

## Response to President's Column

# Embrace It!

## An Answer to the President's Question, "Public-Private Managerialism: What's to be Done?"

Tim Barnhart and Glenn Sutton

Here's our answer to Donald Menzel's question ("President's Column," *PA TIMES*, November 2005) Public-Private Managerialism: What's to be Done?: Embrace it! ASPA should embrace it, welcome it, and teach public service professionals how to use all available tools not only to strengthen the capacity of public institutions to serve their citizens-customers, but also to increase accountability. And we believe that doing so will improve ASPA's ability to attract and retain members.

In the subject column, President Menzel characterized recent initiatives such as results-oriented government, pay-for-performance, competitive sourcing, customer-oriented services as "managerialism" and suggested that managerialism has run amok. He said that an even more pernicious trend is the ongoing nationwide effort to deconstruct Civil Service systems. His recommendations as to what is to be done include: observing those who govern, demanding accountability and advancing the cause of public service as a noble enterprise. Finally, he recommended that ASPA advocate professionalism in government, perhaps

establishing a task force to explore the ramifications of these trends.

As long-time practitioners in public administration, both inside and outside the Federal government, we agree that he has identified real trends in public service, but is off-base on several fronts. While our experience is primarily Federal, we believe our views would be valid for state/local governments as well.

### Accountability

THE challenge in public administration, overshadowing all others, is accountability. Businesses don't suffer from this problem because they have clear customers. A private business is accountable to living, breathing customers with complete power to buy from that business, from another business, or not at all. A business that fails to serve its customers, at a level of quality and at a price that induces them to pay the business again for more services, will lose those customers, see its revenues dry up, and quickly cease to exist. That's accountability.

But the only connection government has to its customer is through elected representatives. If we assume the ultimate customer of government is the public, the only opportunity the public has to hold govern-

ment accountable to its interests (the only time the people go shopping for governments) is at election time. They elect politicians who they think can deliver the kind of government and government services they are willing to pay for with their taxes. So the thin line connecting the millions of public servants in the Federal government to their customers, the hundreds of millions of American citizens, is the President and the Congress.

The fact that this line of accountability is so thin creates enormous difficulties in establishing meaningful accountability for government agencies and for civil servants. But what President Menzel seems to be proposing—a civil service independent of elected officials—severs this thin line completely. It seems to suggest that civil servants should create their own internal accountabilities—they define what they are there to do, and they decide when they've done it well. It's equivalent to arguing that the American military should not be under civilian control (that thin line to the politician); instead the military should define American security interests, decide when to go to war, and declare when the war has been won.

We view both civil service reform and government outsourcing as promising

attempts to strengthen this thin line of accountability. The focus of civil service reform is on increasing the extent to which public servants are accountable to their leaders. Most reform proposals give leaders increased power to influence employee pay, shape an employee's career, and cut short their employment. Since the civil servant's chain of leadership eventually leads to an elected official, the effect of these reforms is to strengthen government's thin line of accountability to its customer.

Likewise, outsourcing uses a model for delivering government services that creates extremely high accountability. The government (and the thin line that runs through it) is completely free to select the contractor who promises the best hope of delivering the services needed and continues to remain free to cancel that contract at any time if the contractor fails to deliver. Furthermore, the contractor has all eyes on serving its government customer because it wants that customer to continue to buy its services so that its revenues don't dry up and so it doesn't cease to exist.

In the column, President Menzel cites only one specific example of managerial-

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Hampton Roads Chapter of ASPA

### 2006 Symposium

## "Innovative Partnerships: Regional Solutions for Workforce Issues"

March 16 2006— Norfolk Virginia

This year's symposium will focus on proposals for developing partnerships to deal with the issues and challenges facing our Government Workforce in the Hampton Roads Region. Topics:

- Developing the Workforce
- Sustaining the Workforce
- Expanding the Workforce

For additional information and registration visit:

[www.aspahr.org](http://www.aspahr.org)

Registration begins at 8:30 AM and break out sessions are scheduled from 9:00 AM to 2:30 PM. Fee of \$35 includes lunch.

The Symposium will be held at the Holiday Inn Select, 1570 North Military Highway, Norfolk, VA 23502.

## Tomorrow is Only a Day Away

From **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**, pg. 16

the next five years. Advertising in the *PA TIMES* should also grow but how to make this happen appears elusive.

Stop-and-start efforts have been made in recent years to find grant support for ASPA projects and more recently, international training initiatives have been launched but the future here is uncertain as well. Most importantly, the ASPA leadership should avoid a fiscal tomorrow that is driven by dollars and not purpose. An ASPA, Inc., is not a desirable tomorrow.

*Last, let me turn to an ASPA tomorrow that should be and can be reached—organizational learning.* ASPA's staff, as dedicated and committed as can be found anywhere in the nonprofit world, is the nerve center of the organization and the executive director is the most important person in the entire organization. Yet, there are limits to what a small dedicated staff can do in a volunteer driven organization—limits that are exacerbated by staff turnover and a relatively short institutional memory by the volunteer leadership. Therefore, ASPA—leaders and staff—must find ways to turn the Society into a learning organization.

The Strategic Plan promises to be one vehicle for accomplishing this task but it has limits as well. (Can you name the Steering Groups?) More is needed.

Perhaps the more is to reconsider the roles of the elected leadership. Many sections have moved to two-year terms for the chairs in order to provide for greater

stability and programmatic consistency. Should the ASPA president sign on for two years? At present, would-be presidents spend one year as vice president and another as president-elect before a one-year watch as president. Admittedly, a two-year term would be taxing on a volunteer president who is also holding down full-time employment. And, given the significance of the executive director in the organization, a two-year term could be a step in the wrong direction.

