Some Unfinished Business in Public Administration

By Philip Rutledge*

First let me thank ASPA for inviting me to give the seventh Donald C. Stone Guest Lecture. It is a special honor to join such distinguished luminaries in public administration as Ferrell Heady, Harland Cleveland, Louis Gawthrop, Naomi Lynn, Herbert Simon, and Robert Behn in this series of tributes to one of the truly great figures in our profession. As with them, and many of you, I knew Don Stone well and had the privilege of working with him in a number of his incarnations. In each he was always exhorting me to do more to live up to his expectations, although I was never quite able to do so. Some of Don Stone’s admonitions are still with me today. Here are some examples.

He counseled me – and sometimes scolded me – on such things as:

1) how to be an effective president of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), and to be sure that ASPA leaders better appreciated the contributions of the American Public Works Association to our profession;

2) how to become a useful Executive Council member of National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), especially as it embarked upon the uncertain waters of accreditation – of which he was very suspicious;

3) why it was important to be an ever vigilant Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), given his fears that it might become too elitist or just another Washington job shop;
4) why the mission of the late American Consortium for International Public Administration (ACIPA) as the U.S. National Section of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences IIAS) was essential – if only, he sometimes hinted, to support his beloved International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) in the machinations of IIAS in Belgium. (As an aside, it’s interesting to note that today, although ACIPA has been laid to rest, IASIA is still going strong under the leadership of ASPA member Allen Rosenbaum.)

5) that the most important thing I should know about holding successful high level meetings was what he called “the administration of chairs” – how you stand depends on where you sit, according to Miles’s Law.

   And during Don’s final years as titular head of the Coalition to Improve Management in State and Local Government, his office was down the hall from mine on the Indianapolis Campus of Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs, and he was ever beseeching me to put my oar in the water on behalf of the Coalition in order to keep it at Indiana University. Today, the Coalition, one of Don’s fondest enterprises, is at the University of Texas at Arlington, under the loving care of one of Don’s deputies, Jim Kunde.

   The big reason Don felt such ownership in each of these pillars of our professional community -- ASPA, NASPAA, NAPA, APWA, ACIPA, IASIA and on down the line -- was that he helped create all of them, and served in top leadership positions of every one of them, usually as chair, president, or executive director. It would not be unfair to say that he expressed his impatience and disappointment with most of us in our stewardship of his progeny. He always felt there were so much unfinished
business in these offspring -- and so little time to get it done. Today, in tribute to Don Stone, I want to reflect on some of this unfinished business.

Parenthetically, I should note that most of my predecessors as Stone Lecturers have been thoroughbred academics, while my perspective is more that of what Dwight Waldo referred to as a “pracademic”, that is, one who is congenitally a practitioner, but sometimes dabbles in academia between gigs. Today, I speak primarily as a practitioner of the art and science of public administration.

My colleague, former ASPA President and NAPA George Frederickson, in his column on Public Administration and Gardening in the February issue of ASPA’s PA Times, provided a useful metaphor for our purposes today. Among many perceptive observations, Frederickson wrote, “To understand public administration as gardening is to know that it is all about the garden, not the gardener. In the long run, the patient public administration gardener will, working with the resources at hand, plan, adapt, guide and nurture processes of genuine and lasting institutional change.” Our best gardeners, he said, will pay attention to the soil, the water, the seeds, the climate, and “know when to prune, to plan, to plant, and to cultivate.”

Don Stone was a public administration gardener in the best sense of this metaphor, and there are some lessons for us here. The lesson is particularly relevant for those of us who have invested much of our careers in trying to bring a better sense of fairness, justice and equity to the field of public administration. Issues of social equity have not always been at the forefront of the attention of the founders of either our profession or its organizational instruments like ASPA, NAPA, and NASPAA -- but social equity has always been implicit in both the language and the philosophy of their
founding fathers. Just as equality for minorities and women was not foremost in the minds of the white male slave holders who wrote our Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, the philosophy and values they promulgated in those documents made possible the tremendous gains we have made in social equity over the past 200 years.

A symposium on “Social Equity and Public Administration”, in the January/February, 1974 issue of ASPA’s Public Administration Review, focused attention squarely on social equity in governance as an inherent responsibility within our profession. Who was editor of that symposium – George Frederickson, of course. PAR and other journals have elaborated further on this imperative, as scholars in the field have provided appropriate underpinnings. It is now time to adapt the social equity concepts, so well defined for us by our public administration scholars, into modules that the practitioners among us can use on the streets and in the neighborhoods, as well as in the bureaucracies.

