
ASPA BUZZ

A Publication of the American Society for Public Administration, Utah Chapter

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ASPA ANNUAL AWARDS LUNCHEON

Thursday, May 7, 2009

12:00 noon

Auditorium of the State Office Building

Natalie Gochnour

Salt Lake Chamber

A “Provocative” Look at Public Service

Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr. has declared May 4-10, 2009 as Public Service Recognition Week. This is an opportunity to show appreciation to public employees at the federal, state, county, and local levels who ensure that our government is the best in the world. Please join with the Utah Chapter of ASPA in honoring the following individuals for their service to our state.

Dr. G. Homer Durham Distinguished Service Award for an Appointed Official - **JOHN NIXON**, Director, Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget

F. Ted Hebert Distinguished Service Award for contributions to public administration - **W. DAVID PATTON**, Deputy Director, Utah Department of Health

Please make your reservations early. The luncheon will be catered. Reservations or cancellations must be received no later than Monday, May 4th. **No shows will be billed. Limited parking is available—please carpool or ride public transportation where possible.**

The cost of the luncheon is \$13.00 for ASPA members, \$15.00 for nonmembers, and \$8.00 for students. Cash or checks are accepted.

Please call the Center for Public Policy & Administration, University of Utah, at 581-6493 or e-mail jrandall@cpga.utah.edu for reservations.

www.cpga.utah.edu/aspa

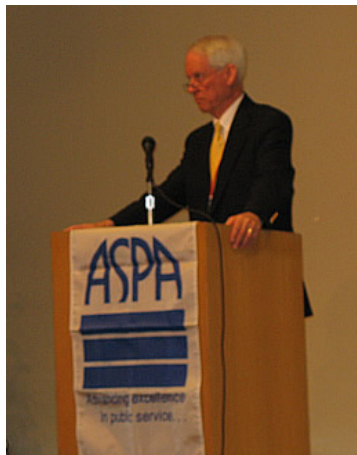
ASPA APRIL LUNCHEON

Health System Reform in Utah

by Tricia Jack

This month's ASPA luncheon speaker was John T. Nielsen, Advisor to the Governor on Health System Reform.

Mr. Nielsen explained that health care reform ideas have been going on for several years but with the impetus of the United Way, Zions Bank and the Chamber of Commerce, combined with the power of the legislature, Utah has been able to move health system reform forward with giant leaps. No other state, except Massachusetts, has done as much as we have in Utah.



John T. Nielsen

In the 2008 General Session, the Utah State Legislature passed HB133 which set up the framework for health care reform, both inside and outside of the insurance market. This helped in various ways, including driving patient information, and providing a state tax credit for individuals paying for health insurance.

When the 2009 General Session began, a task force had been working diligently for a year. The task force was comprised of members of the House and Senate, as well as the executive branch. This was a true partnership where they worked closely to achieve a common goal. The work done by the task force led to some solid legislation that was passed in the most recent session.

The centerpiece of this year's legislation was HB188, which deals with revamping the insurance market and creating three new markets:

1. A market for insurance companies to develop low cost health plans that are free of state mandates. This is important because Governor Huntsman's priority is to make insurance affordable for those who may not otherwise purchase insurance, and because the Governor believes that every student in state funded universities should be required to have health insurance.
2. The establishment of Utah NetCare Plan, a lower cost alternative to COBRA. Currently COBRA gives employees the ability to continue in employer-sponsored health insurance for a period of time after they leave the company. This is expensive, but NetCare's goal is to be approximately 40% cheaper than traditional COBRA and will allow employees to keep the insurance for a longer period of time. Some of this might be available as soon as July, but the whole system will probably not be available until January 2010.

3. The establishment of a defined contribution market. This would be an option to businesses. Rather than employers picking an insurance plan for everyone in the company, they can give employees money to buy insurance. It would be available for purchase through the state Internet portal. This will be beneficial because the insurance is then owned by the individual but has all the features of group insurance. It is portable; employees own it, and can pick a plan best suited to their needs.

The Internet portal is a lynchpin for the entire system. The idea is to develop a system whereby people can use the state portal to compare plans and enroll online; basically, a full-service portal. The challenge will be getting people to use it—this will require some marketing.



Some other significant health care bills passed in the 2009 session are listed below.

HB331 requires that a contractor who contracts with certain state entities offer the employees qualified health insurance coverage during the duration of the contract if the contract is over a certain amount.

SB79 changes the standard of liability for physicians in emergency room situations whereby they will not be held to the same standard of negligence as a physician in a normal situation.

HB165 creates processes and standards that encourage the exchange of information between providers, insurers and patients and changes some of the ways billing occurs. It creates a health insurance card that contains all necessary information that an insurer needs. It also creates a demonstration project to rethink the way we pay for health care services.

Mr. Nielsen concluded by discussing what President Obama would like to do with health care. He said there are some great ideas, but the reality is that it is very expensive and with the money that is being used for bailouts, this might be an issue. There are some estimates that these reforms will cost at least one trillion dollars over the next 10 years.

There will soon be more information on the Office of Consumer Health Services website and at the portal website: www.exchange.utah.gov

The Utah Chapter of ASPA wishes to thank Mr. Nielsen for such a balanced and informative talk.

