

June 27, 2020

A Tribute to Our Friend Chuck Bingman

Remembering a lifetime of commitment and service

In honor of Charles “Chuck” Bingman, his many friends and colleagues look back at his life, and at what made him so special.

What made Chuck Bingman so special that even now, he is the first person we think of when public administrators need advice? Dwight Ink stated it well: Chuck was the epitome of a professional public manager.

His name appears on the Wall of Luminaries at NAPA for significant contributions to the field of public administration; his commitment to our profession was absolute. His professional life was governed by an overarching concept: he believed in government and in public administration. He understood what makes an organization work, recognizing that in the end, its ethic matters more than its mechanics, rules and regulations.

He believed the best way to solve a problem was to deal with it straight on. And he was intellectually fast on his feet: he could turn on a dime to address a new and unfamiliar issue or program for which he had no obvious background or preparation.

Sallyanne Payton noted that Chuck was invariably on the short list of program managers when new and interesting challenges came along. And that’s where he wanted to be. He was a student of government’s inner workings, both domestic and international, and knew how to make them perform more efficiently to fulfill their goals.

He held both career and political posts at the senior level and believed in career staff carrying out the policies of the political leadership. As his career progressed, Chuck became concerned about the degree to which our government has replaced nonpartisan professionals with political operatives.

Public service

Chuck first answered his nation’s call to service as a sergeant in the U.S. Army. He remained in the reserves until 1965, leaving the service as a First Lieutenant. He then spent over 30 years in the Federal government, developing an astonishingly broad and deep knowledge of its inner workings.

As a public servant, Chuck wasn’t flashy and he didn’t seek the limelight; his work never appeared on the front pages. Instead we saw the results of his skill, professionalism and values when our government worked the way it’s supposed to.

As his career developed and he accumulated knowledge, Chuck applied it to an ever-widening range of government agencies, making major contributions at NASA, OMB and Transportation. He advised over 30 foreign governments and shared his expertise through teaching and writing.

Chuck was a man of character, true to his beliefs and values throughout a long and inspiring career. Harry Finger noted that Chuck was known for being thoughtful. He never dominated a conversation but set the stage so everyone could be heard. He gave credit to his team members and respected his leaders. He made friends of his colleagues and supervisors alike.

When skeptics questioned government's ability to solve problems, Chuck would say that all they had to do was look at NASA to understand how effective public administration could lead to progress.

As a junior manpower analyst, Chuck had left a promising career at the Atomic Energy Commission to join NASA, where he spent nine years in increasingly responsible positions. At headquarters, he helped establish NASA's organizational structure and identify its permanent location. Selected to help set up the new space center in Houston, he moved there without a specific position in mind and became a jack-of-all-trades. Among his chief accomplishments were setting up seven key organizations and leading the management analysis branch. He helped make NASA an equal opportunity employer in part by working with the community to ensure that housing and restaurants would be welcoming, establishing Source Evaluation Boards and introducing incentive contracts. He convinced NASA's leadership that a generalist could make a significant contribution to the future of manned space flight and was entrusted with assignments that were usually reserved for scientists and engineers.

After nine years at the space center with major achievements under his belt, Chuck was once again looking for a new challenge when he was recruited to join the Office of Management and Budget as Chief of the Government Organization Branch. He worked with Dwight Ink from the Office of Executive Management to prepare a major Federal reorganization outline for President Nixon. The resulting plan set forth the most sweeping reorganization that had ever been proposed. Chuck was responsible for putting together the details of reorganizing departments and eliminating stovepipes. According to Ink, Chuck was the foremost advocate for ending fragmentation.

After five years at OMB, Chuck was appointed Deputy Administrator of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, overseeing changes in program structures and program management approaches. He later took a second political assignment as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Transportation.

In 1982, Chuck was asked to serve as a senior advisor to Reform '88, President Reagan's long-term initiative to improve Federal management and to develop efficient and compatible administrative systems for the entire Federal government. As a multi-agency task force under OMB's direction, and with the full backing of the President, Reform '88 pulled together the best and brightest from around the government to contribute to one of history's most ambitious government reform programs. In recognition of his exceptional experience and judgment, Chuck was among the most senior career staff brought onto the team.

He also assisted the President's Council on Management Improvement, created to ensure that Reform '88's changes would be permanently embedded, before completing his government career as Management Advisor to the White House Office of Policy Development.

