

TO: Education Reporters/Producers/Editors
FR: Scott Widmeyer, Widmeyer Communications
RE: Upcoming New Al Shanker Book/Back-to-School story angles for consideration

In September, Columbia University Press will publish a major new biography, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*, by Richard D. Kahlenberg. As a former communications director to Shanker during the ed reform era of the 1980s, I saw firsthand the way in which a union leader could become an education statesman, continually shocking critics by advocating innovative reforms.

Rick Kahlenberg's new book brings to life that era and raises a number of questions for contemporary education debates. The September publication date ensures the nation will be focused on "back-to-school" topics and I think you will find this revealing book offering up substantive story "hooks" which will include:

- What role do teachers' union presidents play in education reform today? Do they do more harm than good?
- Who are the modern-day labor leaders who "break the mold" and how does Shanker's legacy relate to their successes and challenges?
- How has the education standards movement changed over time, and what would Shanker, a strong advocate of standards-based reform, think of No Child Left Behind?
- How has the charter school movement changed and what would Shanker, a leading champion of teacher-led charter schools, think about the charter school movement today?
- With new private school voucher efforts pushing forward from Washington, D.C., to Utah, what would Shanker have done to address those initiatives?
- With teacher pay for performance proposals proliferating, how would an education statesman like Shanker have responded?
- Do teacher advocates have a role in education reform today or has it been usurped by political and business leaders? Why?
- Do teacher strikes hurt or strengthen unions, schools and the profession?

Knowledgeable sources for such stories, in addition to Kahlenberg, include:

Former North Carolina Governor and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Founding Chair Jim Hunt (D)

U.S. Senator, Former Education Secretary and Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander (R)

Former New Jersey Gov. Thomas Kean

Ed McElroy, President, American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C.

Randi Weingartern, President, United Federation of Teachers, New York City

Chris Whittle, CEO, Edison Schools, Inc.

Chester Finn Jr., Former Assistant Secretary of Education, Reagan Administration

Diane Ravitch, Author and Research Professor of Education, New York University

Marc Tucker, Vice Chair, New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce

James Kelly, former president, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Bella Rosenberg, former top assistant to Shanker

Adam Urbanski, president Rochester (NY) Teachers Association

Denis Doyle, education consultant

Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo (D)

U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, Massachusetts (D)

Former U.S. Secretary of Education and South Carolina Governor Richard Riley (D)

Eugenia Kemble, executive director, The Albert Shanker Institute

Under Shanker's leadership, the American Federation of Teachers membership nearly tripled and he became known as "a founding father of modern teacher unionism." He came to be written about as

“the most important educator since Dewey.” Shanker earned these titles through principled stands and hard fights. During the 1980s and 1990s, he supported initiatives for high education standards and accountability, teacher-led charter schools, and a system of “peer review” to weed out inadequate teachers.

Many remember Shanker for his weekly column that appeared for nearly 30 years in *The New York Times* in which he offered common sense, keen analysis and no-nonsense ideas about how to improve schools.

Kahlenberg’s unauthorized biography of Shanker is the first to offer a complete narrative of the man who was one of the most important voices in public education and American politics in the last quarter century.

“Al Shanker illuminated our nation’s path toward educating our children with devastating honesty, sharp wit, and profound wisdom.”

—President Bill Clinton, upon posthumously awarding Shanker the Medal of Honor
January 1998

Shanker’s Legacy

Although he passed away a decade ago, Shanker’s legacy can be seen in classrooms throughout the country today:

- Shanker was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the standards movement. “It’s like the Olympics. There’s an external standard that students need to meet, and the teacher is there to help the student make it.” In *Tough Liberal*, Kahlenberg provides details and insight about how Shanker’s work led to No Child Left Behind—and the subsequent debate about its renewal today.
- In 1985 Shanker gave a series of historic speeches that called for a rigorous national exam for new teachers, peer review and career ladders for teachers. The speeches opened up divisions between Shanker and other union leaders. However, he also laid out an idea that received many accolades—an idea that has become the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This year the number of National Board Certified Teachers exceeded 55,000. All 50 states, the District of Columbia and more than 700 local school districts recognize National Board Certification as a mark of distinction.

“More than any other single person, Al Shanker was the founder of the [organization]... [Richard Kahlenberg’s] volume compellingly captures the life and times of Shanker, a remarkable visionary leader who may well have been the most influential educator of our era. I was proud to consider Al Shanker a good friend and highly recommend this truly excellent biography which captures the essence of an inspiring individual who did what he thought was right despite the opposition he often confronted from friends as well as foes.”

—Former Governor Jim Hunt, North Carolina

- Shanker helped launch the charter schools movement in the ’80s although he later became disillusioned as “the concept he put forward began to move away from a public-school reform effort to look more like a private-school voucher plan.” Recent numbers show there are almost 3,000 charter schools operating in 37 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and enrolling approximately 750,000 students.

“...[Shanker was] one of the authentically insightful and imaginative figures in American education.”

—Chester Finn Jr., Assistant Secretary of Education, Reagan Administration

Author's Biography

Richard D. Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and the author of *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools Through Public School Choice* and *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action*. Previously, Kahlenberg was a Fellow at the Center for National Policy, a visiting associate professor of constitutional law at George Washington University, and a legislative assistant to Senator Charles S. Robb (D-VA). Kahlenberg's articles on education and affirmative action have been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic*, and elsewhere. Kahlenberg has appeared on ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, C-SPAN, MSNBC, and NPR. Kahlenberg graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College in 1985 and cum laude from Harvard Law School in 1989. Between college and law school, he spent a year at the University of Nairobi School of Journalism as a Rotary Scholar. He lives with his wife, Rebecca, and four daughters outside Washington, D.C.

MEDIA CONTACT FOR BOOK COPIES AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS:

ADAM SHAPIRO

WIDMEYER COMMUNICATIONS

202-667-0901

Adam.Shapiro@widmeyer.com