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Crisis of the Union: Public Management and Leadership in an Era of Discontent

Editorial

A nger has displaced fear as the emotion of the month. Since we last wrote, fear of the novel Coronavirus has subsided, but the civic fabric of the United States is deeply torn. To the former point, infections continue to rise, and deaths continue to accumulate as COVID-19 infiltrates individuals, families, and communities around the world. New hotspots continue to emerge, and there is already talk of a second wave of the virus in the fall. Much like other singular moments in American history, the salience of this pandemic event will persist in peoples' memory for the remainder of their lives. The social and economic devastation left in its wake is not yet fully known and will not soon be forgotten.

As researchers inch closer to vaccines and therapeutic treatments, nations and states have begun to reopen their economies. In part, this is because the virus' impact was not as severe as expected, and existing hospital capacity has proven sufficient. Collectively, there is a tacit awareness that the long-term economic damage to firms and families exceeds the societal costs of the direct effects of the virus. Reopening in many places is also the result of deepening discontent with lockdown policies and public health requirements that are taxing the human psyche.

Much of the discontent emerged from perceived inequities. Large corporations were permitted to remain open to expansive crowds, while many small, locally owned businesses were shuttered. Residents of some states, such as Tennessee, were never subjected to the most severe restrictions experienced by their neighbors. It became apparent that the party of one's governor was a good indicator of the likelihood and duration of a lockdown, with Republicans more hesitant to implement draconian policies that infringed upon persons and their livelihoods. Of course, there are exceptions outside of this characterization, such as Ohio, which has a Republican governor. President Donald Trump received concerted criticism for his push to reopen America. A few renegades made national news for breaking protocol to deliver services; barbers and hair salons received a lot of this focus, with U.S. Senator Ted Cruz famously receiving a haircut from a Texas salon owner who had been jailed for her refusal to remain closed.

The root cause of all of this confusion—all of this variation in policy and protocol—is American Federalism. Proper roles and authority have to be sorted out. States seemingly waited for the federal government to take leadership that never followed. The federal government acted swiftly in areas that are its singular domain, such as international travel, border control, purchasing and allocating supplies through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and even invoking the Defense Production Act to force auto manufacturers to shift production to ventilators. States and the federal government were in direct conflict in some instances, including a bidding competition for medical supplies. Turning to intergovernmental relations, local governments similarly found themselves figuring out how far they could go. Threats from governors limited local discretion in some cases. In others, impatient local leaders took greater steps, while state leaders were trying to figure out which end was up. This is not to say that American Federalism is bad—certainly, it allows for flexibility in approach, and it permits unique responses that mirror the movement of hotspots across the fruited plain. Closing the entire country while hotspots were billowing on each coast would not make sense. This suggests that Meier (1997) was sage in his recommendation that we reflect not only on the performance of bureaucrats in examining public administration performance but also the electoral institutions that frame their environment; as he said, problems are often not the result of failures by the bureaucracy but failures of the electoral institutions themselves.

Sadly, people are self-sorting into sides in favor of, and opposed to, reopening the economy. Increasingly, however, there seems to be pressure for everyone to select a team—a side—rather than acknowledge the collective struggle, the mixture of needs and feelings, and the comradery that seemed to be taking root

all over the world not so long ago (Hall and Battaglio 2020). Like tributes competing for their district in the *Hunger Games*, people have taken an "in it to win it" attitude, seeking political domination over those who are not like-minded. Evidence seems to suggest that there is a middle ground, where we work to protect our most fragile populations, reduce interaction, and take concerted steps to mitigate the spread of the disease through social distancing, sanitization, and sensible actions. It took some time for evidence to emerge, but now, evidence-based practice has an opportunity to flourish if we do not quash it for political reasons. As Jennings Jr. and Hall (2012) concluded, evidence-based practice is most effective when there is agreement on what to do, and the questions are instrumental—how to achieve the goal.

COVID-19 has challenged people's faith. Religious services were forbidden or restricted in many places, which raised First Amendment challenges; but, more importantly, restricting the freedom to worship touches people on a cultural level. Churches were threatened with police monitoring, mandatory quarantine for attending individuals, and some parishioners were met with nails in their tires upon arriving for services.

Wont for other cultural traditions has also left a great emptiness across society. High school and college graduation ceremonies have been canceled or changed. Spring without America's pastime—baseball—leaves fans with a lingering emptiness; youth ball parks across the country have been empty, gates chained. The Kentucky Derby has been postponed. We are searching for meaning and desperately hoping that we will be able to return to the traditions that define our lives and our time. Hot dogs do not quite taste the same outside the ball park, and mint juleps may not offer refreshment outside the spring season.

It is frustrating that guidance to prevent the virus' spread seems symbolic, such as installation of plexiglass partitions to reduce the size of drive-up windows, the wearing of gloves without changing between customers, or wearing face masks that offer little protection from the tiny virus (especially when most people required to wear them seem to do so with their nose uncovered). There are countless memes and cartoons circulating on social media drawing attention to these logical inconsistencies.

This frustration culminated in an initial wave of protests that first took root in Michigan, where a Democratic governor continued to extend mandatory and unpopular lockdowns. Similar protests followed in states that were slow to show interest in reopening their economies, such as Kentucky. Sadly, these protests took a very personal turn, with an effigy of the governor being hung from a tree on the capitol grounds.

Whatever the reasons, and whatever path has been followed, states are in the process of reopening. For those with few initial restrictions, this process is moving quickly. For others, with broader closures, there is a gradual easing of restrictions as people adjust to their new circumstances. The challenge has just begun for public and nonprofit organizations that are now reopening to provide services. They will be collecting a backlog of taxes, issuing drivers' licenses, and resuming judicial proceedings on the government side, along with a host of other services. Many of these services will be delivered remotely for the first time. But mostly, they will be adjusting to new demands, changes to their work environment, and figuring out how to make drastic budget cuts that are looming just ahead. Organizations in the nonprofit sector will be reconnecting with their stakeholders, restoring services, and finding ways to restore lost funding. Strategic plans are almost certainly being shelved as crisis decision-making continues to permeate practice; however, such dramatic change often invites opportunity, creativity, and innovation for those organizations that are able to keep to their core strategic goals.

Just as the mainstream news cycle began to fade to other topics, another great injustice rose to challenge our society's civil fabric. Police brutality is never acceptable, but worse is the blow when it appears to come with a racial motivation. George Floyd, a Minneapolis man who died as a result of injuries sustained while being arrested for a nonviolent crime, has made us all keenly aware of the pain racism can cause to a person, to a particular race or creed, and to civilization as a whole. There is justification for peaceful protest, for advocacy, and action. Just as the initial provocation was wrong, so is rioting and destruction of property that has caused additional pain to countless other innocent individuals in cities around the United States and the world. There is cause for awareness, acknowledgement, advocacy, and action to treat each other with kindness and respect. Public and nonprofit employees—including police officers—have a responsibility to deliver services fairly. They will be called on to raise the bar with respect to how they treat the individuals they serve. They will, in many cases, take the lead in righting past wrongs and reigning in behavior not in keeping with the standard of universal respect. *PAR* acknowledges the importance of these challenges, and we are actively working to provide research that cuts to the core of discrimination by identifying its causes and remedies. We hope that all find peace and prosperity, and we eagerly look forward to writing our next editorial in a world characterized by restoration, resilience, and reconciliation.

This issue is primarily devoted to our COVID-19 symposium, where you will find Viewpoint articles highlighting challenges and responses from around the world, and covering many facets of our discipline, including finance, leadership, decision-making, and so on. We begin, however, with five research articles that focus on leadership and management. Noortje de Boer (2020) explores how citizens classify bureaucrats, finding three clusters—those focused on regulation, those focused on service, and those oriented toward both. Using a between-subject experiment, the findings reveal that regulation-oriented bureaucrats are assessed to be the least competent and the least warm. While male and female bureaucrats are judged equally competent, females are judged to be warmer in their approach.

Schwarz, Eva, and Newman (2020) study civil servants and their managers in China; they discover that accountability, rule-following, political loyalty, and network governance approaches to leadership are all significantly positively related to employees' public service motivation and job performance. Multilevel modeling results indicate that network governance leadership had the strongest positive relationship with both public service motivation and job performance, suggesting that leaders would do well to encourage their employees to forge and maintain ties beyond their organization.

Geys et al. (2020) examine the effect of turnover in top leadership positions on staff attitudes. Using a unique two-wave survey, they find that leadership succession can trigger meaningful shifts in subordinates' stated attitudes.

Nagtegaal et al. (2020) replicate two experiments on anchoring while adding a test to explore the efficacy of a debiasing technique. Their results confirm anchoring bias in a unique institutional context, although effect sizes differ. More importantly, they find that the low-cost, low-intensity, 'consider-the-opposite' debiasing technique mitigates anchoring bias in this survey experiment.

Rounding out our research articles in this issue, Renaud et al. (2020) ask what intervention stances governments adopt in supporting individual citizens managing their personal cyber risk. Applying a "responsibilization" analysis, they identified policies that applied to citizens and thereby revealed their cyber-related intervention stances. Most governments adopt a minimal intervention stance; given the increasing number of successful cyberattacks on individuals, this suggests governments should better support individual citizens in dealing with cyber threats.

The COVID-19 Viewpoint Symposium stands apart from every symposium ever produced in PAR. From a call for papers issued at the end of April 2020, we closed submissions on May 30 with over 200 prospective manuscripts in hand to consider. Yes—we received what would ordinarily be four months' worth of material in the days leading up to our deadline. The final decisions on those manuscripts are complete, and prepublication versions are now online for about half of those accepted. The other half appears here, in this issue. You can view the entire symposium in virtual format here (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/15406210.covid-19), with all pieces currently set to free access as a service to public servants, policy makers, and researchers seeking lessons from the COVID-19 crisis to guide their work. We offer a special and heartfelt thanks to all of our editorial team and to the scores of reviewers who stepped up to the plate to read and provide feedback on these pieces under the extreme pressure of a one-week review period. Many of our authors were asked to submit revisions, which led to our returning to those same reviewers' well for a second drink under similar pressure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we quietly introduced a new feature to speed the rate of knowledge transfer from our authors to the public administration research and practice community. This new Accepted Article format precedes Early View, and articles are presented in their unformatted, unpaginated state as submitted by the authors. This change facilitates access to newly accepted PAR articles a month sooner than before, further expediting new findings' circulation to our stakeholders. You can view newly accepted articles here: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15406210/0/ja. Keep in mind that most of the current manuscripts are from our COVID-19 Viewpoint symposium, forthcoming in issues 80(4) and 80(5). This protocol came about in an effort to allow emerging research to have an immediate impact. The essays provide unique, global perspectives on the virus in ways only PAR authors can. We hope these pieces spark additional research ideas that will advance public and nonprofit service. We welcome feedback and look forward to more of these essays appearing online first.

Be certain to visit our website at Wiley (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15406210/0/0) to retrieve the newest articles as they appear on Early View. The full collection of COVID-19 Viewpoint essays is currently set to FREE access in its own virtual issue (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/15406210.covid-19), so do not wait for the next issue to come out to read the second installment of manuscripts about the crisis. In addition, be sure to take a free look at articles appearing in our other virtual issues (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/topic/vi-categories-15406210/p1u2b3i4c5-a6d7m8i9n1-r2e3v4i5e6w/15406210). We especially want to draw your attention to our newest virtual issue, which contains recent PAR articles that discuss the logistical and theoretical aspects of navigating public emergencies (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/15406210.public-emergency-management). Also recently updated is our FREE virtual issue of highly cited recent articles, available here: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles.

Visit our website for the latest goings-on (www.publicadministrationreview.com) and interact with us on social media, where we post the latest news and announcements, including calls for papers; we are active on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (@PAReview). Remember to promote our newly created Latin American PAR Twitter account @EspanolPar where we will be sending out information about PAR articles in Spanish to boost our accessibility to our friends and colleagues for whom English is a second language. Be sure to follow—and recommend to your colleagues in the Spanish-speaking world. Do not forget to visit our Early View page (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15406210/0/0) to see what is forthcoming in our next issue. May the odds be ever in your favor!

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