IN DEFENSE OF PUBLIC SERVICE

CEDRIC L. ALEXANDER

How 22 Million Government Workers Will Save Our Republic

Foreword by Congressman ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS of Maryland

Praise for *In Defense of Public Service*

"Over thirty years in a uniform in defense of our freedoms convinced me that soldiering was a good thing. Then I read Cedric Alexander's book. I didn't 'defend' anything; I pursued liberty . . . supported by millions of selfless civil servants. They have my thanks."

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"Cedric Alexander's *In Defense of Public Service* should be required reading for everyday citizens as well as for anyone considering a life in the 'fourth branch of our government.' In a time of profound political division and deep skepticism about the so-called deep state, this book sheds much needed light on the extraordinary contribution made by those unelected officials who actually keep our democracy running."

—Tony Goldwyn, actor

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—Marilee Adams, PhD, bestselling author of *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life* and Adjunct Professor, Key Executive Leadership Program, School of Public Affairs, American University

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in DEFENSE *of* PUBLIC SERVICE

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Cedric L. Alexander

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In Defense of Public Service

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To the 22 million men and women who get it done for us every day. They are true American patriots.

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FOREWORD

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As I pen these words, we are living through a time in our nation's history when powerful forces are seeking to divide us, one from another; when the legitimacy of our constitutional institutions is under attack; and when factually supported truth itself has come under relentless challenge.

I am among those who have not lost confidence in our ability to right the ship of American democratic life, but I also realize that we are in a fight—a fight for the soul of our democracy.

It is from this perspective that I can highly recommend Cedric Alexander's cogent analysis in this very readable book.

Dr. Alexander was trained as a clinical psychologist, with a lifetime of experience in law enforcement at all levels. He brings to this book an acute understanding of both why our cherished form of government—and those who serve us in the civil service—appear to be under such unrelenting attack and how we, as citizens, should and must respond.

Dr. Alexander's book may especially resonate with me because, as an American of color, I have been able to receive an excellent public education, become an attorney, and serve my community and country in both the Maryland General Assembly and the Congress because of one very important fact: Americans of conscience from every political vantage point took our Constitution seriously and fought for my right to be all that I could become.

This is the personal debt that I and so many others with my heritage owe to our democratic republic—to the twenty-million-

plus Americans who serve our republic and its values in our nation's civil service.

And this is also why I, personally, will remain in the fight to preserve our republic and the humane and equitable values at its foundation for as long as I can draw breath.

It is for these reasons that I have contributed this brief foreword as a way of speaking to all patriotic Americans, whatever their philosophies may be, who are at heart "constitutionalists."

It was to our Constitution—and not to any political perspective or party—that I gave my oath when I became an officer of the court, when I joined the Maryland state legislature, and when I was elected to serve in the Congress of the United States.

It is this commitment that I bring to my work as chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, the committee that has direct oversight over our federal civil service. From my more than two decades of experience performing this oversight, I can confirm that our nation's federal employees deserve our respect, gratitude, and support.

In Defense of Public Service advances this perspective toward our civil service—federal, state, and local—in clear and compelling terms. Equally important, if not more so, Dr. Alexander's work explains *why* these millions of American civil servants are so important to all of us and to the preservation of our system of government.

This is a time when we, as Americans, need his perspective.

When people in the leadership of the nation attack our courts, the members of our Congress, our civil servants, and our press, they are attacking the glue that holds our diverse nation together as the *United* States of America.

And when these attackers do so on the basis of factually unfounded *opinion*, rather than verifiable evidence, they are engaged in demagoguery of the most dangerous sort.

This is why our civil service, committed to maintaining the rule of law and decision-making based on verifiable facts, is so important to maintaining the *legitimacy* of our government, both elected and appointed.

Dr. Alexander is right to point out that, under our democratic republic, elected leaders make policy but must rely on civil servants, appointed on the basis of merit, to implement those public policies. We must rely on the expertise of our merit-based civil service if we wish to have a government that addresses the factual realities of our lives (to the extent that human beings can ever achieve that goal).

