



Making the Case for Government and for its Role in the Economy

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Oregon Advocates College V

Patrick Bresette - pbresette@publicworks.org

Public Works is dedicated to building public will for the common good.

We equip community leaders, advocates and public servants with the skills and knowledge they need to be articulate and vigorous supporters of the role of government in a functioning society.



This is not about:

- “Liking” the government as it is, or telling people “government is good”
- Making excuses for government when it does not work
- “Big” government or “small” government

This is about:

- Recognizing the unique role of government in society
- Aspiring to create the government we need & deserve
- Public systems and structures that are essential to quality of life

The Work of Public Works

Research

- Government
- The Economy
- Budgets & Taxes


In the Field

- Policy Shops
- Advocates
- Unions
- Coalitions
- Organizers
- Electeds & Managers



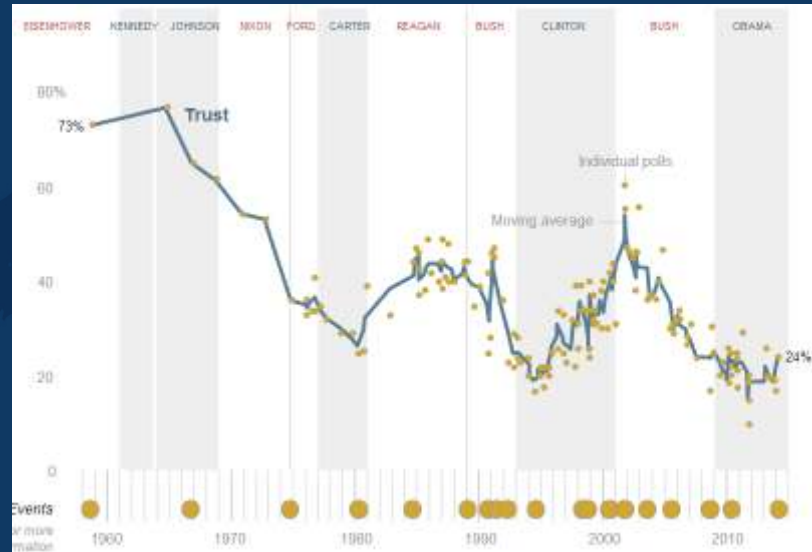
Public Works in the Field

- Presentations
- Workshops
- Intensive engagement over time (Advocates College)
- Application to advocacy, organizing and civic engagement
- Consultation
- Review and comment on materials
- Webinars
- Online tools

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Trust in Government Declining



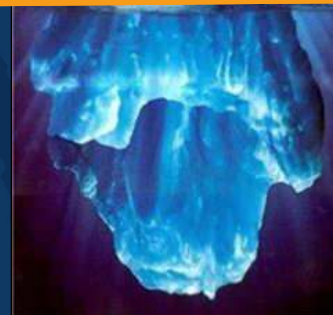
<http://www.people-press.org/2013/10/18/trust-in-government-interactive/>

What we are trying to understand

Polling:
Looking for Visible Attitudes



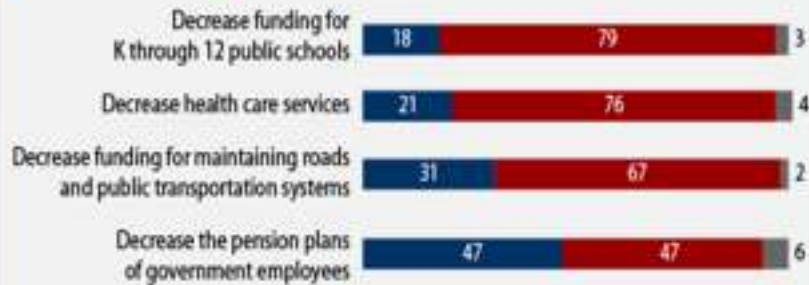
Our Research:
Looking for Hidden Reasoning