Perhaps the ASPA president should be a different kind of person, more of a figure head than anything else. Perhaps he/she should be a person with a proven record of administrative/scholarly accomplishments—much like those of ASPA's first presidents.

A figure head president will never emerge from the current competitive electoral process that the bylaws call for. Thus, this alternative would require a major overhaul of the bylaws and a process that would attract a highly regarded administrator or scholar. A return to a selection process that resembles a "good ole boy or girl" approach of years past is certainly not desirable but maybe it's time to explore the alternatives.

I trust these thoughts provide some stimulation for thinking about ASPA's tomorrows—remember "Annie's" wonderful message, "tomorrow is only a day away!"

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# Managerialism Nothing More Than Accountability

From **EMBRACE IT**, pg. 17

ism not working—the case of the Florida Correctional Privatization Commission. As we understand the brief reference to this case, it looks as if the civil servants who were staff of the CPC violated Florida's budget laws in order to continue paying their salaries, and that two private contractors over-billed Florida by \$12.7 million. These contractors immediately re-paid Florida when the error was identified (these repayments then allowed the civil servants to illegally continue to pay their own salaries).

The simple fact that it was possible to identify precisely how much should be paid by Florida for correctional services to prisoners and that someone was accountable for delivering those services at that price is itself a huge step forward. In the bad old days (professionalism?) there would've been none of that—just a budget with no accountability for any kind of results in return for all that public money.

In summary, “managerialism,” in our opinion, is nothing more than accountability. And the civil service “professionalism” set up as the preferred alternative is nothing more than the lack of accountability. Understood in this light, there's little choice. We choose, and think the people would choose, “managerialism.”

## ASPAs Response

We have heard that to some extent, ASPA is in trouble, i.e., having difficulty in attracting and retaining members. Perhaps

President Menzel has touched on a part of that problem. Is it possible that today's public servants (potential ASPA members) perceive that ASPA is stuck in the past and is hanging on to the shreds of an outdated philosophy?

The modern public servant may or may not be a government employee. But the people we need in government today (and in many, many cases we have them) are capable, confident and willing to take some personal risk while working hard to meet a mission. They don't want to work in a system that rewards every employee the same regardless of contribution. They don't want to work in a system that retains marginal performers because a process-bound system can't hold them accountable.

The people who manage governmental functions (public managers and other leaders) don't want to depend on a workforce whose primary motive is job security. They want the tools to get the mission accomplished, and then for all contributors to be recognized and rewarded for it. And they would likely join and support an association that facilitates and leads toward that goal.

President Menzel suggests that ASPA might form a task force on “At-risk Government Employment” to explore all the ramifications of this trend. We completely agree with the recommendation to establish a task force on this topic, but with a different focus. We recommend a task force on “New Tools for Government Performance” that would highlight the positive contribution that

public servants can make by:

- Embracing the opportunity for greater accountability to citizen-customers,
- Perfecting their use of tools such as outsourcing and pay-for-performance to leverage all the resources at their disposal, and
- Learning to apply those new methods with the integrity and loyalty that remain the hallmarks of honorable public service.

Many ASPA members no doubt have expertise within the realm of these trends that they would be willing to share with others. The task force could identify and create better mechanisms for this sharing to occur across all levels of government and in academia.

Our experience tells us that there are far more positive stories of improved public services than negative ones like the Florida example. Let's publicize them and use them to revitalize the Society's role in promoting public service as an honorable and noble profession.

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## ASPAs In Brief

### ASPAs Delegation Headed to Moscow in 2006

President Don Menzel will lead an ASPA delegation to Moscow, Russia, to participate in an international conference on “Public Administration in the XXI Century: Traditions and Innovations” May, 24-26, 2006. Interested ASPA members should contact Menzel for more information at donmenzel@tampabay.rr.com.

### ASPAs Offers Free Websites to Chapters and Sections

As a service to Chapters and Sections, ASPA offers a free 10MB website. ASPA will serve as the host and pay for the site located at [www.aspaonline.org/~yourchapterorsection](http://www.aspaonline.org/~yourchapterorsection) but you must have your own webmaster. If your Chapter or Section is

interested in this opportunity, please contact ASPA Senior Director Matt Rankin at [mrankin@aspanet.org](mailto:mrankin@aspanet.org).

### ASPAs Task Force on Hurricane Katrina

A task force will explore the governance issues and challenges that arose when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region. The Katrina Task Force consists of experienced academics and practitioners with broad based knowledge, expertise, and a commitment to strengthening the emergency management capacity of public agencies.

The task force is co-chaired by Bev Cigler (Penn State) and Bruce Baughman (Director of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency and former national FEMA official). Other members include

Louise Comfort (University of Pittsburgh), Frannie Edwards (Director of the Emergency Management Office, San Jose, CA), Greg Gould (Emergency Program Manager, Training and Exercise, State of Alaska), Lenneal Henderson (University of Baltimore), D.C. Jensen (Chief Planner, Louisiana Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness), Carole Jurkiewicz (Louisiana State University) and Bill Waugh (Georgia State University).

The task force will work in concert with more than 70 ASPA members representing all regions of the country who have volunteered to serve as members of the Katrina Advisory Group. This advisory group is still seeking volunteers.

*Interested individuals should contact ASPAs President, Don Menzel at donmenzel@tampabay.rr.com*

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Find out more about ASPAs activities on the Society's website.

[www.aspanet.org](http://www.aspanet.org)