



The Albert Shanker Institute

THE WAR AGAINST PUBLIC SERVICES AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNIONS

June 9, 2011

The Public's View of Public Service and Government in the U.S.

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THOMAS DONAHUE: This session is about public opinion and especially the stereotypes that Americans hold about government and about public service. We want to look at how these views affect public choices. This research has been conducted with the hope that we can find new and better ways to engage taxpayers in a realistic examination and a realistic understanding of the need to support public servants, public services and public purposes.,

So, to discuss all of that, to talk about words do matter, we turn to Miles Rapoport, who is the president of Demos. We're delighted to have him with us to make a presentation.

MILES RAPOPORT: Thank you very much, Tom.

I want to thank all of you for having Demos be part of this conversation. And I thank Eugenia and the Shanker Institute for doing this. I actually feel like we're sort of privileged to be part of a serious family discussion about some major issues. And I feel honored, because Demos—while we are not members of the labor movement per se—we absolutely consider ourselves partners to the labor movement in figuring out how to bring economic justice and a vibrant and inclusive democracy to America.

Demos is an 11-year-old organization, based in New York City. We were founded in response to a desire to create progressive think tanks that write books and get ideas into the public conversation -- Sunday morning talk shows and in op-ed pieces. We were created to get progressive values into the public discussion. We've grown along the way and I think we've had some accomplishments. A year ago we merged with or affiliated with the American Prospect magazine. And I brought this issue [NEED LINK HERE] because there is a special section within the magazine about the war within the states and countering the right-wing attack on government. And I think that's obviously relevant here.

Demos' mission in life is to really support, in the public policy debate, three fundamental values. The first is economic justice, and the widest sharing of America's prosperity, and an understanding that inequality needs to be decreased, and the middle class needs to be saved, if we're going to be the America we want to be. We've done a lot of work on credit card issues and debt, how debt has affected American families, and the economic challenges facing young people today.

The second principle is to have a vibrant, inclusive democracy with high levels of voter participation and civic engagement. I take note of the fact that many people have talked about the assault on voting rights as part of the agenda that's being pushed right now, and that's absolutely true. A lot of states have tried to push back on the voter ID bills and the assault on Election Day registration, including in Wisconsin and other places.

And lastly, our third principle is that we realized very early on that we needed to strongly support a robust role for government itself. The 30-year effort waged by the right wing to undermine the public sector and undermine government has become a huge stumbling block in getting any kind of economic justice work done.

So, seven years ago, recognizing that people's attitudes towards government itself, and public service and the public sector were part of the problem that we needed to solve in order to do that, we created the Public Works program—the Demos Center for the Public Sector.

We discovered something that was interesting—a topic Elaine Mejia will talk about in a minute—and that is that the initial framing that people have about government is extremely negative. We did this by going up to people with a microphone and saying, “what do you think about government?” And almost anybody on the street who was asked that question would laugh or they would say, it’s a joke,” or they would say, “get it off my back.” But if you probe deeper, there are also positive frames which can be accessed in a way that changes the debate.

It’s clear that the immediate critical fights, the defensive fights, have to be waged. The mobilization of members has to take place in a major way. The elections of 2012 and political engagement have to be a major target.

But we also have to do our best job at reframing the conversation to our advantage. Currently, the way the conversation takes place is on the right-wing’s terms. It just puts us in a more and more defensive position

So, Elaine Mejia is going to make the presentation, in a very quick way, because we’re very mindful of time and we do want to be part of the conversation. It will cover what our research has shown, and some examples of where it has been used to benefit public employees and labor unions generally.

Elaine has been with Demos for one year. She was with the North Carolina Justice Center, and has done a lot of work on the issues of justice for public employees.

MS. MEJIA: Thank you, Miles.

I’m delighted to be here. I’m going to spend my time sharing the basics of findings from our “How to Talk about Government” research project, which we undertook in 2004 and repeated again in 2009. I want to talk a little bit about how we often inadvertently trigger unhelpful, unproductive thinking that’s out there. Then, I’ll give just a few examples of where we’ve been in a supportive role in some actual campaigns about the public sector and public workers and public services, where people in organizing campaigns have chosen to reframe the way they were talking about their issues. And hopefully I can all do that pretty quickly.

Public Works: the Dēmos Center for the Public Sector

**Public support for a
government dedicated
to the common good
and empowered to
address the challenges
and opportunities of
the 21st Century.**



We have done extensive research on the thinking of Americans about the economy, how it works, and what government’s role ought to be. I won’t be talking about that here today, but that’s all on our website.

We have done preliminary research around taxes and budgets, and we’re doing more extensive research now with our research teams on that issue. We do have some preliminary findings, but

we are going to look more in depth, at how to talk about budgets and taxes.

