Remarks of Assistant Secretary of the Interior John A. Carver, Jr. at the Summer Institute in Executive Development for Federal Administrators, Center for Advanced Study in Organization Science, The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 8, 1964

Reality and Change in the Bureaucracy

An abstruse or contradictory title usually signals that the speaker didn't have the remotest idea what he was going to say when the deadline came to submit his subject. I plead innocent. This one was given me, and I've been puzzling for weeks as to what its author--your Director--had in mind.

This being my third annual appearance here, I could suppose, I guess, that the assignment of this title had some relationship to my efforts of the past. You can't know it, of course, but I've fancied myself as the practitioner commissioned to present a testing of the insights which are the product of your sessions. Since you by definition are all practitioners yourselves, I've sought to emphasize the dilemmas, the paradoxes, the compromises, and the accommodations which mark what I've called the real world. Choosing between right and right is a process which differs from choosing between right and wrong.

I work in a department where these choices are the day-by-day stuff of the decision-making process. To build a dam which floods irreparable natural beauty, to sacrifice power generation head to maintain fishing or boating or scenic values, to wear two hats and represent both sides when the United States and Indians contest for the same dam-site--these are commonplace imponderables for a Secretary of the Interior.

Last year I said: "The government's business is too often thought of as operating in a theoretical vacuum, affected by outside forces only at the policy-making or political level. If we acknowledge at the outset that at every point of contact between the public and a public official there is going to be an interaction, we've laid the foundation for a discussion of administrative persuasion as worthy of an artistic touch or two.

"This view of administration isn't politics, and it doesn't contravene the civil service laws. It simply faces reality to recognize that administration oblivious to a constant interplay with outside forces can fail for that reason alone."

Public administration is in the public arena. The "realities" may be the political, social, or economic forces, but in a broader sense the realities are the determinants, whatever they may be:
Arthur Schlesinger in this month's Harpers, uses the term "reality" in somewhat this sense. His interviewer asked about decision making: "There are, I presume, Presidents who simply take decisions on the basis of different alternatives offered to them. And then there are Presidents who on the basis of the alternatives forge their own decisions, their own ideas. Was this Kennedy's technique?"

"Schlesinger: Very much so. As you know, Kennedy was a man of extraordinary and insatiable intellectual curiosity who had a great instinct for the crucial realities in a situation....He had the effect on people, in short, of forcing them to fresh approaches--exciting them because of his great interest and his own brilliance, and forcing them to a higher, more imaginative performance than the bureaucracy would ordinarily produce or tolerate."

Schlesinger also discussed the processes of decision. "I think," he said, "the historian tends in retrospect to make the processes of decision far more tidy and rational than they are: to assume that people have fixed positions and represent fixed interests and to impose a pattern on what is actually a swirl if not a chaos. I think the historian doesn't realize the opaqueness of the process."

I suppose in a general sense one of my major objectives today is to demonstrate that a palpable, authentic, major U.S. governmental program, one with a long and well-chronicled history, is as subject to the interplay of myth and reality, as prone to succumb or rise above organizational and personal rivalries, or to respond rationally and irrationally to stress, and as capable of both administrative inventiveness and administrative failure, as the smallest organizational unit which you may be studying.

The Indian people of North America challenged the administrative capabilities of John Smith, and history records his inability to meet the test. The Continental Congress named Benjamin Franklin and Patrick Henry as Indian Commissioners, but their role was diplomatic rather than administrative. They were expected to treat with the Indian sovereignties.

Such societies could not be sustained, not when the conquest of the land at all costs had to be justified, and by 1822 the Indian Bureau was the beneficiary of a permanent annual appropriation of $10,000 as a civilization fund. (1/3 of 1% vs. 1/5 of 1%). This suggests that the Indians, at least in generalities, had come to be regarded as wild or uncivilized, a suggestion borne out by the frankness of a couple of Indian Commissioners in the mid-nineteenth century--In 1851, Commissioner Lea wrote: "On the general subject of civilization of the Indian, many and diversified opinions have been put forth; but, unfortunately, like the race to which they relate, they are too wild to be of much utility. The great question, how shall the Indian be civilized, yet remains without a satisfactory answer."
In 1872, Commissioner Walker referring to the reservation system said: "there is no question of national dignity, be it remembered, involved in the treatment of savages by civilized powers. With wild men as with wild beasts, the question of whether in a given situation one shall fight, coax, or run, is a question merely of what is easiest and safest."

