**Interviewee**: Director/Admiral Thad Allen

**Organization**: FEMA & The US Coast Guard

**Interviewer**: Professor Don Kettl

**Video** **Length**: 11:50

**Date**: March 26, 2020

**Brief Overview**:

[Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen](about:blank) served as the Incident Commander of the [Deepwater Horizon oil spill](about:blank) in the Gulf of Mexico and later replaced [Michael Brown](about:blank) as the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](about:blank) (FEMA) administrator in the midst of the [Hurricane Katrina disaster](about:blank) in September of 2005. In this interview, Allen speaks about the importance of leadership during a crisis, his role in directing the Hurricane Katrina response efforts, and his expertise in an evaluation the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Discussion Points**:

* Leadership during a crisis.
  + Leaders in government should prioritize transparency of information, honesty, and eliminating ambiguity in order to build credibility with the American people to establish a cause for action that everybody can believe in and work together towards.
  + “Every one of these major crises actually becomes an exercise in applied civics and tests social contracts and expectations at all levels of government.”
  + Command authority is much more than just a matter of giving orders and getting things done but also building partnerships and collaboration.
  + Allen differentiates between unity of command and unity of effort. When working within the military, units are subject to the same governance, but once the response goes beyond that structure, the best that can be achieved is unity of effort with leadership vertically and horizontally integrating different and not always compatible sectors.
* COVID-19 application
  + Existing frameworks and doctrines for thinking don’t have the same practical applications in this disaster because of the sheer magnitude.
  + Complexity itself is a risk factor that isn’t restricted to a single city, county, or state, because it is being experienced in all fifty states simultaneously. This eliminates the normal capacity for states to assist each other and instead forces them to compete for valuable lifesaving resources.
  + This pandemic will demand private sector, federal, state, and local governments to unite their assets to confront the problems at hand. Allen claims that a major problem is that the aggregate amount of resources available might not be adequate to meet the necessary demand, which will result in economic rationing of scarce resources.
  + According to Allen, in situations like these America needs a professional subject matter expert who is focused on fixing the problem and is immune to political consequence. This person must be held accountable to political leadership who needs to speak openly and honestly to the American public about the crisis.
* Hurricane Katrina experience
  + Shortly after arriving to Louisiana, Allen is informed he will be relieving Mike Brown and will be placed in charge of FEMA for the disaster response mission. One of his immediate roles as leader was gathering members of the force and requesting that they treat every person they encounter as if they were a member of their own family. He also expressed his support to the front-line workers which resulted in a much-needed boost to morale.
  + After weeks of providing resources Director Allen realizes the major issues are not with the hurricane but that, “the City of New Orleans lost their command and control capability, and the real problem was the continuity of government.”

**Find Interview Here**: <https://youtu.be/O1eeHEkv_lY>