would not want our arguments misconstrued here. We are not arguing that seismic safety is necessarily a partisan question (Atwood is a Republican, for example). That issue does merit careful, empirical investigation across a number of states, however. We are arguing that the late 1970s partisan shift in Utah effectively reflected a political cultural swing to the right, which in Utah meant profoundly to the right. Moreover, the Republican Party is the traditional home of the antiregulation, antigovernment element in American society, and *all* of the proposed USSAC legislation was classic regulatory except one piece, and that would have added a new, permanent government officer! As one opposing legislator said, “Representative Nielsen and Senator Swan were brave as hell even to bring the USSAC package to the 1981 session.”

A very interesting and somewhat related illustration of the political climate change facing USSAC came from the 1981 session itself. Early in the session, Republican Senator E. Verl Asay introduced a bill (SB 5) which, in its final form, permitted either the state superintendent of public instruction or local governments to waive “state and local building, fire, health, seismological, and zoning” regulations in order to cut costs in school construction or renovation. Called wild-eyed and radical by opponents (a “Burn the Children” bill) in the Legislature, the media, and the design professions, SB 5 actually *passed* both the House and the Senate, with the partisan element very clear:

Senate

Ayes, 17 (Democrats, 1; Republicans, 16)
 Nays, 7 (Democrats, 3; Republicans, 4)
 Absent or Not voting, 5 (Democrats, 3; Republicans, 2)

House

Ayes, 42 (Democrats, 1; Republicans, 41)
 Nays, 27 (Democrats, 11; Republicans, 16)
 Absent or Not voting, 6 (Democrats, 4; Republicans, 2)

Ultimately, Governor Matheson felt compelled to veto SB 5, and rather vehemently:

I am returning, disapproved, Senate Bill 5, School Buildings and Code Waivers, which would allow the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Commissioner of Higher Education or local governing bodies to waive state and local building, fire, health, seismological and zoning codes, ordinances and regulations

My policy as governor has been to reserve judgment on legislation by use of the veto unless the enrolled bill poses serious constitutional problems or threatens the health, safety or welfare of the people of this state. Unquestionably, Senate Bill 5 clearly falls into the latter category....

At a time when the state is striving for uniformity in building codes, this bill would create a multiplicity of codes from community to community. It raises serious legal problems as to ultimate liability in the event of death or injury occurring inside a building where minimum codes were waived pursuant to the provisions of this bill. It establishes a double standard for private and public buildings, and presents a clear possibility of reversing a decade-old policy in Utah of providing accessibility to the handicapped....

I urge the Legislature to consider more durable long-range solutions rather than a quick-fix that compromises the safety of our children and the citizens of our state.

Proponents of SB 5 did not attempt an override, but the bill itself vividly reflected the dominant attitude of the 1981 Utah Legislature.

To return to our mainline explanation, if the political cultural swing was the major determinant in the USSAC legislative failure, a secondary but still important factor was the decision by Genevieve Atwood to run for the State Senate. A three-term incumbent in the House (1974, 1976, 1978), Atwood

chose 1980 to try for the Senate. All early signs were promising, and if she had been successful, seismic safety policy would have had an influential “insider” proponent, and Republican at that. Unfortunately, Atwood was depicted in a rather unsavory Republican primary campaign as liberal, feminist, and an “ERA’er,” all devastating in Utah. She lost the primary but subsequently became Director of the Utah Geological and Mineral Survey.

Related to both of the above (the partisan shift and Atwood no longer being a legislative “insider”), the last determinant of the USSAC 1981 legislative failure was political and itself rather complex.

The USSAC legislative proposals comprised a dangerous mix. While impeccably professional and within the mainstream of seismic safety policy, four pieces of regulatory legislation together with a bill to create a permanent earthquake officer was a suicidal package to present to an early 1980s Republican-controlled legislature. One key legislator said that only the earthquake officer bill had a sliver of a chance, and “it died from bad company.”

USSAC’s second major political-strategic problem was an unwillingness and/or inability to craft an interest group, public, and media campaign. A perfunctory attempt at public meetings was made, but several prominent interest group leaders indicated that *if they had been approached*, they would have supported the earthquake officer bill at least. Moreover, there is no evidence of a concerted USSAC attempt to bring in the media. Again keeping this in perspective, however, USSAC strength was in technical expertise and professionalism, and those characteristics are often incompatible with political entrepreneurship. Moreover, USSAC members could read the partisan shift as well as anyone, and they knew the legislative environment of 1981, knowledge which undoubtedly contributed to a general loss of USSAC morale.

