



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #98 — MAR. 20, 2012

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How to Talk Like a Republican

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Mar. 20, 2012)

"5 Words and Phrases Democrats Should Never Say Again" by Jill W. Klausen, DailyKos/AlterNet

Mar. 19, 2012,

(http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/863927/5_words_and_phrases_democrats_should_never_say_again)

We talk about the "Death Tax" and not the proper term, "Estate Tax." Two little words—"Death Panels"—were capable of nearly derailing the best thing that's happened to health insurance in this country in decades. Harvard-educated President Obama is universally considered "elite," while Yale-educated George W. Bush is considered "down home."

Many Democrats buy into the old saw that the Democratic party has had a history of "tax and spend" policies that needs to change or be lived down somehow. Until the Occupy movement brought the topic front and center, even most Democrats accepted the notion that businesses were "job creators" and worried more about distracting the opposition from this "fact" than debunking it for the lie it actually is.

Unfortunately, this is because Democrats have failed to speak in a language strong enough to rebut Republicans who have defined who we are and what we want, in a way that doesn't even remotely reflect an iota of the truth, and instantly conjures up the negative in the mind of the listener.

HOW TO TALK LIKE A REPUBLICAN

Professional media strategist Frank Luntz has been providing Republicans with a detailed handbook on exactly what language to use and not to use for decades. He has built up a lexicon that is not only far-reaching and deeply ingrained, but also very, very successful. As Progressive Democratic linguist George Lakoff explains it, this "framing" is crucial to how they've managed to win so much of the debate.

Here are some examples from Luntz's handbooks, of how the Republican party has been taught to frame the way they talk:

- Don't say "bonus!" Luntz advised that if [corporations] give their employees an income boost during the holiday season, they should never refer to it as a "bonus." If you give out a bonus at a time of financial hardship, you're going to make people angry. It's "pay for performance."

- Don't say that the government "taxes the rich." Instead, tell [people] that the government "takes from the rich." "If you talk about raising taxes on the rich, the public responds favorably," Luntz cautioned. But "if you talk about government taking the money from hardworking Americans, the public says no."

This sleight-of-tongue has managed to manipulate at least half the country into believing things that simply are not true. And this type of language mash-up has been so successfully drilled into the vernacular, that Democrats have been hard-pressed to come up with a simple and just-as-effective way to expose the lies beneath them

DEMOCRATS NEED A HANDBOOK OF OUR OWN

How can Democrats and Progressives fix this? Start by never saying any of the following five words or phrases again.

1. Never say "Entitlements."

Instead, say "Earned Benefits."

While the word "entitlement" was originally coined by Democrats as a way to illustrate that the receiver of the attached benefits was entitled to them by having worked to earn them, or having been taxed to support them, it has been re-defined by the right as akin to a spoiled child who acts as if they're "entitled" even though they are not.

"Earned benefits," on the other hand, cannot be twisted or misconstrued to mean anything other than what what they are: something the recipient has actually earned, as opposed to something they are being given. Social Security and Medicare are paid into through taxes deducted from employees' paychecks, or the paychecks of one's spouse or parent. No one who hasn't either personally paid into these programs, or been the spouse or child of someone who has paid into these programs, or, in the case of Medicare Part B, paid a monthly premium in order to receive them, can extract benefits from these programs.

Here is a perfect example of how the right wing uses the word "entitled" as a pejorative associated with Democrats (emphasis mine):

Fluke is an entitled liberal, which is both emblematically typical and essentially required for one to be a liberal in today's American political landscape ... Her talking points represent a very real attitude quickly manifesting itself into mainstream American thought process: that a person literally deserves the resources of another. This, of course, is the entitlement and dependency culture on which the Democratic Party has rallied around, encouraged, campaigned, and insisted.

Democrats have done nothing of the sort. Recall that the subject at hand is insured individuals. That means that they have paid into the pool in order to be able to take resources out later when needed. Even if the check was dispersed by their employer, it's still their benefit as employees, paid out in the form of insurance coverage in lieu of cash compensation. Not to mention any shared responsibility the employee, or in Sandra Fluke's case, the student, may have in paying the monthly premium. (For the record, students at Georgetown University where Sandra Fluke is a student, pay 100% of their own premium toward their student health insurance.)

Do not allow the right wing to frame this issue in their terms. These are Earned Benefits. Say that.

2. Never say "Redistribution of Wealth."

Instead, say "Fair Wages For Work."

When we hear "redistribution," we think in terms of simply moving things around, not something earned by someone. And when you tack the word "wealth" onto it, everybody's hackles immediately go up. "What do you mean, redistribute my wealth? You don't get to take something from me and give it to someone else! I work hard for what I get; let other people work for their own money, not mine!"