But . . . Americans don't want services to be cut

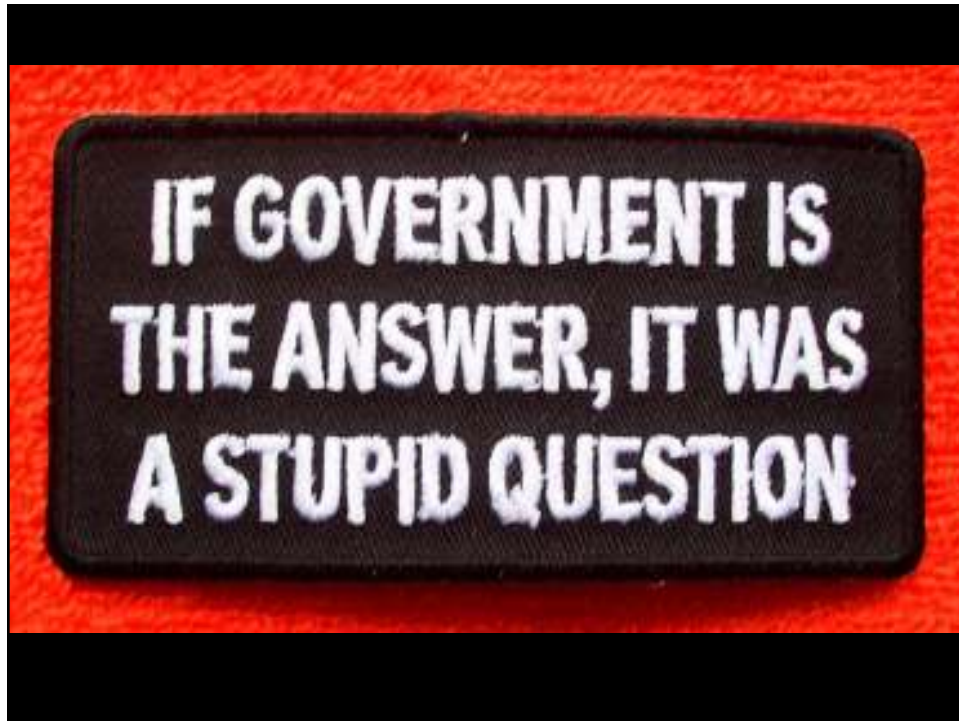
If your state government needs to find ways to balance its budget this year, do you think your state should do the following or not?

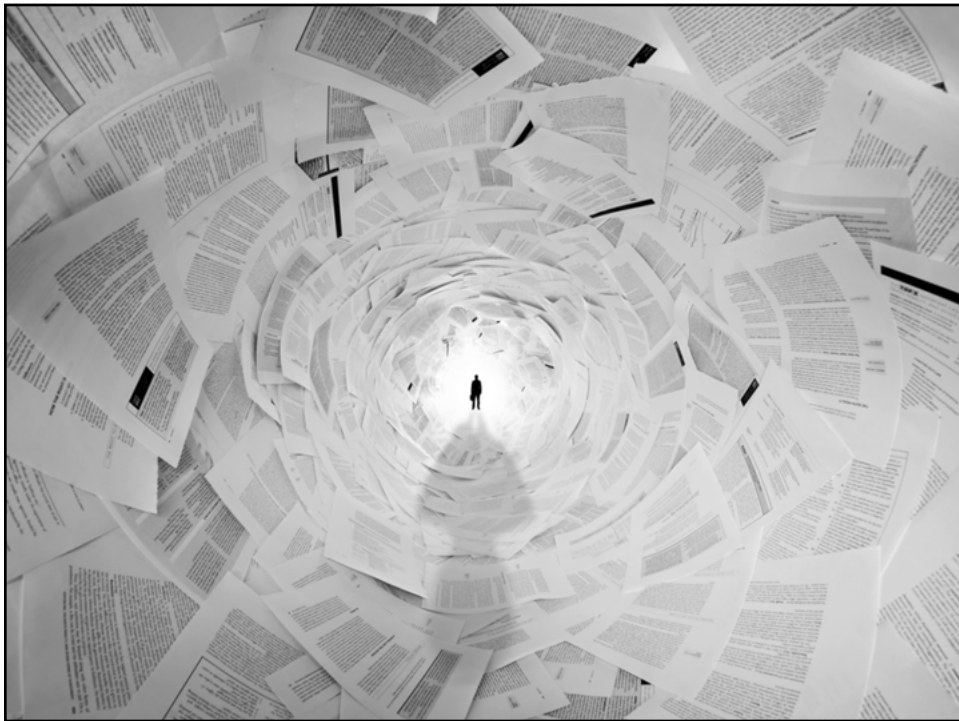
■ Yes, state should ■ No, state should not ■ Don't know/refused

