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ESTABLISHED 1879



1998
 Pulitzer Prize
 Winner

opinion

Our View

Post-Sandy questions to ponder

What can we do to help?

How can we assist those who have lost their homes, those who still aren't sure what they will find when they are allowed to return to them, and those who are too old or infirm to leave them?

Those are the immediate questions we all should be asking now — those relating to getting the power back on, getting our schools reopened, getting more gasoline to service stations to avoid the huge lines, and getting commercial activity to approach normalcy again.

But it isn't too soon to start giving at least some thought to tomorrow. What are the lessons we need to learn from the huge slap in the face delivered to the Jersey Shore and beyond by Mother Nature?

Was it, indeed, a 200-year storm, something we may never witness again in our lifetime? Or is it a wake-up call to prepare us sometime soon for the next one?

Was it a badly needed reminder that climate change, coupled with largely unbridled development along our coastal areas, has left us vulnerable in ways that require new ways of thinking and major public policy changes?

Despite plenty of advance warning that a major storm was coming — the power companies were talking about possible losses of power of five to seven days well before the storm had arrived — it is clear we were not prepared for a storm of this magnitude.

Going forward, what policy changes are needed to guard against a repeat? What must be done to make any similar encounters with Mother Nature a fairer fight? Among the questions we should be asking:

» What does the damage to the coastal areas say about the effectiveness of the beach replenishment program? Early indications suggest that high dunes, with well-developed vegetation, provided better protection than widened beaches.

» Could the utility companies have done more to soften the impact



Crews work to clear sand from Route 35 in Ortle Beach following Hurricane Sandy. DOUG HOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

of the storm, and shorten the length of the outages? Would major additional investments in protecting substations and other critical infrastructure against flood and wind damage pay off? Would ratepayers be willing to pay a premium for extra safeguards?

» What changes are needed to the state's Coastal Area Facility Review Act, which regulates coastal development? Should the compromise built into the amended CAFRA law in 1993 that explicitly guarantees the right of homeowners to rebuild damaged or destroyed homes be changed?

Should the governor impose a temporary moratorium until a determination is made about how and where it makes sense to rebuild?

» Does Gov. Christie need to rethink his Executive Order No. 2, which states that New Jersey's environmental regulations must not exceed those of the federal government? In the aftermath of Sandy, it seems more clear than ever that federal standards are inadequate to meet the threats posed by New Jersey's vulnerable coastline.

» Do New Jersey's building codes need to be bolstered to better protect homeowners' investments along waterways? Many of the homes that were badly damaged or washed away could have benefited from stricter

construction requirements.

» To ease the long lines at gasoline stations due to the loss of power that makes pumps inoperable, should backup generators be required? Should the state make low-cost loans available for their purchase?

» Were local police, many of whom spent time controlling traffic at service stations, manning intersections where lights were down, and blocking roads where there were downed trees and power lines, optimally employed?

» Could the communication between towns and their residents have been improved through targeted phone trees, better utilization of websites and improved communication with media outlets?

» What did this storm demonstrate, if anything, about our vulnerability to a terrorist attack?

» Is it true, as some environ-

mentalists have suggested, that the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant dodged a bullet during the storm by being offline for refueling at the time the storm struck?

These are all questions that deserve answers. Some of them — particularly decisions about how and where to rebuild — need to be answered sooner than others.

In a very real sense, Sandy represents an opportunity to reassess development patterns. That opportunity must be seized.

But for now, our full attention should be focused on helping those whose homes have been destroyed, and those whose lives have been turned upside down.

If you are fortunate enough to have your lights and your heat back on, turn your attention to the less fortunate. They need your help, and you should do all you can to lend them a hand.