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002. fax	Mark Penn to Melanne Verveer re: political (17 pages)	08/15/1995	Personal Misfile
003. memo	Don Baer to Leon Panetta et al re: Report on Strategic Message Session (6 pages)	10/02/1995	Personal Misfile

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free client's
message

12-18-08



TALKING BACK ADVISORY #1

February 28, 1995

This Advisory memo launches the "Talking Back" Project—a planned series of advisory memos, action alerts, guides, workshops, trainings, and other activities—conducted jointly by the Advocacy Institute, the Benton Foundation, the Berkeley Media Studies Group and the Marin Institute. The project is dedicated to helping progressive community-based advocacy groups challenge the efforts of the libertarian right to dominate and frame the terms of policy debate in the media.

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Newt's favorite pollster, Frank Luntz, has done us an unintended service. His confidential communications strategy memo to the Republican Conference, leaked and attached, reveals as much to inform and guide us, the progressive community, as it does for its intended audience.

Sure, the memo offers libertarian Republicans the language, symbols and positioning strategies they need to "soften the blow" of their massive program cuts, rooting reform in the trappings of historic American values. It is no coincidence that Luntz is a scholar of the American dream. But this memo also bears a rich vein of poll and focus group data and insight, and rhetorical shrewdness that can teach us much about what we need to do, and can do to reframe the debate and regain public support.

There are **vulnerabilities** for libertarians which Luntz cautions against—which can also serve as **opportunities** for those who would thwart them. There are **common lessons** here, advice from Luntz that is as sound for liberals and progressives as for conservatives and libertarians. And there are useful **rhetorical techniques** which can readily be adapted by the very groups Luntz fears.

Vulnerabilities and Opportunities

Your latent ability to seize back the language of public discourse remains a serious threat to the libertarian right. "[I]f we ...surrender our language to the Democrats (as we did in 1982 and 1986)," writes Luntz, "our reign will be short indeed."

Opportunity: Progressives can seize back the language of public debate.

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Your stories have more power. Luntz worries: "Our enemies are already gathering their stones. The New York Times has taken the lead, running two full pages of pictures of homeless people sifting through dumpsters for food....We must match our opponents story-for-story—the personal and national immorality of passing along increasing debt to our children and future generations versus their budget gutting horror stories."

Opportunity: You have better stories—the faces of the victims—that dramatize the threatened loss of essential programs. More stories! More pictures!

The public is not obsessed with budget deficits. "Just 19% of Americans consider the budget deficit to be "a crisis," down considerably from 34% in October 1992 and 38% in February 1993."

Opportunity: You need not cower before budget-deficit rhetoric.

Programs do matter to people. Luntz cautions Republicans to avoid giving people the impression that any "truly important" program will be harmed or eliminated. "Individual programs have friends. Bureaucracies and bureaucrats don't."

Opportunity: You can bring home forcefully and constantly the truth that programs people care deeply about and rely upon will be harmed or eliminated—that Republican regulatory "reforms," for example, will leave family health and safety, and the environment at the mercy of transnational corporations, that they go *too far*.

Republicans don't give a damn. Worries Luntz: "A number of Americans (even those who voted GOP for the first time this year) believe Republicans are 'mean' and 'uncaring.' As one woman not so delicately put it, 'The Republicans don't give a damn about the average person.'" Be careful, says Luntz, not to highlight the capital gains tax cut ("for the rich"). Go first with "middle class tax cuts," later, with capital gains tax cuts.

Opportunity: Hammer home the truth that the "Contract with America" will do nothing for—indeed, will harm—the average person—that Republican tax plans, for example, will benefit the rich far more than most working people.

Common Lessons

Morality matters, especially the moral obligation to our children. Luntz does not find people predominantly greedy, ungenerous, paranoid, seething with righteous anger at the needy. He cautions that Republicans must make their case in "moral—as well as economic terms...The moral force for balancing the budget must be stronger than the pseudo-moralists who will decry specific budget cuts....Frame the debate in terms of a moral commitment to our children and their children."

Lesson: You can and need to challenge the morality of the libertarian agenda—especially the impact of their policies on our children and their children—for example, the connection of the "Contract with America" to the lives of our children. Balanced budget amendments don't feed children; capital gains tax breaks, house them; term limits, educate them. By contrast, you offer the morality of commitment to the needs of children now growing up: better schools, safer schools; health care; decent housing; jobs that pay struggling parents enough to sustain a family, etc.

Words matter. The memo notes that simply substituting the words "foster home" for orphanage" in the poll question, "In general, is it better for children of a teen-age mother on welfare—who have been victims of abuse—to remain with the mother, or is it better for those children to be sent to an orphanage?" causes the support ratio to leap from 3 to 1 to 5 to 1.

"In baseball terms," gloats Luntz, using "foster homes" rather than orphanages is a home run. We shouldn't be satisfied with perceptual "doubles" when we should be hitting the ball out of the park."

Lesson: Luntz hammers home this simple lesson we know but never learn: We too need systematically to seek and utter rhetorical home runs—at least doubles. Instead, too many public interest spokespersons, enmeshed in the technical language of policy, or in old rhetorical habits, continue to commit rhetorical third strikes daily.

Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Luntz notes: "Every time you save money for the taxpayers, let them know. And then tell them again. And again. And again. Without continuous repetition, Americans won't hear you."

Lesson: Let us repeat.

Needed: A Communications Strategy. Luntz pays due homage to the centrality of effective communications. "This means a communications strategy—an effort to select the words, phrases, and examples that will actually paint a picture of the future you envision." And then to do it, as Luntz commands, "with tremendous precision and repetition."

Lesson: Too many of us spend most of our time struggling to develop and demand the right programs; too few of us spend adequate time or resources developing strategies for communicating the need for, and appeal of, those programs to the broad public.

Techniques

Luntz offers his clients a series of rhetorical techniques. His memo teaches us how to spot them—and your truths teach you how to counter them.

Change the subject: Since people care about programs, counsels Luntz, change the subject: "Focus the general rhetorical attack on the 'Washington bureaucracy'"—not on the programs people care about.

Your response: Don't let them change the subject. Focus upon the tangible human needs programs serve. Speak less in the elite language of programs, more in the language of tangible, visible benefits to people. Not in support of FDA "regulation," but in support of safe food and drugs.

Fudge the truth: Luntz advises, "Avoid giving people the impression that any 'truly important' program will be harmed or eliminated."

Your response: Melt the fudge. Bring home forcefully and constantly the truth that programs people care deeply about and rely upon will be harmed or eliminated. Museums and libraries will close; public television and radio as we know it will disappear; schools and the environment will degrade; public health and safety will be jeopardized.

Promote (false) saviors. Knowing that people fear the consequences of the dismantling of government, Luntz urges his listeners to promote the illusion that private charities and state and local governments are ready, better able, and willing to fill the gap:

Charities: "Be confident," says Luntz, "in arguing that private charities would deliver services better to those in need. A significant majority of Americans believe the Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity can deliver more efficient and better quality services to needy Americans than Washington ever could....Play up the role for charities at every hearing."

Your response: Puncture the myth of private charity's endless bounty. The Center For Budget and Policy Priorities, Children's Defense Fund, The Council on Foundations, The Independent Sector, church groups, and others are all hard at work calculating the finite limits of private charities to patch the safety net. Watch for their reports and calculations. Use them to call the bluff. Convene local charities to talk back, to show they can't possibly pick up when government drops the ball.

State and local governments: "Sending Washington Home," says Luntz, "is absolutely the best way to explain the transfer of power from the federal to state and local governments." In the words of one focus group participant, "We've got to turn a lot back to the states and let them run the show."

Your response: Puncture the myth of state and local government superior virtue and omnipotence. Yes, acknowledge that in some program areas, state and local governments are potentially more responsive and can indeed do more, better. But don't let

libertarian rhetoric promote unchallenged the nostalgic fantasy that the states are inherently more competent or responsive to people's needs than the national government. Americans need to be dramatically reminded (they already, deep down, know) that many state legislatures are far more lobby-ridden, corrupt, and incompetent than Congress.

In focus groups we've witnessed, Americans call this "a pea and shell game." They know that the transfer won't yield efficiency or benefits. Give them facts to support their innate distrust of this sleight of hand.

Bob Garfield, in the February 5, 1995 *Washington Post Magazine*, offers a choice illustration of effective counter-rhetoric:

Who wants a balkanized America? Who wants an Incredibly Shrinking United States Government? Who wants a mom 'n' pop federal government? . . . Could a mom 'n' pop federal government have built the interstate highway system? No. . . Big Government and Big Government alone revived Lake Erie, sponsored the GI Bill, preserved and operated Yellowstone National Park. You might have, say, a Vermont Division of Antitrust, but it would scarcely put the fear of God in a person. Think of taking medication regulated by the Utah Food and Drug Administration. Imagine pinning your cancer-cure hopes on the South Dakota Institutes of Health. Imagine the U.S. Virgin Islands Centers for Disease Control. The New Hampshire Aviation Administration. . . .

"Responsive chord" communications. Luntz touts the rhetorical effectiveness of "responsive chord" communications. "We need to ask America to answer some pretty basic questions every single day." Right again.

Luntz's "responsive chord" question: Do you get your money's worth from Washington?
Yours: Do you really think that tax breaks for millionaires will make life better for you?

Luntz: Do you think America is an over-regulated or an underregulated society?
You: Who would you rather have assuring the safety of the water you drink, Exxon or the Environmental Protection Agency?

Luntz: Who cares more about your children's future, a bureaucrat at the department of education or You?
You: Who cares more about your children's future, a Republican National Committee which took \$1,000,000 from the tobacco lobby, or the Department of Health and Human Services?

Seize cherished values and symbols, e.g., "Fairness." Republicans, urges Luntz, must "take back our language and turn the issue of "fairness" against the Democrats." And he proceeds to offer (some surprisingly weak) rhetorical thrusts for Republicans; you can do better, much better:

Luntz offers: "Is it "fair" for medicare recipients to have even greater choice of doctors and facilities than the average taxpayers who are funding the system?"