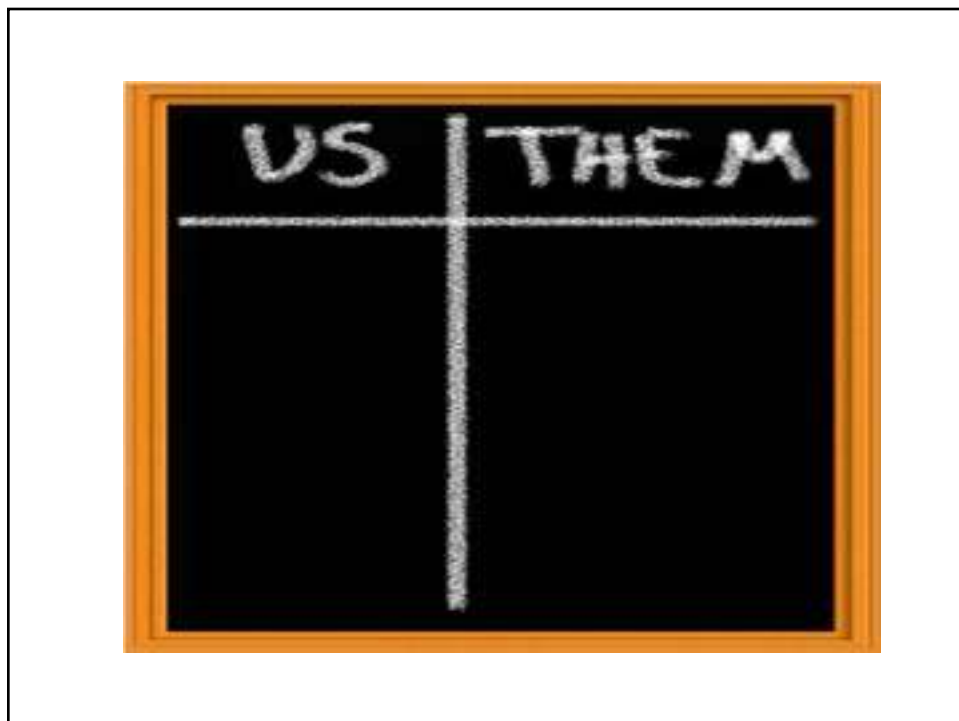
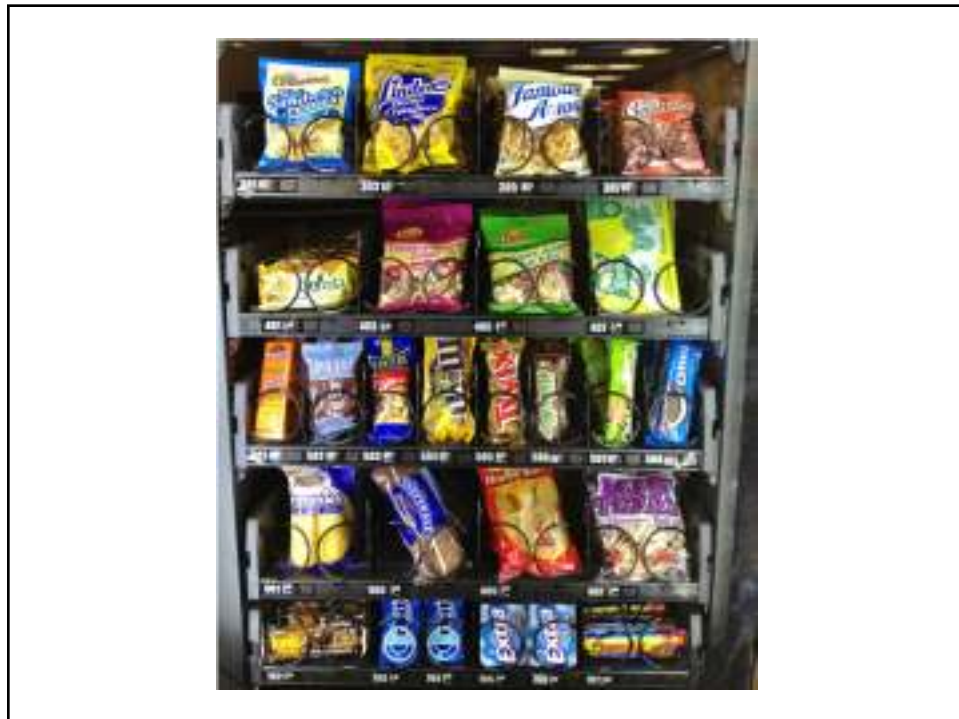


Source: February 2-7, 2011 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press political survey. N=1,385.

But when we try to talk to people about government . . .








“Racial labels perform a decisive function in public debate. In particular, race is a dividing line that is used to define the “other”, and, by implication, define the “undeserving other” and undermine public support for public welfare programs.”

-Talking the Walk



The Challenge	The Good News
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant and Resilient images consistently misdirect thinking. • Concrete images of the systems and structures of government are missing. • Consumerist thinking narrows understanding and responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “idea” of government is not lost • Responsible citizenship is still valued • A desire for collective action, respecting consensus, and problem-solving • Stewardship and planning for the future – roles for government


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“JUST POLITICS”

a partisan spectator sport

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Mission and Purpose

VALUES	ROLE
• Common Good	• Protector
• Quality of Life	• Manager & Planner
• Community Wellbeing	• Steward
• Public Purpose	• Consensus-BUILDER


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Why Does this Matter?

