

1974

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Recommended Citation

Christenson, G. (1974). The Challenge. *Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science, Vol. 40 No. 1*, 8-12.
Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas/vol40/iss1/3>

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The Challenge

GERALD CHRISTENSON

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If you look across the western world, many leaders are in trouble. Prime Minister Heath forced to resign in Great Britain; Premier Johannesson forced to resign in Iceland; Chancellor Willy Brandt forced to resign in West Germany; and Prime Minister Trudeau forced to resign in Canada. And here in the United States, there is talk of resignation. (President Nixon resigned several months after this).

But I don't think there should be solutions by resignation. I don't think manager Frank Quilici should be held responsible just because the Minnesota Twins have lost three baseball games in a row.

But, seriously, government is in trouble and not just here in the United States, but throughout the world.

I think we've got an opportunity here in Minnesota, and have had an opportunity under Governor Anderson, with a good legislature, to put things together, to make the governmental system work. And I think if we can't do it, if we can't put it together here in Minnesota, I guess I don't think it can be done anywhere.

Just last week, Dave Broder, the well-known and well-respected political columnist of the Washington Post, had an article which was reprinted in the St. Paul Dispatch. Let me read you part of that article. He is talking about the problems of inflation and the erosion of public confidence. Broder writes as follows:

"These two problems — the erosion of the dollar and the erosion of public confidence in government — are really the two sides of a single crisis. And we ought not to kid ourselves about how serious the consequence may be. You don't have to be a prophet to see where this can lead. Other countries in the past have experienced the same unhappy combination of rampant, sustained inflation and mounting public cynicism about the honesty and dependability of government which the United States has seen during the past decade. The upshot, all too often, has been to bring to power by democratic means a right-wing demagogue who promises the people relief from unbearable economic pressures in return for a grant of extraordinary extra-legal power. That kind of swap has cost many countries their liberty without bringing them prosperity. We are kidding ourselves if we think it can't happen here."

Not so long ago, Senator Muskie's Sub-committee on Intergovernmental Relations employed the polling firm of Louis Harris and Associates to examine the pulse of the American people and of various governmental leaders on their attitude towards government. That study is very worthwhile. Let me point out a couple of the highlights of the study, because I think it is revealing:

Harris found, and nobody is surprised I guess, a growing alienation of people toward government at all levels — corruption, Watergate, unresponsiveness,

misleading governmental leaders, red tape, and the like.

He found that the people had less confidence in government today than they had five years ago at all three levels — federal, state and local. Most people said government hadn't changed much, but those that said it had changed were inclined to say it had changed for the worse.

For the first time in ten years of polling, the majority of the American people (55%) displayed profound cynicism and alienation towards their political leadership. The point is clear. The people are not happy with their government.

But, and I think this is very important, he also found that the people in this country want strong government. When asked, "How strong should government be?" 61% said local government should be made stronger than it is today; and 59% said state government should be made stronger than it is today. And even with the problems that we have with the federal government, 32% thought the federal government ought to be made stronger; 42% thought power should be taken away from the federal government.

But the point again is that the people want strong government. When they were offered the extreme of Jefferson, "That government is best which governs least" the majority disagreed. And, in fact, nearly nine out of ten of those polled, believed for example, that the federal government has a deep responsibility for caring for poor people.

It also came through in the polls that the public knows it is not well informed, it is not satisfied that it has enough knowledge of government, the issues or the personalities.

Another interesting aspect of the study is a comparison of the attitude of the people polled with that of the government leaders who were interviewed. The leaders generally (the "in-group", of course) would tend to say, "Yes, things are better now than they used to be, etc., I'm here." They also tended to say, "Just elect good people and trust us." And the people tended to say, "Oh no, that's not good enough. We want to elect good people, but we want some checks built into the system. We want the media checking on you leaders, and we want open meetings and the like."

But here is one of the most interesting aspects of the poll. "What kind of people should work in government?" Harris asked. "What do you think are the qualities the people ought to have who work in government?" This is the order in which people ranked the qualities:

- 1 — Honest
- 2 — Dedicated to hard work
- 3 — Want to help people
- 4 — Intelligent, bright
- 5 — Courageous
- 6 — Care about freedom

7 — Public-spirited

You know what is way down in 8th position, and it came as a surprise to me?