Public administration has always enjoyed a fertile tension between those within our ranks who can conceive great ideas and those among us whose primary contribution is to agitate, rankle and cajole in a way that makes things happen. ASPA, since its inception during the 1930’s, has been the place where academicians, practitioners, researchers, and concerned citizens traditionally have come together for this cross-fertilization of ideas which keeps our movement vibrant, relevant, and essential.

Don Stone, and other founders of ASPA, frequently referred to it as the “mother church” of public administration, and in keeping with that metaphor, ASPA has given birth to NAPA, NASPAA, ACIPA, and other significant offshoots in our field. It may be
that some cutting edge ideas, such as social equity in governance -- conceived over 35 years ago by ASPA leaders, but more recently nurtured by organizational relatives -- may have to come back home in order to grow up and flourish. Perhaps only ASPA has the breadth of vision, purpose, and constituency to embrace such a transforming notion in public administration.

My scholarly friends in the profession can trace our current thoughts and dilemmas around social equity back to Aristotle and Plato. Others would stop at Woodrow Wilson’s seminal writings on the study of public administration. But in my own mind, I trace the “invention” of social equity as a practical tool in public administration to the Minowbrook conferences convened by Dwight Waldo, George Frederickson, and a group of young Turks in the 1960’s. They recast the debate in terms with which those of us who toil as foot soldiers within the ministries can wrestle. In their writings about the “new public administration”, they asked whether it is enough for public administrators to seek excellence in management directed at efficiency and economy in governance – or should we also be evaluated on how well we manage to enhance fairness, justice and equity in the outcomes of governance processes? Is not the latter an ultimate test of effectiveness in managing the public business? I think Don Stone would agree that it is.

Although the issue was joined some 35 years ago, the profession still does not have good answers or acceptable strategies for policy implementation. A major weakness has been our failure as a profession to develop the quantitative tools, indicators, and benchmarks to define objectives and measure progress in pursuit of social equity. This deficiency may be second only to our failure to marshal the will and commitment
within our professional ranks to move social equity front and center among our national concerns.

Several developments suggest that the second year of the 21st century may be when social equity is an idea whose time has come. There has been a deluge of research papers, journal articles, books, conferences, etc., on the subject, at both the domestic and international levels. A quick check on the internet turned up nearly 45,000 entries on “social equity”. They range from a very provocative speech by the President of the Inter-American Bank on “Globalization, Competitiveness, and Social Equity”, to an important Conference by the U.S. Department of Transportation on “Environmental Equity and Social Equity”, to initiatives by national and sub-national governments around the world to operationalize social equity as a working concept. The entry New Zealand, as that nation ponders issues with their indigenous population, is one that stands out in my mind. This is in addition to the plethora of courses launched by colleges and universities, as the number of text books on the subject mounts.

Just recently, the leading industrialized nations of the world met in Monterey, Mexico, to wrestle with the unsustainable condition of nearly half of the world’s population living on less than $2 a day and a fifth survive on $1 or less. Whatever else one may say about the September 11 attack on America last year, social equity was a burning issue at the core of it, even though the consequences may be counter-productive to our cause. Hunting down terrorists without worldwide attention to poverty and exclusion as root causes of terrorism will lead to failure and frustration.

Speeches by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan and World bank President James Wolfenson often have made this point. President George W. Bush’s
recent speech to the Inter-American Bank announcing a small increase in our nation’s niggardly support of foreign aid is regarded as a major policy breakthrough. In response to the Bush initiative, Thomas Friedman, the highly respected columnist for the New York Times had this to say: “Since September 11, the Bush administration has focused on making the world safer, but has shown little interest in making it more healthy, less poor, and more environmentally safe. As a result, there has been little chance that it was going to end up safer for Americans.” He went on to write that, “President Bush’s speech announcing a $5 billion increase in foreign aid to poor countries is important – not only as a substantive breakthrough for the administration, but also, one hopes, as a psychological one.” At Monterey, after much criticism of the paucity of this amount, the Bush Administration “clarified” that actually the increase would be $10 billion rather than $5 billion over the next three years – so sometimes these summit meetings do help. NAPA Fellows Colin Powell, Secretary of State, and Paul O’Neill, may be considered President Bush’s gardeners in this field.

Documents prepared by the United Nations and the World bank, such as the Report on the World Social Condition, World Development Indicators, the Human Development Report, Development and the Environment, and State of the World’s Population are only a few examples to remind us why Don Stone felt so strongly that we must pay attention to public administration on a global scale.