“Every child should have access to immunizations but too many families in our community are not bringing their children in to our clinics. This is why we are proposing a new agency rule requiring more clinic hours . . .”


Speak to Values First

“The health of the whole community is **protected** when we ensure that our children are immunized. One of the ways we do this is through **our public health agencies** that provide free and low cost **immunizations for all children**. We need extended clinic hours to keep up with growing demands.”



MINDLESS BUREAUCRACY

blurry and
undefined; only
dimly understood

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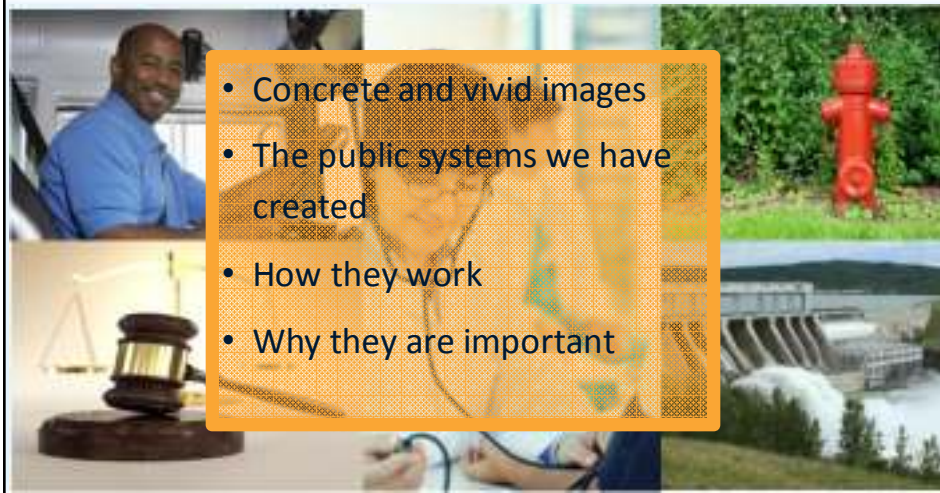





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Systems and Structures



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

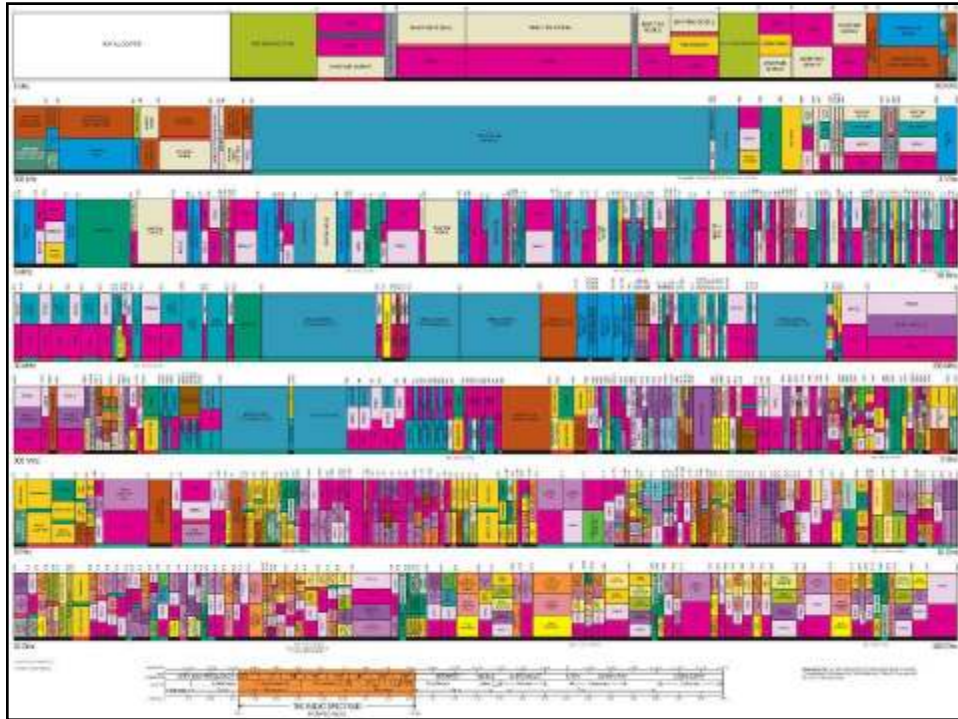
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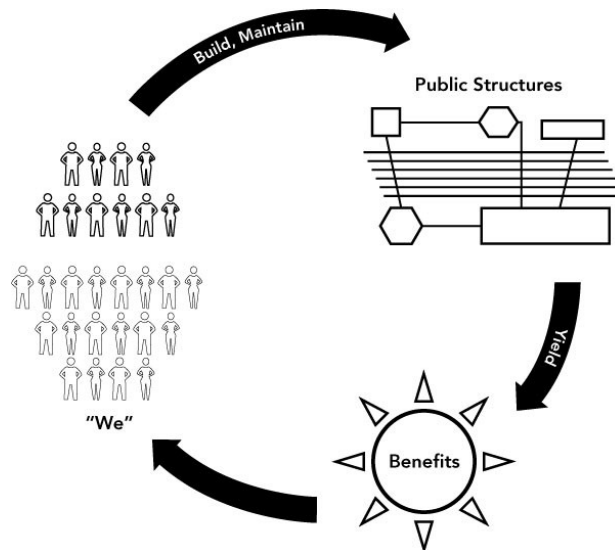
Government as Public Structures