We do one type of polling as part of our research called a priming survey, which is where you read an opening paragraph that frames up an issue and then you see how it affects people's support for specific types of policies.

But for the most part, we are not about polling. We are about one-on-one interviews, focus groups, talking to people on the street, and then testing out in focus groups and in something called TalkBack Testing, where you go around the room and see how well different ideas stick.

We're not really a group that's fundamentally about polling. As Miles said, we're really about changing those polling results, changing how people value public services, and changing negative views they have about collective bargaining.

So, it won't shock you much to discover that one of the underlying findings about what people think about government is that they don't think about it very much. And to the extent they do think about it, they have a very hazy view of it.

Now, we as Americans might think about elections. We might think about politics. And we're certainly not afraid to voice our opinions about government, but that's different than thinking about it regularly, thinking about what it does, and thinking about the role that it plays. For the most part, Americans don't think about that very much. And to the extent they do, they have a very hazy understanding of what government does.

To the extent people do think about government, there are three underlying, dominant images that come to mind, across the country and across income categories. And these are the underpinnings of this negative attitude that would show up in polls. There are three core categories of this thinking,

and this informs what needs to be part of our better narrative, to have a better, more productive, more proactive, more solutions-oriented conversation about government.



The first image is, people associate government with just politics. Which team is winning? My side/your side. It's a spectator sport. It's a boxing match. And of course what gets lost is what government's doing on a day-to-day basis, or what it has done in the past to bring us to where we are now.

And we often trigger images like this in many of our

comments, particularly in a heated moment of a campaign. People might say ‘hey, it’s just those crooked, crony politicians up there in Columbus, in Madison, in Albany, whatever it is.’

When painting with a broad brush like that infiltrates our own communications, we trigger this negative attitude that’s actually a barrier for us in being able to have a more productive conversation about government.

I was recently in Ohio, and earlier in Wisconsin, and lots of times around these collective bargaining fights you see examples of people, in their talking points actually triggering negative images about government.

So our messaging just disparages an entire other layer of government -- making the story all just about politics. This is a challenge for us.



The second dominant image is that people think of government as this giant bureaucratic blob that eats their money. They have difficulty queuing up for themselves, at least initially, what government is actually doing on a day-to-day basis.

For example, you can have teachers be in focus group for a couple of hours before one of them might finally say: ‘you know what, I actually work for government.’ Or people who rode in on a public transit system to a

focus group, who think that that transit system was a private entity. People also sometimes think banks are public entities. It’s very confusing and there’s not a lot of knowledge there.

We reinforce this ‘bureaucratic blob’ image all the time when we say things, blanket statements like, these are devastating cuts to public services. What have we really told people when we’ve said something like that? We haven’t really told them anything because we haven’t given them any meaningful examples of what those services are.

Or this example: ‘we can’t live with less government; this is going to tie the hands of government’s ability to do its job.’ We haven’t really said anything. We’ve allowed the listener to live within this concept of, government is a bureaucratic bog; we don’t know what it does.

Here is another example: folks might get quoted in the paper as saying, this is going to mean 10,000 public sector jobs lost. Well, again, what gets lost is the important role that those jobs are playing in communities. So it's important for us always to add to that sentence, to insert that fundamental role that public sector workers are actually playing in those communities. I'll give some real examples in a minute.



Now we come to the third image. So, first, it is just politics. Second, it is giant bureaucratic blob that eats my money; I don't know what it does. And the third image is that government should work like a vending machine. I put in X in tax dollars and I want to get out exactly X, in terms of public services. This is also a huge barrier. It's no surprise that in our capitalist country where we think a lot about money and how we spend it and how we earn it, that we would then transpose that sensibility onto how we think about government.

This presents an incredible challenge for us. But we trigger this image when we say things like, 'we agree with you that services ought to be provided as cheaply as possible, and you're wrong that public employees make more. Let me tell you why we're actually cheaper, because you haven't accounted for, A, B and C, or you haven't accounted for turnover that you would have if you were to privatize this'.

We lead with: we agree with you, cheaper is what we should do, and let me show you why we're cheaper. Or we might use terms like: 'hey, let me show you why this program is the best return on investment.' We trigger a financial ledger/consumerist kind of thinking.

Now, we need to have those facts and those arguments, but we shouldn't be putting them in the context that triggers this consumer thinking: If I put in X dollars, I want to get out exactly X dollars. It's a barrier for us.

So what are the sorts of things that need to be part of our communications in dealing with the broad spectrum of Americans? As Miles said, there are latent but very productive values and beliefs

that Americans do hold. We have to put them in the forefront. It's not going to happen miraculously overnight. If we're not inserting them, no one will, but if you do insert them into discussions, you can have a very solutions-oriented discussion about government, using 'reframing' that is about inserting the fundamental mission and purpose of government and public services.