But when we hear "fair wages for work," we know instantly that we are talking about paying working people a fair wage for the work they're doing, not giving them something they haven't actually earned. Since at least 1965, Republican policies have created a corporate culture that only rewards those at the very, very, very top of the pyramid. While the average "hourly wage" equivalent for CEOs has gone from \$490.31 to \$5,419.97 (\$11,273,537.00 per year), the average hourly wage for workers has stagnated at \$19.71. That's just \$40,997.00 per year. The same \$40,997.00 that we were earning in 1965. At 2012 inflation. We need fair wages for our work*—in today's dollars. Say that.

3. Never say "Employer Paid Health Insurance."

Instead, say "Employee Earned Health Insurance."

When we say "employer paid," we immediately think of it as something that's given to the employee by their employer. But as I pointed out in my blog post, "It's Not About Who Writes The Check—Stop The Republican Lie About Who Pays For Contraceptives," all employee health insurance is earned by virtue of the employee's labor. That makes it "paid for" by the employee, even if they aren't the ones writing the checks to the insurance companies themselves. Employee health insurance is just one of several forms of compensation in exchange for labor, that include cash, retirement funds, long- and short-term disability coverage, etc.

Employee health insurance is not a "gift," it is compensation in exchange for labor. Cease the labor and the compensation ceases right along with it. Employees earn their insurance. Say that.

4. Never say "Government Spending."

Instead, say "The People Are Investing."

When we hear "spending," we automatically think of going shopping and whipping out the credit card. And while government at every level often leverages their ability to borrow at low interest rates to fund their spending, it's hardly the same thing as going out and buying a dress you're only going to wear once and then hanging in the closet until it's out of style.

What governments actually do is invest in our cities, states, country and our people. Government invests in infrastructure that affords us the ability to move around freely. It invests in programs that train people with job skills. It invests in research that cures diseases. There is an actual benefit to "spending" when a government does it, which actually makes it an investment in all our futures.

And who is "the government"? We, The People. It's a Constitutional phrase that evokes strong support for whatever follows. Democrats need to take Constitutional language back from the Republican party and make it ours again, since Democratic principles of equality and liberty were the driving forces behind the creation of this great nation in the first place.

We, The People, are investing in our future. Say it that way. Every time.

5. Never say "Corporate America."

Instead, say "Unelected Corporate Government."

Calling businesses "Corporate America" gives the impression that somehow corporations are the same as human Americans. But in spite of what the current Supreme Court would have you believe, they aren't.

In fact, in many ways in our daily lives, we are governed far more by corporations than we are by governments. Corporations govern where we shop, what we pay for goods and services, who gets access and who doesn't, how we communicate and what we pay for that privilege, and so on.

But more importantly, Corporations govern us by buying our legislators to do their bidding with campaign donations, and by actually writing legislation that makes it into our law books. Corporations govern when they privatize formerly-public, taxpayer-funded institutions, like schools, prisons and military operations. And unlike actual governments, they do it solely for their benefit and profits, not those of real American citizens.

And if there's one thing we know the right wing zealots claim not to like the most, it's "government interference in our lives." So what's worse than the government we actually elect to make our laws "interfering in our lives"? It's a government structure that we didn't even elect interfering in our lives.

Corporations are not "Corporate America," they are Unelected Corporate Government. Describe them that way and people will come to resent their presence in our public policy-making.

In closing, turning once again to Professor Lakoff, "Unfortunately, Luntz is still ahead of most progressives responding to him. Progressives need to learn how framing works. Bashing Luntz, bashing Fox News, bashing the right-wing pundits and leaders using their frames and arguing against their positions just keeps their frames in play. ... Progressives have magnificent stories of their own to tell. They need to be telling them nonstop. Let's lure the right into using OUR frames in public discourse."

Let's start doing that by never saying any of the above five words and phrases again.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING

- ▶ "Framing the Issues: UC Berkeley Professor George Lakoff Tells How Conservatives Use Language to Dominate Politics" by Bonnie Azab Powell, NewsCenter (http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/10/27_lakoff.shtml).
- ▶ "Words That Don't Work" by George Lakoff (If you read nothing else from the below list, this article and the one immediately above are Must Reads.) (<http://georgelakoff.com/2011/12/11/words-that-dont-work/>).
- ▶ *The New American Lexicon* (2006) by Frank I. Luntz (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/70467439/Leaked-Luntz-Republican-Playbook>).
- ▶ "The Language Police: Gettin' Jiggy with Frank Luntz" by Nancy Snow at Common Dreams (<http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0226-27.htm>).
- ▶ "Frank Luntz Teaches GOP Governors How to Lie More Effectively" By Charles Johnson at Little Green Footballs (http://littlegreenfootball.com/article/39525_Frank_Luntz_Teaches_GOP_Governors_How_to_Lie_More_Effectively).
- ▶ "How Republicans Are Being Taught to Talk About Occupy Wall Street" by Chris Moody at The Ticket (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/republicans-being-taught-talk-occupy-wall-street-133707949.html>).
- ▶ Frank Luntz: *New American Lexicon* (2006) from Political Cortex - Brain Food For The Body Politic (<http://images.dailykos.com/images/user/3/Luntz.pdf>) (http://www.politicalcortex.com/special/Luntz_NAL_Introduction).
- ▶ "The Worst Political Failure of the Obama Administration" by Joe Weisenthal at *Business Insider* (Trust me, it's relevant—and not what you think it is. Great article.) (<http://www.businessinsider.com/the-worst-political-failure-of-the-obama-administration-2012-1>).
- ▶ "Raise Taxes on Rich to Reward True Job Creators" by Nick Hanauer at Bloomberg *Businessweek* (<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-12-07/raise-taxes-on-rich-to-reward-true-job-creators-nick-hanauer.html>).

