

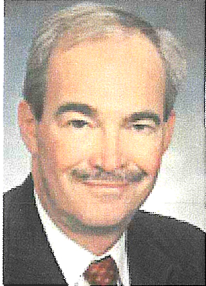
Too big to fail, too big to succeed

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Straight Talk



By James Hettinger
Senior Advisor, Battle Creek Unlimited
hettinger@bcunlimited.org

It is one thing to sympathize with the southern states in their battle against the gulf oil spill and quite another to wake up one day and find a similar catastrophe playing out in the Kalamazoo River, just 80 miles from the third largest freshwater lake in the world.

The range of major challenges over the past eight years raises the question of how big is too big? How big is too big to fail? How big is too big to succeed?

Can a big, lumbering, interest-torn government respond quickly and effectively to sudden crises?

Increasingly, the answer seems to be no.

Hurricane Katrina's deadly voyage across New Orleans revealed a woefully underprepared response to emergency at all levels of government, particularly, the federal government.

Even though government had plenty of advance notice last autumn that the H1N1 influenza would be an epidemic, it still managed to bungle the availability of vaccine to the point where there was not enough when we needed it, and too much, today, when we do not need it.

When the gulf oil spill started, not only was the federal government conspicuously inconspicuous, but when it did lumber into the party, it took weeks to approve the most simple of permits merely to block the oil's approach to beaches and sensitive wetland areas. It failed to waive the Jones Act and other establishment protections that thwarted early containment and cleanup activities.

It seems fairly certain that the Asian carp will enter Lake Michigan if it has not already. This oncoming catastrophe is literally unfolding by the minute. We are told that our congressional delegation "has been working on it for years." Since most of our congressional delegation is the same political party as the President, what is there to work on? Since all these people claim the environmental high ground, what is the problem getting this done? Shut down the shipping canal and fix the problem of a destructive invasive species.

Sound familiar? Just shut down the border and fix the immigration problem. Instead, years of neglect and disgraceful political pandering have taken us to a virtual constitutional crisis with lawsuits flying between layers of government.

Have we built too many expectations and too much reliance on ever-growing bureaucracies to manage or solve our problems? Can you teach an elephant to tap dance?

How can we turn arteriosclerotic, process-oriented government bureaucracies into nimble problem solving mechanisms? We had better find out and find out fast.

The terrorism of the 21st century is systems disruption. Sudden disruption of the electrical grid,

disruption of the food supply chain, disruption of the drinking water supply — these are all possible attacks that are churning through the creative minds of our adversaries.

With oil headed down the Kalamazoo River toward Lake Michigan, it is hard to accept the assurances of an EPA official who said the oil would not reach the lake. Is the bureaucracy in control of this crisis? Why am I not optimistic?

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