Mission & Purpose



VALUES

- Common Good
- Quality of Life
- Community Wellbeing
- Public Purpose

ROLE

- Protector
- Manager & Planner
- Steward
- Consensus-BUILDER

These latent values that are associated with government are about common good, quality of life, community well-being, and public purpose. And also, people have strong associations with, or want government to be playing, these essential roles: protector, manager and planner, steward and consensus building.

Systems & Structures



- Concrete and vivid images
- The public systems we have created
- How they work
- Why they are important

Think about that second image -- that government is this mindless bureaucracy; I have no idea what it does. Our challenge then is to insert systems and structures thinking, giving concrete and vivid images about what government's doing on a day-to-day basis to make society run better, to grow an economy in which resources are more widely shared, and how government works and why it's important. These need to be part of our

communications, and we can't skip this step and make an assumption that people can queue that up for themselves.

The researchers tested lots of different ways of talking more broadly about government. The approach that they found that was the most helpful was a 'simplifying model. It's a concept of public structures: those institutions, organizational systems, social support systems, all of those things, are public structures.

Government as our Public Structures

The main advantages that make America so successful come from the Public Structures it has created. These Public Structures include the *physical* structures (highways, airports, and communications grids) and the *organizational* structures (the postal system, courts) we need to get things done, and the *social* support systems that help to ensure the health and well-being of our communities. It is our well-functioning and supported Public Structures that are essential for overall success.

structure; public health is a public structure. Obviously, firefighting as well as infrastructure, those are public structures. There are so many benefits associated with talking about government this way; if you have a structure, then what comes up for people is, that the structure didn't get there overnight. It's something we actually built together. And if it's a structure, it needs to be maintained. It has all kinds of other benefits.

When you can talk about government in terms of public structures, it has an incredible number of benefits. This is just one of the researchers' recommendations, that when it comes to getting people past that blurry bureaucratic blob image of government it is very helpful to insert the simplified model of public structures.

So, for example, education is a public

Consumer Stance



Our Government



Citizen Stance

And then, finally, we have to get beyond this 'vending machine' thinking about government and insert 'citizenship' thinking again. And we can't take for granted that people see themselves in a broader role than just voters. We have to be inserting that role into the narrative, to oppose that "us-versus-them" narrative about government.

Citizen Thinking



- Interdependence
- Working together
- Problem-solving
- Everyone has a role to play
- "Our" Government
- The Common Interest

Interdependence, working together, problem solving; everyone has a role to play, even just using terms like "our" government, right? And it's a simple thing, but it's very powerful. And, of course, the common interest. So, instead of just politics, bureaucracy, vending machines, we should be leading the narrative with a message of mission and purpose, giving examples of systems and how they work, and reminding people of their broader role in this whole system.