The lack of an overtly USSAC political strategy was especially evident with HB 92, the earthquake safety officer bill. The Council reached a consensus that they wanted the proposed earthquake officer to be as “independent” as possible, and for that reason chose the State Planning Coordinator’s office, near the Governor, as the best locale. Unfortunately for USSAC, the head of the agency thought his operation a “mishmash” and wanted to streamline the office, not add to it. He opposed the idea of placing the earthquake officer in State Planning.

Ultimately, Governor Matheson asked that the bill be amended to put the earthquake safety officer in Comprehensive Emergency Management (CEM), whose leadership was willing to accept it. USSAC leaders then let it be known, however, that they would *oppose their own bill* if it came to

the floor of the House with that amendment. Their position, surprising at first glance, is familiar to seismic safety advocates: USSAC was concerned that any earthquake officer in a CEM operation would face inexorable pressure toward the disaster response rather than the hazard reduction side of earthquake countermeasures.

Needless to say, this kind of confusion failed to impress the House Committee on Labor, Manpower, and Industrial Development. The bill died in committee.¹

In retrospect, several close observers as well as participants in the HB 92 case agreed that the bill was fatally hurt by *USSAC not solving the bureaucratic politics of officer placement before the bill was formally introduced and entered legislative politics*. That is, a united front of seismic safety proponents and the executive branch agencies involved was the prerequisite for HB 92 to have even a fighting chance with the 1981 Utah Legislature.

With the permission of former USSAC Executive Director Delbert Ward, we are including one particular paragraph of a letter he wrote to us responding to this observation and which clearly illustrates the highly professional but essentially apolitical orientation of USSAC:

While it is entirely correct to state that the Council resisted assignment of the program to CEM and thereby jeopardized acceptance of its proposals, it also must be pointed out that the Council evaluated this alternative, the consequences both of acceptance and resistance, and the available strategies to achieve acceptance of the proposals anyway. The Council concluded that no program would be better than a poorly managed program and so was willing to take that risk.

That is, politics is all about ideas, proposals, strategies, timing, and decisionmaking. USSAC evaluated its strengths and weaknesses, played the game, and lost.

Afterlife

Picking Up the Pieces

When the news spread that Utah was allowing USSAC to sunset, dismay spread among seismic safety advocates across the United States. Rather than lose the momentum and the agenda salience of the earthquake threat along the Wasatch Front Zone, however, other government entities gathered up fragments.

In 1981, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funded the position of “Earthquake Program Officer” in the State of Utah Division of Comprehensive Emergency Management, effectively filling the gap left by the failure of HB 92. Former USSAC staffer Craig Taylor held the initial appointment and “facilitated coordination with both the Utah Geological Survey (UGS, the former Utah Geological and Mineralogical Survey) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).”

Through CEM, Taylor prepared and submitted to FEMA a proposal on planning for earthquake-induced dam failure (the recurring nightmare) along the Wasatch. FEMA/Washington and the regional FEMA/Denver offices responded with the suggestion that the proposal be resubmitted in a “multi-hazard” format along the lines of the very much in vogue Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS). Ultimately, FEMA funded the “Utah Multi-Hazard Mitigation Project” for three years at approximately \$180,000 total. The City of Ogden in Weber County was the selected site, because much of the city is at risk from a failure of the nearby and earthquake-vulnerable Pineview Reservoir dam.

In July 1985, the Project delivered to the Ogden City Council and the Weber County Commission a twenty-year plan which emphasized (1) hardening emergency response facilities, (2) dam monitoring and failure warning systems, (3) acquiring property and/or removing structures in especially hazardous areas, (4) emergency response planning, (5) disclosing to the public those areas of the community most prone to natural disaster, (6) improving technical information to the jurisdictions on geologic and hydrologic hazards, (7) increasing inter-jurisdictional consistency in land use regulations and building codes, (8) floodproofing especially vulnerable areas, and (9) raising public awareness. Both the city and county formally adopted the plan.

Clearly a spiritual offspring of USSAC, the Utah Multi-Hazard Mitigation Project was earthquake-focused, mitigation-oriented, and aimed at local government. The difference was that although it was physically based in Utah CEM, FEMA — not the State of Utah — provided all of the salary and operating funds. In effect, it was a federal project bypassing the state and working directly with local jurisdictions on a major seismic hazard.