Last year, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences issued a two volume report, *AMERICA BECOMING: Racial Trends and Their Consequences*, prepared by some of the nation’s most distinguished scholars. This Report documented again our nation’s difficulty in coping with nagging problems of
social equity in our society. Recent updates by such agencies as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Business-Higher Education Forum show that, although progress is being made, negative racial disparities in health, education, employment, and other areas persist. It appears today, however, in the U.S. at least, social equity is less a problem of conscious public policy than a failure of governance processes administered by the leaders of our implementing institutions.

These reports, among others, reflect the vast disparities in the quality of life among citizens, in developing and industrialized countries alike, which may portend horrendous destabilization and conflict in the future. They all can be characterized as evidence of failures to achieve social equity through existing public administration systems and processes.

Another way of looking at this problem is to ask whether, in our search for purity, we have gone too far in separating public policy formation from public policy management. Debate on this question is raging now in the Academy chartered by Congress to advise federal, state and local governments on governance issues. Are we helpless in the face of all this? What can we do as individuals and as organizations to correct the governance system at the national and international levels? How can we build the coalitions to bring social equity to the forefront as a principal challenge in public administration?

These questions were on the minds of several past presidents, council members, and officers of ASPA, who are now Fellows of the National Academy of Public Administration, at a series of meetings over the last three or four years. The names of the persons involved are too numerous to mention in this presentation, but you would
recognize them all as patient, but passionate, gardeners in the field of public administration. The result has been the launching of a new Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance in the Academy that has energized a quarter of its approximately 500 Fellows in a way not recently seen in that rather selective body.

It was recognized early on that social equity in governance was too big for one Standing Panel of the Academy, and probably too big even for NAPA itself. Therefore, much attention has been devoted to tilling the field through defining carefully our mission, limiting our objectives, and to building partnerships and networks among other concerned entities in the larger public administration community. This gardening has generated a bountiful crop of ideas and opportunities which await harvest.

Since to some, process is destiny in the field of public administration, let’s look back at how the Panel has proceeded, and glance ahead at anticipated strategies for the future. After approval of the Panel’s charter by the Academy’s Board, a group of scholars and practitioners among the Fellows, reinforced by expert associates from related professional organizations, tackled the onerous task of defining issues for a prospective agenda for the Panel. Needless to say, some Fellows felt the agenda explicited in an issue paper and work plan was too narrow, while others felt it was too broad. In one survey of a broad sample of ASPA members and colleagues in the public administration profession conducted by Mary Hamilton, the Executive Director of ASPA, a majority of respondents felt it was just right.

Members of the Panel spent a year vetting the issue paper and work plan in conferences with a variety of professional and civic leaders and audiences across the country. Three notable ones were held in Indianapolis before academic, political, and
civic leaders, in Pittsburgh before a transatlantic consortium of universities and research centers, and in Dallas with leaders of 23 institutions broadly representative of our profession in attendance. An additional forum was held at this Conference, in which many of you may have participated.

Articles and columns on issues raised in these forums are beginning to appear in a variety of media. NASPAA’s Journal of Public Affairs Education has commissioned a symposium on social equity, to be edited by former ASPA President Ed Jennings and former President of the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) Sam Meyers – both Associate Members of the NAPA Panel. The Environmental Protection Administration has asked NAPA to study environmental justice questions as social equity governance issues. These are only a few other new initiatives of importance that are emerging from Panel activities.

The Leadership Conference in Dallas, co-sponsored by NAPA, ASPA, NASPAA, ICMA, NLC, and others -- working through breakout groups after hearing inspiring speeches by national political and civic leaders, most of whom were not Fellows of NAPA or members of ASPA -- generated both broad and specific recommendations in 10 priority areas of the Panel’s agenda. These recommendations are currently under active deliberation to determine the best implementation venue for each. A listing of the 10 topical headings is all our time will allow today, but it is nevertheless instructive.

They are:

1) Ensuring adequate health care for all;

2) Moving from school desegregation and integration to diversity and improved educational outcomes;
3) Investing in people: beyond minimum wages to individual development;

4) Shifting from a “war on drugs” (criminal justice public policy) and long term prison sentences to treatment, prevention, and restoration;

5) Securing the future for income support programs and social security;

6) Supporting the legal and moral dimension of environmental protection and justice;

7) It only matters if you measure: indicators and score cards needed to track social equity issues;

8) Bridging the digital divide: creating equal access so we don’t reinforce inequalities;

9) Balancing national and international economic and social interests;

10) Ensuring that today’s generation doesn’t consume tomorrow’s resources.

