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REMARKS OF ELMER B. STAATS
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[CAREER CHALLENGES IN A
CHANGING CIVIL SERVICE]

It is a great pleasure to be with you at this awards presentation to share in the personal satisfaction and professional achievement of this talented and dedicated group of people who are being honored here today. I believe it is safe to say that the Career Service Award bestowed by the National Civil Service League is the Nobel Prize of the Federal professional community--a mark of distinction that has been well-earned by the recipients in the daily performance of duties which are complex and demanding, reflecting a high degree of commitment to the principles of public service.

✓ Since it was founded almost a hundred years ago, the National Civil Service League has been at the forefront of espousing good government in our Nation. From the beginning the organization recognized that attracting industrious and capable people to the government--and holding them there-- was at the core of an efficient and effective civil service.

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They were correct in that assumption. The single most valuable component of a strong, aggressive civil service is an individual of integrity and purpose--an individual whose dedication to the national welfare is demonstrated through a thoughtful and creative approach to every undertaking.

This program today gives national recognition to 10 Federal employees who have distinguished themselves in the course of their careers in public service. The criteria on which selection is based is rigid. According to standards set by the National Civil Service League, nominees must have displayed exceptional efficiency, sustained superior performance and accomplishments in carrying out their assignments. Such a mandate--in the intricate maze of the present federal establishment--requires uncommon motivation to achieve.

I believe it is appropriate this morning to consider the current climate of the civil service environment and the demands that are placed on public administrators today in the context of the changes that are swirling around us. The Carter administration's broad civil service reforms, set in motion with the passage by Congress of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, have thus far focused on the top levels of government. Over the past two years, we have witnessed the creation of the Senior Executive Service and the as yet untested Merit Pay System which will go into effect no later

than October 1980. Overall, these reforms are based on sound principles intended to maximize the productivity of Federal workers at all levels of government. When the Merit Pay System is implemented, employee performance rather than longevity will be the determining factor in salary increases-- a longstanding mainstay of the corporate world.

Only time will serve as an accurate measure of the merit and effectiveness of these recent changes. But the introduction of the competitive element into the civil service system will have far-reaching impact on the way in which the government conducts its business in the immediate years ahead. Most certainly, these will be challenging times for innovators and futurists who look to public administration as the area where they wish to effect change and make their presence felt.

What will these changes mean for the professionals who elect government service as the discipline in which they will pursue their careers?

Basically, this altered environment calls for the cultivation of a new attitude of mind which puts a higher and consistent value on what might be termed "anticipation." To do this, we must create within ourselves the desire to find time in our schedule to think and to plan. Tomorrow's executive must not only capably handle administrative duties, but also see to it that policy machinery stays several lengths ahead of next year's problems.

The government manager of the future must have the qualities of restlessness, of research, of dissatisfaction. This is where administration both supplies and finds its drive, and where it makes its contribution to the entire process of perfecting the imperfect structure of compromises that we call modern society.

The issue is really the rate at which this incremental process will go on; or how strong the vein of creativity in management will be.

If managers lack creativity themselves, they still have the opportunity--and the obligation--to spread the contagion of leadership through the organization so that the environment encourages creativity among those who have potential. This means less emphasis on procedure manuals, on dogmas of system and method, on fetish for hair-splitting in rubrics of budgeting, personnel management, and methodology, without losing the contributions of these essential disciplines.

To be truly creative, we must reach beyond the things about which we already feel certain. We must take risks. We must unleash our notions, our curiosity and our instincts to experiment. We must find out what the other fellow is thinking about and why he's thinking about it. We must rediscover that there is a convergence somewhere along the line between and among every thread of public policy--between science and foreign relations, between housing and health, between transportation and defense, between budgeting and economics.

To function effectively, public administrators must grasp the big picture. A fragmented approach will not suffice for the manager who must carry out more and more public policy through contracts, grants, regional compacts, institutes, foundations, and self-contained business-type enterprises which will make management at one and the same time both possible and difficult. The line between public administration and private participation will be less clear than ever, while the hybrid will flourish. And it is here that managers will have their work cut out for them--in maintaining the essential responsibility that belongs with Government, in understanding the fine difference between supervision and interference, and in judging how well the ends of public policy are being served.