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.

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Rounding Out the Story



The Core Idea we Must get Across . . .

The public systems and structures we build and maintain together are essential to our quality of life; they are the foundation of a strong economy and critical to broadly shared prosperity . . .

Education, Health Care & Clean Air and Water

REBUILDING OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE

Resources for Kids, the Elderly, Disabled & Working Families

A COALITION WORKING TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE WITH A FAIR, HUMANE AND SENSIBLE BUDGET IN WASHINGTON STATE

OLYMPIA, Wash. – A multimillion-dollar revenue package . . . was approved by the Washington state Legislature . . . to plug a \$2.8 billion budget deficit.

Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane, said that **taxes are needed to pay for "the critical public structures that unite us together as communities."**

Olympia - February 15, 2010





CONSUMER STANCE

What's in it for me?

What is it going to cost?


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Fostering “Citizen Managers”



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

Dominant Stories about Government



Just Politics



Bureaucracy



Vending Machine

Dominant Stories about Government



New Stories about Government



New Stories about Government



New Narratives about Government



Which “model” is being triggered?

Access to health care, good nutrition and cash assistance is vital to low-income families. Yet, enrolling in programs like Food Stamps and Medicaid has gotten harder and harder over the last year. The new computer eligibility system is riddled with problems. And, turnover in state workers means untrained workers are often ill-prepared to help families get the benefits for which they qualify.

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Which “model” is being triggered?

Of every tax dollar collected by the state of Minnesota, roughly 80 cents is returned to communities and individuals in the form of aid and grants. The remaining 20 cents pays for such things as state highways, appropriations to colleges and universities, prisons, state parks and state government. Some areas receive less than their citizens pay in, while other areas receive more.

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Which “model” is being triggered?

Our children deserve better. They need an education accountability system that provides fair, accurate and understandable information on the effectiveness of our schools. But, rather than debating the merits of our accountability system our Governor and Legislature are slugging it out in that legislative boxing ring we call the Capitol.

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Practicing our Stories

..... About Public Sector



- **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?

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government for the people

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Public Structures Spotlights

Office of Child Support

PUBLIC STRUCTURES SPOTLIGHT. August 2009

The mission of the Office of Child Support (OSC), created in 1990, is to improve the economic wellbeing of children, under 18 or still in high school, from split homes.

→ Continue reading [Office of Child Support](#)

Meat Inspection Section

PUBLIC STRUCTURES SPOTLIGHT. June 2009

Meats bound for market get the highest level of scrutiny from meat inspectors. But whether the meats are for sale or personal use, their slaughter, processing and sale are licensed and inspected to ensure proper animal treatment and food safety.

→ Continue reading [Meat Inspection Section](#)

Banking Division

PUBLIC STRUCTURES SPOTLIGHT. Apr 2009

When a few predatory lenders struck Vermont in the mid-1990s, the legislature stepped in to protect consumers. New laws placed fiduciary responsibilities on mortgage brokers and required lenders

Publications

Reports

Op-Eds

Press Releases

Updates

Public Structures Spotlights

Monthly Jobs Briefs

Cracks in the Public Structures

Search:

Go *

Challenges from from the field . .



- What about when government is not “working?”
- Aren’t we supposed to hold government accountable . . .
- But government has often perpetuated injustice . . .
- Our community’s experience with government is mostly negative . . .



