

094585



094585

*Arby*

ADDRESS BY  
ELMER B. STAATS  
COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
BEFORE THE  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS  
OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ADMINISTRATION  
SYRACUSE, NEW YORK  
MAY 3, 1974

"EVOLVING NEEDS IN THE PREPARATION OF FUTURE  
LEADERS FOR THE FEDERAL SERVICE"

When Dean Campbell wrote me asking if I would address your conference I hesitated for several days before responding. We at GAO have strong convictions, based on in-depth factfinding, about many areas of the Federal management. But in the area of Federal needs for future leaders I must classify myself as a layman. The hard facts are lacking, and even forecasts are not available from the Office of Management and Budget, the Civil Service Commission, or the major agencies. I am encouraged, however, by current techniques being developed by the CSC Bureau of Executive Manpower.

Despite the lack of data, I concluded that as Comptroller General I would be remiss not to make a best effort to synthesize our insights into this problem and to try to contribute some creative thinking on the subject.

THE NAPA REPORT--A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION

The report of the National Academy of Public Administration entitled "Meeting the Needs of Tomorrow's Public Service" is a landmark document. While I had reviewed this report when it was first published

709825

in January 1973, a rereading has impressed me with the high quality of the preparation which went into this document, and with the sharp and lucid presentation of the material.

The NAPA report contains the following statement which sets the theme of the remarks I would like to offer:

"The public administrator of tomorrow will be sorely tested."

In back of this conclusion is a set of findings and "informed speculation" which grew out of the DELPHI Exercise in which many of us participated.

As you will recall, the Exercise strongly underscored a series of emerging trends which will make the environment of the public executive in the years ahead different, and probably more difficult than that to which you and I have been accustomed:

--First, organizations will be highly fluid, with a flatter structure, shorter chains of authority, greater use of ad hoc task forces and project groupings, greater decentralization, and a rapidly diminishing impact of the "boss," whose role will be primarily that of the adviser and consultant. Tomorrow's organizations will be in a constant state of change--forming and reforming around the problems to be solved--and the programs to be planned, implemented, and then delegated for operation. As orderly processes of documentation and communication are reduced, accountability will become far more difficult.

--Second, the work force, by virtue of the above changes, will be more versatile, more highly trained, and more mobile. Individual employees, as well as organized groups will have more access to, and impact upon, decisionmaking. There will be less entrenched tradition and less unquestioning loyalty to agencies and organizations. There will be, however, a growth in loyalty to professional and peer groups, and to employee unions. The report suggests that these changes could contribute to a decline in the "public service ethic."

--Third, as to administrative processes--the report found tendencies both toward increasing flexibility and increasing rigidity. While more participative management moves in the direction of greater flexibility--on the other hand, increased citizen participation and intervention in the administrative process may move in the opposite direction. Because of this latter trend, the report observes: "As is already becoming the case, it will be easier to block action than to push it through." New standards of effectiveness and accountability will be needed. The report concludes by stressing that: "There will be a significant expansion in the planning function, tied more closely to, and with more emphasis upon program evaluation and assessment, program execution, and attention to program purposes."

I will not summarize the findings in Parts II and III of the report, except to agree with what I know many of you must feel; namely, that the report--like most such pioneering efforts--does a far better job of depicting the immensity of the problem than in prescribing actionable solutions.

--The point is illustrated by the story of two public administrators who went bear hunting. One was a highly aggressive systems analyst who was forever coming up with evaluations and ideas on better ways of doing things. The other was a conservative line executive.

The systems analyst suggested that instead of both going into the forest to hunt for bear, they organize their efforts with one doing the hunting and the other staying in the cottage to skin the bears and prepare the hides to take back home. Naturally, the systems analyst offered to be the one to go out and slay the first bear.

Away he went, and shortly he encountered a grizzly bear who proceeded to charge him. The systems analyst raised his gun, took steady aim, and fired. Unfortunately, all that happened was a "click" because he had failed to load his gun. By then there was not time to reload, so the analyst flung his rifle at the bear's head. Unfortunately, this did not stop the bear's charge and the analyst executed his ultimate emergency maneuver by turning and running

madly back to the cottage where his associate was waiting to perform his part of the bargain. The systems analyst dashed into the cottage and yelled: "Here is the first bear; you skin him out while I go back and hunt the second." And away he ran.

I am sure that many of you must feel like the public administrator sitting back in the cottage left to skin a live bear without prior instruction as just how to do this.

