

ADVOCACY POLITICS IN BUDGETING (EXERCISE)

Advocacy politics is about the mobilization of political support for or opposition to decisions about revenues and spending or about public policies and programs that, in turn, affect spending and revenue priorities. The point of advocacy in budgetary politics is to affect the decisions made in the budget process. Therefore, the strategy of advocacy is first and foremost a political calculation.

Advocacy strategy takes the shape of either a mobilization effort that is broad and aimed at the public or narrowly targeted directly at particular decision makers. The choice of strategy and tactics depends on (1) the issue and its appeal, (2) the advocates, (3) their resources, and (4) their long-term goals. Some issues play to the public, but others (such as the need for more staff in a budget office) do not. “Arnoldbucks,” a video on this Web site [📺](#), uses humor and empathy in its appeal for broad-based public support during the 2009 budget showdown in California, when Governor Schwarzenegger warned that he would be forced to issue IOUs instead of checks when the state ran out of cash.

A temporary, loose alliance of specialized interests may form around a highly focused and limited game plan, perhaps a single spending or revenue decision. Key to the alliance’s budget success is its members’ ability to “capture” the issue by defining it. Box 1 shows a letter to the chairman and ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, urging more federal funding for firefighting.

- How does the argument in this letter frame the issue differently from the argument in figure 2.4?
- How is the strategy shown in this letter different from the strategy in the case at the end of chapter 2?

- What might explain the difference in political strategy?

Box 1. Funding for Firefighting

September 15, 2008

Chairman David R. Obey
House Appropriations Committee
The Capitol
Room H-218
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Representative Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
The Capitol
Room H-218
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

We, the undersigned, urge you to provide emergency supplemental appropriations to cover US Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) wildland fire operations costs above originally appropriated amounts. In the absence of adequate firefighting funding, the USFS has been forced to move \$400 million from non-fire accounts to support fire suppression efforts.

This has disrupted or completely stopped many important programs, projects and cooperative agreements benefiting public and private forests, including forest management, wildlife habitat, conservation, and research activities, many of which help prevent or minimize wildfires. This has eroded agency partnerships and credibility with communities and organizations that help it accomplish its goals.

To date, the USFS and DOI combined have spent over \$1.3 billion on fire suppression activities, controlling wildfires on over 4.6 million acres. As you are aware, the 2008 wildfire season in California began much earlier and proceeded with greater intensity than it had in previous years.

This increased and prolonged wildfire activity, along with large fires in North Carolina and across the Southwest, has once again strained USFS and DOI finances. Now that we are in the midst of a very active hurricane season, we will likely see an increased need for supplemental funding as USFS takes on greater responsibility for hurricane response and recovery efforts.

The current fire funding crisis underscores the importance of developing a long-term solution to correct the way in which fire suppression funds are budgeted. We urge Congress to provide these supplemental funds to prevent further short-term financial damage, and at the same time, address the more challenging issue of finding a budget fix to end this six-year cycle of emergency supplemental funding. We are committed to working with Congress and the Administration to craft a comprehensive solution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Community Trees
American Fisheries Society
American Forests
American Forest Foundation
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Resource Council
American Hiking Society
Appalachian Mountain Club
Association of Consulting Foresters
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
Black Hills Regional Multiple Use Coalition
Campfire Club of America
Colorado Forestry Association
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dale Bosworth, Former US Forest Service Chief
Dale Robertson, Former US Forest Service Chief
Ecological Society of America
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Idaho Conservation League


Intermountain Forest Association
Jack Ward Thomas, Former US Forest Service Chief
Meeteetse Conservation District
Mike Dombeck, Former US Forest Service Chief
Mississippi Land Trust
Moosalamoo Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
Northern Forest Alliance
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Public Lands Council
Quail Unlimited
Ruffed Grouse Society
Society for Range Management
Society of American Foresters
Sustainable Northwest
The Nature Conservancy
The Pacific Forest Trust
Trout Unlimited
Trust for Public Lands
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Vermont Woodlands Association
Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association
Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Mississippi
The Wildlife Society
Wyoming Timber Industry Association

Source: Reprinted by permission of the American Fisheries Society,


http://www.fisheries.org/afs/docs/policy_group.pdf, accessed November 23, 2008. See the

American Fisheries Society's advocacy guidelines at

http://www.fisheries.org/afs/publicpolicy_advocacyguidelines.html

Advocacy communications may be aimed at a constituency, an audience, or both. Constituents are the source of support for the advocates and issue. Advocacy organizations often are organized around voluntary membership and depend on voluntary contributions from like-minded people who share the organization's interest in an issue. A survival skill under these conditions is to gear political communications to the supporting constituency. This skill is evident in many advocacy Web sites (see Web site resource, Internet Resources )

The audience is the formal, immediate target of a communication. The audience may serve as a sounding board to test the message or as an amplifier to magnify the message. Press releases and radio spots are popular precisely because they amplify the message. The target audience is expected to exert influence on behalf of the advocates' budgetary goals and may include public interest organizations and the public at large.

