REMARKS OF UNDER SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR JOHN A. CARVER, JR.,
AT THE 11TH ANNUAL CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS
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It has become fashionable over the past decade
or so for political executives in the Federal establishment
to pay high tribute to the industry, competence and dedi-
cation of civil service personnel. Effusions of such
praise occur before meetings of Federal employees, or
as a part of a political executive's swan song as he leaves
office.

I have idly speculated on this latter predictable
behaviour. The cynic would perhaps attribute such state-
ments or speeches to career subordinates who might have
the ear or the pen of the official. The political executive
may be caught up in the swift current of precedent and
feel that this is in order because his predecessors and
his contemporaries have done so, or feel that it is a part
of the price one must pay to assure the loyal support of
"the system".

But, by and large, I am confident that most such statements are honest, sincere and highly personal estimates of the career service's contribution to the national effort. To those who have worked with the Federal civil service for any length of time, this conclusion comes as no surprise. In fact, the really surprising thing is that the political executive coming in from private business or professional practice feels moved to confess his underestimation of the career service's competence and dedication. Quite clearly, neither the Federal establishment nor the employees have always done a good enough job in creating a favorable image with the public.

Federal employees almost seem content to absorb the slings and arrows of political invective, and to accept the role of whipping boy for those who would castigate the burgeoning bureaucracy without reference to
it is performing services essential to national growth and stability. Shackled by the formal restraints of the Hatch Act, the Federal employee cannot defend his cause in the same political forum—and this is probably just as well. Rather, he has had to find other outlets to persuade the Congress, the public and his professional associates in private industry.

Events such as this are an important part of that process. In honoring Federal employees of the Greater St. Louis Area for outstanding service to their government, you are in a very real sense honoring all Federal employees everywhere. By calling attention to the training, the technical ability and the ideals represented in these unusual accomplishments, you underscore the quality of Federal service and raise the level of public appreciation a degree or two. The cumulative effect of many such recognition ceremonies
the public interest.

The invitation which you have extended to me, a political executive charged with policy-making responsibilities, to speak to you as career civil servants, provides a welcome opportunity to devote a little time to analyzing the relationship that exists between us and some of its attendant problems.

This is an old subject which has captivated both practical politicians and students of administration since the days of Andrew Jackson. The archives are full of government organization studies and personnel management treatises, all of which eventually turn to the question of patronage versus a career merit system. Or, in more modern terms, where the dividing line should be drawn between the politically sensitive policy makers and the career executors of those policies.

At the same time, however, there is a very strong
tendency in every administration--once the first blush of "taking over" has paled--to draw upon the experienced career base in the filling of top policy jobs. Soon, through this process, original political appointees and some of their more able career subordinates find themselves sitting as equal colleagues at the policy-making council tables.

Does this mean that there is really no valid distinction between the two categories? That all of the debate and discussion about a cut-off point or dividing line is academic?

I think not. Differences really exist. The mere fact that some people in the career service can cross the line does not erase the line. It merely means that they have demonstrated their commitment to the principles of the controlling administration and their reliability to exercise policy judgments in a manner consistent with
those principles. John Jones, top career technical and administrative expert, changes his entire character and status when he becomes John Jones, political appointee.

Thirty years ago major reforms were made in our Federal personnel system. Less than half a decade later, the Hatch Act pretty effectively neutralized the civil servant as an effective political factor and that was followed by the Ramspeck Act which blanketed into the protected civil service hundreds of thousands of jobs formerly open to political control. These two actions were clearly complementary and equally necessary to the development of a professional public service.

At just about the same time, President Roosevelt's Committee on Organization of the Executive Branch set the philosophical tone that has, with only minor variations in emphasis, conditioned the development of our personnel program to this date. Louis Brownlow, the
executive director of that committee's monumental effort, coined a most significant phrase, later used in other contexts more often: He described the ideal professional civil servant as one who had a "passion for anonymity."

The essence of this term is that the career civil servant, who in professional and technical matters, may assume the full stature that his accomplishments warrant, on policy matters, may advise and consult only. Decisions are the responsibility of those who are responsible to the public. Within the executive branch, only the President and Vice President are elected.