How about: Is it "fair" for members of Congress and their families to enjoy government-subsidized medical care, when millions of working Americans earning 1/4 as much have none?"

Luntz offers: "Is it "fair" to give student loans for truck driving schools?"

How about: Is it "fair" that the sons of wealthy alumni with poor grades go to good colleges while the children of working class parents with good grades will no longer get college loans?

Luntz offers: "Is it 'fair' to penalize middle-class families for saving for the future?"

How about: "Is it 'fair' to keep the minimum wage so low that the family of a parent who works full time at the minimum wage earns significantly less than the poverty line?"

Luntz offers: "Is it "fair" to leave battered children in abusive homes?"

How about: "Is it "fair" to deprive helpless children of food, clothing, housing, and health care to punish their young mothers for having babies?"

Fairness is only one theme to play out. "Common sense" offers another powerful line of reasoning. Many Americans are uncomfortable about whether the new Republican proposals will work any better than the programs they are replacing. Try framing your position accordingly.

How about: Does it make sense to take away a child's chance to achieve—their school lunch, their access to health care, their housing—just so we can punish his or her mother? Isn't it our goal to get that child out of the cycle of poverty by investing in him or her early, getting him on the right track, so he can get a good job and become a taxpayer?

Finally, the Vision Thing

Luntz concludes his memo by admonishing the right that they must recognize people's need for an "irresistible" vision for the future. Only then, Luntz warns, "will the nation support you and your agenda unconditionally." In short, all the pieces have to add up to something, and that something has to be a compelling vision of the good society.

Perhaps the greatest danger to progressive causes is the power of the unchallenged libertarian vision.

Central to any progressive revival is the need to expose the libertarian vision as false, a masquerade for securing the lopsided privileges and advantages and subsidies and wealth of the greedy and the lucky.

But Luntz is right. That won't be enough. Most challenging, all of us need an explicit "irresistible" vision of our own. Most of you carry about in your heads and hearts at least parts of such a vision. Most of what you fight for daily - whether it's housing for the homeless, peace, public health and safety, fairness and justice, preservation of the planet - is propelled by at least an implicit vision for the good society. But we have not done what the libertarian and radical individualist think tanks have been doing now for decades: developing and propagandizing that vision. Now, together, we need to advance an overall vision which effectively challenges the hollow vision Luntz seeks to prop up. And Frank Luntz can't help us do that.

Talking Back Advisory #1

Appendix

Frank Luntz's "Idol" Responds

Luntz describes fabled media strategist Tony Schwartz as his idol, drawing the very concept of "responsive chord" communications from Schwartz's writings. So we asked Tony to provide a sampling of his own suggested alternatives to Luntz's responsive chord questions. Here they are, along with Tony's thoughts on an alternative vision:

Responsive Chord Questions

Tony: Do you want Washington to continue inspecting meat and poultry, ensuring safe air travel, and helping to build roads, bridges and tunnels?

Tony: Do you think the government can ever do too much to ensure clean air, water and food?

Tony: Do you think we should have good teachers in our schools?

Tony: Is it fair for members of Congress and their families to enjoy government-subsidized medical care, when you have to pay for your family's health coverage?

Tony: Is it "fair" to pay a hard-working parent a wage that's below the poverty line?

Tony on the Vision Thing

People need to understand the consequences of tax cuts. The federal government has a profound effect on people's lives, primarily in ways most people do not understand. Few people realize that government, for example, provides a large portion of the money necessary to build the bridges spanning the creeks and rivers of our community.

The myriad of programs the government pays for are too remote. For many people, the one direct interaction with the federal government is at tax time. We must bring home the point that, yes, there are programs that are wasteful—but look at our success stories! The government isn't over-regulating; maybe the regulations need to be made more effective. The government is not doing enough, as opposed to doing too much.

When can we ever be said to be spending too much money fighting crime, keeping our environment livable, ensuring the best quality of life for all Americans? Whoever wants to cut money to the Department of Education does not want America to have the best educational system in the world. Scrapping the school lunch program will mean our school-age children will be more likely to fall asleep or otherwise drift off the subject, and therefore will not achieve their full potential. (Studies support this.) These are the messages that people must hear.

02-14-95 17:54

THE LUNTZ RESEARCH COMPANIES

Luntz Research & Strategic Services ■ The Public Opinion Company ■ Luntz Corporate ■ Luntz Worldwide

Memorandum

To: The Republican Conference
From: Frank Luntz
Re: Communication Strategy for the Upcoming Budget Battle
Date: January 9, 1995

INTRODUCTION

"The most important reason to eliminate the federal deficit and balance the budget? For the future of American generations, for the children."

- Budget Survey Respondent

"The government is incredibly inefficient. It's like a bad charity that gives more to administration than to the people it's supposed to benefit."

- Focus Group Participant

"You give me a sign that you can spend money responsibly, and I'll give you every penny of my taxes without even flinching."