When testimony is given in formal legislative hearings, advocates try to persuade the audience and in this way draw decision makers into the circle of supporters. When many or most decision makers are already convinced and are themselves part of the issue network, then we see a theatrical performance aimed at public opinion and reassuring supporters. When the audience is different from the constituents, advocacy groups know that both are listening. The need to play to both the audience and the constituency explains why it often is said that grandstanding is another word for strategic positioning. (For limits imposed by the president's budget office on agency advocacy in federal budgeting, see the Web site resource, Rules of the Game in Washington )

The witnesses at a hearing of the Committee on Ways and Means in October 2008 included governors; representatives of business interests, professional associations, and unions; public interest organizations on the left and right wings of the political spectrum; and leaders of

nonprofits and educational institutions (see box 2). Some provided testimony and others submitted statements supporting their point of view.

- Why do you think these people and organizations would take their case to *this* committee?
- Why do you think the committee would schedule such a hearing?

Box 2. List of Witnesses to Appear before Committee on Ways and Means Hearing on Economic Recovery, Job Creation and Investment in America

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2008—BEGINNING AT 10:00 AM
1100 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Witnesses Panel:

The Honorable David Paterson, Governor, State of New York
The Honorable Mark Sanford, Governor, State of South Carolina
The Honorable Douglas Palmer, Mayor, City of Trenton, New Jersey
Timothy Firestine, Chief Operating Officer, Montgomery County Executive, Rockville, Maryland
David Mongan, President, American Society of Civil Engineers
Dennis Van Roekel, President, National Education Association
Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers

Panel:

Jared Bernstein, Ph.D., Director, Living Standards Program, Economic Policy Institute
Robert Greenstein, Executive Director, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Christine Owens, Executive Director, National Employment Law Project
Jeanne Lambrew, Ph.D., Associate Professor, LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress, Action Fund, Austin, Texas
Martella A. Turner-Joseph, Vice President, Joseph & Turner Consulting Actuaries, LLC, New York, New York
Alan Viard, Ph.D., Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

Submissions for the Record

American Apparel and Footwear Association, Statement
American Benefits Council, Statement
American Federation of State, Statement
American Prepaid Legal Services Institute, Statement
American Public Works Association, Letter
American Seafaring and Longshore Labor Unions and U.S. Flag Shipping Organizations Statement
Associated General Contractors of America, Statement
Burnett County Wisconsin Child Support Agency, Statement
Center for Law and Social Policy, Statement

Chippewa County Child Support Agency, Statement
Coastwise Coalition Joint Letter, Statement
Columbia Country Child Support Agency, Statement
Congressman Luis G. Fortuño, Statement
Denise Soffel, Statement
Diana Aviv, Statement
Frank Hugelmeyer, Statement
Honorable Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, Statement
Honorable John P. DeJongh, Jr., Statement
J. Lee Pickens Project, Statement
Jicrilla Apache Nation, Statement
Jim Gibbon, Statement
Kenneth J. Kies, Statement
Meg Torgerud, Statement
National Association of Home Builders, Statement
National Black Chamber of Commerce, Statement
National Child Support Enforcement Association, Statement
National Complete Streets Coalition, Statement
National Employment Opportunity Network, Statement
National Retail Federation, Statement
National Retail Federation, Statement
Ohio CSEA Directors, Statement
Pamela S. Pipkin, Statement
Patrick Smith, Statement
Patti L. Worzalla, Statement
Pre-Paid Legal Services, Statement
Public Human Services Association, Statement
Richard L. McNeel, Statement
Rod R. Blagojevich, Statement
Shirley Franklin, Statement
Starwood Hotels, Statement
Statement of National Roofing Contractors Association
The Honorable Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, Statement
Transportation for America Coalition, Statement
Transportation for America Coalition, Statement
U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Statement
United Jewish Communities, Statement
William C. Daroff, Statement
Wisconsin Board of Supervisors, Statement
Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association, Statement

Source: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means,

<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=detail&hearing=650>,

accessed January 12, 2009.

