

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STANDING PANELS ON THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

MEETING OF JULY 31, 2008

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

PANEL ATTENDEES & GUESTS: Paul Posner, *Panel Chair*; Bill Barnes, Beverly Cigler Tim Conlan, David Garrison, George Hardy, Bruce McDowell, Ralph Widner, Charlie Wise

STAFF ATTENDEES: Jenna Dorn, Malika Bouhdili

SPEAKERS: Michael Springer, Government Accountability Office (GAO)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Panel Chair Paul Posner welcomed all meeting attendees and briefly discussed the highlights from the last Panel meeting. On May 27, 2008, the Panel had heard from two guest speakers who served as liaisons for the Clinton and Bush Administrations. The speakers discussed case management and how they dealt with a number of intergovernmental issues. The Panel also discussed “middle range reforms”, seeking to make the partnership between local, state, and federal government work in more mutually satisfying ways. The conversation ended with a decision to shed light on these intergovernmental concerns through the development and publication of a paper. Paul Posner articulated that the purpose of day’s meeting would be to discuss the content and structure of such a paper. He then introduced Michael Springer, Senior Analyst at the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

MICHAEL SPRINGER

Michael Springer discussed a paper he drafted on key intergovernmental management issues; he noted that the paper could serve as a vehicle to spark the day’s discussion.

Having seen a number of transitions, Mr. Springer articulated that there is a window of opportunity from mid-November until the inauguration when White House staff and transition groups can be approached with new ideas and suggestions. Mr. Springer noted that whatever the Standing Panel on the Federal System produced, it would have to

- vocalize intergovernmental management issues since there are no longer any other formal intergovernmental consultation bodies; and
- create an effective role for states and localities since much of what the country is facing (rising health care costs, crumbling transportation infrastructure, and city management issues) will be discussed and tackled at the state and local levels.

Mr. Springer added that the challenge is bringing states and local communities the appropriate tools to tackle these high level intergovernmental management issues. He suggested several ways to institutionalize increased consultation and advice from representatives of states and localities¹:

- A reconstituted Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations with a primary mission to provide a forum for discussion of and research on intergovernmental issues.
- A quasi-independent entity within the Executive Office of the President, with a director and advisory board jointly selected by the President and major state and local government organizations. Its mission would be to provide advice and intergovernmental issues and issue IGR impact assessments for major grant, tax and regulatory initiatives.
- Employ the GAO or create an entirely new governmental agency to perform the same functions for the Congress.
- Provide the National Academy of Public Administration a legislative mandate and regular financial support to provide a venue for discussion of and research on intergovernmental issues and issue IGR impact assessments.
- Employ some “good government” organization to perform similar functions but with guidance from the major state and local government organizations and financial support from both governmental and non-governmental sources.

Mr. Springer also discussed several “targets of opportunity”, or issues which could provide a marketing opportunity for the Panel to discuss intergovernmental management at large:

- Regional or state initiatives to constrain health care costs.
- Regional “smart growth initiatives” that allow coordinated federal assistance for housing, transportation, environmental regulation, economic development, and infrastructure investments.
- Integration at the local or state level of a variety of job training and job readiness programs to more effectively address job losses due to technological change and global competition.
- Community or regional level economic development initiatives that are afforded the discretion to integrate in an array of tax preferences, loans and grants.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Paper Content

Bruce McDowell noted that it has been a long time since a major study on the status of the intergovernmental system was completed. The Academy could conduct a two year study on the status of intergovernmental relationships at each level of the government. He added that there exists an endless number of scattered ideas on what the intergovernmental agenda actually is and that a fresh look is needed at the entire system

¹ The list that follows was taken directly from Michael Springer’s paper *An Intergovernmental Agenda for January 2009*.

to see what steps would be needed to lead to a new consensus. The results of the study could ultimately be presented to the President.

Panelist George Hardy noted that he was impressed with the idea of marketing “targets of opportunity”. Since the Presidential nominees are two Senators, it’s certain that any intergovernmental management agenda will have to be sold to these candidates and their new cabinet secretaries on a programmatic level.

Several other Panelists noted that the paper could recommend a new institutional structure to formally discuss and represent the intergovernmental agenda. This institutional body could take the form of an office within the White House or OMB. Panel Chair Paul Posner noted he was hesitant to recommend such an institutional body without discussing those issues the group would tackle.

Audience

The Panel also discussed the paper’s intended audience. George Hardy articulated that if the Panel’s intention is to inform campaign representatives and the staff of the two Presidential candidates, then a paper that focuses on programmatic threats and opportunities would be appropriate. If the audience were intended to be scholarly and academic, however, then the content of the paper could focus on an institutional intergovernmental body or a long-term study of the entire federal system.

Most Panelists agreed that for the paper to have the maximum impact possible, the intended audience should be campaign representatives and the Presidential candidates.

Structure

The Panel agreed that the product should be a short four or five page memo or discussion paper.

FINAL DECISIONS

At the end of the meeting, the Panel decided to pursue a phased strategy, starting with the preparation of a short paper highlighting the importance of intergovernmental issues for the major elements of the emergent domestic agenda and then itemizing some of the important questions that a new Administration will face as it develops and implements its policy strategy. The Panel’s principal contention will be that the intergovernmental issues are better addressed up front and deliberately than through trial and error; several policy areas will be highlighted where attention to intergovernmental management can reduce risks and promote enhanced programmatic opportunities. Following the initial short paper, the Panel decided to take up other issues in greater depth such as institutional alternatives to promote intergovernmental consultation and dialogue.