- Focus Group Participant

Debt. Welfare. Bureaucracy. Taxes. Spending. In your hands over the next six months is nothing less than the chance to transform America's perceptions of the GOP and Congress and, more importantly, to rebuild the nation's expectations for the 21st century. **Caveat Dem.**

Since the election, we've conducted two national surveys and two focus groups to discuss budget and spending issues with real Americans. If a single conclusion can be drawn, it is this: **If we communicate our VISION AND POLICIES effectively, we will survive and prosper as a party and as a political movement. But if we forget the future and surrender our language to the Democrats (as we did in 1982 and 1986) our reign will be short indeed.**

There are no clear cut solutions to the budget situation lurking in America's public opinion landscape. The public has very limited information, their priorities are often in conflict, and nearly all government programs continue to have some constituencies. That said, I'm more convinced than ever that your policies are America's policies. Why? Because the themes of shrinking government, cutting the deficit, rolling back regulation, reforming welfare, and lowering taxes all resonate with broad majorities. To the extent your ideas are understood, they are supported.

Unfortunately, this alone won't win the battle for you.

The challenge now is to explain your objectives -- clearly and convincingly -- to the broadest possible cross section of America; to galvanize massive public support for the changes you will be making over the days ahead. This means a *communication strategy* -- an effort to select the words, phrases, and examples that will actually paint a picture of the future you envision.

Your challenge is to create "The New America," the post-welfare state vision as powerful to Americans as the New Deal was 60 years ago. This is a lofty goal, of course. And it will take tremendous precision and repetition to achieve. But only then -- when you've described an *irresistible* future to the American public -- will the nation support you and your agenda unconditionally.

Important strides have been made over the last two months. America is beginning to buy into your vision of the future. This memorandum is aimed at helping you do more -- avoiding pitfalls and seizing opportunities during the budget fight ahead.

THE PERCEPTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Before moving into recommendations, it is important for you to understand the perceptual environment you face:

- 1) The crisis mentality that surrounded the deficit issue in late 1992 and early 1993 has somewhat dissipated.

It remains an important issue to most Americans, but the all-encompassing fear that a majority of voters expressed to pollsters two years ago exists among only one-in-five Americans today. Just 19% of Americans consider the budget deficit to be "a crisis," down considerably from 34% in October 1992 and 38% in February 1993.

Why the change? In part, simply because Americans have "survived" the torrent of red ink generated in recent years. As one focus group participant explained, "A

Why the change? In part, simply because Americans have "survived" the torrent of red ink generated in recent years. As one focus group participant explained, "*A crisis means that a problem should have been solved yesterday. The deficit can be tackled today.*"

Yet, the public still wants a balanced budget, and 80% support a Balanced Budget Amendment. The public expects you to balance the books NOW, and they are tired of hearing about it. As another focus group participant concluded, "*I'd like to see a balanced budget amendment tomorrow, so that next week this mess won't be in our hair anymore.*"

2. By an overwhelming 20 point margin, voters believe Republicans are more likely to balance the budget than the Democrats -- but you need to understand the whole picture.

You are already seen as "conservative" and "anti-government" -- two important strengths in the budget arena. The Democrats are tagged as "big government liberals," a fatal weakness. But a number of Americans (even those who voted GOP for the first time this year) believe Republicans are "mean" and "uncaring." As one woman not-so-delicately put it, "*The Republicans don't give a damn about the average person.*" She was not alone. A male colleague added, "*The Republicans might care about our money, but they definitely don't care about us.*" Thus, to an important segment of the population, you are more likely to achieve the right objective (a balanced budget) but for the wrong reasons.

3. Most people believe Congress has the facts to balance the budget.

Again and again, focus group participants complain that they don't have anywhere close to the information on the budget that you do. Survey respondents always *overestimate* their knowledge on nearly any subject, and only 22% believe they know either "a lot" or "a good amount" about the budget process. On the other hand, the public envisions Members of Congress with all the data at your fingertips. And they are therefore expecting you to have the answers. Keep this in mind before you hit the road.

4. Remember that many Americans perceive the key challenges ahead in moral terms rather than economic terms -- a reality the Democrats still don't fully understand.

In last week's poll, we asked, "*Thinking about all the problems facing this country today, which should Congress focus on first?*" A majority (56%) said

"our nation's economic problems," but a significant 41% said "our nation's moral problems" -- and the focus on moral concerns was strongest among middle class Americans. The lesson here: talk about the challenges of irresponsible debt, runaway spending, destructive welfare, and an anti-saving tax code in *moral* -- as well as economic -- terms. America believes Washington isn't just irresponsible, but that it is also fostering all the wrong values in our society.

STRATEGY

"If we all ran our personal finances like the government, we'd all be bankrupt."

-- Focus Group Participant

The following are some of the more important lessons learned from the two focus group discussions and the budget-related polling. First, in terms of general strategy:

- 1) The moral force for balancing the budget must be stronger than the pseudo-moralists who will decry the specific budget cuts. Our enemies are already gathering their stones. The *New York Times* has taken the lead, running two full pages of pictures of homeless people sifting through dumpsters for food. NBC's Tim Russert is a close second, decrying the inhumanity of the Republican cuts even before knowing what they are.

