A Singular, Enduring Purpose: Serving the Public

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Government is a tapestry of diverse missions united by a singular, enduring purpose: serving the public. Whether it's advancing federal management practices, delivering healthcare to military service members and their families, ensuring operational readiness, improving service to taxpayers, driving digital transformation, or balancing innovation and integration—public service is at the heart of it all. This edition of *The Business of Government* magazine profiles government leaders driving these efforts while also tackling some of the most complex public management challenges of our time.

As we anticipate the upcoming presidential transition, it has become clear that strong leadership is a cornerstone of effective public administration, serving as the driving force behind innovation, accountability, and the delivery of public value. In an environment often characterized by complex challenges, competing priorities, and resource constraints, strong leadership ensures that public organizations remain focused on their missions while adapting to emerging needs. Effective public leaders can inspire trust, foster collaboration, and make strategic decisions that balance immediate demands with long-term objectives. They navigate volatility and uncertainty with clarity, turning challenges into opportunities and setting a vision that mobilizes teams toward collective goals. In doing so, public leaders not only enhance organizational performance but also strengthen the public's confidence in government institutions, ensuring that policies and programs meet the needs of citizens.

The next administration and senior-level appointees need to be ready to lead and manage the government effectively when they step into the office on day one. Since its inception, the IBM Center has always complemented its rigorous public management research by offering government executives a platform to tell their leadership stories on its weekly interview program, *The Business of Government Hour*—convening engaging conversations with frontline practitioners and thought leaders. From these conversations, I have gleaned eight practical insights for leaders.

1. **Start with self-awareness:** Before embarking on any change initiative, leaders should engage in self-reflection to understand their values, strengths, and motivations.

2. **Create urgency and coalition:** Recognize the need for change and build a team that can support and drive the change.

3. **Develop a vision aligned with values:** Craft a compelling vision for the future that aligns with both organizational goals and personal values.

4. **Communicate authentically:** Use effective communication to articulate the vision in a way that resonates emotionally and intellectually with stakeholders.

5. **Empower and inspire action:** Remove barriers to enable action while fostering a culture of empowerment and inspiration.

6. **Achieve and celebrate wins:** Focus on achieving short-term successes and celebrate them to build confidence and momentum.

7. **Continuously learn and adapt:** Embrace a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability to respond to changing circumstances and new insights.

8. **Anchor changes in culture:** Ensure that new practices are deeply embedded in the organizational culture for lasting impact.

The following are summaries of what you will find in this edition of *The Business of Government* magazine.

Conversations with Leaders

Throughout the year, I have the privilege of engaging with influential government executives and public sector leaders, delving into their agencies' missions, accomplishments, and visions for governance in the twenty-first century. These three leaders highlighted in this edition exemplify a dedication to innovative thinking, demonstrating the strategic foresight and leadership necessary to achieve their diverse objectives.

- **Lt. General Telita Crosland, M.D., Director, Defense Health Agency (DHA)** shares her forward-looking vision for military healthcare, emphasizing a transformative approach that integrates operational excellence, innovative technology, and resilient healthcare delivery. Our conversation focuses on the importance of adaptability, data-driven decision making, and patient-centered care, positioning DHA to address current needs while preparing for future challenges.

- **Vice Admiral Frank Morley, Principal Military Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition** discusses the Navy's key strategic initiatives and modernization efforts. As the senior uniformed acquisition officer, he plays a crucial role in advancing the Navy's technological edge and operational readiness. Our conversation explores the challenges and strategies involved in maintaining superiority in a dynamic threat environment.

- **Danny Werfel, Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service (IRS)** outlines the agency's strategic direction, emphasizing the importance of modernization, enhanced customer service, technology-driven transformation, and a well-trained workforce as essential components of its evolution. Our conversation provides valuable insights into how these priorities are shaping the IRS's long-term vision and ongoing initiatives.

Insights from Leaders

From my interviews with a range of government executives, I've gained valuable insights on the leadership and dedication required to accomplish their diverse missions. In this edition, six government leaders share their insights on the work they are doing and the initiatives they lead. While each faces unique challenges in their respective fields, they are united by a common focus on looking ahead and finding effective solutions to drive transformative change and make a difference.

- **Alexis Bonnell, Chief Information Officer and Director of the Digital Capabilities Directorate, Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL)** develops and executes the AFRL information technology strategy, leading the strategic development of highly advanced next generation technologies and platforms for AFRL. She shares her insights catalyzing the discovery, development, and integration of warfighting technologies for air, space, and cyberspace forces via digital capabilities, IT infrastructure and technological innovation across the lab's operations.