COUNCIL CORNER

Mike Hansen

Strategic Initiatives Director, Utah Governor's Office of Planning & Budget
ASPA Council Member

Current Fiscal Issues and Strategies to Address Them

It is often said that the difference between a *recession* and a *depression* is that a recession is when the economy affects someone else, and a depression is when it affects you. Even the most optimistic economists are struggling to see reasons to remain positive about our collective situation. Here are some of the things they are looking at:

- Net migration into the state drops precipitously
- Unemployment rates continue to rise
- Housing markets continue to deflate
- Taxable sales and business investments are down dramatically

What does this mean for the public sector? It means a radical decrease in tax revenue at the same time that the demand for mandatory services increases. Often this translates into disruptive investigations that result in program realignments and often staff reductions.

Change (real or perceived) creates anxiety that can paralyze even the most productive employees. As an administrator, there are strategies to address this situation. Of course, their effectiveness is directly proportional to the energy invested in them.

Strategy #1 – Address the fear. Fear of the unknown (aka change) is often worse than the actual change. Managers need to talk to employees and team members honestly and up-front. They should be clear about potential changes without feeding rumors. Once personnel changes are made, the message should be a consistent reminder to those that remain that “we have a job to do, and we can't do it without you”.

Strategy #2 – Focus on performance. Re-examine the value proposition. It is important to take a critical look at the work from the perspective of an individual, a team, and an organization. Openly ask the question, “How does the work being done contribute to the (statutory) bottom line?” Utilize data to identify where the organization is, and use it to develop a performance culture. Enlist employees / create teams to find efficiencies; listen to their ideas and make the necessary adjustments.

Strategy #3 – Communicate your value. Once a value-proposition is refined, it needs to be communicated. Careful effort is required to do it both internally (individual, team, division, department), and externally (stakeholders, public, legislators, interest groups).

Strategy #4 – Monitor progress. Improvement is an ongoing process. Consider utilizing scorecards and websites. Perhaps even dust off the employee performance plans and reviews.

The economy is down now, but the Utah economy is uniquely positioned to rebound strongly. The fundamentals of the State are better than in most areas.

Once this crisis passes, the only public administrators that will be viewed as successful will be those that view the current situation entrepreneurially – it was really an opportunity that required a unique approach...just like everything else.

Declaration

Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., Governor of the State of Utah, declares
May 4-10, 2009 as Public Service Recognition Week

Note: Over the years we have received many excellent articles for publication in the *ASPA BUZZ*. Many of these articles have lasting value and are appropriate for reprinting. The following article, written by W. David Patton, Ph.D., former Director of the Center for Public Policy & Administration at the University of Utah and Secretary/Treasurer of the Utah Chapter of ASPA, was originally published in May 2005 as part of Public Service Recognition Week. Dr. Patton is now the Deputy Director of the Utah Department of Health.

Making a Difference

One thing public administrators are not very good at is “tooting their own horns” about the work they do in serving the public. The first week in May has been celebrated as Public Service Recognition Week since 1985. This is the one week each year set aside to honor the men and women who serve in federal, state and local governments. The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) has put together materials to help local chapters like ours celebrate the important contributions made by people in the public service. One of these documents lists 51 ways public service makes a difference, and the list is impressive:

- building and repairing roads
- operating libraries
- helping the poor
- educating children
- providing healthcare
- keeping our homes safe
- defending our country
- improving workplace safety
- overseeing park, pools and playgrounds
- protecting air quality
- finding cures for diseases
- ensuring food safety
- patrolling neighborhoods
- supplying clean water
- aiding people in disasters
- conserving public lands
- putting out fires
- running bus systems and subways
- making scientific discoveries
- exploring space

- enforcing laws
- managing airports
- dispatching emergency services
- supervising prisons
- solving crimes
- providing grants and loans for college
- helping businesses get started
- preventing consumer fraud
- printing money
- promoting product safety
- rescuing lost hikers
- collecting garbage
- managing elections
- upholding civil rights
- inspecting buildings for safety
- safekeeping historic sites
- conducting recreational programs
- operating zoos
- managing national parks and forests
- ensuring the safety of medicines
- plowing snow-covered roads
- running museums
- revitalizing neighborhoods
- protecting children from abuse
- maintaining public records
- keeping highways safe
- administering social security
- combating hunger
- enforcing justice for all
- preserving our liberties and
- making America better!

The list doesn't stop there; numerous government functions help the aged, the young, the disabled, and the needy. It is clear from this list and any serious thinking about public service, that public employees and administrators affect nearly every aspect of every life in this country. They have an awesome influence and tremendous responsibility.

This is one of those times in history when many see through the political rhetoric and cynical derision aimed at public service. It is a time when we have seen the sacrifice of police officers and firefighters and those serving to protect our country. Citizens look at public servants a little differently today because they see how they make a difference in their lives. President John F. Kennedy said, ***“Let the public service be a proud and lively career. And let every man and woman who works in any area of our... government, in any branch, at any level, be able to say with pride and with honor in future years: ‘I served... in that hour of our nation’s need.’***

Public service is unique because it is made up of jobs that directly affect people's lives. The bottom-line for public servants is not profit or self-promotion, it is service. Public employment has its quirks and inefficiencies, but the most important thing is that people often serve in government jobs because they know it makes a difference – in the lives of others, in society and in their own sense of worth. President Gerald R. Ford said, ***“It is a work environment for which top-notch people are selected on the basis of ability. A place where the product of one’s hands is more important than the color of one’s hands. A place where the work itself takes precedence over the sex of the person doing it. A place where service to the people transcends party labels. A place where the word ‘service’ means exactly what it says.”***

Let's all take a few moments from our busy jobs and take a little pride in our contribution to the well being of those who may never see us or fully understand the services we provide. Every job, whether it be in an office, a cubicle or on the street, makes a difference.