This is nothing new: Reagan faced a similar outcry in 1981-82. This time, we need to fight back, and we need to frame the debate in terms of a "moral commitment to our children and their children." We must match our opponents story-for-story -- the personal and national immorality of passing along increasing debt to our children and future generations versus their budget cutting horror stories. Otherwise, we could win the budget battle but lose the rhetorical war.

- 2) Individual programs have friends. Bureaucracies and bureaucrats don't. Therefore, focus the general rhetorical attack on the "Washington bureaucracy." The focus group participants repeatedly complained about the billions that are mismanaged and wasted by the federal government for needless layers of administration and personnel. "There's just too many folks running the show," said one. "Why can't we fire the bureaucrats?" asked several others. Indeed, on last week's national survey we asked Americans what percentage of the federal bureaucrats should be fired. The answer: 30%.

The greatest anger is directed at bureaucrats and waste rather than the specific programs themselves. Every budget statement by every Republican official should include the words "cutting the Washington bureaucracy."

- 3) Focus on cutting entire departments rather than cutting specific programs. Al Gore went against public opinion when he said, "We were convinced that the reinvention and reform option was preferable [to eliminating agencies]." Americans want elimination rather than reinvention, reduction rather than reform.

For example, both focus groups (even though they included six individuals employed in education) accepted the elimination of the Department of Education, but student loans were a completely different matter. *"It's just a question of whether you want money going to programs, or money going to people,"* said one teacher. The NEA, NEH and CPB will be even less difficult, as long as museums aren't forced to close. The communications lesson: be ready with assurances that any "truly important" program will be maintained even while entire departments are being eliminated.

- 4) Don't publicly rule out an across-the-board cut. Right now, the public believes overwhelmingly that the budget can be balanced just by cutting out the waste, fraud and abuse -- and they expect you to find and eliminate it. But that will change as the debate moves forward and as Americans come to realize that deficit reduction involves sacrifice.

After several months of debate, broad spending cuts may sound more fair because the pain is spread around and is less tangible than when a single program is targeted. After an hour of trying in vain to agree on budget cuts, an exasperated Baltimore woman exclaimed, *"We'll be here all day! There's just no other way -- a 10% cut is the easiest, most equitable solution."* The broader your package of cuts, and the more shared the sacrifice, the easier it will be to sell.

- 5) Nothing tells America more about your priorities than the sequence of your actions. The media is watching closely to see what comes first. That's why "banking" the budget savings before cutting the taxes is so important. It's aligned with the national mood, which would choose "ensuring no debt for their children" (72%) over "getting a tax cut this year" (24%). Similarly, it would be a serious communications mistake to implement a capital gains tax cut ("for the rich") now while only phasing the "middle class tax cuts" over multiple years. Regardless of the economics, this will look like you're putting the "wrong people" first.

- 6) Incrementalism is a failure. Do it all at once. Trying to sell the American people on a piecemeal approach to budget cutting will literally result in "death of a thousand cuts." All budget cuts must be acted on simultaneously. Focus group participants are ONLY able to accept cuts when they are presented in one package. Tactically, each special interest opponent will decry their specific cut, and that will produce a collective cacaphony that will muddle our message and vision.

COMMUNICATION

The objective of the two national polls and focus groups was to learn how to communicate Republican budget and tax policies to the American people. In one sense, this memorandum is about taking back our language and turning the issue of "fairness" against the Democrats. For example, why don't we begin to ask:

- Is it "fair" for Medicare recipients to have even greater choice of doctors and facilities than the average taxpayers who are funding the system?
- Is it "fair" to give student loans for truck driving schools?
- Is it "fair" to penalize middle class families for saving for the future?
- Is it "fair" to leave battered children in abusive homes?

That is why we are currently in search of the right words and phrases that will help explain what you want to do and why. These are our findings to date:

- 1) No single event will convince America you are real "budget cutters." It is going to take a steady drumbeat of progress. High-profile successes such as cutting staff, selling buildings, and eliminating Departments are critical, but it will take a hundred "victories" over an extended period of time to cement the voters' trust. A key challenge 1995: every time you save money for the taxpayers, let them know. And then tell them again. And again. And again. Without continuous repetition, Americans won't hear you.
- 2) Stop with this "devolution" rhetoric. It's "Sending Washington Home." Nobody in America knows what "devolution" means (except for those who think it has religious connotations). "Sending Washington home" is absolutely the best way to explain the transfer of power from the federal to state and local governments. In the words of one focus group participant, *"We've got to turn a lot back to the states and let them run the show."*

3) Political communication works only when it is played in context. Put the budget debate in terms of "The American Dream" and "our children's future." When asked to comment on the relationship between a balanced budget and the future of America's children, both groups unanimously agreed that they would feel extremely optimistic about their children's future if the budget deficit were erased. The public does not want to pay higher taxes or see their services cut, but the vast majority are prepared to make sacrifices "so that their children can achieve the American Dream." If we talk about *pain*, we lose. If our words invoke a *better future*, we win.