Is that a plateful or what? Are we dealing with public policy or public management? Can they both be subsumed under “public administration”, or must the banner be “civic engagement”? Which of our many instruments in the public administration community are best structured to deal with these issues? Do we need to create a different organism or coalition? Serious, sometimes heated, discussion of these questions, is now taking place within NAPA, which had the misfortune, perhaps, of opening this Pandora’s Box. However, the issue is too big for NAPA and must be moved to a broader platform. Any thought of implementation – or, as we say today, “governance”, of these issues in social equity must be moved to the larger society for “buy in”.

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Many of us who have served as presidents of ASPA feel – and I think former President Don Stone would concur -- that ASPA, the “mother church” of public administration, is the ideal instrument for leadership of this movement. Not only has the ASPA Council voted social equity its number one priority, but its peculiar constituency of scholars, researchers, practitioners, and civic leaders makes it the ideal forum, as envisioned by its founders, to develop consensus and action on these public administration initiatives in the social equity arena.

So what is job one in order to get off the dime on this issue? The NAPA Social Equity Panel feels that job one is developing a protocol of indicators, scorecards, and benchmarks that will enable us to define better, measure, and track phenomena we identify as social equity issues, as proposed by Dallas breakout group #7. This is something we all can defend as our calling, on whatever side of the policy/administration debate one may fall.

Social accounting is a challenge that has long concerned both policy leaders and managers in public administration. ASPA members and NAPA Fellows have long been active in this arena. In 1966, as riots were engulfing our major cities, the late ASPA member and NAPA Fellow John Gardner, then Secretary of Health Education, and Welfare, convened some of the most outstanding social scientists of the time to discuss how to measure social change, and to explore the possibility of a social report on the nation. In 1969, under the leadership of NAPA Fellow Alice Rivlin, then Assistant Secretary of HEW, a pioneering document, “Towards a Social Report”, was issued to point the way to what might be possible. Meanwhile, in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, as the social equity concept was taking root, Minnesota Senator Walter Mondale, Chair
of the Sub-committee on Evaluation and Planning of Social Programs, and other congressional leaders, ably assisted by ASPA member and Academy Fellow Herb Jasper, were fashioning legislation and holding congressional hearings on the establishment of a federal Council of Social Advisers, similar to the Council of Economic Advisers. This Council annually would survey conditions, gather data, and develop social indicators, similar to our economic indicators, that would give a clearer picture of the nation’s quality of life.

None of Mondale’s different versions of the Full Opportunity Act of 1969 ever became law, but the hearings held on the legislation over the next few years, and the energetic debate over the idea, generated such high interest that many attempts to produce a report on the social health of our nation have followed – and are continuing today in a variety of institutions. A major recommendation from the Dallas Conference, pushed hard by ASPA Member and NAPA Fellow Charles Washington, was that NAPA, in association with others, seek public and private and funding to develop a study on social equity in America, which would be updated periodically. Considering the long history of interest in a system of social accounting and the need for a compendium of data and benchmarks to help public policy leaders and managers effectively address fairness, equity and justice in governance – this idea seems to have legs.

ASPA members and NAPA Fellows Jim Svara, George Frederickson, and Joe Wholey will lead this effort to develop the basic tools which may enable us to do this, and to see who else within the public administration community may be interested in joining this venture. A brief horizon scan indicates that there may be many who will sign on to this effort. This does not mean, however, that the other Dallas recommendations get
left behind, or that the social equity issues agenda is complete as it now stands. It merely represents a starting point, and a clarion call to develop new coalitions and networks to attack the whole beast. Other ASPA members, NAPA Fellows, and others in the public administration community are preparing to assume leadership in other areas, through their own respective agencies and institutions, to advance the social equity agenda identified at Dallas, and in tribunals yet to come.

So, I conclude today with the hope that I have found a few more gardeners to help cultivate this ancient and honorable field of searching for ways to enhance social equity in domestic and global governance outcomes, so that we can get on with some of Don Stone’s unfinished business in public administration. Thank you.

* Prepared for presentation at the National Conference of the American Society for Public Administration in Phoenix, Arizona, March 26, 2002. Rutledge, Professor Emeritus at Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs, was national President of ASPA, 1974-75, and is Chair, NAPA’s Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance.