



WILEY-
BLACKWELL



*Advancing excellence
in public service . . .*

Political Public Administration

Author(s): James P. Pfiffner

Source: *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Mar. - Apr., 1985), pp. 352-356

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of the [American Society for Public Administration](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/976157>

Accessed: 16/10/2011 09:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Blackwell Publishing and American Society for Public Administration are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Public Administration Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Roslyn S. Kleeman, with Patricia S. Florestano, Editors

TOPS—Those Other Publications

RECORDS, REPORTS, AND WORK IN PROGRESS

Political Public Administration

James P. Pfiffner, George Mason University

Mandate for Leadership II: Continuing the Conservative Revolution (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1984) was published as a handbook of policy recommendations for the second term of the Reagan administration. It consists of a series of essays on public policy issues with specific recommendations for each major agency of the United States government. Part I deals with domestic agencies; Part II with defense and foreign affairs agencies; and Part III with institutional reforms. This review deals with Part IV (pp. 457-560), entitled "Implementing the Mandate," which was written by Michael Sanera, assistant professor of political science at Northern Arizona University.

The Nature of Public Management

Sanera is disappointed with the first term of President Reagan because many of the political appointees of the administration were "captured" by the federal bureaucracy and thus failed to achieve the type of fundamental change advocated by the Heritage Foundation. "On the administrative level the first Reagan administration was 'business as usual' " (p. 560). "Green eyeshade Republicans" failed to understand the true nature of public administration and were co-opted by the career bureaucracy and manipulated into implementing its agenda rather than the mandate of the president.

Sanera's essay is intended to remedy this problem in Reagan's second term by explaining the political nature of public administration and prescribing tactics and strategies which political appointees can use to implement their agendas and avoid co-optation by the bureaucracy. Two basic assumptions provide the basis for the entire essay. First, much of what the federal government does is destructive: "big government is not merely inefficient but is in many respects destructive in its consequences" (p. 542). Second, many career civil servants are not to be trusted: "The political executive who is promoting significant policy change within his department should not be surprised by career bureaucratic subordinates engaging in this type of covert inter-bureaucratic struggle to block his initiatives" (p. 491).

In analyzing the nature of public management and setting forth his prescriptions, Professor Sanera makes liberal use of mainstream public administration literature, drawing on the writings of Graham Allison, Anthony Downs, Hugh Heclo, Herbert Kaufman, Frederick Mosher, and Francis Rourke among others. Most of these authors would find little fault in the narrow points Sanera makes—usually about the role of bureaucrats in policy making and implementation—but most of them would not embrace the conclusions at which Sanera arrives in using their ideas. While most of these academic authors analyze bureaucratic behavior from a somewhat detached perspective, Sanera's explicit purpose is to further "the policy agenda of a conservative administration" (p. 464).

This essay examines Sanera's ideas about the nature of public administration and the motivation of career executives. It argues that he is right that public administration is essentially different from business administration, but that his assumptions about the motives of career executives are stereotyped and over-simplified. It then argues that many of the tactics advocated by Sanera are counterproductive to successful management and to legitimate goals of any presidential administration. It concludes that the type of political entrepreneurship advocated by Sanera is disturbing and tends to undercut the president's right to direct his administration.

Sanera rejects two pillars of "classical" public management theory: Woodrow Wilson's distinctions between politics and administration and Frederick Taylor's emphasis on administrative efficiency. Each of these schools of thought has spawned a tradition of thinking in the public administration literature, and each has been substantially challenged in recent

James P. Pfiffner is associate professor of public affairs at George Mason University. He is the author of *The President, the Budget, and Congress: Impoundment and the 1974 Budget Act* (Westview Press, 1979) and editor of *The President and Economic Policy* (ISHI Publications, 1985). He is currently research associate on the presidential appointments project of the National Academy of Public Administration.

decades. Considered here first are Sanera's rejection of efficiency as the primary goal of public administration and his contrast of public with business administration.

Theorists have argued that public administration is concerned with more than merely efficiency because it is (or ought to be) infused with the values embodied in public policy and that public administrators are entrusted with the public interest. Thus, the commitment to public service calls for more than a narrow focus on efficiency, though accomplishing public purposes efficiently is a primary value. But Sanera's argument is that public administration is different for his brand of conservatism because it seeks fundamental change of direction toward less government. Thus, conflict is inevitable between political appointees and the career service, which is the guardian of the status quo. Needless to say, Sanera does not speak for all conservatives.