- - - - -

I would like to devote the remainder of my remarks to examining three questions and suggesting answers from my own perspective:

- A. What key skills and perceptions will future Federal administrators need?
- B. What are the satisfactions and constraints which they should expect?
- C. How can educational institutions and agencies attract outstanding students and careerists?

A. KEY SKILLS AND PERCEPTIONS LEADERS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE WILL REQUIRE

The NAPA study, to which I earlier referred, supplemented by the conferences at Airlie House and Belmont, have done a good job of identifying basic skill requirements. There is virtually unanimous agreement that the key skills which need to be stressed are those of planning, analysis and evaluation--based on the use of sophisticated quantitative techniques, and employing multiple disciplines. I

believe that learning of these techniques should be rooted in specific case examples which clearly demonstrate their value. This will require careful case research, and the presentation of cases--whenever possible--by those who themselves were involved, or those who can vividly describe the environment in which the study and decisionmaking occurred.

One of the richest sources of such case materials--and one of the most accessible--is the corps of top executives who leave Government at the end of an Administration.

In 1971, seventeen distinguished lecturers spoke to the GAO staff during our Fiftieth Anniversary Year, on the theme of "Improving Management for More Effective Government." This series, which has been published, is itself a rich source for analysis.

I would like to highlight a few points made by six of the speakers--George Shultz, Jim Webb, Sandy Trowbridge, Bill Gorham, Bob Weaver, and Harlan Cleveland. I am doing this because their views are relevant to curriculum innovations.

1. George Shultz, former Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and former Secretary of Treasury. Mr. Shultz

spoke to our group while still Director of OMB. I was particularly impressed with his re-statement of four traditional functions which this agency, as the President's staff, must perform:

--Use of the budget process as a tool for understanding the total Federal enterprise and for thinking about its priorities.

--The need to give attention to detail and to follow-up--probably among the most neglected traits of public administrators.

--Acceptance of the role of the budget staff as the "whipping boy" who is willing to accept the burden of being unpopular in the public interest.

--The need for an agency willing to stop programs and activities that have failed, or which have fulfilled their original purpose.

The key message from George Shultz's lecture (which I have characterized only in part) is that the old-fashioned attributes of executive management must not get lost in the formulas of quantitative analysis and the new rhetoric of behavioral science--and that we must first continue to train our next generation of managers in the most basic tasks that they are to perform.

2. James E. Webb, former Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Jim drew upon his experience in leading this Nation to a successful landing on the moon, while meeting a timetable and a budget estimate established years in advance. The burden of Jim's message was that success is dependent upon the most detailed planning, clear recognition of Murphy's Law (if anything can go wrong, it will), and most importantly that "when an unplanned-for event occurs, the immediate need is to find out what happened, to apply the best available knowledge and technology to fix it, and to thoroughly test the fix." He went on to

attribute NASA's success to a psychology of not being concerned with finding the culprit but with seeking to solve the problem and getting on with the job.

Most important in Jim's message, to me, is his conclusion that there is a need for more research on leadership. He stated: "I believe that in Government today we have no greater need than to involve scholars from many disciplines in this research, scholars who can observe and accurately describe what successful senior Government executives do to produce success and what causes them to fail. We particularly need close cooperation between these researchers and our best governmental executives so that the research results can be translated into new and better teaching in our graduate schools."

3. Robert C. Weaver, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. In a most thoughtful paper, Bob Weaver examined the problems of managing urban programs. Particularly relevant to the training of our future leaders he spoke on the values, as well as the limitations, of quantitative approaches. He warned of becoming over-enamored with approaches whose very mathematical character "gives them an image of being scientific and exact." Bob points out that: "Not only is this an exaggeration--since we are still learning how to use them effectively--but also it ignores many significant realities. Not the least of these is the fact

that political as well as analytical considerations are involved in the choice and perpetuation of public programs."

His paper further warns that our increasing reliance upon evaluation "not only calls for more sophisticated approaches but we also need to be ever conscious of its potential for interfering needlessly with operations." He says that: "Those who engage in evaluation are required to walk a narrow path which avoids too great a reliance upon mechanical measurement on the one hand and receptiveness to improved evaluation techniques on the other."

4. Alexander B. Trowbridge, former Secretary of Commerce.

Sandy Trowbridge delivered one of the most provocative of the lectures. He proceeded from a theme of the growing public distrust and disillusionment in American institutions, including the corporate business structure and "the governmental, religious, educational, and social organizations of the United States." The principal proposal resulting from Sandy's paper was summed up in this recommendation:

"This need is to create, therefore, a unique, independent Institute devoted exclusively to the identification, coordination, assessment, and communication of alternative national goals, priorities, and comprehensive policies."

