The Day
State Services
Were Suspended

by Governor Dan Evans

What if State services were suspended for 24 hours?

The federal government has been called omnipotent, local governments have been called the "dark continent" of American politics and state government has been viewed by many persons as an anachronism that will soon disappear from the American scene.

Unlike the federal government, states do not make decisions that are highly visible to the citizenry such as choices regarding the bombing of additional targets in North Vietnam, nor the decision to impose wage and price
controls. States simply do not operate in an arena which has as high a level of citizen visibility as many of the individual departments in the federal government.

At the other end of the spectrum of governmental services, states do not provide the common everyday services enjoyed by our citizens, such as providing water, the disposal of sewage, fire protection for buildings, and police protection for people and property.

If the average citizen has a view on the three levels of government, I suspect that he might tell you that he reads most often about decisions made at the federal level; that if and when he does have direct contact with government it is at the local level, and that in between somewhere there is a State Legislature that meets too often and passes too many laws, and there is a governor who talks about a number of things that ought to be done but who most often, in fact, raises taxes and devises ways of spending the taxpayers' money.

Even though he might have only a rather vague idea of what state government actually does, the average citizen is certainly well aware of its existence—particularly when he pays taxes to the state. And, I am sure that many a taxpayer has asked himself:

"What does the state do with all the money that it collects?"

Few citizens realize that the state uses about 90 percent of its General Fund revenue collections for the maintenance of state institutions, public assistance, and education—both support to the common schools and the operation of the higher education system which includes our six four-year schools and 22 separate community college districts serving 182,000 students.

While the average citizen is probably not keenly aware of the services provided to him on a daily basis by state government, I am confident that those services would become immediately apparent if they were suddenly withdrawn.

Thus, one way of viewing state government from the eyes of a taxpayer would be to look at the result if the state ceased to function for a 24-hour period.

Suspension of state services for that brief a period, of course, would only make the most timely and urgent types of services readily apparent. If the state ceased to function for a longer period of time, there would be a number of additional and long-range affects that I cannot attempt to quantify here.

But for a 24-hour period, the suspension of state services would have the following impact:

Human Resource Services

The suspension of mental health services for about 2,000 residents in state institutions
would result in many of these persons being dependent upon communities adjacent to the hospitals for food, medical attention and other personal needs.

- An unknown number of deaths would occur among people who are receiving intensive care in state mental hospitals, and a large number of citizens seeking voluntary admissions, or crisis intervention services would not be served.

- Lacking any state services, 2,700 residents of adult correction institutions could be at large in the adjacent communities, causing distress to the population. Substantial efforts and costs would be entailed in apprehending those individuals who chose to escape from the institutions.

- Adult offenders on parole would find that there are no parole officers to contact and, lacking timely advice and assistance, a number of these persons would probably find themselves committing new crimes.

- About 1,100 juveniles presently being treated in state juvenile institutions would do as they wished.

- Over 600 elderly veterans presently residents in the two state veterans' homes would not receive care and attention, and a number of those veterans would die because they would be deprived of the intensive nursing services necessary to sustain their lives.

- 75 patients now at Firland Tuberculosis Hospital, many of whom are quarantined to prevent spread of the disease would be unattended.

- Over 3,300 individuals being treated in state institutions for the mentally retarded would be left without services.

- At least 10 individuals in state institutions for the mentally retarded, suffering from hydrocephalus would die due to lack of medical attention.

- A large number of the profoundly retarded individuals in state institutions, who are entirely dependent upon staff for their survival, would also die.

- A majority of the patients in mental institutions would suffer greatly from the lack of attention. For example, 20,000 pounds of 0# laundry would not be done that day in the three schools for the mentally retarded. Imagine, if you can, the human misery which would be caused by the lack of anyone to change clothing and diapers for these people.

- 450 students at our Schools for the Deaf and Blind will receive no services, and the suspension of state services could cause severe emotional problems and seriously retard the progress of those students.

- 72 kidney patients who do not have adequate financial resources and who are dependent upon the state would suffer a serious deterioration in their health or die because of the
lack of dialysis or kidney transplants.

- 15 public assistance recipients would not receive burial services and 208,000 other recipients would not receive their allowance for food, shelter and housing.

- About 500,000 pounds of meat, about 100,000 pounds of poultry, and 5,000,000 pounds of milk would enter retail channels of the state uninspected for disease and contamination. Although the sanitary conditions throughout the agricultural economy is excellent, even a small amount of contamination in these quantities of food could have far-reaching ramifications.

Public Safety Services

- Two dead and 48 injured persons would be left unattended on the highways of the state because the State Patrol would not be operating.

- The delays in providing services to persons killed and injured in traffic accidents would create confusion, if not outright panic, when motorists realize that the State Patrol would no longer be serving them.