New Government Stories



Mission & Purpose



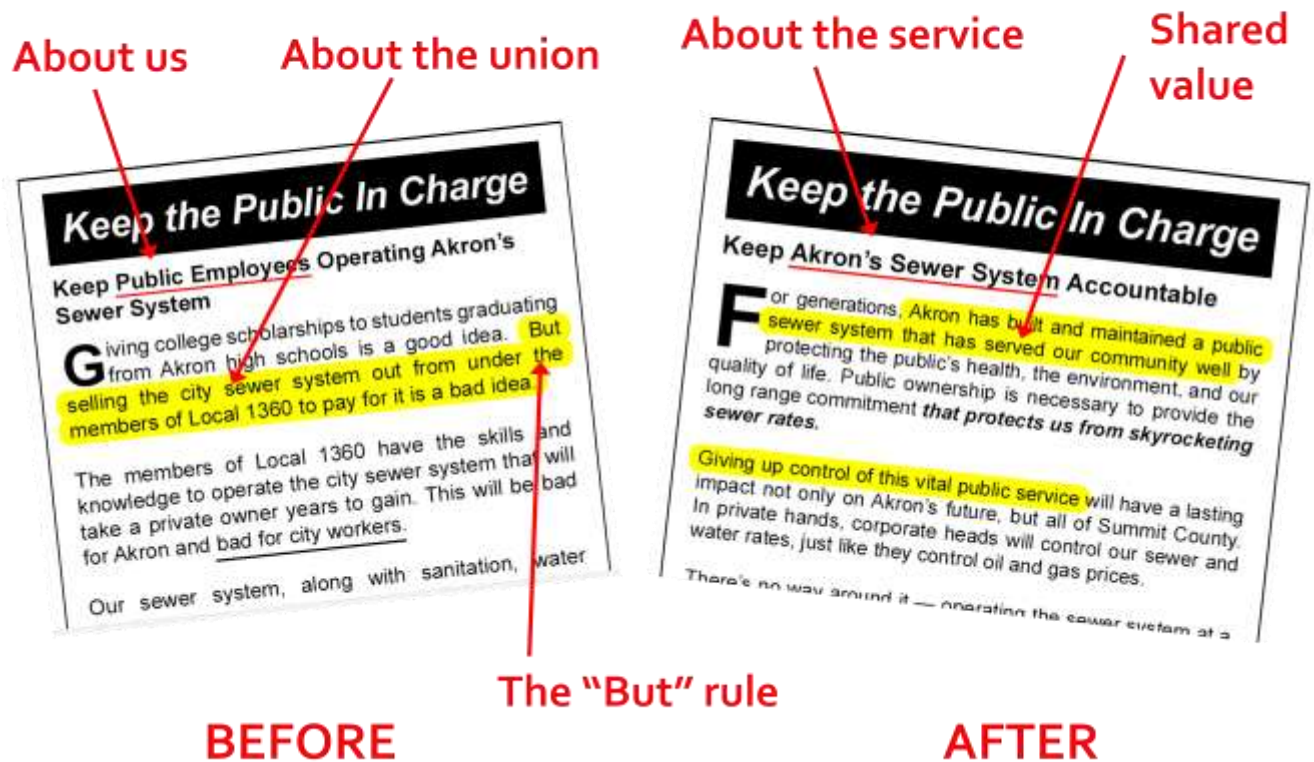
Systems & Structures



Citizen-Thinking

... our tool for solutions & the common good ...

Before & After from AFSCME Council 8



I'm going to give now three examples of specific campaigns that we've been a part of. And this first example was a local AFSCME chapter that was fighting a privatization effort led by a mayor who was going to sell off or lease for many, many years, their local sewer system and use the revenues to provide scholarships for local students.

Before we were working with them, AFSCME that was more like this [graphic, above left] on the left. It's all about the employees.

This led with: it's just about these public sector jobs. And if you find yourself using the word "but" a lot in your public communications -- you might even want to just do a Google desktop search for the word "but," -- because that usually means that you're leading with what the other side is saying rather than leading with your own vision about how your community will be stronger, will be better, if you do it the right way.

So then they switched to something like this [graphic, above right]: 'Keep Akron's sewer system accountable.' Akron has built and maintained a public sewer system that has served our community well by protecting—remember that value of protection people associate with government—protecting public health, the environment.

This is now about everybody. This is no longer just about their jobs. This is about leading with that fundamental value and purpose of this public system. And they won. This was a referendum—a ballot referendum that they defeated.

California Teachers Calling for Reform

If the state of California is going to have a viable future, we must reform the way government is run. After years of budget cuts, California now ranks close to the bottom in almost any measure of how well we support public education and the other basic services of our state. We cannot afford to cut our state programs any more. That's why CFT initiated the Fight for California's Future, an open-ended campaign to educate the public about the real problems facing the state, and the only real solutions that will fix them.

California Teachers Building Support for Government

The future of California is directly linked to the health and capacity of its public systems and structures. Our schools, colleges, parks, courts, and infrastructure are the foundations of our economy. Decades of fiscal crises and the impact of the Great Recession are threatening these essential public functions. That's why CFT has initiated the Fight for California's Future, a campaign to engage all Californians in rebuilding the public foundations of our prosperity and making the California Dream real once again.

So they switched to something more like this: 'The future of California is directly linked to the health and capacity of its public systems and structures. Schools, colleges, parks, courts, infrastructure are the foundations of our economy.'

Another example: just last fall we were invited to participate in a webinar with the California Federation of Teachers, and they were about to launch this new campaign: the Campaign for California's Future, or something like that. And this was their original narrative: 'If we're going to have a viable future, we must reform the way government is run. After years of budget cuts, California now ranks close to the bottom in almost any measure. We cannot afford to cut out state programs anymore.'

This is not an aspirational narrative that says, how will California's future be better if we do the right thing? This message implied what people already think, which is that government can't do anything right. Why would I want to invest more in a system that has already brought us to this point? And it's not leading with the fundamental role that this system of education in California plays in making the state a better place to live.

This, I think, links up with asserting this fundamental connection between healthy public systems and a good economy. The early campaign was about ‘educating people about the problems’ and then they switched to something more like, ‘engaging Californians in rebuilding.’ So that’s one example.

Funding for School Nurses

“School nurses today carry out a variety of roles in providing healthcare to our nation's children. There are approximately 45,000 school nurses employed in the United States. Unfortunately, this means that there is only one school nurse for every 1,155 students and many are responsible for multiple schools. Funding cuts are making the situation worse, as school nurses are sacrificed to balance budgets.”