He argues that most business executives coming to Washington fail to recognize the true nature of public administration. He points out that no bottom line exists in government by which managerial performance can be judged. While this is true, it is also an oversimplification. In the private sector the bottom line is only a help in evaluating sales people or the head of a profit-making unit. Performance in private sector jobs such as corporate attorneys, accountants, computer programmers, or marketing specialists cannot be determined by profit or loss statements. Business managers still have to make judgments about the contribution of each person to the success of the whole enterprise, which is the way it must be done in the public sector.

The federal government also differs from the private sector because public power is intentionally fragmented. The separation of powers system assures that the different branches struggle with each other over policy and power. Thus, public administrators in the executive branch have more than one boss, and the bosses do not always agree about public policy. While Sanera admits the legitimate role of Congress and the courts in making public policy, he expects public administrators to be loyal only to the politically appointed executive rather than recognizing that they necessarily and legitimately must respond to other sources of authority.

Motivations of Career Executives

Sanera devotes the bulk of his essay to "the bureaucratic problem" (p. 481). He rejects Woodrow Wilson's argument that politics and administration can be separated. He supports his position by citing public administration research which shows that bureaucrats do play a role in policy making and that there is no way to avoid this, particularly in the U.S. political system. While Sanera recognizes the necessary role of the bureaucrat, he wants to minimize that role in public policy making. What makes Sanera's approach different from the typical suspicions that new administrations hold about the bureaucracy is that his convictions about the career service are much more dogmatic and negative than most

(despite a few brief statements in his essay to the contrary).

According to Sanera the bureaucracy is staffed by self-serving liberals wedded to the status quo.

- "The degree and overtness of bureaucratic sabotage of administration initiatives will vary from agency to agency and from one period to another" (p. 492).
- "The bureaucratic entrepreneur will not be content merely to block administration proposals; he wishes to impose his policy agenda on an unwary administration" (p. 492).
- "A bureaucrat who is making a comfortable living providing services to a specific interest group has every reason to resist the political executive's efforts to change or curtail his program" (p. 497).

For Sanera this organizational self interest is sufficient explanation for the behavior of virtually all civil servants.

But there are other possible motivations for civil servants. For instance, bureaucrats could be motivated by personal rather than organizational self interest. In this case the selfish bureaucrat seeking self aggrandizement, power, and money or being fearful for his job would submissively do whatever he was ordered. On the other hand, the public servant might be motivated by the highest ideals of neutral competence and work conscientiously for his politically-appointed superiors. Such a person would subordinate personal preferences to support the president's policy directives. But such complexity does not inform Sanera's conclusions even though he states at one point that bureaucrats may have "widely different motivations" (p. 521).

Sanera's cynical view of career executives is stereotypical and one dimensional. They are neither so selfish that they will respond to managerial carrots or sticks, nor are they so selfless that they will implement the policies of a conservative administration with which they personally disagree. To Sanera, they are locked into opposition to any change in present programs or policies.

To support his assertion about career executives, Sanera cites an article in *Regulation* magazine that reports on a survey of a specially selected sample of 200 federal executives (out of a total of 5,000 to 7,000 SES members). The survey found that more of those interviewed identified themselves as liberals than as conservatives and that more voted for Democratic than for Republican presidential candidates in recent elections.

He then minimizes the significant support for Reagan in 1980 among SES members (Reagan: 36 percent; Carter: 48 percent; Anderson: 18 percent). "Most of this support was probably moderate Republican or anti-Carter as opposed to conservative in nature" (p. 519). He seems to want it both ways: "the people" voted for President Reagan for good reasons (i.e., for Sanera's reasons) but career executives voted for Reagan for the wrong reasons. This enables Sanera to cling to his assumption that the people support his interpretation of

President Reagan's mandate and that bureaucrats inevitably try to undermine it.

Voting patterns and attitudinal surveys, however, beg the question of behavior. It is true and appropriate that senior executives as private citizens have policy preferences that they register in the voting booth. But it is also probable that most of them work with the professional values of neutral competence and support their political superiors, whether they agree with them or not. While it would be foolish to claim that this professional view is held by all bureaucrats, it is just as foolish for Sanera to imply that it is held by none.