- 121 accidents would not be investigated by the State Patrol. Given the delays in investigating accidents and clearing highways, it is predictable that additional accidents would occur because the State Patrol would not be insuring that traffic is moving smoothly.

- 25 truck drivers and 2,500 automobile drivers would not be cited for serious traffic violations, such as speeding and other activities which might contribute to additional accidents.

- About 2,000 motorists would be left stranded on the highways without the usual assistance for mechanical difficulties and emergency gasoline supplied by the State Patrol.

- The 90 separate local law enforcement agencies who would make 2,500 inquiries of the State Patrol for information would find that this information is not available.

Transportation Services

- If state services were suspended during the period when snow can be expected in our mountain passes, we would have 20,000 automobiles and 1,600 trucks stranded on both sides of the Cascades. At an average of two persons per automobile, and one person per truck, 41,600 people would be stranded.

- Nearly 25,000 persons would find themselves cut off from any land communication with other parts of the state because the State Ferry System would have ceased operation. Persons served by the Ferry System would be unable to obtain necessary daily supplies of food, and the like, and a substantial number would not be able to commute to their regular jobs.
Natural Resources & Recreation

- Fire protection services for some 12 million acres of state and private lands would be suspended.

- If the services were suspended during the season when fires might occur, at least 12 forest fires could start and rage unchecked in our forest lands.

- The suspension of forest fire fighting activities would mean that any fires in existence would continue unchecked and uncontrolled, resulting in a tragic loss in our timber resources.

- If the new and existing fires were not controlled, they could spread into federal or private lands and the State could be held financially responsible for this loss.

- 25 million steelhead and trout being raised by the Department of Game would probably die from lack of attention. Needless to say, this would have a disastrous impact on sport fishing conditions throughout the state.

- 100 million salmon fry would perish and both commercial and sport salmon fishing in the future would all but pass out of existence.

- If services were suspended during the tourist season, 160,000 people planning on attending state parks would be turned away and would have to search elsewhere for recreational facilities, or cancel their vacation plans. Normal maintenance operations would be suspended, and untold numbers of garbage cans would remain in our state parks unemptied to foul the atmosphere and camping sites.

- Also, during the tourist season, 2,000 visitors to tourist information centers would lack information and would have to search elsewhere for guidance and information about the state.

General Government Services

- There would be no National Guard to assist in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

- Four fires which would normally be suspected of having been started by arsonists would not be investigated by the State Fire Marshal.

- At least fifty taxpayers would try to contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division to inquire about business practices and would receive no response.

- Fifty taxpayers would try to contact the Utility and Transportation Commission to register complaints and would receive no response.

- About 140 taxpayers would attempt to contact the Insurance Commissioner to register complaints, and would receive no response.
- Millions of dollars that normally flow through the commercial channels of the state would literally be frozen due to the closure of the State Treasurer's Office. Interest income amounting to thousands of dollars daily would be lost.

**Education**

- Approximately one-half of the 69,000 teachers and employees of local school districts would be given a holiday resulting in the closure of 900 schools and the loss of a day's education for 400,000 students.

- Twenty-two community colleges with 109,000 students enrolled in academic and vocational courses would close.

- At the four state colleges and two universities, 73,000 students would lose an opportunity to progress one day closer to their educational goals.

- The suspension of services at hospitals operated by the University of Washington would leave 500 patients with no care, 50 patients seeking admission would not be placed in the hospitals and 700 out-patients and emergency cases would go unattended. It can be predicted with confidence that numerous deaths would result from the suspension of services in these two major hospitals.

- At Pullman, a major portion of the fire department for the city is located on the campus of Washington State University and the city of 21,000 would be without essential fire services in the event of an emergency.

- Laboratory animals and plant cultures used in instructional and research programs would die and years of scientific research on human, plant and animal diseases would be tragically wasted.

- The closure of state historical museums and the State Library which provide a unique learning experience for the advancement and understanding of man would be lost.

**In Summary**

We have listed but a few of the effects of what would happen if the State suspended operation for a 24-hour period. It is obvious that if such a suspension were to continue such impacts as the traffic congestion which would come from a halt in highway construction and maintenance, deprivation which would come from the elimination of the welfare and unemployment compensation programs, the increased chances of epidemics from the state health program, the gains which have been made in pollution control to maintain the high quality of our air and water would substantially alter the social makeup of our society and life in general as we know it today.

In the final analysis, perhaps one of the reasons why many citizens do not relate to state
services is that these services are either taken for granted or that they relate to unpleasant or depressing situations which the public would sooner forget. Perhaps the best way to remind the citizens that the state does indeed provide a complex variety of essential services is to tell what would happen if the State went out of business for a 24-hour period.

The foregoing is adapted from remarks made to the Washington State Association of Broadcasters in Olympia, May 18, 1972.