This is neither degrading nor demeaning to the competent, experienced civil servant. The system we have evolved demands the discipline to recognize this division. The career man holds his job on the basis of demonstrated merit; he is insulated from the pressures of political power by a complex of law and regulations; within his
sphere of professional competence, he may be the final word. But he may not use the protective shield of the system to usurp the power of political decision-making while retaining immunity from the consequences.

This is a neatly balanced formula which demands the utmost good faith on both sides—the political executive to recognize the professional competence of the career expert and the career man to leave his political boss free to make the policy decisions for which he is responsible.

Rarely does this issue arise in stark terms of black and white. Few career professionals will directly challenge the authority of the political executive. But such a result may be forced upon him by circumstances—as when a weak or indolent executive so fails in his duty.

Much more frequently, intrusion into the political decision-making field results from a too finely
honored staff job. That is, the professional organization develops the background, the analysis and the recommendations on a given issue in such a way that the responsible executive really has no choice— or at least only the Hobson's choice of rubber stamping the staff position or appearing to act irresponsibly and arbitrarily by deciding contrary to professional advice.

As experienced administrators you are well aware that there are few issues of major policy significance on which there are not two or more points of view. Your professional judgment may convince you that one of these should prevail. And, if the power of decision is at your level, you are free to decide accordingly. But if the question is a politically sensitive one or has other policy implications requiring decision at a higher level, then the executive responsible for that decision is entitled to know what the alternatives are, with a full analysis.
of the implications of each.

In this complex world there are few simple answers. Doctrinaire solutions based on policies of the past will not do. The decisions we make now may affect the nation, its people, its environment and its security for our generation and more.

When decisions become this critical, it is imperative that they reflect honest evaluation of all possible alternatives. The duty we all bear to our country is to identify alternatives, their consequences, their weaknesses and strengths, so that the choices may be made responsibly and knowledgably. No captive of a system that breeds on the past can do this, whether career or political.

And this line of thought serves to underscore the increasingly responsible role that the Federal civil servant is playing in our society. Not many years ago,
the scope and process of Federal administration was relatively simple. We collected taxes, administered immigration laws, ran the General Land Office, regulated interstate carriers in a passive sort of way, maintained a peacetime military force which emphasized manpower rather than weaponry.

But today Federal management must keep pace with the speed of the fastest computers. One agency regulates and controls airway traffic that is about to breach the supersonic speed barrier. Another plans and executes missions aimed at the moon and points beyond. National defense is keyed to a technology not even contemplated two short decades ago. And the work of my own agency has been revolutionized, principally in the last decade or less, by the need to discover and harness resources adequate for a population in 1980 that will nearly double that of 1940. More than that,
we have the equally complex task of correcting the technological errors of the past which increasingly threaten the purity and the beauty of our environment.

The Federal career employee has had to change as the Federal responsibility has changed. Practically every skill known to industry or business can be found somewhere on the Federal payroll. But more than that, the burden of responsibility is infinitely greater—for the workforce as a whole and for each individual within it. We cannot afford to miscalculate on the effect of new drugs, or the lead content of our atmosphere, or the energy requirements of our industries, or the potable water reserves of the nation any more than we can miscalculate the intentions and actions of those who control intercontinental ballistic missiles on the other side of the globe.

The economic and physical health of our nation
depends to an increasing extent upon timely decisions made by Federal agencies, backed by the highest degree of intellectual and moral force which we are capable of marshalling. The ultimate burden of this fearsome responsibility rests upon the Federal career service. Our decisions on major national policy issues can be only as sound as the information and the analysis furnished by the subject matter specialists. I see no immediate reversal of this trend because the problems we face more and more assume national or regional proportions. To meet that challenge we must seek constantly to improve the competence, the dedication and the effectiveness of the people involved.

I have talked about the importance of weighing all viable alternatives in meeting the complex issues of our time, and of the discipline required to prevent usurpation of the policy-making responsibility. This
caution applies with equal force to the governmental establishment as a whole in its relations with the general public. Both of us, political policy maker and professional careerist alike, must be ever alert to the right of the general public to be heard in a democratic society.

As our population grows, it remains as pluralist as ever, but the voice of the individual becomes more difficult to hear. When controversy rages, group interests become so polarized as to make agreement difficult. The easy course, the natural tendency on these occasions is to make decisions in the governmental vacuum, backed by technical expertise and political authority.