8 — Efficient

There is a lesson for us in that, isn't there? It is a mistake to say citizens are not concerned about efficiency (24% cited it), but it is number eight on that list.

The next question I thought was the most significant question in the whole series. The people were asked: "Can government be run well? Is it possible to make the system work?" Despite their cynicism, despite their alienation, they responded in the following manner:

Local government — 90% said it could be made to run well.

State government — 90% said it could be made to run well.

Federal government — 86% said it could be made to run well.

Only 5% of the people said that it couldn't be done, that you couldn't make state and local government work. And only 8% said you couldn't make the federal government work. I think that is just remarkable. We're not talking here about a poll in Minnesota. We're talking about a nationwide poll that includes several states that have had a lot of problems. Eighteen out of twenty people believe that the system can work — that government can be run well.

Let me just try to summarize what I get from this.

- 1) The people want honest, responsive government. They are not interested in anything too fancy. They just want honesty and responsiveness.
- 2) They believe that there ought to be strong government and that the roles for the federal and state and local governments ought to be sorted out better.
- 3) They do not favor weak government at any level.
- 4) They believe that checks should be built in to require elected officials to perform.
- 5) And finally, as Lou Harris said in testifying before the Muskie committee, "It appears the people have lost confidence in their government, but they haven't lost faith."

I think the challenge for us is included in that Harris analysis. The people believe in our democratic system, but they don't like the way it is working today. How can we make it work?

But I think the real keys in that right hand column, for making the system work, are the elected officials. If we can get the elected officials firmly in the right hand column, taking a comprehensive approach, I think it can be put together. Very often now the elected official is over there in the left hand column because he "wants to do something" and he is finding an unresponsive bureaucracy and so on, and he has to act. He has to make that track record. But if elected officials begin to take a comprehensive view, I think it can be done. Now to do that is going to require several things.

Elected officials have to begin to see the interrelationships that exist in a whole variety of government actions. A beautiful example of these interrelationships, I think, is the governor's property tax relief-school finance program of '71. I have said and I really believe that that is the most important piece of

environmental legislation that has been passed in recent years. I get some raised eyebrows from school people on that. They say, "What are you talking about, environmental protection tied to school finance?" It is, because what we did with that legislation was take the pressure off the local property tax. Up until that time, the state was providing 43% of school operating costs and local school districts had to pick up the remainder, along with all of the capital expenditures. And the local school districts had to tax heavily the homes and industry in the area to provide the local share.

Under the governor's program, 70% is picked up by the state and a much smaller part is paid by the local property tax. You take the burden off the property tax and local officials can start to make good decisions. They can afford to make them now. I contend that the Allen S. King plant would never have been built in that beautiful St. Croix Valley if we had had the kind of a school finance system that we have today. The people in the Stillwater area would not have had to pay that high a price. But if you've got senior citizens who are afraid of losing their homes because of high property taxes, they say, "OK, put the chimney up, we'll take it. We don't want it, but we'll take it so we can save our homes."

Quietly, effectively, the governor's program permits local officials to make the right decisions. They don't any more have to take that glue factory in a neighborhood. They can resist. So, I think when government leaders, elected officials, mayors, city councilmen, county commissioners, legislators, and others, see those interrelationships, see how the pieces can come together, I think that is the beginning.

Another need is for elected officials to have adequate staff support. Part of the battle from the federal to the state to the local level is the battle against the narrow functionalist — the person who is an expert in only one little area. All he is interested in is his area. He doesn't care about the rest. He doesn't see the big pattern. He doesn't see what the elected official is trying to do to fit those pieces together, to have impact on people. He just wants to make a name for himself with his program.

Third, I think there has got to be much greater emphasis by elected officials on the making of basic policy, rather than just reacting to program-after-program and the delivery of services. I have gotten to be a good friend of Barbara Donoho, who is the Mayor of Fergus Falls. She is a good mayor and a fine woman, and I asked Barbara one day, "Barbara, have you and the City Council in Fergus Falls ever sat down and looked ahead and said, what do we want Fergus Falls to become? Do we want Fergus Falls to grow? Do we want it to stay the same? If growth occurs, then at what kind of a rate? And where?" She said, "No, we have never talked about it." I said, "Do you think many mayors and city councils have done that?" She said, "No."