Funding for School Nurses – Improved

“We all know that healthy children are better able to learn and participate fully in school. Studies show that students in schools with a school nurse perform better academically. Today, their work is more important than ever. More children with special health care needs, chronic conditions and regular prescriptions are attending schools. At the same time budget cuts are eliminating nurse positions or forcing them to be responsible for multiple schools. It is time to reinvest in this essential public health and education role. Our children, schools and communities will all benefit.”

not be too few nurses. It might be obvious to the people in this room, but it certainly wouldn’t be obvious to somebody who might read this as the lead paragraph in the op-ed in their local paper.

So when you switch to inserting these things, about the fundamental value and purpose of government or public structures, how everybody’s connected to this, explaining the system and why

And then the final example—and this is where I’ll end—was an AFT chapter we were working with a couple of years ago, that was talking about the need for more funding for school nurses. And their original narrative was like this: ‘School nurses today carry out a variety of roles in providing health care to our nation’s children. There are 45,000 school nurses employed in the United States. Unfortunately, this means there’s only one school nurse for every 1,155 students and many more responsible for multiple schools. Funding cuts are making the situation worse.’

And this group had had research—very compelling research—about how demand was growing because all these kids were showing up at school with chronic conditions that needed a lot more resources. You could read this and not even think that you need more school nurses.

I could read this and think, how am I connected to this story? Or, 45,000 nurses sounds pretty good; that might

it matters and inserting citizenship, you go in a direction like this: ‘we all know that healthy children are better able to learn and participate fully in school. Studies show students in schools with a school nurse perform better academically. Now their work is more important than ever.’

Explain the system and what’s going on.

Making the Case



- Values: Articulate the Public Good behind the policies and programs
- System Thinking: Help reveal our essential Public Systems & Structures
- Awaken the Citizen: What is our shared stake and responsibility?

And then it focuses on how budget cuts are eliminating nurse positions or forcing them to be responsible for multiple schools. We framed it as: we have to reinvest in this essential public health and education goal. And then, remember that citizenship language: “our.” *Our* children’s schools and communities will all benefit.

So these are just three concrete examples of campaigns shifted towards the ‘message’ recommendations: leading with your values and the inherent values of these public systems, giving examples of what these systems are and explaining how they work, and awakening the citizenship thinking.

Public Sector Unions

Unique Role to Play

- **Use Values** to speak to the common interest, not self interest
- **Use Knowledge** to create understanding and system thinking
- **Use Experience** to offer solutions
- **Use Organizing** to multiply the message

You all have had that knowledge, and it's so powerful and important. And you have the experience to also offer solutions to the challenges. And, unlike so many types of organizations that we work with, you have this unbelievable organizing ability to really carry this message out there. It's just so important.

So, in the interest of time, I hope I've sparked some good discussion. And I'll yield the rest of my time for Q&A or whatever, Tom. Thank you very much.

MR. DONAHUE: Thank you very much. That's a splendid presentation. I'm always struck by the fact that business, in its advertising, spends days, weeks, and months crafting messages, choosing just the right word. And we tend to have to deal with the message of the moment; it's fascinating to focus on these issues.

Q: Your last slide there, the one before this where you had used the experience to offer solutions. And I recall—it was quite a while ago, 1983: “A Nation at Risk” report, Reagan administration, all sorts of things, “rising tide of mediocrity,” a threat to our national security, the real problems in performance of the American public school system.

And the AFT did something that was pretty courageous at the time. We basically came out publicly and we said, you know what, you're right, whereas the entire remainder of the education

community, both our other teacher organizations but also administrators and school boards said, this is a right-wing conspiracy designed to undermine the public schools, and everything is really pretty good.

And if you take a look at—I'm thinking about your blob notion—there's a certain credibility element here of connecting with people and taking them somewhere and generating a degree of credibility as an organization. Yes, government has experience to offer solutions, but that notion comes from identifying, yes, indeed there are some problems out there.

And everyone has their story, and it tends to get blown out of proportion: I waited three hours to have my driver's license reviewed. This stuff takes on a folkloric dimension, but it's real. And I didn't really see, in any of the examples that you gave, this notion of recognizing that there are problems and that we have solutions, if given the opportunity. And we care about quality and we have ideas as to how to get that done. So I wonder if you or Miles could comment a bit on the connection of some of those notions with the overall frame that you've laid out.

Speaker: Well, that's a terrific point and something we could spend lots of time talking about, because if you as an organization, or as an individual, see a public system and you think it's either failing completely or it's not living up to the goals or to the effectiveness that it ought to have, I don't think that we should shy away from being part of that. But I understand the tendency to—when it looks like a system is just constantly under attack—it feels like the response sometimes should just be to defend it and say it's actually just doing a great job.