Advocacy politics played a large role in February 2009 in shaping and then passing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), better known as the economic recovery package. Some of the drama took place on an intergovernmental and decidedly partisan stage. Pressing demands on state and local budgets and record budget deficits sent state and local political leaders to the federal government for assistance. Marshalling support from governors of both parties was part of the Obama administration's effort to get bipartisan support for the spending package and the president spent a lot of time working the telephone (see figure 1). The governors' backing was intended to put pressure on Republicans in Congress who opposed the plan. Minnesota's Republican governor told CNN that "while governors have virtually no say in what goes into the stimulus bill, Obama's outreach to the nation's governors is a power play to speed things along" (Hornick, 2009). The White House did not get the bipartisan support in Congress that it had wanted and the legislation passed on the strength of the Democratic majority in the House and Senate.



“Feb. 3, 2009: From his private study, the President pays courtesy calls to governors hit hard by the economic crisis.”



“Feb. 6, 2009: Back on the phone, the President tries to persuade a Republican Senator [sic] to vote for the bill.”

Source: White House photos by Pete Souza, “The story of the economic recovery package,” slideshow, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photogallery/The-story-of-the-economic-recovery-package>, accessed February 17, 2009.

Figure 1. President Obama Urging Governors to Support the Stimulus Package

In a classic example of advocacy politics, the National Governors Association (NGA) sent a bipartisan letter urging congressional leaders of both parties to support the legislation (see box 3). The letter was signed by the NGA’s chairman, a Democratic governor, and the vice-chairman, a Republican governor. The organization is designed for advocacy: its officers and other members of the executive committee are elected each year by the member governors and take policy positions on issues involving federalism, the federal budget and tax policy, and other issues affecting the states.

Box 3. Letter from National Governors Association to Congressional Leaders

February 13, 2009

The Honorable Harry M. Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Representative Boehner:

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) represents a critical step in a unified effort by states and the federal government to speed recovery and create jobs for millions of Americans. As governors, we greatly appreciate the level of investment Congress is making in states to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, and provide core services for citizens that need them in these difficult economic times.

The combination of funds for Medicaid, education and other essential services is critical for governors as they work to manage the downturn in their states and improve government for the long term. We also welcome tax relief to spur investment and the unprecedented accountability and transparency requirements included in the bill.

We recognize the differences of opinion many members have regarding the legislation. Some of our fellow governors share similar opinions, but with the completion of the conference report we believe the time for debate is over; the time for action is now.

As Chair and Vice Chair of the National Governors Association, we call on Congress to pass the ARRA and work with us to immediately put federal dollars to work.

Sincerely,

Governor Edward G. Rendell

Governor James H. Douglas

Source: National Governors Association,

<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.cb6e7818b34088d18a278110501010a0/?vgnextoid=fea824675c07f110VgnVCM1000005e00100aRCRD>, accessed February 13, 2009.

It turns out that advocacy politics is a sophisticated game in which not all of the players are winners. Although not all governors supported the recovery package and some strongly opposed it, the White House tactic of using gubernatorial support paid off for the states. According to the federal Web site established to track the spending (<http://www.recovery.gov>), \$144 billion of the ARRA is for state and local fiscal relief. This component of the package is second only to tax relief in the number of dollars doled out.

- As a governor and fiscal conservative elected by conservative voters in a state facing a record deficit, do you sign the NGA's letter, and why or why not?
- Was the NGA's letter to congressional leaders appropriate advocacy politics in a federal system of government? In a democracy?
- And now for two really tough questions. Imagine yourself as a religious leader in a community facing insistent demands on overwhelmed public and private resources.

Unemployment, the credit freeze, and foreclosures are putting pressures on food pantries, shelters, and many other social services. Should you participate in budget advocacy? How do you go about it and where do you turn?

References

Hornick, Ed, 2009. *States to Congress: Stop squabbling and send help*. CNN, February 3, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/02/states.economy/index.html> and video at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/02/states.economy/index.html#cnnSTCVideo>, accessed February 3, 2009.

Related Web Site Resources

Courage Campaign's "Arnoldbucks" video

Internet Resources

Rules of the Game in Washington