This duty to find and implement the truth, as I have mentioned, is the province of our civil servants, whether they serve in Washington, DC; our states; or in the law enforcement agencies of our country. This is not to say, and Dr. Alexander does not contend, that our government agencies always get it right or that they never overreach. Human beings, however talented and well-meaning, make mistakes.

That is why our Constitution gives our elected representatives and our courts the power of oversight. What it does mean, however, is that decision-making by government must be based on factually verifiable reality and not solely on the opinions of any partisan group.

In Defense of Public Service admirably makes this case, outlining how our civil service came to be created and improved and arguing persuasively why our civil servants deserve our respect and support. The book appears at a critical, even dangerous, moment for our nation and our democracy, and, for this reason, I will close with these parting thoughts.

As citizens of the greatest democratic republic in the world, we have the privilege and duty to recall our nation's founding and to engage our nation on the basis of those fundamental principles.

We should never forget that, at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked whether the framers had proposed a republic or a monarchy. And Mr. Franklin is said to have replied: "A republic, if you can keep it."

Today, in 2019, I still believe that we have a republic—but only if we can keep it.

I hold fast to this conviction because the functioning—indeed, the very *legitimacy*—of our democratic system has been under attack for some time. I am speaking, of course, of the continuing attacks on our elections—from sources both foreign and domestic—and of the failure of too many of my colleagues in Congress and the White House to adequately defend us against those attacks.

For the unity and future of our republic, our Congress must reassert its constitutional obligation of oversight, seeking and obtaining the answers to serious questions of governance that, until now, have gone unanswered. We must perform this constitutional duty so effectively and convincingly that those Americans who support this president and his administration and those who disagree will reach a shared and united answer as to how our nation must proceed.

I remain confident that we can fulfill this historic duty. To succeed, however, we will need our federal civil service and the Americans who serve us there to give us their complete and unbiased cooperation. To the extent that we are required to do so, we will enforce that cooperation through action in our courts, but I sincerely hope that this route will seldom be necessary. Toward this end, I will close with this pledge. In the words of my heroine, former congresswoman Barbara Jordan, from 1974:

> My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, [or] the destruction of the Constitution.

I hope and trust that all Americans feel—and will do—the same.

Sincerely,

Congressman Elijah Cummings of Maryland
July 20, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Back to the Future, 1829

In his Farewell Address of 1796, President George Washington warned us about the undue influence and power of political parties in our public life. He urged his fellow citizens to "moderate the fury of party spirit," which was giving rise to "a frightful despotism" that "serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration." He went on to say that partisanship "agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection," and "opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions."[1]

Sound familiar today? Almost too familiar to warrant "yet another" book on "divided America"? Well, chances are you don't know the half of it. Partisanship set in hard even before President Washington completed his first term, but *hyperpartisanship* is

relatively new. Of its many destructive effects, the most corrosive has received the least attention.

Whatever other acts of vandalism it drives, hyperpartisanship demonizes government "bureaucracy"—the unelected government workforce—so that we have poisonously politicized the work of twenty-two million government employees whose service is, in essence and in fact, nonpartisan and distinctly nonpolitical. Due to the relentless distortion of fact and truth, of reality itself, originating at the top levels of America's elected leadership and amplified by some in the broadcast and social media, we have confused the delegitimization of elected political leadership with the delegitimization of government work and civil service. This has ginned up a roiling war within our republic, producing everything from the self-inflicted wound of government shutdown in 2018–2019 to the churning out of gothic, ghoulish, and goofy "Deep State" fantasies that are far out of joint with the realities of government employment.

The nonpartisan, inherently objective, moderate, and service-oriented unelected branch of our government has been dishonored and has become disheartened. It is time to both recognize and restore its legitimacy as the vital cement that holds us together as Americans regardless of party and politics. The unelected government is the one part of government that, quite truly as well as literally, *works*.

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How do I know? Why do I care?

