

Week 2

Recap: Modern American public administration is, in large measure, a response George Washington Plunkitt and his kind of political leader. What were the problems with his approach to governance? First, administrative decisions (like where to put roads and how best to build them) were made for personal financial gain at public expense; generically, we can refer to this, in its various forms, as graft and corruption. Second, staffing decisions (whom to hire for government jobs) were made to reward political supporters rather than according to a person's competence and ability to achieve public objectives; this came in two forms: nepotism (hiring of relatives) and cronyism (hiring friends and political supporters). Third, distribution of services was directed toward rewarding political support; in other words, favoritism influenced how resources were distributed. And, fourth, larger public problems were left unaddressed (what we might term ineffectiveness). Put in more general terms, we can say that under Plunkitt (and his kind), administrative processes (delivering services and managing government) were subordinate to political processes (getting elected, connecting to voters). Of course, we want administration to be subordinate to politics (if by this we mean politics as the "voice of the people" and the essence of democracy) but not to "politics," which is concerned with perpetuating the terms of current office holders. Since Plunkitt could claim, with a fair amount of success, that he represented the people, that getting elected showed that to be true, and that it was the very essence of democracy for him to distribute resources to those who helped him stay in office, we need to ask what public administration has to offer that is better than Plunkitt: that is, what will PA do that appeals to the "people" in the same way Plunkitt did without all the defects of his approach to governance? This chapter is Henry's attempt to articulate a modern response to that question.

Prefatory Notes for Chapter 1: Henry argues that the three pillars of good government are democracy, honesty, and competency, and that public administrators are essential to all three. Indeed, he asserts that "Public administration is the device used to reconcile bureaucracy with democracy." He then goes on to make the claim that, even though it is an American tradition to limit the power of executive authority at all levels of government, bureaucrats (who are often demonized unfairly) have considerable influence over the structuring of policy alternatives and even in policy-making, especially at the local level. Noetic authority, or the authority that derives from their superior knowledge of complex social matters, is their primary tool in this process, though he acknowledges that their power also comes from the longevity of institutions (staying power) and their role as stoppers (impeding the implementation of policies decided by others). The role of the bureaucracy is, therefore, to translate increasingly complicated issues into terms that can be understood by and used in a democracy. A great deal of the book will be devoted to issues of honesty and competency, but it is clear that Henry believes that public administration is also essential to democracy. So it is interesting that he ends the chapter with the following quotation: "would we trust the unemployment numbers if, every time a new president came along, he replaced the entire Bureau of Labor Statistics with a new crop of cronies and campaign

aides?” This suggests that public administration acts, at least in part, as a barrier to democratically elected officials doing whatever they want with the bureaucracy: this is more than bureaucratic inertia (the stopping power of bureaucrats), for Henry implies that it is good that public administrators do not allow the Bureau of Labor Statistics to be the tool of elected officials. That is, it would appear that this is a case in which noetic authority trumps democratic responsiveness as a means of advancing democracy. In what sense is this a case of public administration aiding democracy? On what grounds could you make the argument that elected officials should be able to replace entire departments with political supporters? On what grounds could you make the case that it would be inappropriate to allow them to do so?

In the introduction to Part I, Henry makes some very important claims: bureaucracy is in our bones, but we have always wanted limited government; bureaucracy and democracy are antithetical (which is to say that they are opposed to one another); and, thus, the purpose of public administration is to reconcile bureaucracy and democracy. His definition of public administration is a good one, for it captures this essential problem: “Public Administration is a broad-ranging and amorphous combination of theory and practice; its purpose is to promote a superior understanding of government and its relationship with the society it governs, as well as to encourage public policies more responsive to social needs and to institute managerial practices attuned to effectiveness, efficiency, and the deeper requisites of the citizenry.” The role of the bureaucracy, therefore, is to translate increasingly complicated issues into terms that can be understood by and used in a democracy. Though that might sound like a good pairing of objectives, the two are often in conflict, and the changing ways we view each element of the equation (bureaucracy and democracy) mean that the relationship between them has also shifted over time.

