

SOME CAREER OPTIONS AND REWARDS FOR STUDENTS CHOOSING PUBLIC SERVICE CAREERS

by Linda C. McNish, Ph.D.

Often when we think of Public Service, we have a one-dimensional view. It may be that we think of politicians who run for office and then serve as elected officials, such as the President and Members of Congress. Perhaps we think of appointed officials, such as Judges or Cabinet Officers who are appointed by the President. Or, we may think of officials in International, National, State or Local government. All of these persons may be called "Public Servants." They represent a wide range of careers where one might serve the public.

Federal Government Career Options

The Federal Government is in many ways a microcosm of private industry. There are the same career occupations ranging from messenger to research scientist. Some are listed below:

- Medical Doctor or Nurse
- Research Scientist
- Computer Specialist/Programmer
- Epidemiology Intelligence Service Officer
- Foreign Service Officer
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Officer
- FBI Agent
- Accountant
- Personnel Generalist
- Building Management Officer
- Teacher
- Elected Official
- Peace Corps Volunteer
- President of the United States
- Budget specialist
- Travel clerk
- Park Ranger

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one agency within the Department of Health and Human Services of the Federal Government, employs approximately 6,500 persons in 170 occupations with facilities from Anchorage, Alaska to Atlanta, Georgia.

EIS Officers

CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) Officers are Federal employees who are called upon to determine the cause(s) of mysterious illnesses, such as the one that was eventually named Legionnaire's Disease because it broke out at a convention of the American Legion in Philadelphia. When State and local officials could not determine the cause, CDC was called in and the EIS Officers proceeded to investigate the illness and look for possible causes. After much work, they did identify the cause.

A recent news story told about a second outbreak of the Ebola virus in Alice, Texas. This is the same virus that struck a Reston, Virginia laboratory a few years ago and inspired the book *Hot Zone* and the movie "Outbreak." The CDC EIS was called in and determined that this strain of the virus is not the same as the one which caused so many deaths in Zaire last year. However, they did discover that it was caused by monkeys shipped into Texas by the **same** source as those causing the two previous outbreaks in Reston and Texas. CDC EIS Officers were also sent to Zaire to assist in controlling that outbreak.

When there was an outbreak of an undetermined illness in the Four Corners area of the Southwest, CDC EIS Officers were called in. The mysterious disease was identified as Hantavirus.

CDC EIS Officers are called on whenever there is an outbreak of a known infectious disease or one that is potentially infectious anywhere in the world.

The movie "Outbreak" showed CDC Officers wearing space suits to handle live virus and performing experiments to try to find a vaccine. Some real-life CDC employees do, in fact, work in a secure container building and wear space suits for their everyday job. This is an exciting career with the potential for great rewards and great danger.

CDC is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia and as a result, CDC health officers will be staffing the emergency clinics for the Olympics in July.

Other examples of Careers in public service

The Federal Emergency Management Agency responds to the sites of earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters. It sends workers to help with relief efforts and to assist local governments and citizens in receiving monetary and other assistance.

Computer research performed at the National Institutes of Health resulted in the development of an interactive computer system for the doctors to use in caring for patients. The doctor enters the symptoms and the computer gives him a diagnosis. This artificial intelligence application can **think**. Will it replace medical practice as we know it? Perhaps. This illustrates two career options--Medical Doctor and Computer Scientist.

Something more mundane--procurement officer or building manager--may not be so run-of-the-mill, either. In Oklahoma City, persons in both of these professions suddenly had to deal with extraordinary decisions and circumstances.

When the Cold war first began to "thaw," a group of our senior scientists went to the USSR to make presentations on their work and to learn of the work being carried out there. One was a physicist specializing in extraterrestrial magnetism. They were all public servants working for such Government agencies as the National Bureau of Standards, now the National Institute of Standards and Technology in the Commerce Department.

What is different about public service as a career from the same occupation in the private sector?

The primary difference may be the profit motive. Private industry needs to make a profit; Government has a higher purpose--the intrinsic value of the work (e.g., research) itself and whether it will benefit our citizenry. The work itself requires the same skills and level of competence; but the motivation is different.

The priorities of drug manufacturers are quite different from those of scientists at NIH; but both are trying to find cures for such diseases as AIDS. The drug manufacturers want a wonder drug in order to sell it and make a fortune; NIH scientists want a cure for a dread disease. The manufacturers want to be the first ones on the market with the new drug; the Food and Drug Administration scientists want the drug to be safe before it is released for general use.

The remuneration for careers in private industry is probably higher than for the same careers in public service; but the rewards are every bit as satisfying.

What are the rewards of public service?

Some career public servants win Nobel prizes for research in medicine, or physics, or peace. Others work diligently at their jobs and only become well-known when some event occurs which thrusts them into the limelight. Such a person was Charge d'affaires L. Bruce Laingen, the top American diplomat in Iran at the takeover of the U. S. Embassy in Teheran. Another was retired Ambassador Frank Devine who was in El Salvador when the U. S. Embassy in El Salvador was besieged by rebels.

Ex-president Jimmy Carter in his current career works with the Habitat for Humanity project and occasionally goes on *ad hoc* diplomatic missions for the country. One only has to look at him to see that he derives great satisfaction from his current role in public service.

The National Center for Health Statistics has been conducting its National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) for many years now. In the past, Government employees, and more recently contractors, performed physical examinations on statistically selected populations in order to gather such information as average height and weight, health status

indicators, nutritional habits, etc. The selected persons are given a free physical examination (they are even paid a small amount) and the results are made available to them for use by their personal physicians if they so desire.

How is the information gathered used? Airline companies use it to determine how wide to make airplane seats; medical schools use the information in teaching; *and* one NHANES resulted in legislation being passed to take the lead out of gasoline. Statisticians, nutritionists, Medical Doctors, Registered Nurses, office workers--all of these and more were involved. These are careers available to those in public service.

The reward they received was primarily satisfaction in knowing that they accomplished a change that affected positively the health of the entire nation. They did not receive greater monetary rewards--just their regular salary. However, the reward was great!

When someone says to you, "I'm a public servant" or "I'm a civil servant," what type of person do you visualize? Perhaps you'd say, "A bureaucrat" or "a little person who sits at a desk all day and does nothing" or "someone who creates red tape and makes life difficult for the average person." Current Congressional rhetoric would lead you to think that; yet in Government today (as in the past) there is a sense of dedication to social well-being--the good of all vs. the good of one.

As in the past when government workers were very highly esteemed, today's Government workforce is comprised, for the most part, of highly-educated, dedicated individuals with a sense of mission--to serve the public interest and to carry out the laws of the Nation for the betterment of the citizenry.

Thus public service is still a viable option for anyone looking for an exciting, rewarding career. The opportunities are there.

[Dr. Linda C. McNish chairs the National Campaign for public service sponsored by ASPA--The American Society for Public Administration. ASPA is a sponsor of Foreign Extemp]

(Executive Council minutes from page 40)

Removal from Office

Moved by Naegelin, seconded by Belch to adopt the report on removal from office which is section that says 5 members of council and a vote by majority of eligible voters be required.

Carried unanimous.

Move by Naegelin, seconded by Tate, that we submit to the electors the additional recall section to be included in the constitution with referendum.

Carried. Unanimous.

Personnel

Contract of James Copeland as Executive Secretary extended to 2001. Unanimous.