

## Book Review

### ***Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug, or How to Survive Public Service***

by Kenneth Ashworth. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001. 200 pages.

Ken Ashworth is a career public servant who has written a resource furnishing practical advice to the would-be bureaucrat. The book is a series of 16 letters to his niece/nephew Kim, who is enrolled in an M.P.A. program. In the letters, he describes the challenges and rewards of working as a professional in the political world of government management.

Published as a supplemental text for courses in public administration, this work should be required reading for every management intern, administrative assistant, and local government manager who thinks that the latest confrontation with the council was a unique experience.

In the letter entitled "Re: Working with Politicians," he writes about the dilemma of advocating doing what is right in the face of opponents whose competing interests may be less than honorable. He describes the all-too-familiar feeling of being the lightning rod for criticism, defending the policies established by elected officials who are more than willing to let the administrator take all the abuse. He shares the advice he received from a former board chair, who said, "You don't understand. Your job description is to stand between the dog and the fireplug."

Other letters in this well-written book focus on working with the press, dealing with unpleasant and difficult people, risk taking in government, dealing with pressure and influence, relations with a governing board, ethics, and leadership. These are the topics that have been the table talk whenever managers have gotten together to share war

stories and to seek the comfort and advice of their peers.

This volume of wisdom could have been written by any one of the "wise old men" of ICMA. Maybe it should have been. Maybe it will be. But this version will do extremely well until that one is published.

—Mark Levin  
City Administrator  
Maryland Heights, Missouri, and  
Chair, ICMA's Advisory  
Committee on Graduate  
Education