Later years

But after 30 years of Federal service, Chuck wasn't ready to retire. There was a new generation of public administrators to be trained and new topics to explore. His experience and his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in public administration gave him a solid background to teach graduate school. He taught graduate studies in government at The George Washington University for three years and at the Center for Advanced Governmental Studies at Johns Hopkins University, where he was a Fellow.

He broadened his career with extensive consulting and spent a year and a half in Gaza helping the Palestinian Authority to design their government. He also had consulting assignments in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China, Japan, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Estonia, Botswana and other countries.

Chuck was a prolific author, publishing 10 books on diverse topics, including *Why Governments Go Wrong* (2006), *Reforming China's Government* (2010), *Changing Governments in India and China* (2011) and *Governments from Hell* (2015). He authored more than 60 articles and made numerous presentations to professional organizations. He was working on an article with Dwight Ink on "*Government Reform: Strategies from the Nixon Era*" that will be published posthumously, and had a new book underway about political parties.

Commitment to public administration and its institutions

Beyond his belief in the importance of public administration, Chuck believed in the institutions that support it. He was honored for his contributions to the profession with several significant awards from the Federal government, including honors from NASA and from Presidents Nixon and Ford.

Several learned societies also honored him. In 1975, nominated by his peers, he was elected to NAPA, one of only 159 Fellows nationwide to be elected a Fellow of the Academy at that time. He placed a high value on his membership, participating in many NAPA activities and often collaborating with other Fellows.

As part of its anniversary celebration in 2017, NAPA honored its First Decade Fellows, chosen to join the select society between 1967 and 1976. The 29 survivors included Chuck, Dwight Ink and Harry Finger. Their monthly lunches ran for some 50 years. A new member would join every year or two, ensuring a lively discussion of current events with a focus on improving governance.

As Diane Disney remarked, with his generous spirit, keen intellect and passion for good government, Chuck would always be at the lunch's center. Tom Stanton noted that Chuck was the mainstay of the EOM Panel for many years. As a member of the NAPA audit committee, he offered insights based on his long and varied experience. Cora Beebe Fosdick recalled that Chuck made a significant difference in ensuring that funds designated for a specific purpose were reserved for that purpose. When OMB asked NAPA to evaluate the PART program, he volunteered his expertise along with five other Fellows.

NAPA President Terry Gerton summed up Chuck's contribution: "He lent his time and expertise to our study projects and standing panels, and he supported us financially, making substantial contributions to the Academy's endowment. We will miss him greatly."

Chuck believed so strongly in the value of program management that he urged many NAPA presidents to place more emphasis on strengthening the management of NAPA's own programs.

Chuck was a 48-year member of the American Society for Public Administration, serving as the Houston chapter's first president, and a long time active member of the National Capital Area chapter and of the Section on International and Comparative Administration. William Shields, ASPA's Executive Director, summed it up: if there was a personification of the phrase "a gentleman and a scholar," it was Chuck.

Nominated by his colleagues, Chuck was elected to the private Cosmos Club in Washington D.C. The Cosmos Club was founded in 1878 for persons of "distinction, character and sociability". Members must be "distinguished in science, literature, learned profession or public service". Chuck belonged there.

Family and friends

Chuck's engaging smile will be one of our most cherished memories. He embraced his family and friends with warmth and pride, participating with enthusiasm in social activities and caring for family members in need. He often attended holiday parties with Cora and JD Fosdick, showing up in creative Halloween costumes or bearing unique Christmas ornaments from his personal collection. As a close friend of Dwight Ink and Dona Wolf and a frequent visitor in their home, Chuck often joined them in cheering for the Washington Redskins and for Chuck's favorite, the Green Bay Packers.

Passage

Charles F. Bingman passed away on April 12, 2020, at the age of 90. He leaves behind a long and enviable record of quiet professionalism, defined by the program decisions he made, by the keen insights he offered through his consulting and publications, and by the contributions that his students will make to America through their own careers.

Donald Borut summarized Chuck Bingman's life very well: "He was a beautiful, passionate, caring giant and advocate for our beloved field of public administration."

HE WILL BE REMEMBERED.

- *Cora Beebe Fosdick in collaboration with Donald Borut, Diane Disney, Harry Finger, Terry Gerton, Dwight Ink, Sallyanne Payton, William Shields, Tom Stanton and Dona Wolf*