Given his assumptions about the behavior of career executives, it would be difficult for Sanera to explain the way in which the Community Services Administration (CSA) was closed down. CSA was a successor to the Office of Economic Opportunity that President Nixon tried to eliminate by impounding funds for its operation. Nixon was unsuccessful because Congress refused to agree to shut down the agency. When President Reagan decided to "zero out" the agency he appointed Dwight Ink, a distinguished career executive who had served presidents of both parties, to do the job.

Ink made it clear that he would tolerate no opposition from within nor interference from without the agency and that he would use career professionals rather than political appointees to do the job. Through several difficult months the CSA career executives worked themselves out of their jobs. Even the employee union, once it was clear that Congress was going to back the president, participated in trying to make the shut down as smooth as possible. A similar story could probably be told about the recent closing of the Civil Aeronautics Board.

Ironically, at one point in the essay, Sanera says that political executives should avoid a "fortress mentality" in which "the political executive adopts a paranoid attitude, seeing the bureaucracy around him as a solid phalanx of political and institutional hostility. Relations between the political executive and bureaucrats are frozen into an adversary format. Communication ceases" (p. 516). If one takes seriously the thrust of Sanera's essay, one could easily end up with a fortress mentality. Except for a few scattered statements at odds with the bulk of the argument, the fortress mentality seems to be the logical conclusion when dealing with "the bureaucrats who have 'made the mess in Washington,' " for whom political executives can feel "legitimate hostility" (p. 516). Sanera does advise political appointees, however, that it is wise to keep this "legitimate hostility" in check.

In what must be characterized as a sardonic statement, given the tone of his whole essay, Sanera dedicates his work (in a footnote) to: "all career federal employees who, by their daily action, live up to the highest ideals of the civil service. They willingly use their expertise and knowledge to assist political appointees in the implementation of the Administration's policy objectives. . . . Nothing in this part of *Mandate II* should be construed as reflecting negatively on these career civil

servants" (pp. 466-467). But judging from the tone of the whole essay, Sanera must believe that few civil servants live up to these ideals.

Political Management Techniques

In Sanera's view the bureaucracy is so powerful that it is virtually invincible. "The environment in which political executives are placed is so powerful that they are almost inevitably swept along with the current" (p. 508). And its lure is so irresistible that the "capture" of political appointees is an ever present danger. "Capture is the process by which the political executive is converted from an agent of the President and his policies to an agent of the career bureaucracy and its policies" (p. 504). Those who are experts in a particular policy area or are experienced managers are at a distinct disadvantage. Most experts in a particular policy area have professional qualifications "and as such are clearly linked to specific government functions and the corresponding professional groups." One with managerial skills is likely to be "naive concerning policy issues and the political aspects of his job" (p. 505). Those whose primary qualifications for a governmental appointment are political party activism are in a better position to resist bureaucratic pressures.

If, as Sanera argues, public administration is essentially different from business administration and the bureaucracy is as powerful as he asserts, then traditional management techniques will not be sufficient to do the job. First of all, Sanera departs from traditional business and public administration orthodoxy by arguing that efficiency is not a primary goal. It has long been recognized in public administration theory that the goal of efficiency is undercut by the need for responsiveness to changing public priorities and a fragmented constitutional structure. Sanera argues that efficiency is subordinate to his definition of the conservative mandate.

He argues that the "businessmen's 'crusade'" to eliminate overlap, redundancy, and waste "not only has the negative aspect of diverting the political executive from the primary task of policy change, but the negative result of changing organizational structures so that the political executive has less control and the career officials have more" (p. 531). Overlap and duplication, he argues, create conflict and competition which can generate useful sources of information for the political executive. These sources of information can be used by the political executive to counteract the career bureaucracy which will try to shut him out and control information in its own interests. Sanera also argues that it can be easier to create a new organization to accomplish a purpose than to change an old, entrenched one. The added expense is less important than accomplishing the goal.

To assure that orders are carried out without distortion, he advocates creating uncertainty among subordinates in reviewing their performance. He also advocates bypassing the chain of command in order to get undistorted information from the bottom of the organization (p. 537). This may upset midlevel management,

but its support is suspect anyway. In Sanera's general scheme, trust will not be lost because none existed in the first place. He disdains the traditional distinction between staff and line. The political executive should promote conflict between staff and line in order to ensure a rich flow of information. In effect the executive will have two line organizations, often in conflict with each other (p. 538).