- ▶ "Koch, Exxon Mobil Among Corporations Helping Write State Laws" by Alison Fitzgerald at Bloomberg (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-21/koch-exxon-mobil-among-corporations-helping-write-state-laws.html>).
- ▶ "FAQ: How to Qualify for Medicare" by the Social Security Administration. (http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/400/~how-to-qualify-for-medicare).

(This post originally appeared at Reelect Democrats. Please visit my blog for more of my posts.)

("How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." --Anne Frank)

FotM NEWSLETTER #98 (Mar. 20, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120320-00		SteveB	How to Talk Like a Republican by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("5 Words & Phrases Democrats Should Never Say Again")
20120319-01	07:48	SteveB	Fw: Avaaz Petition: Stop Tuna Plunder in the Pacific!
20120319-02	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Butterfly in Porongo, Santa Cruz, Bolivia

20120319-01	07:48	SteveB	Fw: Avaaz Petition: Stop Tuna Plunder in the Pacific!
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from Avaaz.org:

Pacific tuna are being fished out of existence, but in just a few days, key countries will decide on bold measures to save them. Powerful fishing lobbies are looking to weaken any outcome, so it's up to us to push for a tuna-saving deal!

The Western Pacific is the world's largest tuna fishery and a vital breeding ground for a variety of ocean life, but it's also a goldmine for giant fishing corporations, driving some species close to collapse. Next week Pacific countries are meeting to discuss extending and strengthening tuna protections. At stake is a continuation and expansion of the no-fishing zones in the Pacific commons marine reserves, new science-based targets to prevent 'bigeye' tuna from extinction, and a ban on the use of so called FADs -- deadly lures which attract fish and other marine life with devastating results.

Pacific Island nations are championing a bold deal, but they need the support of the US, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines to face down the multi-billion dollar fishing industry. Sign the petition below, urging these key Pacific countries to support the islands to protect our oceans for everyone, not the narrow interests of the tuna fishing industry! Sign now and forward -- Avaaz and Greenpeace will deliver the signatures via a massive virtual aquarium in the lobby of the hotel where the meeting is taking place!

http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_pacific_tuna/?v

Today, tuna profits are controlled by a very small high-tech fishing elite, who are destroying the livelihoods of small coastal fishing communities like the Pacific Islands. Foreign ships -- from Japan, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea, the US and the EU -- are taking 80% of the tuna catches back home. They're plundering the Pacific and leaving nothing for the islanders who only get between 5-6% of the value of the fish caught in their waters.

This plundering affects all of us. Current fishing techniques are laying waste to marine life such as sharks, turtles, other fish and juvenile tuna. Removing top predators affects the entire web of life in oceans and the declines can set off a domino effect with dire consequences. If overfishing is not halted our oceans will turn into deserts filled with just jelly fish and other simple organisms.

It's why the Pacific Island nations have taken steps to enable a more sustainable future by closing large areas of ocean to purse seine fishing -- the technique of setting giant nets over a mile long, that trap tuna, sharks, rays and turtles. But Island countries are under tremendous pressure to give up these protections, which is why they need our support.

The US Taiwan, South Korea and the Phillipines are important power brokers in the Pacific. If they stand behind the Islands we can win on protections for tuna and measures to stop the Pacific plunder. Sign the petition to stop devastating overfishing for the sake of the world's tuna, Pacific ocean life and the future of coastal communities. Sign now and forward widely:

http://www.avaaz.org/en/save_pacific_tuna/?v

Tuna are amazing fish. Some species can reach up to 700 kilograms and can accelerate quicker than Porsches. They're also a vital source of food for tens of millions of people in the world. If we continue to allow greedy corporations to over fish them for short-sighted profit, there will be none left for current and future generations to appreciate. Fortunately, a more sustainable fishing future is possible, and today we can take one step closer to it.

With hope, Iain, Alice, Paul, Kya, Wen-hua, and the rest of the Avaaz team

More information:

Pew: The Issues on Agenda for Fisheries Commission Conference on Guam March 26-30:
http://www.pacificnewscenter.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21538:fishires-commission-conference-march-26-30&catid=45:guam-news&Itemid=156.

Greenpeace's Pacific Tuna campaign: <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/savepacifictuna/>.

http://www.biocentroguembe.com/eng_index.html

Biocentro Güembé



—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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