4) Pursuing "Responsive Chord" Communications. We need to ask America to answer some pretty basic questions every single day:

- Do you get your money's worth from Washington?
- Does Washington spend your tax dollars wisely or foolishly?
- If you have to balance your check book every month, shouldn't the government have to balance its books every year?
- Who delivers charitable services more efficiently, the Salvation Army or the Federal Government?
- Who builds higher quality and less expensive housing for the poor, Habitat for Humanity or HUD?
- Who cares more about your children's future, a bureaucrat at the Department of Education or you?
- Do you think America is an over-regulated or an under-regulated society?
- Do you think the same welfare programs work in the South Bronx and in South Dakota?

5) "It's time to put the government on a diet." This phrase resonates extremely well. With the average American likely to have gained four pounds between Thanksgiving and New Years Day, the diet analogy plays well this month and next. As our focus group respondents offered:

"A fast comes to my mind. So many people are managing other people that they can't manage the thing they want to manage."

"The fed could afford to be anorexic for a little while."

"Cut the waste. Cut the fat. I don't know what or where, but it's there."

- 6) Eliminate entire departments, but soften opposition with assurances that "truly important" programs will survive. Of the nine departments and agencies we asked Americans about eliminating, only one encountered stiff opposition: Education. But even here, an assurance that the government would continue "to fund student loans and special education" reduced the number of Americans "strongly opposed" to cutting the Department by 10%.

TACTICS

The upcoming public hearings will play a major role in how Americans view Republican efforts to balance the budget. The fact that we are prepared to go to the people and make them part of this process is a critical first step in building faith and confidence in our leadership. We cannot allow these public forums to fail, whether in Washington or in America's heartland.

- 1) Even when you are listening to the people, have your own plan. Americans want to have input into the budget process, but they expect Members of Congress to come up with the actual solutions. You can't go on the road in January and February and solely take input. It won't be credible. Worse, you may end up looking like typical politicians dodging tough choices. Indeed, we're already seeing this line of attack from the Democrats in connection with the balanced budget amendment.

You should first commit to a preliminary -- even vague -- outline for budget cuts, and only then go out and listen to the people. Such preparedness will prevent you from being labeled, as one man bluntly stated, "gutless and spineless."

- 2) Either put the budget in context or be prepared for continuous whining. The only way to quiet the complainers is by putting the budget challenge in perspective from the start. Then talk about the \$4.5 trillion debt, and explain what it will mean for our future if we fail. Otherwise, someone in the audience will defend just about every program. "*When it's billions of dollars, it's them,*" said one woman, "*When it's thousands or hundreds, it's me.*"
- 3) Educate America and you empower yourselves. The more knowledgeable the public, the easier your job will be. Again, Americans know almost nothing about the budget, and what they think they know is often wrong.

Therefore, your road show audience needs information at their fingertips. A 20-page document complete with data, explanations, pie and bar charts, and budget options will improve the quality of participation and the usefulness of the hearings.

- 4) Be confident in arguing that private charities would deliver services better to those in need. A significant majority of Americans believe the Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity can deliver more efficient and better quality services to needy Americans than Washington ever could. *"At least I'd know that the money'd get there."* said several respondents. Play up the role for charities at every hearing.
- 5) Practice before you hit the road. How are you going to insure that you are, in the words of one focus group participant, "listening to America, not just the squeaky wheels?" If I were a Democratic strategist, I'd go out of my way to disrupt the hearings by organizing (secretly) poor, homeless and AIDS advocates to stand up and decry Republican ruthlessness and cruelty. If this happens, or if the hearings receive negative publicity, you may not get another chance.

WELFARE REFORM

While our focus groups and polling did not focus at length on welfare reform, we do have enough data to draw several conclusions:

- 1) Words matter -- and almost any word is better than "orphanage." America clearly subscribes to Newt Gingrich's position on welfare reform. We asked, *"In general, is it better for children of a teenage mother on welfare -- who have been victims of abuse -- to remain with the mother, or is it better for those children to be sent to an orphanage?"* By nearly 3 to 1, respondents chose orphanages. This may seem like a successful way to communicate our position. However, with a better choice of words, the true magnitude of support for moving children to a new home is revealed. When substituting "foster home" for "orphanage" in this question, the approval ratio increases to an overwhelming 5 to 1.

In baseball terms, using "foster homes" rather than orphanages is a home run. We have the right policies. Let's choose the right words. We shouldn't be satisfied with percentual "doubles" when we should be hitting the ball out of the park.

- 2) Nothing resonates like "work." That is by far the Number One reason why Americans demand changes in the welfare system. "Requiring able-bodied

recipients to work" is at the core of American hostility toward welfare as we now know it. Everything else is secondary.

