

Joe M. Allbaugh

Oklahoma State '74

Oxford Cup Roll No. 047

The Allbaugh family settled on a plot of land outside the small town of Blackwell, Oklahoma, in the Cherokee Strip Run of 1893. Years later, the oldest son of Marvin and Peggy Allbaugh grew up on the family's wheat farm, some 100 miles north of Oklahoma City. Young Joe dreamed of the day when he would become a linebacker for the Dallas Cowboys.

Joe M. Allbaugh, *Oklahoma State '74*, took a keen interest in politics during the seventh grade, after a knee injury ended his budding football career. In 1964, he volunteered to distribute leaflets for Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign. In the years that followed, Allbaugh assisted with gubernatorial, senatorial and presidential campaigns.

His sense of civic responsibility paid off when Senator Harry Bellmon offered Allbaugh a job with his re-election campaign. Following graduation, he accepted a position as Bellmon's field representative in Enid, Okla. Joe Allbaugh was a natural when it came to organizing and managing political campaigns — a skill that would serve him well as George W. Bush's national campaign manager in 2000.

Allbaugh advanced his knowledge and honed his skills in various legislative and administrative roles before being named Oklahoma's deputy secretary of transportation. In 1994, a former Bellmon staffer recommended Allbaugh to Bush, who was searching for a new campaign manager. Bush won the Texas governorship and named Allbaugh as his chief of staff.

In February 2001, President Bush again turned to his trusted friend from Oklahoma, nominating Allbaugh to serve as director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA.) "When the worst happens anywhere in America," remarked Bush, "I can assure you folks will be confident when Joe Allbaugh arrives on the scene . . . Joe will help Americans deal with the worst, in the best, most compassionate way possible."

As FEMA director, Allbaugh coordinates federal disaster relief activities, including the Federal Response Plan, which authorizes the response and recovery operations of 28 federal agencies and departments and the American Red Cross. He also oversees the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration, and initiates proactive mitigation activities that reduce loss of life and property from all types of hazards. Allbaugh directs approximately 2,500 federal employees and 4,500 temporary disaster assistance employees.

During his first six months at the helm, Allbaugh provided emergency assistance to victims of tornadoes in Kansas, tropical storms in Mississippi, floods in Iowa and more than two dozen other natural disasters around the country.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Allbaugh was in Bozeman, Montana, attending the annual meeting of the National Emergency Management Association. After learning of the terrorist attacks, he immediately made his way back to Washington, DC, and on to New York City. Allbaugh directed FEMA's unprecedented response by quickly activating search and rescue teams from across the country. "That single day challenged our agency, my staff and me — indeed the nation — in a way nothing that came before it had ever done," wrote Allbaugh in the spring issue of *The Beta Theta Pi*. He continued, "The aftermath truly separated those who make things happen from anyone else. And it underscores the Beta concept of mutual assistance in a way none of us would have imagined."

"I think America has seen (Joe's) superb ability during September 11 and its aftermath," White House Advisor Karl Rove told *Oklahoma Today* magazine. "He's a talented leader who's been able to inspire a lot of volunteers, to give comfort where it's needed and to provide tough leadership in the face of a very, very tough crisis," he said.

Allbaugh, who is not a great fan of the limelight, believes that actions speak louder than words. "At the end of the day," he offered, "it's not what you said that's going to be measured, it's what you did that actually counts."

— Thomas C. Oliver, *Central Michigan '98*, Editor, *The Beta Theta Pi*