**Government can
be a tool for
racial justice or
injustice.**

**How do we
reclaim it for the
common good?**

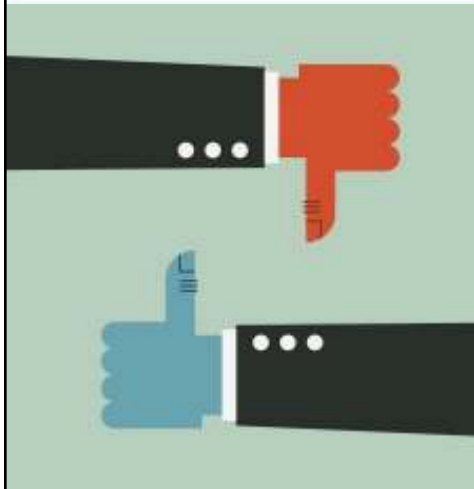
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Critiquing without Undermining

Every time we engage in discussions about government or its programs and services we are either cuing up helpful or damaging frames.

Our short term fights must reinforce our long term goals.

Critiquing without Undermining



- What is the core public value at stake?
- Is this system living up to the core purpose or value?
- If not, how do we reclaim it?

Once again the actions of our city housing department show that its all about who you know if you want to get anything done. If you don't have some big money political clout you can't get any response out of that bureaucratic mess of an agency. As always our working-class neighborhoods are just overlooked. But we are taxpayers too! We paid our share into the city coffers and we should be getting some attention and services in return.

Once again the actions of our city housing department show that it's all about who you know if you want to get anything done. If you don't have some big money political clout you can't get any respect. **Just Politics** The Bureaucratic Blob of an agency. As always our working-class neighborhoods are just overlooked. But we are taxpayers. **Consumer-Thinking** the city coffers and we should be getting some attention and services in return.



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An Example of Constructive Criticism

One of the **most important jobs of our city government is to help create clean and safe neighborhoods** where residents can live, work and play. Unfortunately, our housing department is not living up to that **essential responsibility** and neighborhoods are not prioritized equitably. This system needs to address the disparities that are effecting our communities of color in **order for our whole city to thrive**. It is time for **all of us to work together** to get this public agency back on track and focused on community needs.




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Thinking about public “budgets” and the taxes that support them is a challenge for many Americans. We need to help people remember what they are for.

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Attitudes about government shape thinking about public budgets...



Politicians use budgets to benefit their own interests and the interests of contributors.



Our public resources will be wasted by the invisible, inefficient bureaucracy.



“What’s in it for me? Why should I pay for things I don’t need or want?”

Use Values to Connect



Articulate the public good and shared values that public budgets make possible . . .
 . . . they pay for the public systems that “protect” us
 . . . help ensure “community well-being”, and allow for families to have economic “security”.

Explain how we ALL benefit

We need to help people see themselves not as consumers “purchasing” only the services they want but as members of a community in which we all benefit from living in a society with well-supported public systems.





Talking about the Need for Revenue



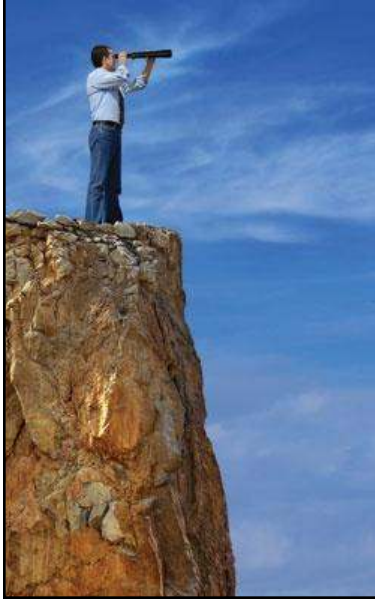


Changing the Conversation

Reconnect Taxes to Purposes



Reset the Context



Debates about taxes are often lodged in arguments about costs and benefits in the current moment. Reset the context by focusing on the role taxes play in helping us meet future goals and objectives and reminding us that previous generations paid taxes to construct the many public benefits we enjoy today.

Measure 84 and Our Family Farms

The Estate Tax has been an important Oregon policy since 1903. It's one of the ways we make sure that future generations of Oregonians have access to the foundations that make success possible, like a good education or care for our seniors. And it's designed to protect another important state resource—our family farms.



A decade ago, we as Oregonians reaffirmed our commitment to keeping this key source of revenue, because we knew that 100 years of progress in Oregon had been bolstered by the funding it provided to support our state and our families.

From the beginning, we've known that the legacy of family farms is one of Oregon's unique resources, so we've adjusted the Estate Tax to make sure there are ways for farms to stay in the family. If your family's assets are worth less than \$2 million, you're automatically exempt from this tax.



Don't Reinforce Bad Frames . . .



Avoid these:

- Tax Burden
- Tax Relief
- Hard-earned tax dollars
- Taxpayer

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“... A talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change . . .”

