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**GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP  
IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

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# **GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

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# Government Leadership in a Time of Crisis

Patricia E. Salkin



Twelve months and it is still a current event. The aftermath of September 11th, 2001 still lives daily not just with the families of the victims of the attack, but it has become inextricably intertwined in the routine work of so many local, state and federal lawmakers and policymakers.

One of the things that has struck me as an observer of government over the last year is the remarkable way in which large bureaucracies, that at times seem to move at a snail's pace, were able to quickly and appropriately respond to an immediate crisis. This is the best illustration of why people choose a career in public service . . . to serve the public and to do the right thing. The next generation who might be considering government service got to witness positive public sector role models, something desperately needed to shed the popular images and jokes about public servants. Government showed with actions, and not just words, that our system of democratic governance does work and that we are a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

At the Government Law Center we have often said that government lawyers are leaders. At no time has this been more evident than through the actions, intellect, commitment and creativity of government lawyers in response to the tragic events of September 11th. The significant challenges and responsibilities that were instantly thrust upon the public sector lawyers and the clients they serve once again illustrated the high quality and excellence of government lawyers at the local, state and federal levels. September 11th proved that as a group, this profession, while perhaps at the time not expecting the unexpected, could mobilize rapid legal and

policy responses appropriate to lead neighborhoods, communities, local governments, and the state and the federal government through a major crisis.

The Government Law Center sponsored and supported a series of programs with the State Academy for Public Administration, the American Society for Public Administration and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators in the Spring of 2002 that examined various aspects of government leadership in this time of crisis. It was evident that legal/policy talent across the board in the public sector was called upon to assist in crafting and advising lawmakers and policymakers on appropriate responses and effective strategies to deal with this extraordinary crisis. Whether it was the Governor's Office, the Legislature, the Corporation Counsel's Office, the State Emergency Management Office, the Workers Compensation Board, the State Insurance Department, the Department of Law, the Comptroller's Office or the U.S. Attorney's Office (and countless other agencies, boards and authorities), everyone was cooperating, communicating and committed to simply "doing the right thing" for the people of this state. There were no partisan politics in the time of great need. Even after putting in more than a full day of work, many lawmakers and policymakers spent precious hours with firefighters, the Red Cross and other relief activities to help ease the pain and share in the support process.

There have been dozens upon dozens of legal issues to address as a result of September 11th. Some of these issues had to be dealt with immediately, such as the issuance of emergency and executive orders. Other issues will challenge the government in the coming months and years such as potential revisions to the laws surrounding the right of intestacy, the wrongful death statute, and the definition of marriage. Government has been taking a closer look at issues including: charities regulation, effectively balancing civil rights and security, and balancing the public's right to know/access government information with safety and security concerns. None of these issues have easy solutions and yet government is called upon to lead us to practical and workable resolutions to benefit society.

It remains a privilege for the staff of the Government Law Center to work with dedicated and committed lawmakers and policymakers who make this state and this country a little bit better every day. Our sincere and heartfelt wishes remain with the innocent victims of the September 11th tragedies in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., and special thanks and appreciation to all in government who can take credit for a job well done and who continue to face the challenges of balancing law and policy in a time of national concern.

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