I don't either. And that is one of our problems. We get so caught up in our day-to-day problems that we don't find time for long range planning or policy making. We don't do enough of it in the State Planning Agency. We don't do enough of it at any level of government. And the worst offender of all is the federal government. Senator Humphrey has a bill he calls the Balanced

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National Growth and Development Act of 1974. He would be the first to admit that it may not be a perfect bill. But it is a good beginning. And if the federal government can't put its house in order and start to develop some strategies, some alternate futures for this country, I think we are in real trouble.

We've got problems at the federal, state and local level. Not enough time of elected officials at all levels is devoted to policy making; too much time is spent reacting to immediate concerns and crises.

It seems to me that one of the most serious problems is the constant fragmentation that we see around us in government. I was in a meeting one day and made lists in two columns. I put in the left hand column the forces that I saw, that I thought were leading toward fragmentation in our society, in government. And in the right hand column, I listed the forces that I thought were leading toward a comprehensive, integrated approach. Let me just share with you what I had on my lists. First of all, the forces leading toward fragmentation.

- The first is the increasing complexity of our society. It is just so complex that it is exceedingly difficult to figure it out, to put the pieces together.
- The second force, I think, leading toward fragmentation, is the pressure on government leaders, particularly elected officials, to "do something," to make a track record. They get tired of unresponsiveness in government and they want to move out and make their mark in drug abuse, or crime in the streets, or in some other problem area.
- The third factor, I think, is the committee structure, particularly in congress. In order to accomplish much of the work that needs to be performed, it is necessary to break a legislative group down, whether it is the state legislature, city council or congress. There is a need for some type of division. But I worked for a congressman, and I saw what I think is a very unhealthy situation at the congressional level. Those congressional committee chairmen are all-powerful. They often don't care what another committee does. They say, "This is the way we are going to do it in health care"; or "We are going to go our own way in labor"; or "We are going to go our own way in education"; or "We don't care about appropriations"; "We don't care about taxes"; "We're not interested in putting the pieces together." That is, unfortunately, the pattern that persists today in congress. It was a big disappointment last week when the reform leadership in the congress tried to put it together and reform the committee system. It was voted down in the Democratic caucus. I just don't see how congress is going to succeed the way it is going now. I think that is a fragmenting force.
- A fourth fragmenting force is the nature of the news media, particularly television. They are generally not interested in the guy sweating in the back office trying to put the pieces together. You see the fast shots, the quick answers, you see the conflict. And I think that is a fragmenting force.

- Fifth, I would list the increasing skill of the single-purpose special interests. They have become very adept at manipulating the legislative process, particularly congress. They are very skillful at getting a bill through to meet their special needs. If they don't have the expertise, they have been able to go out and buy it in the form of expert consultants or lobbyists.

All right, what have we got on the other side. If those are some of the forces leading toward fragmentation, what's in the other column, the forces working toward an integrated approach?

- One force, I think, is the political parties. We have had in America a strong two-party tradition. And the parties, if they were going to succeed, had to have a broad appeal. They had to bring people together. They had to have programs in environment, in consumer protection, in jobs and taxes and all the rest. But the parties are in disrepute. More and more people, particularly young people, are saying, "I am an independent — not a Democrat or a Republican." That may be a problem.
- I think in the past many of the labor unions have been an integrating force. The AFL-CIO, because they represent a broad group (16 million people), have had to be concerned about a whole variety of issues and they have been, I think, many times (but not always) a comprehensive force.
- A third integrating force includes various planning groups, such as the Metro Council, the State Planning Agency, the Citizens League, Regional Development Commissions, etc.

What we are talking about is an attitude toward government and an attitude toward making the system work for the people out there who need the services.

I think we have already taken a number of steps here in Minnesota. I would say more than any other state. Let me just list some. I think I mentioned to you once before that I think we are on the right track in strengthening elected officials at all levels.

We have strengthened the governor's office in Minnesota, better staff support, 4-year term, party designation, coterminous appointments, etc. We have also strengthened the legislature, I think — better staff support, flexible sessions, etc.

