Book Review

Government Is Us 2.0, Edited by Cheryl S. King, April 2011 M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, ISBN 978-0-7656-2501 (cloth), 978-0-7656-2502 (paper) 256 Pages

This book is a follow up to *Government Is Us: Public Administration In an Antigovernment Era* [2]. That book was conceived in the aftermath of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City by an American citizen, a self-proclaimed anti-government zealot who was a member of a domestic militia movement. In the original volume, the editors sought to collect essays on administrator-citizen interactions in government situations that would highlight the issues involved. The emphasis of the first book was on the need for citizen involvement in government beyond the act of voting. It called for increased and innovative citizen engagement in administrative governance

Needless to say, a lot has happened since 1998. As the editor points out, antigovernment sentiment has increased [5] and hate groups and antigovernment militia movements are growing stronger [5]. Cheryl King and Renee Nank point out in the first chapter that U.S. citizens' attitudes toward their government have had their ups and downs throughout American history, but that antigovernment sentiment and rhetoric has become a central theme in the modern era, expressing itself in consistent claims about inefficiency, bloat, and corruption in government agencies and promises by politicians to address these problems with cutbacks, eliminations of government agencies, and a general "shrinking" of government activities. As a potential antithesis to these sentiments and actions, the social web and Web 2.0 technologies are enabling more and deeper citizen engagement with government at all levels.

The book is divided into four parts: "Introduction" (2 chapters), "Democracy and Engagement Through Different Lenses" (5 chapters), "Stories of Practice" (5 chapters), and "Imagining the Possibilities" (1 chapter). The bulk of the contributions are contained in the two middle parts. As the name suggests, the second section is a bit of a hodge-podge. Kelly Campbell Rawlings and Thomas Catlaw kick off the second section by revisiting John Dewey's claim that "democracy is a personal way of individual life" [1]. They argue not for a broadening, but for a deepening of citizen participation. The basic argument is one of the importance of community [3,4], with emphasis on family, schools, and workplaces. While this is interesting and probably worth repeating, it is not a new idea. Unfortunately, there is no discussion of how emerging social technologies might be relevant to the project of deepening citizen engagement. Richard Box's chapter on the "Citizenship Role of the Public Professional" asks the interesting question of whether public employees should be neutral players who carry out public policy or more involved actors who seek to influence policy from their unique perspective. Other interesting chapters in this section discuss the role of empathy in public administration, partnership between nonprofits and government agencies, and a scorecard for measuring and modelling citizen participation.

The second section of the book consists of case studies. They do not follow a consistent structure or organisation A chapter by Walter Kovalick, Jr., Alan Waltz, and Suzanne Wells on the EPA's evolution over 15 years toward an "increasingly activist and collaborative model" of citizen engagement is fascinating. One take away from this story is the complex interplay of internal policy making and external events and attitudes. Few agencies have encountered as many changing public attitudes as the EPA. Nonetheless, the agency has evolved a set of principles and practices for increasing interaction with the public. A disappointment of this chapter, however, is again the lack of meaningful discussion of the role of

information technology. Other case studies in this section discuss the city of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative, the city of Olympia's effort to take action on sustainability efforts across government agencies, and a very interesting story of failure involving a government outreach service organisation called Team Metro in Miami-Dade County. It is unusual to read case studies of initiatives that do not work out, but nothing could be more informative than an in-depth post mortem such as the one presented here on Team Metro. Unfortunately, in the end it is left to the reader to put a coordinated set of lessons learned together from the collection of stories in this section.

In the end, *Government Is Us 2.0*, while interesting in many places, does not have a clear direction. The contributions vary in their quality and their focus on the theme of citizen engagement in public administration They are not tied together in a comprehensive manner. It is a significant omission that there is virtually no treatment of new information technologies or discussion of e-participation initiatives that are currently ongoing in many government agencies. Cheryl King and Ryan Warner point out that the first volume called for "active administration" and a move toward "horizontal power" that includes collaboration between administrators and citizens, and they say that fifteen years later there is a realization that this is not enough to reduce the distrust that currently pervades our citizenry. While this is probably true, I am sorry to say that I do not find in this book a way forward.

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References

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[2] C.S. King and C. Stivers, eds, *Government Is Us: Public Administration in an Antigovernment Era.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.

[3] R.J. Lacey, *American Pragmatism and Democratic Faith.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.

[4] R.D. Putnam, Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000.

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