Yet public issues must be decided in public if our philosophy of government is to survive and have meaning. The public is entitled to know what the alternatives are and, through their representatives, to
indicate how our society is to be molded for the future.

Despite what I have said about the seriousness and the immediacy of the questions that face us today, I would take the liberty of indulging in one admonition. Don't be too hasty about forcing the kind of consensus that binds us irrevocably to a particular kind of solution or recommendation. In that direction lies fixity of position and the stifling of further thought in an area where change is rapid and flexibility essential.

The dangers of a "locked-in", stereotyped positions on public issues was dramatized in a recent commencement address at a small Illinois college. The speaker, a Cook County Judge and a woman, told the graduates that if they felt a need to serve their civic or social conscience, but were lazy about it, they could join an extremist group. In this manner, she said, one is free to turn off his thought processes and be carried
forward by the "movement"—whether its proclivities be left or right.

The bitter irony of this commentary has real pertinence in the whole area of public affairs. Even in my own area of responsibility, natural resources issues have economic and social, as well as purely physical, overtones. They are, therefore, political in character.

As in almost any endeavor that touches a socio-economic or political nerve, we have extremists on natural resources issues—those who oppose new dams under any conditions at all times, those who oppose range fencing at any time for any purpose, those who oppose scenic preservation if a nickel of expenditure is involved, those who regard public land retention as a great waste through lack of exploitation and failure to pay taxes. You can, if you wish, find movements which will think for you along any of these lines—and speak for you with
strident voices.

But our Illinois judge offered an alternative: the infinitely more difficult and demanding process of rejecting stereotypes in favor of a dedication to careful, objective individual analysis—even of fundamental assumptions commonly taken for granted. She warned that this choice is not the way to intellectual comfort. The group or the movement will rarely concede the possibility of error; for the individual there is always the nagging suspicion that your facts or premises were wrong or that faulty reasoning led to erroneous conclusions.

Justice Holmes voiced this hazard when he said the test of a truly civilized man was his ability to doubt his own first principles. Walt Whitman took it to be an ideal of national character that we could tolerate differences among men and as a community from one time to another when he wrote:
"Do I contradict myself?
Yes, I contradict myself.
I am large. I contain multitudes."

Clearly we cannot vacillate on public issues.
We must have decisions for government to operate. But let those decisions be rational, based on all the facts and all the choices. And let us not drown out the voices of doubt and dissent or refuse, when change is possible, to consider that past decisions may have been erroneous or based on conditions that have changed.

The times in which we live are complex and confused--but they are also stimulating and challenging. I hope that no one in this room would choose another ear in preference to meeting the challenge of this one.

The Federal employee is an integral part of the social machine we have constructed to guide us through this difficult passage. As in all human pursuits,
excellence stand--out--to be an object of gratitude from those who have benefited from it, and a source of inspiration to those who would achieve on a similar plane.

Immediately after his election President-elect Johnson told the Cabinet: "I am sure each of you shares my conviction that the character and effectiveness of our Administration will be largely determined by the quality of men and women appointed to leadership positions. This means our Presidential appointees must be men and women of character, ability, and devotion."

In his search for talent the President observed that: "We need more, and better, and experienced, and qualified people for the Federal Government in the days ahead, and we are going to the career service to get them."

As of last August 54 percent of the nonjudicial appointments--over half--have been purely merit appointments from the career service of the Government or
other Government background.

The President places high trust in the public service and has observed that: "How long this Nation will endure and survive and meet the trials of leadership will depend largely on the quality of its public servants, their dedication, their honesty, their integrity, their enlightenment, their selflessness. . . ."

I offer my sincere congratulations to those who have been recognized through your top awards here tonight. But let them not think that their work is done -- for now they assume the added burden of leadership and example to their colleagues throughout the Federal service. Congratulations also to those who could not receive the top award but who were recognized by their agencies as qualified for that honor. In some respects this is the highest form of recognition for, as you know, it is difficult to be honored in your own land.
Finally, let me express again appreciation and commendation to the originators and sponsors of this occasion. May you have the greatest possible success in the future in promoting public appreciation for the contributions of the Federal career employee.