Indian Affairs was for many years a responsibility of the War Department. The justification for the manning and maintenance of military bases (which just coincidently were valued contributions to the local economy) as necessary for the protection of the local people against marauding Indians continued as late as 1923.

At times, the Indian service controlled almost every aspect of Indian life. At one time, the United States by conscious policy sought to solve its personnel problem by asking the organized Protestant Churches to supply it with reservation superintendents, to "Christianize" the savages.

Policy has been framed in ethically agreeable terms even when the most materialistic of objectives has dominated our national programs. While we were "civilizing" or Christianizing" the Indians, we also were subordinating their culture and their land ethic to the expansion of the railroad net, the opening of land for settlement, for mineral development, and for other forms of exploitation.

Two pieces of "policy" have caused more difficulty for current administrations than any others. One was the policy of allotment. The individualization of the communally-held tribal land on the theory that with an individual land base Indians would become farmers and ranchers and move into the mainstream of American life. The other was the policy of "termination"--to terminate federal supervision and services special to Indians.

So its policies have evolved. As the 1961 Task Force on Indian Affairs reported:

"Longer than any other agency of the Federal Government, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has carried out directives to arbitrate cultural differences between the American society and one of its segments. As it is the fate of arbiters seldom to please everyone and often to please no one completely, the Bureau throughout its history has been under constant attack from some quarters and, occasionally, has been criticized from all sides at once. The need for its very existence has been continuously challenged by those who feel that differences should be arbitrated "naturally" through the processes of conflict and competition, rather than "artificially" through Government intervention."
"Yet, in spite of the many difficulties which the Bureau has encountered in discharging its often-conflicting directives, the assistance which it and other agencies have provided to the Indians has made it possible for this group of Americans to progress toward fuller and more effective participation in the social, cultural, political and esthetic life of the United States. A greater percentage of the Indians today vote, seek elective office, attend school, enjoy good health, have attained prominence in the arts, and are socially accepted by their non-Indian neighbors than at any other time in the nation's history. On the other hand, the number of Indians for whom these changes have not taken place is still large, is increasing rapidly, and presents a continuing challenge.

"Much of the progress which the Indians have made has occurred during the past forty years. They have been considered citizens only since 1924 and, in Arizona and New Mexico, their right to vote was not confirmed in the courts until 1948. Statutory authority for the organization of tribal governments was provided by Congress just a little over 25 years ago, and Indian youth have been drafted for military service only since World War II.

"The events of these past forty years have done much to make Indians aware of the fact that they cannot alone decide the kind of future world they will inhabit. Furthermore, their experiences have shown them new ways of making their lives more secure and comfortable. Now, the desire of many for better incomes, more formal education, better health, and more voice in their own affairs rivals their desire to retain older ways.

"The Task Force believes that in the foreseeable future, the proper role of the Federal Government is to help Indians find their way along a new trail—one which leads to equal citizenship, maximum self-sufficiency, and full participation in American life. In discharging this role, it must seek to make available to Indians a greater range of alternatives which are compatible with the American system, and where necessary, to assist Indians with choosing from among these alternatives. As a part of this responsibility, it must mobilize and direct the vast reservoir of good will toward Indians which is found throughout the country. Finally, since many of the problems relating to Indian development are local problems, it must use its influence to persuade local governments, as well as those who live near Indian reservations, to recognize their stake in the Indian future and to work with the Indians and with the Federal Government in preparing the new trial."

Carl Schurz, in his 1879 annual report, set forth the Indian policy as follows:

"1. To set the Indians to work as agriculturists or herdsmen, thus to break up their habits of savage life and to make them self-supporting.

"2. To educate their youth of both sexes, so as to introduce to the growing generation civilized ideas, wants, and aspirations."
"3. To allot parcels of land to Indians in severalty and to give them individual title to their farms in fee, inalienable for a certain period, thus to foster the pride of individual ownership of property instead of their former dependence upon the tribe, with its territory held in common.

"4. When settlement in severalty with individual title is accomplished, to dispose, with their consent, of those lands on their reservations which are not settled and used by them, the proceeds to form a fund for their benefit, which will gradually relieve the government of the expenses at present provided for by annual appropriations.