Because the career service is so likely to try to undermine the administration, political appointees ought to engage in "jigsaw puzzle management" (p. 514). "Career staff will supply information, but they should never become involved in the formulation of agenda-related policy objectives. Similarly, once controversial policy goals are formulated, they should not be released in total to the career staff. Thus, the political executive and his political staff become 'jigsaw puzzle' managers. Other staff see and work on the individual pieces, but never have enough of the pieces to be able to learn the entire picture" (pp. 514-515). This approach to management, which has also been referred to as "mushroom management" because it keeps subordinates in the dark, is usually counterproductive. If those with the most experience and expertise in operating (and shutting down) governmental programs are excluded, whatever policies are pursued will not be managed most effectively.

Use of these techniques is not unprecedented, and any administration may find occasional and selective use for them. What is disturbing is the across-the-board way in which Sanera advocates their use by political appointees. This negative approach to public management is also self-defeating. Political executives cannot run the government by themselves; the career service must be involved (as even Sanera admits in a footnote). The president cannot implement his policies unless his administration works with (rather than around) the career service. Finally, hostility and paranoia on the part of political executives will likely be mirrored back to them by the career service. This mutual hostility is not conducive to successful public management, nor will it help the president achieve his goals.

Despite the negative tone of most of his essay, Sanera has some positive suggestions for political appointees. One is to enter office with an agenda and keep the focus on it. It is easy to become distracted while fighting fires. Another is not to ignore the "details" of administration. While micro-management by top level executives will not help, neither should they eschew involvement with the nitty-gritty of policy implementation. Selective intervention in details may help assure that administration priorities are being faithfully followed. Another bit of useful advice is to ensure that messages about the administration's priorities, symbolic and literal, are delivered clearly and often, and that they should be backed up with firm follow through. He also advises political appointees to stay in touch with other appointees in the administration to help keep one's focus on the central agenda. These tips would be useful for the political appointees of any president to keep in mind.

Political Entrepreneurship

One of the most disturbing aspects of Sanera's essay is his advocacy of what might be described as "political entrepreneurship," in juxtaposition to what he describes as bureaucratic entrepreneurship. This appears in his section on the White House as a "constraint" on political appointees. Sanera emphasizes that the White House and the Executive Office of the President are "not" the president and that their relations with political appointees are characterized by "lack of policy guidance and difficulty in communication" (p. 501). Furthermore, "specific guidance concerning the policies and operation of the agency is close to nil" (p. 501). Nevertheless, the political appointee is held accountable for the performance of his agency.

This set of circumstances usually leads to caution and an unwillingness to take risks, but according to Sanera this entails the danger that the president's electoral mandate will remain unimplemented. Thus: "The White House acts as a policy constraint on its own policy implementation agenda. . . . The internal 'bureaucracy' of the White House causes policy questions to be coordinated and reviewed almost to death. . . . The cautious nature of the White House in taking policy stands sends the signal to the political executive that the White House is not serious about dramatic policy change" (p. 501). To remedy this fault on the part of the White House, Sanera encourages political appointees to "take risks and engage in a certain amount of controversy" (p. 501).

The implications of this line of thinking are disturbing. The question is: who has the legitimate authority to interpret the president's mandate? Sanera's answer is that any political appointee has that authority, even in spite of the White House. Is the political appointee the embodiment of the public will? Are political appointees the right substitute for a constitutional system of shared powers? It must be pointed out that just as bureaucrats are unelected, so are political executives. They receive their legitimacy only through their appointment by the president and their authority to act comes only from the president and law.

Who ultimately interprets the president's mandate if not the White House? Sanera's view of the good president being undercut by his political minions in the White House and the EOP is like the pre-revolutionary Russian serf's view of the Czar. The Czar was good and could do no wrong, and if he only knew what those dastardly administrators were doing in his name, he would certainly repudiate them and set things right.

Where does this leave the career executive? The conscientious career executive under a government of laws must be guided by existing public law and carry out its mandates. He or she must also be responsive to the president, the Congress, and political superiors. Regardless of Sanera's interpretation of the president's mandate, public law prescribes that certain programs should exist and that the president has the constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. But if a politi-

cal superior, *without* the backing of the White House, pursues some policy direction that is at odds with public law or congressional directives, the career executive can ask some legitimate questions, though this does not necessarily give license to engage in sabotage of political superiors.

