Government may be facing some big challenges right now, but history shows that during times of crisis, great public servants have stepped forward to show tremendous leadership. Government Executive consulted with the National Academy of Public Administration and the Partnership for Public Service to produce a list of notable civil servants leading up to the 21st century. The selections were, by necessity, based on subjective criteria. But they make an inspiring gallery.

Ralph Bunche
(1904-1971)
Diplomat and civil rights leader who brokered the 1948 armistice between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. He was the first nonwhite to win the Nobel Peace Prize. During World War II he served in the Office of Strategic Services, War Department and State Department, where he focused on colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Also helped plan creation of United Nations.

Wilbur Cohen
(1913-1987)

Prudence Bushnell
(1946- )
Foreign Service officer who sounded the alarm about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Served as deputy assistant secretary of State for African affairs, 1993-1996. In 1998 as ambassador to Kenya, she was injured by an al Qaeda bomb in Nairobi. Later appeared on national TV to reassure Kenyans angry about delays in search-and-rescue operations due to evidence-gathering.

Al An K. “scotty” Campbell
(1924-1998)
Academic dean who became the first director of the Office of Personnel Management. Known as the architect of the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act, which reinforced merit system principles and brought private sector management approaches to government. Chaired the Civil Service Commission for the first two years of the Carter administration.

David O. “doc” Cooke
(1920-2002)
Known as the “Mayor of the Pentagon,” he served 12 Defense secretaries over 44 years as a civilian administrator, from 1958 until his death in a car accident in 2002. He was the department’s highest-ranking career civil servant as director of administration and management and head of Washington Headquarters Services.

Charles Dawes
(1865-1951)
Banker who became the first director of the Bureau of the Budget under President Harding. Before serving as vice president under President Coolidge, he was comptroller of the currency under President McKinley and general purchasing agent for the American Expeditionary Force during World War I. Co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for the Dawes Plan for German war reparations. President Hoover appointed him ambassador to Great Britain and later head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.
LESLIE GROVES
(1896-1970)
Supervised construction of the Manhattan Project, which created the atomic bomb. A lieutenant general in the Army Corps of Engineers, he oversaw numerous construction projects. He headed the Manhattan Project over to the Atomic Energy Commission in 1947, when he became chief of the Army’s Special Weapons Project, which determined military handling of nuclear weapons.

HAROLD ICKES
(1874-1952)
A powerful Interior Department throughout FDR’s administration, he managed key components of the New Deal. He oversaw the Public Works Administration to create jobs while building the National Park Service and addressing concerns of Native Americans. Also administered fuel resources during World War II, and his anti-corruption crusade earned him the nickname “ Honest Harold.”

CONSTANCE BERRY NEWMAN
(1935- )
Director of the Office of Personnel Management under President George H. W. Bush who earned seven presidential appointments. Became assistant secretary of State for African affairs in 2004. Having begun federal career as a secretary at Interior Department in 1962, she was appointed by President Nixon as director of VISTA and later as a commissioner of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Was assistant secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and in the 1990s was undersecretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

ALICE RIVLIN
(1931- )
Fiscal and monetary policy expert who was founding director of the Congressional Budget Office. Also served as director of the Office of Management and Budget under President Clinton and later vice chairwoman of the Federal Reserve. During the District of Columbia’s financial crisis in late 1990s, she chaired the Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT
(1858-1916)
Spearheaded introduction of the merit system in the federal civil service years before becoming president. Appointed a member of the Civil Service Commission in 1889 by President Benjamin Harrison and later became its commissioner. Named assistant Navy secretary before his famous exploits as a Rough Rider in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. In 1900, won election as vice president to President McKinley, whom he succeeded following McKinley’s assassination in 1901.

ELMER STAATS
(1914-2011)
Shaped the Government Accountability Office (then known as the General Accounting Office) over four presidential administrations. In a career spanning 50 years, he worked in the Bureau of the Budget under President Ford and helped implement civil service reform during the Carter administration.

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