"5. When this is accomplished, to treat the Indians like other inhabitants of the United States, under the laws of the land."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is one of the bureaus generally assigned to me for supervision within the Department. The Commissioner in charge, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, is one of the ablest and best-trained in government. Philleo Nash is, like your Director, a Ph.D in Anthropology; he is a practicing and practiced politician, and veteran of elective office, Lieutenant Governor of this State; he served in the White House on the Staff of President Truman, specializing in equal opportunity and minority problems. Mr. Nash and I just returned from a conference of all the Indian Service Superintendents at Santa Fe, and I think perhaps we can make something of the title "Reality and Change" in the context of one government program, The Bureau of Indian Affairs.

I'm going to frame some questions for Mr. Nash and me to chew over, and we both want you to join in. This week this group is concerned both with the organizational and the personal processes of innovation and controlled change in complex systems.

To what extent, in the history of the Bureau (including the last three years) have individuals left a continuing work, for good or ill, of innovation and change of established policy?

To what extent has the bureaucracy successfully resisted change, either for the worse or the better?

Resistance to termination as a policy--

Can you give some examples of creative response by individual to bankrupt policy?

Where is the reality in the program--
In the Indians?
In the interest of the U.S.?
In the interest of the Congress?
Indian politics--per capita fever?
What plus the Task Force as a technique for change, to get a "new trial."

How do you see your relationship as among Congress, the Secretary, the Indians, the Indian interest groups? To what extent do you think the bureaucracy sees your relationship, or its relationship, the same as you?

Conclusion:

I have been reading an impressive volume of history, "The Rise of the West," by William H. McNeill of the University of Chicago. Let me read you a couple of paragraphs from his essay of conclusion synthesizing the history of civilization's growing ability to organize the manage:

"...basic questions of social hierarchy and human purpose which haunt all men in an age when inherited institutions and customary relationships no longer appear natural, inevitable, immutable. Hierarchy and control remain as vital as ever, perhaps even more so; for the complex co-ordination of human effort required by modern industry, government, and warfare make it certain that some few men will have to manage, plan, and attempt to foresee, while a majority must obey, even if retaining some right to criticize or approve the acts of their superiors. But who has the right to manage whom? And toward what ends should human capacities be directed?

"The wider the range of human activities that can be brought within the scope of deliberate management, the more fateful these questions become. Or perhaps a really tough-minded critic of twentieth-century society would have to say: The wider the range of human activities brought within the scope of deliberate management, the more irrelevant questions of social hierarchy and managerial goals become. Admittedly, as the managerial elite of any particular country gathers experience and expertise, reduces new areas of human activity to its control, and integrates partial plans into a rational (or transnational) whole, the bureaucratic machine exercising such powers becomes increasingly automatic, with goals built into its very structure. The administrative machine, like other specialised instruments, can only do what it was built to do. Scientific personnel classification allows, may, requires, interchangeability of parts in the bureaucracy; hence individual appointments and dismissals make remarkably little difference so long as they do not achieve too massive a scale or too rapid a rate. The administrative totality, its over-all structure and functioning, and even the general lines of policy remain almost unaffected by changes of elected officials. Even energetic reformers, placed in high office and nominally put in charge of such vast bureaucratic hierarchies, find it all but impossible to do more than slightly deflect the line of march.

"A really massive bureaucracy, such as those now constitute every major modern government, becomes a vested interest greater and more strategically located than any "private" vested interest of the past. Such
groupings are characterized by a lively sense of corporate self-interest, expressed through elaborate rules and precedents, and procedures rising toward the semi-sacredness of holy ritual. These buttress a safe conservatism of routine and make modern bureaucracy potentially capable of throttling back even the riotous upthrust of social and technical change nurtured by modern science. Consequently, as the corporate entities of government bureaucracies grow and mesh their activities more and more perfectly one with another, both within and among the various "sovereign" states of our time, use and wont—the way things have "always" been done—may become, bit by bit, an adequate surrogate for social theory. By sustaining an unceasing action, administrative routine may make rational definition of the goals of human striving entirely superfluous."

I would say in summary that what we have demonstrated here tonight is at least a partial rebuttal to Mr. McNeill's somber thesis--