Meanwhile, in 1983, another federal agency, USGS, initiated a five-year “focused research and implementation” program on earthquake hazards in the region. This effort culminated in a series of Open File Reports entitled, “Assessment of Regional Earthquake Hazards and Risk Along the Wasatch Front, Utah.”

For three years, USGS also funded engineering geologist positions in the planning departments of four Wasatch Front counties (Weber, Salt Lake, Davis, and Utah). The purpose of the positions was to help transfer and apply earth science knowledge to local land use planning. By 1992, however, only Salt Lake County retained the position. The other three counties dropped the positions in the years following the end of federal funding.

On the local level, in 1989 the City of Salt Lake finished restoring the historically and architecturally significant City and County Administration Building as a result of (1) general deterioration, (2) seismic studies which proved its vulnerability, (3) additional cracking produced by the 1983 Borah Peak, Idaho earthquake, and (4) the refusal by the city's insurance carrier to continue coverage unless it was properly fixed.

Also, information generated from the USGS program increased general earthquake awareness and led to seismic evaluations of Salt Lake City schools and fire stations. By 1992, five fire stations had been replaced and others strengthened.

A variety of other Utah-related technical studies and projects have been done including (1) examining the impacts of a magnitude 7.5 earthquake on the state's financial institutions; (2) conducting a multihazard study in Utah County; (3) supporting research financed by the National Science Foundation on methods to evaluate seismic code decisions in areas, like the Wasatch Front, which are characterized by low-to-moderate seismicity but high catastrophic loss potential; (4) preparing detailed liquefaction maps for Davis, Salt Lake, and Utah Counties; and (5) completing two studies of ground amplification for various soil types in the Salt Lake Valley.

In addition, the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, the national professional organization in this field, held its annual meetings in Salt Lake City in 1981 and in 1991. The decision to hold these meetings was driven in part by a desire to reinforce the legitimacy of local seismic safety advocates and to publicize the earthquake threat in the region.

1991 State Action: A New Beginning?

In July 1991, the State of Utah created a "Utah Earthquake Advisory Board." With very limited funding, the Board functions in a truly advisory manner, its staff functions performed by the CEM's Earthquake Preparedness Information Center (EPICENTER), with support from state, university, and private organizations.

During the January-February 1991 session, the Utah Legislature approved the Governor's request for funds (\$75,000 for the first year) to plan

a strong-motion instrumentation program. The UGS directs the program in cooperation with the University of Utah and the Utah Earthquake Advisory Board.

The State of Utah also contracted for a preliminary seismic evaluation of the Capitol to explore retrofit possibilities. This action followed the strengthening of six state buildings and vulnerability assessments of all University of Utah buildings.

In Retrospect

First, by killing USSAC, the State of Utah abrogated, at least for a time, its role of centrally coordinating and promoting earthquake hazard reduction *policies* along the Wasatch Front Zone. It seems clear, however, that the Utah Seismic Safety Advisory Council, while only legally in existence for four years, met its charge and made an enduring impact by cementing an “issue network” composed of Utah seismic safety advocates who continue to play major roles. Or as one observer noted, this group “became aware of the problem and would not let it die.” The difference is that the activity had to be at the specific *program* level.

Second, we in the research community must give further thought and attention to the partisan/ideological aspect of seismic safety policies. In Utah, for example, it seems clear that the late 1970s swing to very conservative Republicanism doomed both the five USSAC legislative proposals and its *Final Report*. The swing destroyed that bipartisan coalition which was so obviously key to the positive legislative momentum of the 1977 general session. The disaster research community has often noted that bureaucratic politics play a role in hazard mitigation, disaster preparedness, and the entire chain of response/recovery/reconstruction, but the USSAC case indicates that we need to explore the role of ideology and party politics as well.

Finally, the post-USSAC period clearly indicates an interesting and positive role played by federal agencies when a state in effect drops the ball at the policy level. Principally FEMA and USGS kept the momentum going and the professional level of the work high in the 1981-1991 period, although both agencies had to function at the program level.

Notes

1. This House committee may not have been as negative to the earthquake officer bill as USSAC leaders thought. A majority were apparently prepared to report the bill out favorably as an authorization to Comprehen-

sive Emergency Management, but without an appropriation. One seismic safety proponent in the executive branch said that it was probably a mistake to give up on the bill at that time. Tactically, this interview suggested that it might have been better to pursue authorization and then seek funding from the federal government (which came) and/or wait for a more favorable state fiscal environment.

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