The problem can be illustrated by a hypothetical example. Suppose a presidential candidate, among other campaign promises, advocated cutting back the military, and suppose that after taking office he changed his mind and chose not to pursue that campaign promise. Sanera's political entrepreneur might be out in the Defense Department cutting and slashing programs because of an interpretation of the president's mandate (in the absence of an explicit reversal of the campaign promise from the White House). The question is: who defines a president's mandate, the White House or the appointed assistant secretary?

Or in another hypothetical example, suppose the president decided that he could not pursue all of his campaign promises and decided to concentrate on a few. He judged that it was more important to focus on the most important aspects of his agenda than to jeopardize them by waging the battle on all fronts simultaneously. That is, the president decided to set priorities. In this case the zealous political entrepreneur could easily undercut the president's program and endanger the administration's success by actively pursuing his own narrow interpretation of the administration's mandate rather than that of the president acting through his White House staff and the EOP.

Sanera quotes Anthony Downs's definition of bureaucratic "zealots" as those who are characterized by "their single-minded devotion to their sacred policies" (p. 523). Such a definition seems accurately to characterize Sanera's political entrepreneurs when they strike out on their own because "the White House is not serious about dramatic policy change" (p. 501).

Conclusion

Realistically speaking, even paranoids have real enemies. Sanera is not entirely wrong when he expects the president and his political appointees to encounter some opposition in the bureaucracy. Some bureaucrats do indeed act as Sanera assumes all bureaucrats act, and they do so from a variety of motives, ranging from selfish to selfless. The question is one of balance and realistic expectations. Every administration finds that most civil servants work conscientiously for the goals of their political superiors and that many provide outstanding service and dedication.

According to Craig Fuller of the Reagan White House, "My experience in the four years that I've been here is that . . . the relationship between the political appointee and the career people in the departments is very much a partnership. . . . I think that where we have had appointees that for whatever reason don't clearly communicate or don't involve their career people at all, we have tended to have rather poor results. . . . So I don't

come at this with some notion that we have some norm of behavior among the career staff that is totally at odds or variance with the ideals of the political appointee. . . (*PA Times*, 1/1/85).

But more importantly, opposition to a president comes from a variety of sources. As Sanera recognizes, significant opposition originates in Congress, interest groups, and even from the president's own appointees. Despite this recognition, Sanera sees "the bureaucracy" as the embodiment of all opposition to presidential priorities. Certainly instances exist of bureaucratic leaks and sabotage of policies. But most of the power to frustrate presidential desires comes not from the bureaucracy but from Congress and powerful political interests. Bureaucrats may at times cooperate with or help these other forces, but the bureaucracy has little chance of frustrating presidential wishes by itself. This is borne out by the severe budget cuts in civilian agencies in 1981. If the bureaucracy were as powerful as Sanera suggests, it would have been able to reverse these cuts. But since Congress went along with the president, the bureaucracy had little effect on the budget cuts.

Resistance to presidential desires is inevitable, but it is essential to keep in mind that this resistance is often simply a reflection of interests of members of Congress, interest groups, and executive branch agencies (including their presidentially appointed leaders). Career bureaucrats may be a part of these opposing forces, but they are not the most influential participants. Using the career service as a scapegoat for all resistance to presidential desires may be comforting, but it does not represent an accurate analysis of power in Washington.

If what Professor Sanera wants is the conscientious implementation of the president's program by the career service, his advice is doing a disservice to the president. The government cannot be run by a handful of political executives, and it will not be well managed if relations between career and political executives are marked by distrust and hostility. What must be sought is a constructive relationship with a frank recognition of the different roles, talents, and perspectives of the political and career managers of the government. The longer it takes to overcome the distrust and hostility, the harder it will be for President Reagan, or any president, to accomplish his legitimate priorities. Our ambitious goal must be an appreciation of what Chet Newland calls ". . . the sublimely symbiotic relationship which is essential between politics and administration" [*PAR* 43 (Jan./Feb. 1983), p20].

Professor Sanera's essay might have been a useful addition to the professional literature on the role of the bureaucracy in the federal government. It is well written, well organized, and thoroughly based in the academic literature. Unfortunately, it is so laden with Sanera's own political values and such a basic attack on the integrity of career civil servants that its usefulness is severely limited, both academically and as practical advice for political appointees.