But I agree with you; there's a credibility question. If that's an organization or an individual you believe needs to undertake reforms, our responsibility is to say that and to take leadership. But it is very, very hard to critique something while at the same time building support for it.

So you're right. These examples are more like just introductory narratives. Let's take the California example. Ideally, a narrative like this would be followed with, here's our agenda. And then your agenda can be matched up with someone else's reform agenda, and you can have a real discussion about which one of these is going to improve the quality of our education system.

But being able to critique something in a way that doesn't further undermine and erode support for the very thing that you support is a big challenge. And if you're the one that also has the knowledge of the system, you are often put in the position of being the one to critique and then you are asked, either by the media or others: you have this expertise; tell us what's wrong.

So, I don't have a specific answer. What we would say is that a) we shouldn't shy away from taking a leadership role in identifying reforms that need to happen to public systems. And I agree with you, it undermines our credibility—if there's good data that a system should be performing better, or is completely failing we should not shy away from that.

But it's a question of, how are we talking about it? Are we talking about it in a way that says, this is a fundamental public purpose and it needs to be accomplishing A, B and C, and right now it's not? And we all have to recommit and engage, and here's our agenda.

So, generally our recommendation is, go for it but think about the order, because so often when you're the one with the expertise and are seeing what's going on inside of a system, we tend to

skip the fundamental steps of leading into our critique with: this is a really important public system that is supposed to accomplish A and B and C, which will yield all these benefits for all of us. Right now it's not working, or it's not working well enough. Here's what we need to do to fix it.

So it's more a question of making sure these things are still part—in effect, are a leading part—of that critique. So many of you are also in the situation and might also have things you want to add in response to that.

Q: Can I just add two points?

MR. DONAHUE: Yes.

Q: Two quick points. One is I think interesting, it's very nuanced, which is that you cannot assert that everything is hunky dory, -- because everybody has a problem.

But at the same time, the longer-term problem that we had is changing the fundamental frame with which people think about those public structures: how they got there, how they have to be maintained. And so, that's the second point, which is sometimes there's a short-term, long-term question here.

I'll give you a quick example. The campaign against privatization of Social Security, one of the campaign messages that I saw was, privatization of Social Security is just a tax increase. Well, that message was helpful in the moment, but then how do you later argue for the fact that as a society, we need higher taxes? We need a tax increase all across the board in order to maintain the public structures we have.

So the idea that I think we're trying to get at [to achieve what we need to achieve] in the short term, but always keep in mind that in the long term we need to shift the fundamental frame of the conversation.

MR. DONAHUE: Q?.

Q: Thanks I'm an AFT officer.

I love your presentation and I love the material in the book. And I just wanted to make a couple of observations about where we used it successfully in Wisconsin, and then some comment about the unions.

And I think what we saw—and I'm maybe more 'organic' than 'planned', to tell you the truth—but the planned part was that every day we had rallies, for I don't know how many weeks, at the capitol; noon and in the evening. And we had so many people who wanted to come and speak, and we had so many international and national presidents to whom we said 'thanks but no thanks; you can be on the stage and wave.'

But the powerful stories -- it was the teacher that got up and told her story; it was the university professor that got up and talked about what it meant to finally get collective bargaining, and what that meant to him in his life; and it was the nurse, the public health nurse that got up. And I was there many, many times, and every time, those were the stories that moved the whole crowd.

So, this idea you discussed of ‘what was the service that was going to be lost, who was really being attacked here?’ It was that nurse. And of course, you know, the fire fighters were transcendent in most of this.

There was an ad -- I don’t know who put the ad together -- but there was an ad in Wisconsin that had a local—I think Racine—fire fighter on it, talking about why collective bargaining was important to him.

And so, as this kind of played out, I heard repeatedly people talking and linking collective bargaining to voice, to quality, to my ability to be a good fire fighter—saying, my ability to be a good fire fighter is dependent upon my ability to have some say at work, which is dependent upon me having a contract.

And when we got in to the capitol building—when it moved from the attack on collective bargaining and people suddenly, within a pretty short period of time, saw that as an attack on democracy—partly because I think, it was how they had moved the bills through in a very, very undemocratic way. But when they restricted our access to the capitol, I’m struck by it, I can’t remember which side it was, but what it became, the slogan and the chant, was “our house, our house, our house, let us in.” The capitol became symbolic, that it was ours. It wasn’t Scott Walker’s. It belonged to all of us.

And so, when we try to figure out what worked right for us, and hopefully as we keep finding the ways to make things work right, so much of what you’ve put here was either intentionally or accidentally part of all of the successful seams. Somebody said, we’re like a civil rights movement but we don’t have a slogan—this was the Labor History Society that I’m part of—and then somebody said, oh, no, you do have a slogan. It is that this is what democracy looks like.