Continuing, he went on to say that,

"The new Institute would conduct, sponsor, coordinate, and integrate both research and education on national policies and alternatives. It would be, in effect, a new management information system for decisionmakers who are concerned

with basic alternative national directions and destinations--whether these decisionmakers are in the White House, Congress, State or local Government, corporate management, labor, education, voluntary organization, or in the general public."

The impressive message in Sandy's paper, for me, is not the organization idea but the need which gives rise to the idea.

5. William Gorham, former Assistant Secretary of HEW, and now President of the Urban Institute. Bill pointed to a succession of over-promises and under-achievements in the past two decades because of inadequate plans in many fields--including employment, small business, minority enterprise, housing, poverty, hunger, environment, equal opportunity, crime, education, etc. In summing up the needs to improve our management, Bill stated: "We must discover mechanisms that assure the simultaneous public discussion of ways of achieving goals along with the establishment of the goal. Our error has been to permit Federal performance to fall short of the expectations formed during the process of setting the goal." The solutions he stressed include better planning, better facts for planning, and better feedback on performance.

6. Harlan Cleveland, former Assistant Secretary of State, and Ambassador to NATO.

Harlan, in surveying the needs of our time, stresses the importance of more gifted generalists. He cites the

Gardner Report of 1957, which in its conclusion stated:

"The trend toward specialization has created among other things an extraordinary demand for gifted generalists, men with enough actual and technical competence to deal with the specialists, and enough breadth to play more versatile roles, whether it be managers, teachers, interpreters, or critics."

This report went on to say:

"There is a premium on men and women with a talent for innovation, for individuals who can move beyond the limits of present fashion. . . We should educate our young people to meet an unknown need rather than to prepare them for needs already identified."

Harlan feels that future executives must have three perceptions:

- First, that crises are normal, tensions are promising, and complexity is fun.
- Second, that paranoia and self-pity are reserved for non-executives.
- Third, that the executive must have a sense of responsibility for the "situation-as-a-whole."

I have cited but samplings from our seventeen Anniversary Lecturers. Their relevance is underscored by the fact that each of those who spoke did so from a recent, fresh perspective of top management in the Federal structure.

B. WHAT ARE THE SATISFACTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS  
FUTURE FEDERAL LEADERS SHOULD EXPECT?

I fear that good men are discouraged from seeking Federal posts because they frequently lack an appreciation of the high personal satisfaction which the skilled and properly-prepared executive can experience. On the other hand, far too many become disillusioned

with the constraints in the Bureaucratic System and leave before they can adjust and start contributing. In both cases, educators have an opportunity to do a better job of advance preparation.

1. Explaining the Satisfactions of Public Service

Let me cite several sources of data which demonstrate the attractions of top executive posts in the Federal service:

- . Almost 15 years ago the Harvard Business School Club of Washington, D.C., conducted a survey, by questionnaire and interview, covering one thousand businessmen and top civil servants, to discover the attitudes of those who had served and those who were still serving in Government. Seventy percent of the business executives who had served expressed the view that the experience had made them better business executives, and that their Government service had proved to be rewarding. The study recommended that educators develop more practical courses in public administration and that more funds and facilities be allocated for research into public administration problems.
  
- . Ten years later the Brookings Institution summarized the results of its Public Affairs Scholarship Program, conducted between 1961 and 1967, and involving 96 participants who had a 14-week tour of duty in the Federal service. In its assessment Brookings found that "generally speaking, participants thought that the Government executive was comparable to the business executive in positions of comparable responsibility." Most thought well of their Federal counterparts

and half stated that their Government experience would help them attain advancement in their firms.

. President's Executive Interchange Program. The most recent body of experience, and one that offers opportunities for very current research is the experience of the President's Executive Interchange Program. During the past three years the program has graduated 100 men from industry who spent a full year in Government--and 34 Federal executives who spent one year in business. An evaluation report covering these groups has just been published. Among its highlights are the following:

- 81 percent of the private sector executives reported that their Federal experience had been "very beneficial." Only 65 percent of the Government executives so rated their private sector experience.
- Government executives approached their interchange job with more enthusiasm than did private sector executives. However, at the end of the interchange year, the private sector executives viewed their job opportunity more highly than did the Government executives. While the Government executive's experience did not measure up to his initial expectations, the industry executive's experience was significantly greater.

I have spoken to and worked with many men who have occupied top Federal positions and returned to industry. Some have later returned to Government. There is no more predictable phenomenon than that the

industry executive who is successful in Government finds, after his return to the industrial scene, that his work lacks the same scope, challenge, and public service satisfactions.