- **Ramesh Menon, Chief Technology Officer and Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)** leads the agency's technology and AI strategy planning, experimentation, emerging technology solutions architecture supporting DIA and intelligence community (IC) priorities. He offers his insights into how DIA leverages AI, the strategic implementation of AI, the challenges faced, and the evolving landscape of intelligence and national security.

- **Andrea Fletcher, Chief Digital Strategy Officer and Director of the Digital Service, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** focuses on improving the user experience and delivering better digital services to CMS beneficiaries, leading digital transformation and modernization efforts at CMS. She details her insights into promoting interoperability and public access to health data and recruiting the next generation of technical talent into federal service.

- **Melinda Rogers, Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)** oversees the department's $3.5 billion information technology (IT) investment portfolio, providing strategic direction and directly supporting mission operations through IT service delivery and the department's cybersecurity program. She puts forth her insights on DOJ's strategic IT modernization, cybersecurity enhancements, and the adoption and use of emerging technologies.

- **John Boerstler, Former Chief Experience Officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** led the department customer experience office for the last three years and was instrumental in raising its trust among the country's veterans. He provides his insights into the VA's journey to improve veteran services, the challenges faced, and the progress made under his leadership.

- **Corey Nickens, Client Executive of the Innovation Business Unit, Office of Assisted Acquisition Services, U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)** works to deliver efficient, effective, and innovative acquisition solutions that meet the diverse needs of government agencies. He describes the strategic priorities for AAS's innovation portfolio and articulates a vision grounded in collaboration, emerging technologies, and a deep commitment to understanding customer needs.

Perspectives on Pursuing IT and Digital Transformation at the U.S. Social Security Administration

Marcela Escobar-Alava, Chief Information Officer, and Betsy Beaumon, Chief Transformation Officer from the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) shared their perspectives on the agency's ongoing digital transformation efforts, how they are working together to shape a new operating model delivering innovative digital services to the public. The discussion provides valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with transforming a large, traditionally paper-based federal agency into a more agile and customer centric organization.

Forum on Integrating AI in Government: Lessons, Applications, and Innovations

AI has become an integral part of modern governance, reshaping how the U.S. federal government operates and delivers services. From safeguarding national security to streamlining routine processes, AI technologies are transforming the public sector at an unprecedented pace. This forum is dedicated to exploring the dynamic intersection of AI and government operations, focusing on its current applications, potential, and the critical questions it raises about trust, ethics, and effective implementation. The adaptability of AI offers enormous promise—but it also demands careful oversight and strategic governance.

We continue a conversation initiated in the 2020 The Business of Government magazine forum dedicated to the evolving use of artificial intelligence in government. Four years later so much has changed in the application and use of AI in government. To that end, this forum highlights a sampling of recent IBM Center reports further exploring the operation and use of emerging technologies like AI and documenting lessons learned, recommendations, and next steps.

Viewpoints

Dan Chenok, drawing on recent publications and other IBM Center research, demonstrates how secure implementation of advanced technologies, such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum computing, can help government leaders use data to make more informed decisions, promote transparency, and improve outcomes in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Margie Graves ponders the challenges and opportunities of the use of AI and quantum computing for business and mission results. She counsels that by staying abreast of this evolving landscape and remaining vigilant, organizations can better protect themselves against unintended consequences and chart the right path forward. I close the viewpoints with an article exploring how to apply, within a government context, leadership insights from NFL great Tom Brady—emphasizing the importance of teamwork and how great leaders bring out the best in their teams.

Wrap Up

I wrap this edition with a management section highlighting several IBM Center reports that tackle topics such as preventing fraud and improper payments, building cyber resilience for critical infrastructure protection, and the role of risk leadership in defining enterprise risk management (ERM) readiness in government. If you have not read these reports, we encourage you to do so by going to businessofgovernment.org/reports.

There are approximately 75 days between a presidential election and the inauguration of a new president. This is considered the presidential transition period. It is a time of opportunity for an incoming administration. The transition from campaign to governing requires that presidential policies be transformed from rhetoric into an actionable agenda and then into concrete results. Neither good policies nor sound investments are likely to work, let along succeed, if undermined by poor implementation. Managing the federal government remains a complex and difficult assignment, both technically and politically. Failures underscore the need to pay attention not only to policy, but also to whether and how policies and programs are executed.

Many of the leadership stories, insights, recommendations, best practices, and lessons learned presented throughout this edition of *The Business of Government* magazine can help government executives do the business of government. The Center also has a wealth of other presidential transition resources available at businessofgovernment.org/presidential-transition. We invite government leaders to use these resources in pursuit of that singular, enduring purpose: to serve the public.

I hope enjoy this edition of *The Business of Government* magazine. Please let us know what you think by contacting me at michael.j.keegan@us.ibm.com.