I doubt seriously that government executives of the future can be developed and trained exclusively in the career civil service. They will have to have some first-hand experience with related disciplines: the university environment, the regional environment, the business and research environment. Efforts must be expanded to develop an exchange of persons between Government and these allied communities, through reciprocal internships and residencies. This trend is already underway and I expect it will undergo further expansion as new needs emerge which support the value of such interchanges.

Still another determinant with which we must cope in the coming years is the growing appetite for data--the passion for facts, for information, for probability. This is inevitable as a society draws closer together, as public purposes fuse, as the public and private economies meld, as decision-making takes place in a continuum.

The information explosion, which has characterized the last half of this century, has occurred with such force and vitality that we, as a society, are still struggling to understand it and sort out its meaning.

Computer technology has changed how we do virtually everything we do. The rapidly proliferating uses of electronic storage, retrieval and processing of information, can swamp us with material almost instantaneously that in the past would have taken weeks, months--even years--to acquire. The big computers are being joined together in nation-wide and even world-wide networks. Satellites are not the wave of the future: they are here today. The electronic household is just a short distance down the road.

The managers of the future must have a keen comprehension of the values and limitations inherent in the use of data, the art of timing in its collection, the process of designing the structure of investigation, the ethics of reporting and disclosure, and the judgment that interprets the significance of the information and applies it to policy making. And this is because managers will have to rely more

than in the past on the top of their heads rather than the seat of their pants. They will have to be at home with theoretical statistics and the rarer altitudes of mathematical science. And, above all, they will have to search out the answers to a provocative question posed by T.S. Eliot many years ago: "Where is the knowledge lost in information?"

Managers of the future must grasp the meaning of science and technology in the relations between Government and all the rest of society. World wars may have produced the environment which gave science and technology the spark they were waiting for; science and politics, national and international, now go together and neither can function without the other. That is the central fact of our time, and it can only have one meaning for the future.

The problems of administration are surely destined to require this kind of understanding of science and technology. How else shall we make a contribution in the difficult fields of weapons control and disarmament, in problems of eliminating air and water pollution, in harnessing our energy sources for both human and industrial needs, in understanding the requirements of education and vocational motivation, in meeting the requirements of an exploding population at home and abroad, in providing developing nations of the world with our expertise in technology since our material resources will not be sufficient to share with them.

No problem is more directly related to the future of our democratic society than the problem of attracting the best talent for public service. While a democratic society's government is not expected to have a monopoly on the most able people produced by the society, neither can it afford to provide for the public service an iota less than its full share of the talent available.

In the past, the consequences of an average or below par public service have not been nearly as serious as they are today. As the role of government grows and changes and as the decisions of public officials at all levels of government have a more and more direct effect both on our daily affairs and on our prospects for the future, the quality of our public service has increasingly become a major public concern. In terms of what is needed, I cannot improve on the views of Clarence B. Randall. Out of his experience in Government and industry he stated the requirements clearly:

The administration of our government calls for excellence in leadership. We need thoroughly competent executives, acquainted with the most modern techniques in managing large enterprises, from cost accounting to good human relations, from sound staff work to automatic data processing. We need scientists in our race for pre-eminence in all fields of research. Above all we need a continuing source of replenishment of this talent.

Government in the coming years will need as many people as possible with the kind of vision required to solve the complicated problems that arise in our mass society--arresting the rising costs of education, public health, and welfare; rebuilding cities; reducing poverty to its lowest level; and developing a higher sense of unity in our society. All Government employees have an opportunity to serve the Nation.

If I have a single thought to leave with the winners of the 1980 National Civil Service League Awards it will be this: At the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of the year, or perhaps at the end of a career, you should be able to look back and say:

"I am proud to have been a public servant, to have dealt with the problems of our time and to have had a part, however small, in contributing to their solution."

This is the challenge of public service. In one way or another it has always been so and I expect it always will be. Public service is more than an occupational category; it is the discovery, as Harold Laski put it long ago, that men serve themselves only as they serve others.

In 1835--a half century before the creation of the Federal career service--Alexis de Tocqueville described a public official in the United States as a person "uniformly simple in manner, accessible to all the world, attentive to all requests and obligating in replies." I can offer you no better challenge than to adopt this description as your own in the productive years that lie ahead for each one of you. Thank you.