What is the compelling force attracting the public administrator to stay and do his best?

In addition to the usual motivations of pay, security, challenge, etc., I think the key is: concern for those who are served. The Children's Bureau has been headed for decades by men and women who deeply care about children; the Bureau of Indian Affairs, by men who truly believe the Indian has been wronged. The Forest Service similarly is managed by men who believe that this Nation's forests are an invaluable resource that must be protected. The Rural Electrification Administration attracts people who believe that the farms deserve electric power and only the Federal Government will make it available to them.

What I regard as a closely-related motivational force is pride in programs. I have observed this in military units and civilian agencies as well. The IRS, for example, has always struck me as an enterprise involved in much routine work, but its people have displayed high pride in being a part of what they call "The Revenue Service."

A Grade 17 career civil servant in FAA expressed his pride when the FAA Administrator introduced him as the man principally responsible for the new airways legislation. "That means to me," he said, "that I can tell my grandchildren I was largely responsible for the most important part of aviation legislation in a decade." The man who was responsible for administering social security once turned down the presidency of a private insurance company paying more than twice his Federal salary, on the grounds

that "It just isn't as important as what I am doing." I suspect it is apparent to you that I think these motivational forces are real. They cannot be turned on and off as readily as a cash bonus or stock options. Their communication requires thought and subtlety. But they must be captured and exposed to students through such techniques as case studies, guest lecturers, and work/school intern programs.

## 2. Constraints Which Must Be Expected and Accepted

At a recent conference held by the Harvard Business School on the subject of how to prepare a business executive for a tour in Government, it was clear that the businessman does not readily grasp the Federal decisionmaking processes; and that he quickly loses patience with it. John Corson made the key point of the conference--namely, that to work effectively in the Federal environment, one must not only understand these processes--but, more important, respect them as an inherent part of our philosophy of Government.

This fact may explain why many businessmen who come to Washington are not notable successes and why they average less than 2 years. They bring experience and capability, but they lack an understanding of the environment of Government. They are unable to put their capability to work effectively.

What, then, is distinctive about the environment within the executive branch?

The uniqueness, in my opinion, can be boiled down to four characteristics:

1. First, those who work in top management positions work in a high-risk, goldfish-bowl environment. If they are not

themselves responsible for decisions that may affect many lives or many dollars, they are close to those who do make such decisions. And they are exposed to public view.

Take, for example, the young man who now serves as Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons; he is closer to the crime and drug problems than all save a very few people. And a riot of prisoners in one of his institutions is national news.

Or take the head of the Air Traffic Control Service in FAA: he knows that on the effectiveness with which he manages this service depend the lives of many travelers. A mid-air collision puts him squarely before the press and a congressional inquiry.

The responsibility of either of these two executives is greater--and more subject to public exposure every day--than that of a Vice President for Operations of a private company--who is undoubtedly paid more than either one.

2. Secondly, they all work in an environment marked by excessive reviews and controls over resource decisions. These constraints flow both from the Congressional/Executive check and balance--and from the doctrine that has long been maintained in the executive branch, and zealously nurtured by the Office of Management and Budget--that is, the doctrine of the "President's Program."

The idea that the President shall determine what legislation shall be presented to the Congress, and what policies shall be followed in

implementing existing and newly-enacted legislation, is obviously sound. But the doctrine of the President's program is used by the White House staff, the Secretary's staff, the Office of Management and Budget, the Civil Service Commission, and others to require rather arbitrary limits on the number of people to be employed, the number of executives above a certain rank, the structure of the organization, the relative importance of particular jobs, who may be appointed, the times at which equipment may be bought, and the dollars to be expended.

The President is referred to as the "general manager," and it is implied that the executive branch is similar to a private corporation. But it is unlikely that large, diversified companies impose anything approaching the reviews and controls that are imposed over the much larger and more diversified executive branch. Whatever the reasons for these controls, they are part of the environment which the Federal executive must both understand and respect.

3. Thirdly, the environment in which these Federal executives operate is one of multiple--and sometimes conflicting--ties and allegiances. Formally, each is responsible to the Secretary of his department and through him, to the President. Realistically, each must also be responsive to a Congressional Committee (or Committees) and to one or more interest groups. The manager serves the President and his Secretary well only if he maintains harmonious relations with the interest groups and the Congressional Committees.

Mind you, I am not referring to partisan political interference. The environment includes some of that, but not a great deal. But decisionmaking in a democratic Government involves the continual reconciliation of the views of various interest groups and the executive and legislative branches.