- 3) America would rather "send welfare home" than reform it in Washington. The public distrusts Washington to solve almost any problem, let alone a challenge as difficult as welfare. By a 65% to 26% margin, they want welfare sent back to the states to be reformed on a more local level. This is not surprising: the vast majority of Americans believe their values are different from those who represent them in Washington.
- 4) Americans recognize common sense when they see it. Let the social scientists compare regressions and try to figure out whether cutting off welfare will stop young girls from having babies. And let the moral philosophers debate whether unwed mothers should not be allowed to receive welfare benefits. Despite their dissatisfaction with current welfare, Americans aren't yet ready to make either of these changes. For now, talk about denying cash benefits to people who have more kids while on welfare -- that strikes a chord with the public.

A FINAL THOUGHT

"The one thing that Americans do is pull together in times of crisis. That's what we will do for our kids -- what our parents did for us. We will sacrifice for our kids and grandchildren. That's what this country is all about."

-- Focus Group Participant

The public has little patience or sympathy for the situation you are now in. They know the federal budget is a complex problem, but they don't care. They expect YOU to make the tough choices, regardless of the political consequences. They want a "fair" solution, and they want it NOW.

There are two schools of thought to the budget process: specific cuts and across-the-board reductions. Don't forget that when you "zero out" a program, you destroy much of the organized special interest group pressure that inevitably results in increased spending. However, if the policy makes sense, a combination of the two approaches should be considered. After completing the line-item targeting process, put whatever remains on a 3% diet (In a pleading voice, ask: *"Can't we save just three cents out of every dollar Washington spends?"*) After two hours of discussion, it is easier to sell a focus group on \$100 billion in across-the-board cuts than eliminating a specific \$2 billion program.

As you enter this process, remember that America's opinion of the Republican Party has never been more favorable. Despite the national media's attempts to inflame controversy and shift the debate to book deals and orphanages, nearly half of Americans say their opinion of the "Republicans in Congress" has improved since the election; only 25% say it has worsened. These figures are almost exactly reversed for the Democrats. As you read this, the Republicans are the party of "change," "leadership" and "the future."

This unprecedented strength, however, doesn't mean there is no room for improvement. A plurality of Americans still think neither party "*Is listening to them*" (40%), and that neither party "*Will clean up the mess in Washington*" (41%). A majority also believes that neither party "*Keeps their promises*" (58%). And still less than half of America have heard or read anything about *The Contract*.

You are America's best hope for the future. Actually, you are the only hope. Don't let us down.

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. memo	Mark Penn to Melanne Verveer re: political (8 pages)	08/16/1995	Personal Misfile

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Melanne Verveer
OA/Box Number: 10256

FOLDER TITLE:

Message

2013-0534-S

rc1681

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

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- b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

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Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
002. fax	Mark Penn to Melanne Verveer re: political (17 pages)	08/15/1995	Personal Misfile

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Melanne Verveer
OA/Box Number: 10256

FOLDER TITLE:

Message

2013-0534-S

rc1681

RESTRICTION CODES

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Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
003. memo	Don Baer to Leon Panetta et al re: Report on Strategic Message Session (6 pages)	10/02/1995	Personal Misfile

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Melanne Verveer
OA/Box Number: 10256

FOLDER TITLE:

Message

2013-0534-S

rc1681

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LEADERSHIP * FAMILY * OPPORTUNITY * COMMON GROUND
President Clinton's vision for America

*** Leadership: Presidential leadership that makes a difference**

Standing up for America: fighting to open overseas markets to American goods; standing up for American values overseas

Doing what's right -- not because it is easy, but because it should be done

President Clinton took on the NRA to win the ban on assault weapons; he took on the tobacco companies to make it harder to hook kids on smoking.

*** Families: Working to preserve and strengthen families**

President Clinton is working to giving parents the tools they need: from the Family and Medical Leave Act to the v-chip in television sets. He is fighting to be sure our families will have clean drinking water and clear air, and to preserve the heritage of our national parks.

The President is determined to make our schools and communities safe: More police on the street, fewer guns, and safer schools, and a commitment to ending violence against women.

*** Opportunity: Providing opportunities for all Americans**

President Clinton believes the American Dream is for every family, and every child. His economic policies emphasize jobs, education and trade: creating more high wage, private sector jobs, and - because education is the key to higher income -- making computer literacy and college education available to every student.

Opportunity must be accompanied by responsibility: President Clinton believes that as we support policies that reward work and expand opportunity, every American must take more responsibility for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

*** Common ground:**

There may be no more important test of leadership than President Clinton's commitment to **common ground:** leadership and action based on our highest values. By finding common ground, we can get beyond divisive rhetoric and take real action on the issues that are before us.

At a time when too many politicians use language that divides, President Clinton is working to find the **common ground**. He reminds us that we are all in this together -- and together, we have the strength and the wisdom to do what is right.

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PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON:
MEETING AMERICA'S CHALLENGES
IN AN AGE OF POSSIBILITY

CLINTON ADMINISTRATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

May 1996

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BILL CLINTON

AN AGE OF POSSIBILITY PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON CHALLENGES AMERICA

"Now it is time for us to look also to the challenges of today and tomorrow, beyond the burdens of yesterday. The challenges are significant. But America was built on challenges, not promises....I am confident: When Americans work together in their homes, their schools, their churches, their synagogues, their civic groups, their workplace, they can meet any challenge."