And day in and day out, when Bruce and I were just camping out at the capitol this last week, you cannot have a rally of more than five people before somebody will start that chant. And so, this mantra that democracy is people participating continues to be very, very powerful. So, how much of that can we capture as we move forward?

And then the final comment, we’ve put out a values budget to counteract Walker’s. So, again, we see this idea of putting out your own framework. And it’s a whole large community group, we are Wisconsin, but we put an alternative values-based budget out.

But the other thing I was noticing when I read your material about Americans' views of government was that you could really substitute the unions for that because we spend too much time—in transactional unionism on, what do I get for my dollar in the union and trying to defend that.

And I really believe these same themes work in trying to talk about why our unions are important, why it’s important to have a union, the sense of citizenship, the sense of community, the sense of what we stand for.

And so, I think when we’re working on our union work, your same lessons translate right over from the role of public services to the role of unions. So, thank you for the good work you’ve done.

Speaker: Well, thank you. Those were terrific comments.

MR. DONAHUE: Let me pick up a couple more comments and questions and then I'll ask you to respond.

Q: Thank you. One quick comment: Internationally we've found over the years that fighting against privatization is very limited unless you also fight for quality public services. If it's a defensive fight against privatization alone, it's interesting and we win some of them. But if we can marry that with fighting for better-quality public services—and point out that if you keep it public, we can actually *win* that fight for better-quality services—then that's a much more satisfying battle. And we've found that over and over again.

But I want to return to a point I made yesterday very quickly and get your answer, because I'm sure with all the work you've done you have a perfect solution to my conundrum.

The difference between fighting government and fighting the political process that is our governments—and it's something that I've been wrestling with for a while now and I don't have an answer yet—in Canada we just elected a guy named Stephen Harper, who is, I think, a closet libertarian and probably would be comfortable in your Tea Parties. He doesn't admit that publicly very often.

But I have real trouble identifying when I say that Stephen Harper's government is my government. That's painful physically. And yet I represent public sector workers. And, you know, the battle goes on at every different level. The government can be doing things that are atrociously bad, and we need to be able to say that because otherwise our political discourse is incredibly limited. If we can't say that the government is screwing up, then we're not telling the truth to our own members, let alone anybody else.

So how do you fight the government while you're defending it? I was going back to your original slide and talking about the government and how people are murky about that. Well, if what they think about is George Bush, why the hell wouldn't they be mad at government, you know? So how do we get out of that trap of saying the government is the person that is currently holding office versus the public sector, where we represent real value?

MR. DONAHUE: OK, let me pick up [another question] and then I'll ask you to respond, OK?

Q: OK.

MR. DONOHUE: [next]?

Q: Thank you. A couple of observations.

You know, as public school teachers we educate virtually all kids in America, 93 percent of all students. And I was struck by the notion of the citizen government versus the consumerist view. And I think we as an education union have to work with our members to help them teach civics in a better way.

And I know the Shanker Institute has been involved in that, and I know a lot of teachers who work with kids about consumerism, but that's more from a personal kind of standpoint. In other words, they want kids to have a good, full life, but it's not connected so much to government and helping to define what government can be like. I think we have to do a better job within the AFT of working on that.

To the issues that have just been raised, in Illinois we had a battle over pensions, and the state legislature was trying to pass a pension bill that would have really ended public pensions as we know them. We did a lot of polling of the general voter, and we found that if the facts were explained to voters, they were actually at very high support levels for our pension systems.

The thing that moved the voters was the notion that the politicians—specifically the word “politicians”—were responsible for the pension problem, not the fire fighter or the teacher or the nurse who made all their payments.

And as part of our advertising we had to use that. In some ways, it was very effective. In some ways, I feel kind of guilty because I do feel like it has that corrosive effect towards the public view of government, even though you isolate it towards politicians.

But it's an example of that dichotomy of the urgent need for a campaign that's going to win and the broader problem of constructing or building up the public's view of public employees and government structures.

Q: Great. These are all terrific points.

Often in groups when we're doing presentations and workshops, we have an individual who has sort of a light bulb moment who says, ‘wow, so maybe what we all need to be focused on is getting great civics education back into our school system. And isn't that a long-term solution for all of this?’

And we certainly wouldn't want to say no to that, although what we do on a day-to-day basis is work with people who are really advocating for specific policy changes or specific parts of the campaign, but there certainly is lots of room to think more long-term about basic things that need to happen.

I mean, these points are obviously related. And I do think you're right. We observe that lots of times, in short term this is what our polling tells us we have to do right now to beat back this really awful thing, that we have to make some sacrifices and say some things that don't exactly set us up for the long term.

How does our narrative of ‘now’, and of beating back something, set us up for when we want to make the case for restoration? And I don't have a magic answer. It's just to say that I think we should only be doing those things that will sabotage our long-term rebuilding narrative if we're really, really sure it has to be done to stop a really awful thing.