- *Richard Rorty*

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How does the Public Understand the Economy?



Parallel Challenges

- Mission and purpose obscured
- No system awareness
- Limited sense of personal role

Government

The Economy

A “Natural Economy”

Based on this latest survey, most Americans believe that the U.S. economy won't reach **placid waters** for some time. But as they struggle to **steer through the rapids**, each major group in society increasingly appears to be piling into its own boat. And more and more of us feel as if we are paddling alone.

Paddling Alone On The Economic Rapids
Allstate/National Journal Poll - Oct. 10, 2009



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**We just need to
'weather' the storm**

The Individual Actor Model

Implications:

- A broadly shared model
- Moral qualities and personal choices shape economic actions and outcomes



Inequality Happens







Last Resort





Dependency

Stifles Business



Protecting the
“deserving”



Policing the
“bad actors”







Limited
Role as
“worker”

Shaping Economic Outcomes



Policy?



Hard Work!

The Desired Transformation

Default Understanding

The economy is “free” & “natural”
– have to adapt.

Individual character/luck
determine outcomes.

Everyone competes for their own
interests.

The strength of the overall
economy – GDP, Stock Market –
matters.

Government’s role is minimal and
reactive.

The New Economy

The economy is man-made and
intentional.

Systems & Structures affect
outcomes.

Everyone’s interests are
connected and interdependent.

The economic wellbeing of
average people matters.

Government’s role is
fundamental and proactive.

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Connecting the Dots

✓ *Purpose*

- What is the Economy for?

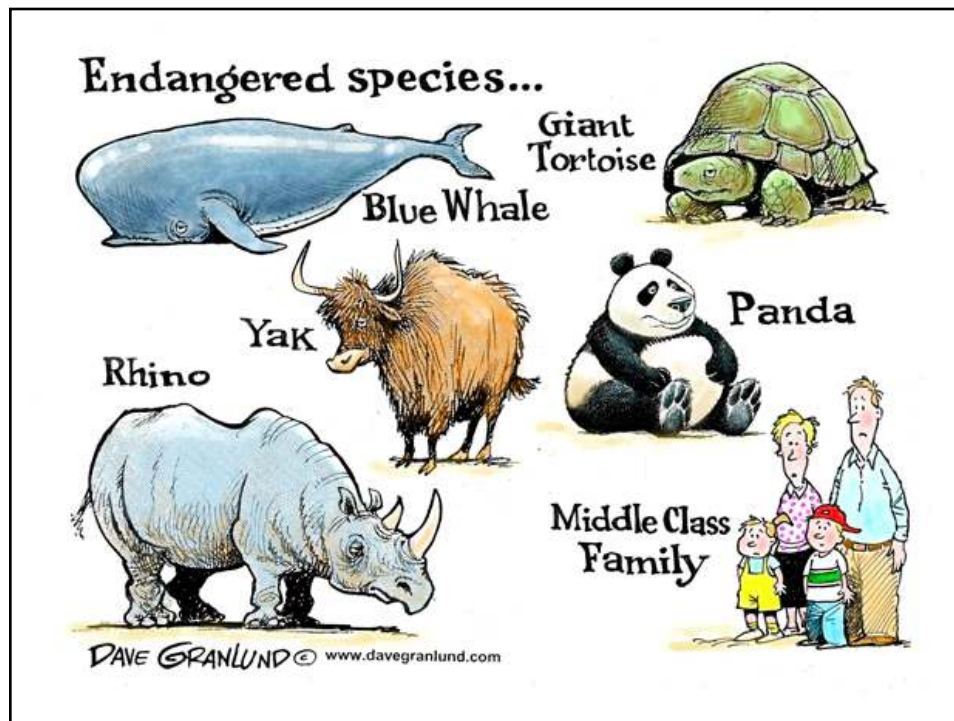
✓ *Intentionality*

- How do we create the
Economy we desire?



The Power of the "Middle Class" Story

- *Deep American mythos*
- *Shared values*
- *Heart/bedrock of the country*
- *Economic engine*



The American Dream

“ . . . life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement . . . regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position . . .

– James Truslow Adams, 1931

How do we tell the story?

A middle class doesn't arise by accident . . .

- Something we work towards
 - Quality of life to sustain or aspire to
 - Not “give me mine”
- Not just about individuals
 - Engine of the economy
 - Holds society together

The Intentional Middle Class

A strong middle class – the engine that drives our economy - doesn't arise by accident, but is the result of deliberate and proactive policy choices.