I think we are in a tough fight, but I think we have a good chance to strengthen the hand of local officials. And an important tool in doing that is the Regional Development Commission. I don't see any other way to do it. For the life of me, I can't see how it can be put together out there with the kind of fragmentation that exists unless some kind of grouping is developed. I don't care what you call them. You don't have to call them regional commissions — call them what you like. But people have got to start working together. They've got to start figuring out what their area of the state is going to become and how they are going to get there.

So I think in those areas Minnesota is on the right track.

I think another area of progress involves our state Environmental Quality Council. We've had some tough

battles. It's very difficult to try to fit the various environmental components together. But, for the first time, we are really wrestling with an integrated state approach to environmental protection. We are meeting — the agency heads and citizens who serve on the Environmental Quality Council — at least once a month and often more frequently, and I think we are making some progress. We take a couple of steps forward, we step back one and we don't always agree, but we are starting to put the pieces together.

I think one of the disappointments we have had in furthering a comprehensive approach was the failure to put it together to some degree in the transportation area. I saw, and I know Ray Lappegaard, highway commissioner did, the opportunity to form a state Department of Transportation as a means for trying to rationalize the whole planning process in transportation.

Another area where we have made some real progress is in the human services field. I think some of the most exciting work in the country is going on in the area of integration of human services here in Minnesota.

The formation of the governor's Rural Development Council, I think, is a tremendous step forward. Jon Wefald is the chairman, and it does your heart good to see high state officials coming together regularly with representatives from each one of the regions outstate, and starting to talk about what kind of a state we want here. How can we help you, and what can you expect from us? I think that is working well.

The Commission on Minnesota's Future, I think, is off to a good start. A broadly representative group of forty citizens, joined with representatives of the Regional Development Commissions, legislators and a few others, meeting very often, at least once a month, and starting to tackle some of these growth and development questions for our state. No miracles, no big promises, but people at least are starting to ask the right kind of questions. And I think that is a step forward.

Land use planning is another area in which we have made great progress. I hear a lot of nonsense talk around the country about land use planning. It's kind of a Program Planning Budgeting System (PPBS) of the 1970's. Say the magic words and people are supposed to fall over. Many of the so-called experts, in my view, don't know what they are talking about.

If you look carefully at the National Land Use Bill, which has passed the U.S. Senate and is now before the U.S. House of Representatives, you will see that we are doing virtually everything in that bill in Minnesota right now. We have done it quietly. We haven't got everybody upset. Let me just list some of the elements that I see in our land use program in Minnesota:

- Start with tax policy. I argue with my planning friends that you don't go anywhere in land use unless you have the right tax system. If local officials are hungry for that property tax base, you are not going to tell them they can't put industry there. Legislators and governors are elected just like those local officials. It will not work to simply escalate the police power of the state to that level and think you are going to push people around. You are just not going to do it.

You've got to get them going your way. You've got to develop some kind of consensus. You start with tax policy and, I think, we are on the right track in Minnesota.

- We've got power plant siting legislation in Minnesota.
- We've got critical areas legislation, which we may be able to use now in the St. Croix Valley.
- We've got wild and scenic rivers legislation.
- We've got lakeshore protection legislation.
- We've got several studies under way regarding the potential effects of copper-nickel mining in Minnesota.
- We're working hard to protect the area around Voyageurs Park. If we are successful, it will be the first time government anywhere has ever adequately protected a peripheral area outside a National Park. We are working with St. Louis and Koochiching Counties, and International Falls and other local units. We are working with the Arrowhead Commission and private groups. State departments and agencies are working together and we've got a good chance to succeed.
- Flood plain zoning is another area where the legislature has acted.
- I think Bob Herbst would agree that we may have the best land information system in the country. You can't succeed without good information. You've got to know what you have in those 40-acre tracts.
- The Commission on the Future can be helpful to us in this whole land use matter.
- The EQC can be helpful.
- The Regional Development Commissions can help.

Those are all elements of a land use plan. What the federal government is talking about is something that we are well on the way to accomplishing. I don't think we have made people too upset about it. I think we are working quietly, but effectively, and I think the pieces are coming together.