4. Fourthly, most executives operate in a highly-specialized program environment, often with little private sector counterparts. Specialization is required by the character of most programs, and is enforced, in some measure, by the interest groups that look over the agency's shoulder. A graduate of the Harvard Business School who is a well-equipped generalist, may move from one company or department to another in a succession of sales, finance, and production jobs. But a man with such relatively generalized capabilities will find only a few opportunities in the Office of Education, the Federal Aviation Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Bureau of Standards, or the Defense Intelligence Agency. Each such agency has its own family of program specialists, and for a non-specialist to break into one of these families is difficult--even if he is willing to do extensive homework.

I would strongly urge the use of internships during the graduate MPA program. This can be regarded as essential to understand the Federal service environment and to develop an awareness of situations, values, and nuances of relationships that are difficult to explain in a classroom. As the NAPA study suggests, a period of 3 to 4 months between the first

and second years of an MPA program probably is a minimum time. However, it must be carefully supervised and have the full support of Federal agencies. The CSC should work with selected schools in experimenting with this idea.

C. HOW CAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES ATTRACT OUTSTANDING STUDENTS AND CAREERISTS?

I believe we need to introduce, deliberately, more of the competitive, entrepreneurial approach by educators and by the employing agencies.

In this connection I would like to make four suggestions:

1. First, public affairs schools are suffering from under-financing, and must compete with the business schools for the best students. I believe that the public affairs schools must find ways of doing what enlightened employers do on college campuses--that is, actively recruit the best students. I suspect that Federal agencies, and undoubtedly many State and local Governments, will gladly assist in these efforts in the future.
2. Secondly, schools of public administration which plan to expand their mid-career training programs must be more entrepreneurial by going to organizations of all sizes to examine their needs and to tailor their offerings to meet those needs. A recent study by the Army Management Training Agency (AMETA) of practices

in ten large companies found a growing tendency to reduce the use of outside organizations for executive development, and to give preference to internal executive development programs. AMETA found that in-house programs are believed to have greater relevancy. While the greater use of in-house resources is an understandable trend, it reflects on the inadequacy of educational research and merchandising by the schools themselves. I would suggest that NASPAA consider more case by case efforts to tailor the capabilities of universities to meet the needs of the major Federal agencies.

3. Thirdly, I feel that the colleges and universities should begin to make it possible for outstanding performers in the public service to earn advanced degrees based upon their own records of on-the-job achievement. The very recognition of the attainment of outstanding performers, and the according them of academic recognition--will encourage their participation as part-time faculty in schools of public administration. This should be a great boost to the image of the universities among public administrators and an assist to teaching programs. In short, I am urging more liberality in the granting of advanced degrees based on criteria and qualifying steps which assess achievement on the job. Bill Collins at American University is trying out a professional doctorate

degree--a degree for persons already on the job. We could use more of this type of innovation.

4. Finally, in respect to competition, I believe the time is at hand when the Civil Service Commission should liberalize the authority to hire direct from college campuses, and to allow agencies to compete for the best talent to meet their needs. This is not only important to make agency manning more responsive, but also to make it possible for the new graduate to have a greater variety of job offers, and to avoid the sterility of the mass examinations.

#### CONCLUSION

The experience of the past three years by ASPA, NAPA, and NASPAA in coming to grips with problems of improving the preparation of future leaders for the public service, has been fruitful. Perhaps the time has now come to start sorting out the numerous ideas which have been identified, and to lay out concrete and specific plans of action in which each of us can participate. The general needs are quite clear, but the specific steps are still to be identified. I suspect that from the deliberations of this conference will emerge ideas leading to specific actions.

- - - - -

I began my remarks by describing the predicament in which we managers put you educators as being analogous to asking you to skin

a live bear. Let me conclude with another anecdote which acknowledges that what I have said does not solve your problems.

This fable concerns the grasshopper and the ants. Once upon a time a young grasshopper lived through the springtime and summertime of his life, but as fall began to approach he became worried that he might not survive the winter when the ground froze and the snow fell. He searched around for someone to give him sound advice, and finally went to the ants. The ants meditated for several days and then called in the grasshopper and gave him their solution. It was--when the ground froze and the snow fell he should turn himself into a cockroach and crawl into a warm basement to spend the winter. This solution pleased the grasshopper greatly and he went back to his play.

When finally the ground froze and the snow began to fall, the grasshopper realized he had not asked the ants how to carry out their solution, so he went back and asked for further instructions. The ants sternly glared at him and said, "We gave you the solution. You will have to work out the minor details yourself." With that I will leave the minor details to this group for further deliberation.

# # # #