For most of the past forty-some years, I have been a public servant, with a parallel career for some of that time as a clinical psychologist. In 1977, my long career in law enforcement began in Florida as a sheriff's deputy. By 1992, when I left policing for a while, I had worked both ends of the state's law enforcement

spectrum, from rural and small-town Florida to Miami-Dade, with, in between, a stint in midsize Orlando/Orange County. I had been a deputy, a police officer, a detective, and even a school resource officer. My tours of duty put me up close to good ol' boys in the backwoods swamplands, to folks struggling with urban poverty in the likes of Liberty City and Overtown, to kids trying to stay out of trouble in seriously challenged schools, and, oh yes, even to mass murderer Ted Bundy.

In 1992, I earned a master's degree in marriage and family therapy, practiced, and then went on to Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, from which I earned a doctorate in clinical psychology in 1997. I continued on to a postdoc fellowship at the University of Rochester Medical Center in Rochester, New York, and taught there as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry. My background as a first responder led to my doing specialized mental health work with police officers, firefighters, and their families. This, in turn, occasioned my appointment as deputy chief of the Rochester Police Department, and a special mandate from the mayor and the chief to oversee the training of a cadre of officers capable of dealing safely and effectively with mentally ill persons, whether members of the public or suspects.

Although my clinical study and practice were incredibly rewarding for me, getting back into a police department as a psychologist made me realize just how much I missed law enforcement. When I was asked to step up from deputy chief to chief of the Rochester PD, I took the job. It was a challenged department in a challenged city, and the work was very hard, very exciting, and very necessary. I went on to other positions as a law enforcement executive—deputy commissioner of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and then TSA federal security director at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, before going on to

become police chief and, subsequently, director of public safety for DeKalb County in the Atlanta, Georgia, metro area.

I like to think that I developed personally and professionally over these forty-some years. I became a chief—twice—and a director of public safety for a large, diverse community. I have also had leadership roles in forward-looking organizations. I had the high honor of presiding as president of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) and serving on President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Yet despite this leadership experience, it was much that I had learned in my earliest years in law enforcement, working the streets, engaging directly with people in their neighborhoods, that taught me the most. In chapter 3, I'll tell you a couple of personal stories that have profound meaning for me and, more important, that have, I am convinced, profound implications for public service in our democracy. But—conceptually—the single most consequential lesson I learned came in the early 1980s when I was an officer on the Miami-Dade Police Department. It was the lesson, the multifaceted lesson, of community policing.

Now, back then, the phrase *community policing* was unknown. Today, it is in common use. Community policing is a law-enforcement strategy focused on working closely with members of the community. Some describe it as "personalized" policing. Well, that seems to me a no-brainer. Good policing is always personalized. Ideally, it is driven by officers who know intimately the neighborhood or community they serve and who have formed partnerships with residents, who share with them their concerns and who bring to them their problems. How can we help if the neighborhood doesn't know us, doesn't trust us, doesn't want to help *us*?

Back in the early 1980s, when a concept some called "community-oriented policing" was just beginning to emerge, I was

incredibly fortunate to work for Major Doug Hughes, commander of Miami-Dade's tough Central Precinct. It was a pretty intense place in the 1980s, and Major Hughes's idea seemed radical, especially for such a hot spot. He wanted to build relationships with community residents—not just on the streets of Central's most dangerous neighborhoods but in its downright notorious public housing developments, such as Scott Projects. The major's orders to us were to reach out. So we did, and what we quickly discovered was that, yes, Scott Projects had some truly lethal residents, but the majority living there were families who just wanted to raise their kids in peace and safety.

And what was it we police officers wanted? *Peace and safety!* It turned out that we had more in common with the residents of Scott Projects than either they or we thought possible. We both wanted peace and safety. But if our precinct commander had not ordered us to make the first move, to reach out, neither we police nor the residents we served would ever have discovered our common objectives.

I was excited by my personal introduction to what came to be called community policing. At the time, I distinctly felt not only that I was seeing the future of law enforcement just beginning to unfold but also that I was part of it. What I have since discovered is that community policing was not new in 1980, let alone a concept waiting for "the future." Its foundation had been laid and its central principles articulated years earlier—more than a century earlier, in fact.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, street crime was a critical problem in London. People were getting pickpocketed and violently mugged in broad daylight. At night? Well, after dark, most "respectable" Londoners just stayed home. What was a problem for the capital of the United Kingdom was a problem for Sir