Strengthening America's Families

- Enabled **workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave** to care for a family member without fear of losing their jobs. (Family and Medical Leave Act)
- Provided **tax relief for 15 million working families.** (Earned Income Tax Credit)
- Gave **parents greater control** over what their children watch on television through **V-chip** requirement.
- Collected a **record \$11 billion in child support** in 1995 — almost a **40% increase** since 1992.

Providing Educational Opportunity

- Making college more affordable for **5.5 million** students this year alone. (Direct Lending Program)
- Enabled students to move from the **classroom to a job** with a future. (School-to-Work Opportunity Act)
- Enabled **45,000** volunteers to finance their education by working for their communities through **AmeriCorps.** (National Service Act)
- Expanded assistance to thousands of disadvantaged **children and families** by increasing **Head Start** funding by almost \$800 million.

Helping Achieve Economic Security

- Over **8.5 million new jobs** in just over three years.
- **Lowest** combined rate of **unemployment, inflation and mortgage rates** in 27 years.
- Largest **deficit-cutting** plan in history — lowered deficit in each of the last three years.
- **Highest rate of home ownership** in 15 years.
- After a decade of losses, **1 million** new jobs in **auto, manufacturing and construction.**

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PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: MEETING AMERICA'S CHALLENGES IN AN AGE OF POSSIBILITY

May 1996

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— President Clinton, State of the Union Address
January 23, 1996

First Challenge: To Cherish Our Children and Strengthen America's Families

Cherishing Our Children

- Announced a breakthrough agreement with the media and entertainment industry to develop a **television ratings system** to enable parents to protect their children from violence and adult content.
- Gave parents greater control over what their children watch on television by requiring the installation of anti-violence screening chips ("**V-chips**") in all new televisions.
- Proposed targeted measures to cut off **children's access to tobacco products** and to ban **advertising directed at children**.
- Established a Childhood Immunization Initiative to ensure **vaccinations and healthy futures for all children**. The President's initiative contributed to the immunization of 75% of two-year-old children in 1995, an historic high.

Strengthening Our Families

- Enabled **workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave** to care for a family member without fear of losing their jobs. (Family and Medical Leave Act)
- Provided **tax relief for 15 million working families** by increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit to allow more families to qualify for tax rebates.
- Helped families move from **welfare to work** by authorizing 37 states to bypass existing welfare rules and set time limits on benefits, require recipients to work or stay in school, provide child care and give employers incentives to hire welfare recipients. These waivers are making work and responsibility a way of life for 75% of all welfare recipients

all of our communities, and we reinforce the values of opportunity, responsibility and community that have made this country great.

4. Message of Progress.

This country has made a great deal of progress in the last three years. 10 million new jobs have been created. More women go to college today than ever before. 1.1 million families have climbed off of welfare. And more women own their own businesses. But we have to stop asking women to make a choice between being a success at work and a success at home. They need more tools to do both. They need adequate day care, more options to work at home, and flex time so they can balance the demands placed on them.

5. Enduring Values

I remember when I grew up how our neighborhood school was the center of our community life. How our teachers were the most respected members of our community. How safe we felt. Society may be changing, but Americans are keeping their values. That's why they support programs like universal child immunization or head start. Expanded tax deductions for college or stopping the flood of tobacco advertising to our children. Americans care deeply about our children and giving them every opportunity to make the most of their own lives.

To: Milan Revere
From: Mark Penn

Ann Lewis suggested I send you some messages for your video taping. Here are four or five different messages I think it would be good to have on film that could be woven into fund-raising and other videos. These are not scripts, but topics with some examples of directions to take them.

Message Principles:

Upbeat, family oriented, talking about progress, not problems, community oriented, concerned but not political, nostalgic for the America you grew up in, showing concern for a set of issues that you have worked on for a long time.

1. Message of Unity

The fight over the fundamental issues in this country in the last few years has really clarified the choices that we face today. People wanted the time off that the Family and Medical leave Act gives them to take care of their newborn or their sick relatives. People wanted assault rifles off of their streets. And they wanted to preserve Medicare, education and the environment. In the last year we have seen all of the progress we have made in these areas threatened by the Republicans in Congress and the response has been an outpouring of support and a bringing together of people across America.

2. Protecting our Children

The first priority we face today is protecting our children from the influences that make parenting so hard today, such as the pressures of time or the commercial pandering to our children. I have been working on this all my life and the President's programs are making a difference. TV shows will soon have ratings along with a chip so that parents can again control what their kids watch. Families are getting the support they need because we are going after deadbeat dads and have increased support by 40%. Scholarships have been increased so that more children can go to college. And with an extension of Family and Medical Leave Act that the President has proposed, working mothers and fathers will be able to take up to 24 hours a year off for medical and teacher appointments.

3. Getting Involved in Community Work

People have to become more involved again. Civic participation and voting are down in this country. Join a group to fight diseases like breast cancer, tutor a child, attend your PTA meetings, join a crime watch. Every time we help someone in our neighborhood we not only help that person, but we strengthen