



How to Talk About Government Toolkit: Sample Editorials

The following sample editorials were written by FrameWorks to show one way to incorporate the framing research government into the format of a guest editorial. This language can be included in your own opinion pieces.

Editorial #1

(In Response to Charges that Government is in Worse Shape Than Ever Before)

Following the wave of recent controversies, it is critical to remind ourselves of the very foundation we have built that makes our country successful and our quality of life possible. The advantages that make America so successful come from the public structures that we have created including physical structures we need in order to get things done like highways and communications grids, as well as the organizational structures we need, like a postal system for delivering mail and courts for settling business disagreements. Developing countries have many smart, hard-working individuals, but they don't yet have the public structures that are essential for overall success. As long as America's public structures are solid, no scandal can truly undermine our system of government. **[Public Structures simplifying model]**

I share Michael Olson's concerns raised in his January 9th editorial, but I disagree with his conclusion that "American government is in worse shape than ever before." As proof, he cites reports of secret wiretapping by the White House, the Abramoff scandal, and congressional bickering. Olson is equating government with the actions of a handful of elected officials and political operatives.

But government is far more than that. It is all of the physical and organizational structures on which we rely, and as long as citizens stay engaged and vigilant, the acts of a few cannot undermine our public structures. As Gandhi once said, "Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does

not become dirty." Similarly, unethical actions by a few in government do not undermine all of our systems of government. When questions arose about the secret wiretapping authorized by the White House, our judicial system did not fall apart. When Abramoff's illegal actions became clear, the stock market did not collapse. When Congress is divided, nobody stages a military coup.

[Emphasizes difference between government structures and individuals]

American government will not be destroyed by scandal. The real force that can weaken us is less obvious. Our quality of life depends upon the public sector, private sector, and citizens working together for the common good. The scandals would become truly dangerous if citizens began to believe that a few dirty drops are the entire ocean rather than recognize them for what they are. The scandals become opportunities if citizens work together to clean up the mess and demand accountability in the future. **[Value of Common Good]**

Most businesses operate ethically, but we need government to protect the public from the few that do not. Most elected officials and government workers are hard-working and honest, but systems need to be in place to catch those who are not. Most appointed officials are competent, but we must be certain that those put in charge of public structures, regardless of party, are given those jobs due to their talents, not their political favors. It is up to us, all of us, to pay attention and to stay committed to the structure of our government by protecting it from the forces that would undermine it. **[protection role for government]**

Rather than be discouraged by recent news reports of corruption in government, Americans should be motivated to reengage with the public sector and strengthen the voice of citizens in the operations of a government that works for all.

Editorial #2

*This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island
From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me*

- Woody Guthrie [**Value of Common Good**]

The most valuable, tangible legacy we have to leave the next generation is our public land, the national parks and wilderness areas we all enjoy. Think of the parks, public beaches and national forests that we all enjoy. These public structures belong to all of us – rich and poor, young and old, urban and rural. Every American has the opportunity and the right to hike trails in the forest, splash in waves at the beach, and watch birds in the park. [**Value of Stewardship**]

However, a concerted effort is in the works to sell off much of our public land to private interests such as mining companies and land developers. Citizens need to make their voices heard and insist that the lands that we all own not be sold off without public knowledge and approval.

The most recent effort to sell off the nation's public land was led by Representative Richard Pombo of California who included a provision in the House budget reconciliation to sell public land where companies have mining claims, including land in and near national parks. Once this hidden provision was publicized, public outcry forced its removal.

But efforts to sell public land continue to creep back into legislation, such as one bill that tried to build support for selling public land by saying the proceeds would go to hurricane Katrina victims. At the state level there have been reports of efforts to secretly sell state land to private developers.

These efforts typically occur without any public hearing or public debate, as though they are nothing more than financial transactions and budget line items. But public land belongs to all of us, and it is up to American citizens, not accountants, to decide the fate of our public trust.

A century ago, our nation put land in public trust because private interests were decimating our heritage. President Theodore Roosevelt, the creator of the US Forest Service, was both a capitalist and a conservationist. He realized that

the nation's natural resources were being rapidly plundered without any government regulation. Alarmed by the destruction of land and wildlife, Roosevelt worked during the course of his presidency to place roughly 230 million acres in public protection. Roosevelt reminds us that we have been given a responsibility that we must protect and nurture: "We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune." This land really is your land, and my land. We need to make sure it becomes our children's land as well. **[Government role of protection]**

(Revised, January 2011)