I heard on Friday night one of the best speeches I have heard in a long time. I attended the St. Paul Urban League dinner. Congressman Dellums from California was the speaker. He was discussing the need for us to decide what our values are in this country and go on from there. We get so concerned, you know, with bits and pieces all over the place. Let's decide what is important — human life, the ability of a human being to grow and develop in his own way and make some choices — what is important? He talked about the ecology movement. He had a statement which I thought was significant. His advice to the environmentalists was something like this: "Don't just be concerned about saving the white whales. Be concerned about saving white students at Kent University. Don't just be concerned about saving the redwoods. Be concerned too about saving those little Indian kids growing up on reservations. Don't just be concerned about saving yellow fields of flowers, but be concerned also with those bombs dropping on yellow kids in Viet Nam. And don't just be concerned about saving black seals. Be concerned,

too, with saving black people living in ghettos all over America."

I don't think we can afford to be narrow in our approach; to say this is my field, I don't have to work with anyone else. If each of us is going to go off and do our own things, we are going to be an expert in consumer affairs; we are going to be an expert in labor negotiations; we are going to be an expert in the environment; we are going to be an expert only in the housing area and we don't care what the other forces are doing, the system won't work. The legislature, the governor, the executive branch of government all have to sort out their roles in better fashion. The federal government has got to start to relate to the needs of governors and legislators and take a broad, comprehensive view of government, rather than continuing to meet on a functional basis with their counterparts at the state and local level. In my view, elected officials must be given more policy-making power, with adequate checks built in. We have got to, I think, improve the planning capability at the federal, state and local units of government. I believe we've got to build pressure points into the system to insure performance of that system on a day-to-day basis, to insure active citizen participation and to insure accountability. We have to vastly increase public understanding, which I think means far better use of especially television, better linkage between the needs of government and the educational system. We've got to, I think, make the political process much more attractive. I don't think the average citizen is going to participate in the system as it is designed today. I think the political caucuses themselves, very often, are fragmented and divisive. We've got to see government in this complex society as it affects the impact on people as simple and direct as possible. The question of tying the pieces together, taking a comprehensive approach to government, of trying to design a governmental system which will meet the needs of the people, whose attitudes were expressed in the Harris polls which I referred to earlier and others, is a very difficult assignment.

One of the things I was asked to do, and I have tried to do that in summary now, is to tell the participants of this conference what they can do as a follow-up to the conference. I would hope that those of you who are not members of the Commission on Minnesota's Future would stay in close touch with that commission. They need your help. You are not going to find a group of 68 people who can put together any kind of alternatives to be considered by the legislature in '75 and '77. They need the involvement of people in education, in business and

industry, in environment, in all areas of life. Each region of the state is represented on the commission, both by appointed citizens and by the appointment ex-officio of the Regional Development chairmen. You have a contact point and I would hope that you would stay in touch with the commission and offer your assistance, offer your ideas and share with them your ideas as to how the State of Minnesota should proceed. The Regional Development Commissions are another contact point. We have had, in Minnesota, terribly fragmented local government. One of the Regional Development Commission chairmen pointed out to me that he had talked to a farmer a couple of weeks ago. He has been a little critical of townships, and wondered why do we need township government. It's ineffective, it doesn't have a broad enough base, etc. The farmer brought him up quickly by saying, "Look, George, I know my township officer, he's my access point in this terribly complex government. If I have a problem with the county, I may not know the county commissioner, I may be afraid to go and meet with the county commissioner. I may certainly be afraid to go and talk to the state legislator or the governor, but my township officer can be my contact, my representative." There is a good point there, and we ought not to lose sight of it. People want responsiveness. They are not as interested in efficiency, but they want responsiveness in government; they want government close to them. The Regional Development Commission, I think, offer an opportunity for local governments to be strengthened in Minnesota, for the townships and the municipalities and school boards and counties to join together and to establish in their region programs, policies, etc. to meet those needs.

I hope you will stay in touch with the Environmental Quality Council, and in particular with the Citizens Advisory Committee of the EQC headed by Shirley Hunt. She is here participating in this Conference and I know she would welcome your ideas and your suggestions for improving environmental protection in the state. I would hope, too, that down the line in each one of our communities that we can begin to ask some basic policy questions about the future for our communities and how that relates to the future of the region, of the state, of the nation. I would ask your consideration, at least from looking at support, for some kind of federal legislation which would help us to sort out at the national level what our goals and our priorities should be. Finally, I hope that we can on a personal, individual and group basis, work together to try to decide what our values are in this country and get on with the job of bringing America together.