Imagine what Plunkitt would think of this chapter. For him, the bureaucracy was the dreaded civil service: a system that placed applicants in public service positions based on merit (measured by the ability to score some minimum level on a test) rather than party affiliation. For Plunkitt, bureaucracy that was not a tool of democracy only destroyed patriotism and removed government from the hands of the people. He would have a hard time believing that most citizens approve of their interactions with bureaucrats. This suggests that “responsiveness” now means very different things than it did for Plunkitt.

Now apply the concepts you see here to the customer service initiatives in the two ICMA-TV videos. To what extent have modern public administrators been able to marry the best of democracy and bureaucracy? How are they able to do so?

Chapter One

BIG DEMOCRACY, BIG BUREAUCRACY

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

A discussion of the tradition and context of American public administration sets the tone for the book, focusing on American's preference for constrained public leadership. The public perception of bureaucracy (pejorative) is juxtaposed with the public's reliance upon and acceptance of public administrators (favorable). The chapter concludes by defining the paradoxical power of the public administrator, which has developed beyond its cultural, institutional, and legal limits.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the political culture and developments that shaped U.S. government and public administration.
2. Explain the difference between Hamilton's and Jefferson's vision of the bureaucracy.
3. Understand the consequences of a constrained government and public administration.
4. Reconcile the differences between public suspicion of public administration and positive individual experiences with public administrators.
5. Identify the importance of the policy-making role of public administrators.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

AN UNPROMISING PRECIS

The Indians and the English

Administration by Ambassadors: The Articles of Confederation

Administration by Legislators: The First State Constitutions

Administration by Enfeebled Executives: Jefferson Prevails

Hamiltonian Energy

Jeffersonian Constraint

Anti-Administration

A CULTURE OF CONSTRAINT

Americans and Their Governments

Governing in a Distrusting Culture

Distrust of Elected Leaders

Distrust of Government

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONSTRAINT

Hobbled Elective Chief Executives

The Domesticated Presidency

Constraining Governors

Constraining Local Elected Chief Executives

Hobbled Governments

Constraining the Federal Government

Constraining State Governments

Constraining Local Governments

Hobbled Governmental Growth

INFERNAL VERNON: A CASE OF UNCONSTRAINED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (case study)

THE BUREAUCRAT: BRAINED, BLAMED AND BOUNCING BACK

Bashing Bureaucrats

Politicians' Pandering

Academia's Undercutting

Media's Mordancy

Are Bureaucrats to Blame?

The Public Likes Public Administrators

Encountering Bureaucrats

The Bureaucrat: Government's Savior?

THE PARADOXICAL POWER OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR

Bureaucrats and Legislators

Bureaucratizing Congress

Bureaucratizing State Legislatures

Bureaucratizing Local Councils and Boards

Presidents Versus Bureaucrats: Mobilizing the Bureaucracy

Presidential Frustration

Bureaucratic Responsiveness

Bringing Bureaucracy to Heel?

Executive Indifference

Executive Expertise

A Bureaucracy Newly Girded

Governors Versus Legislators: The Battle for the Bureaucracy

The Gray Eminence of the Public Administrator

Staying Power

Discretionary Power

Policy-Making Power: Players and Patterns

Stopping Power: Two Cases

A Bolt in the Bureaucracy

Deep-Sixing Democracy

NOETIC AUTHORITY: THE BASE OF BUREAUCRATIC POWER

Knowledge is Power

Knowledge, Power, and the Public Interest

KEY CONCEPTS/TERMS/INDIVIDUALS

The Articles of Confederation

Alexander Hamilton

Thomas Jefferson

constraint

the “hollow government”

recall

referendum

initiative or initiative petition

bureaucratization

staying power

discretionary power

legislative veto

policy agenda

noetic authority

Max Weber