I would argue that lots of times, particularly in the case of campaign consultants and campaign season, people really jump to conclusions without a lot of good evidence to really prove to

themselves that we actually have to talk this really negative way about what's going on in the capital right now in order to get this person elected.

We need to ask ourselves, in alliances or in individual organizations: 'is there a better way?' Or 'is there a way that leaves us with a narrative from which we can rebuild?'

If you use a certain narrative to stop something really awful or to stop the particular regime from taking back power, if you have left a narrative out there that is, 'government is them, it's not us,' and they can never do anything good, then you've just set yourself up for a lot of battles where, then you might want to make the case for some affirmative policy, there's no public support. . So I understand your point. It might have to be done. It's a question of, I think, we should be more vigilant about making sure that we're only doing it when we absolutely have to.

And then, to the point that I think you were making, about not wanting to have to have citizenship language when you're talking about a government which right now is being run by a closet libertarian, it's just a matter of: are you leaving something behind in your communications about what's going on in government?

So it sounds simple but it's a question of ordering. So when you're out there talking about what's happening in government, are you leading with: 'What we need is for our public sector to be doing A, B, and C? These are the responsibilities of our public sector, and here's why. And right now, this guy and some others like him who are in power right now, are not living up to those responsibilities.'

So, I support calling them out by name. And it's better to call them out by name if you can, than to paint with a very broad brush. It's important that you always lead with something to critique against that's not just about politics; giving somebody a way, now and in the future, to judge the choices that are being made substantively and not just judge the choices that are being made in a framework of, is this person on my side or not?

But instead you want to say: 'I need government to be doing A, B and C – health care and public safety etc., , and so how are the proposals that person is putting out matching up against that?' And we've got to call them out by name. It's better to call them out by name than to paint with a broad brush.

Speaker: Let me say two very quick points. One is, there was a ballot issue in Oregon where it was around the tax structure. And we won. But it turned out that there were two things that were really necessary. One was to argue for a specific set of taxes, that it was a fair and reasonable way to do taxes. But it was also necessary to convince people that their taxes were going for useful purposes and that there was value to be gained from paying them.

Second point, very quick—I really do want to make a very sharp point about not to denigrate politicians as a class. There's a reason that the right wing does that: because the undercurrent of that is that the people who are in government are the slugs and the phonies and the corrupt people. Implicitly, the people who are out there in the private sector doing the productive work of our economy are not.

So I think it's a good thing just to get it out of the vocabulary.

MR. DONAHUE: I'm going to allow two more questions and then we're going to have to call it off. David?

Q: Just to pick up quickly because I think it's very interesting, this analysis and some of the points made, but pick up on the point about civics education and your point about presenting what we do as public sets of structures.

Maybe there's a useful role in producing some simple two-page material on each of those public service structures, because one of the issues is, I think generally people don't understand how the systems work—how's it working? If we had simple material—and targeting at school-age kids is maybe a good discipline for doing that—that can be useful not just for education but in campaigning generally.

And it's something that for PSI I think may be worth thinking of, trying to do globally as well: what the public sector does for you, what these structures do for you.

MR. DONAHUE: Thank you. I would only note that sometimes there's a very special problem for trade unions in these questions of how you shape the message, and that special problem is often that they don't want to hear your nice explanation. They want something we can throw out to be the red meat. They want an attack on the opponent, whoever he is.

So, that's an additional problem to deal with. That doesn't diminish the value of your message at all.

Q: I want to pull back in something that [was} said earlier. I mean, certainly we had a lot of research that went behind our findings, but you can get there organically in organizations and in coalitions. You can get there in an individual organization if you spend a lot of time thinking about your audience beyond your membership?

Because it sounds like most organizations are realizing that, we certainly want to be activating and educating our members, but we also need to be talking to our neighbors, talking to people in our communities.

And if you just spend some time as an organization thinking; what kind of things can we say that will influence their thinking, that can get you beyond wanting to throw out red meat—because we're talking about reaching out to disaffected people. Maybe they're not in a union but you need to explain to them why the state would be better off if we keep public sector collective bargaining.

So, you can get there organically through things like that. You can also get there organically through something that was mentioned earlier, which is if you want to build broad alliances, if you want to sit down with community organizers or faith-based people or civil rights advocates. Because then you're thinking about what things can we say that we have in common? What are our common values and what are ways that we can communicate with our now much-broader membership that has a variety of types of organizations as part of it?

That can also bring you towards talking about things in this way and get more people themselves to see the need to get beyond the wanting to throw red meat.

MR. DONAHUE: OK, let me express everyone's gratitude to our speakers. It leaves us with a lot of thought to work over during our lunch.