Public Structures as Economic Foundation

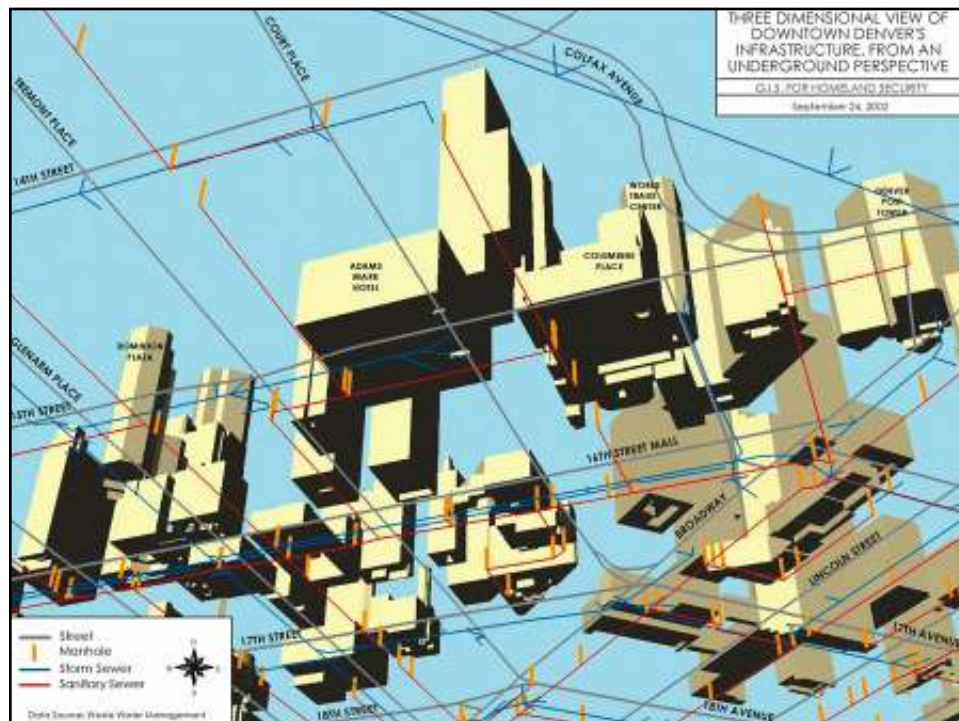
Public structures are foundational to our economy . . .

Explains how it works as well as intentionality and interdependence:

- Government creates and maintains
- Fundamental to prosperity
- Builds and strengthens the middle class

Public Structures as Economic Foundation

Public Structures (like the FDIC, community colleges, & Social Security), that have been created and maintained by government are foundational to prosperity, opportunity, economic stability, and a strong middle class.



We need to tell a New Economy Story

From the dominant story . . .

"The only thing that has ever created a good economy is the hard work, ingenuity and smart choices of our people. Government involvement creates dependency and stifles personal and business initiative. Cutting back onerous taxes and reducing public spending are the best ways to get our economy moving."

...to a more productive story

"Our economy rests on a foundation of public systems and structures. Economic activity depends on things like transportation systems, a healthy and educated workforce, a reliable communications grids, and a sound judicial system. Private enterprise would not succeed without these essential public functions."



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The Public Foundations of Economic Success

"There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own . . . You moved your goods on the roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for."

- Mass. Senate Candidate, Elizabeth Warren, 2011

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"Our economy isn't metaphorically like an ecosystem, it is a literally an ecosystem. And to argue that we would be better off by limiting government, because if we do it will promote business, is precisely like arguing that we will have more animals if we limit plants. It is exactly like it. In every ecosystem that you will find on Earth, you will find that the more plants there are the more animals there are, and vice versa. They are inextricably intertwined. And **in every economy on Earth where you find a robust, prosperous, growing economy, you will find an equally robust, growing public economy because these things are in symbiosis, and you can't have one without the other."**

- Nick Hanauer,
as reported in "The economic theories behind Nick Hanauer's support of I-1098"

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Urban renewal's power:

Public investments boost prosperity for all

by Tom Hughes, president of the Metro Council and former mayor of Hillsboro. OR. November 02, 2011,

Our nation's investments in roads, bridges, research and other public structures distinguish us from countries in the developing world. Similarly, investments in local communities throughout our own urban region help make the most of our cities, towns and neighborhoods and distinguish us from sprawling regions around the nation . . .

If we cast aside the important role of the public sector in creating great communities, it will cost us billions of dollars in lost jobs and productivity, and our children and grandchildren will be poorer as a result. We need more tools, not fewer, to ensure strategic public investments continue to pave the way to prosperity for everyone in our community.

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**We can build the
economy we need**

- The economy is manmade
- It rests on a foundation of public systems and structures
- Public investments are crucial to shared prosperity