

Friedrich – Finer and Gas Prices

A leak occurred in the Colonial Pipeline in Shelby County, Alabama. This leak significantly impacted the distribution of gasoline on the East Coast and forced numerous states to declare an emergency. Viewing this current crisis through the lenses of Carl Friedrich and Herman Finer provides an interesting framework for discussion.

The current system for recognizing and declaring emergencies most closely follows Finer's view. Elected officials typically declare an emergency based on information presented by staff. In this case, the governors of several states declared such emergencies or otherwise took executive action. These declarations typically expand authority normally held by individuals and agencies, increase access to resources including funding, and remove barriers to collaboration.

Friedrich would have several interesting observations on this process. Perhaps the first would ask "What rationale existed for restricting authority and access to resources in the first place?" That the controls could be waived for a gasoline shortage, which is arguably very different than a terrorist event or hurricane, is proof that said controls were not practical. Friedrich could also argue that a history of slow, ineffective action validates the need to release accountability to public officials instead of elected ones.

Finer would counter, asking why this situation was not anticipated and planned for by public officials. Finer would point out that the emergency declaration was necessary to avoid the time and process often associated with a state bureaucracy, as people would have been harmed by any delay in action. Finer would consider price gouging, which did occur, as a serious harm to the populous. Finer would also likely argue that the slow, ineffective action was the result of public officials rather than elected ones.

Overall, emergency management has a history that supports a range of arguments on both sides of the Friedrich-Finer debate. The expediency of the states to declare an emergency in this case and implement price controls through executive action was crucial. The citizens of Alabama were protected from complaints like those currently found in North Carolina, where more than 1,100 complaints of price gouging are under investigation.

Original Article:

Alabama pipeline leak: Georgia governor issues emergency declaration freezing gas prices
http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2016/09/alabama_pipeline_leak_georgia.html

The Budgetary Process: Balancing Priorities

Virginia currently is facing a serious revenue shortfall, as the state took in more than \$266 million less than forecast. This resulted in significant challenges as the Governor and state lawmakers had to break promises that were made to state agencies and their employees. The news article outlined an email from Virginia State Police Colonel W. Steven Flaherty to agency employees.

As the class encountered in the budgeting simulation, government functions in a constant state of compromise. One of the tactics used by public administrators such as Colonel Flaherty is public pressure, which results from statements such as the one release. The class saw this play out repeatedly as groups made statements to the media, which resulted in pressure and compromise between the legislators and Governor. The influence of the media, especially when the issue is highly emotional, is significant. As discussed in class, the types of issues that results in a motivated public differ greatly based on whether the federal, state or local government is involved. Issues impacting health, education, safety and security, and those involving more vulnerable populations are triggers that serve to motivate the public. Colonel Flaherty plays on those triggers, and uses words with gravitas such as “dire” in his email. Although the email is veiled as explanatory, the words and its release to the media are a call to motivate the public to action.

Gormley qualifies the nature of participation based on the salience and complexity of the issue. Issues that are highly salient and less technically complex tend to see increased public participation. Flaherty’s email is designed to place the issue of compensation in less-complex form than most of the general budget conversations, and increasing the salience of the issue. In the simulation, I did much the same thing – as soon as we reached a compromise between the

University, legislators, and Electra, we announced the agreement in the media. Doing so placed the University in a solid position even when the compromise fell apart at the last moment.

Overall, the ability of public administrators to work within “the system” to attain goals is only one dimension. Public administrators also have to recognize and utilize alternative routes such as the ethical use of media and public pressure, to meet organizational goals when the threat to the public good is substantial.

Original Article:

Ackland, M. (2016). *Virginia State Police experiencing trooper shortage*.
<http://www.fox5dc.com/news/206678223-story>

City vs. Town vs. County: Muddling Through Reversion

Martinsville is a small, independent city in south-central Virginia. Originally supported by both the textile and furniture industries, Martinsville has seen over 20 years of steady economic decline. Three times in the past 10 years the City has considered reversion to town status as a means of reducing expenses, only to reject the idea.

As the class was discussing the concept of “muddling through” last week, the situation in my hometown kept coming to mind. No amount of fiscal belt-tightening, downsizing, and small business development can replace the capital losses it has sustained in the loss of industry. Yet the City’s leadership continues to kick the issue of reversion forward each time, primarily because of emotional reasons rather than as a matter of sound policy. There is no magic pill that will resolve the issues facing the City – reversion has been recommended by outside consultants each time as the *only* viable solution. Yet rather than confront an angry citizenry, or engage surrounding Henry County in consolidation of high-cost programs (such as the school system), City Council members have made smaller, incremental changes to address the immediate need.

After working through class discussion last week, it was very interesting to compare Lindblom to Heifetz. Lindblom is essentially saying that public administrators tackle the small, technical problems that make small ripples rather than address the complex, underlying adaptive problems that would require massive change – a tidal wave. Heifetz would argue that leadership requires one to understand and organize solutions to the adaptive problem. Anything less is setting up dependency which will ultimately lead to larger problems and dissatisfaction. What does that say about the members of Martinsville’s City Council, and their collective leadership ability? Lindblom would argue that while Martinsville City Council has “muddled through” the issue, their decisions have been both rational and in good faith.

The various competing interests in this e make for a fascinating case study, especially given the history of the area in the past 30 years. Individually, the elected body and public administrators are good people with good intentions, but muddling through cannot fully resolve the underlying economic problems facing local government.

Original Article:

Powell, M. (2016, September 29). *Martinsville council urged to reconsider reversion*. http://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/news/martinsville-council-urged-to-reconsider-reversion/article_f2496b57-c5a4-55f3-b06d-8f4345ad6e82.html