

TO: Political Reporters/Columnists/Producers/Editors
FR: Scott Widmeyer, Widmeyer Communications
RE: Al Shanker Biography/Political angles for consideration

Today, Democrats are ascendant politically because of Republican mistakes, but some still wonder whether they stand for anything. The left wing is said to represent the sum of what various special interest groups want; while moderate Democrats are accused of standing only for whatever the focus groups and polls point to. A fascinating new biography of legendary teacher union leader Albert Shanker explores his unique political philosophy which had a simple answer to the question of what liberals stand for: economic and political democracy.

Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy, by Richard D. Kahlenberg, to be released by Columbia University Press in September, raises the question: In a nation weary of George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism," might not Shanker's philosophy -- "tough liberalism" -- prove attractive?

At Shanker's memorial service, President Bill Clinton said "Al Shanker would say something on one day that would delight liberals and infuriate conservatives. The next day, he would make conservatives ecstatic and the liberals would be infuriated." Shanker defended core liberal institutions like public education and trade unionism, but he also was a defense hawk, a strong anti-Communist, and an opponent of racial quotas and extreme forms of bilingual education.

Possible hooks for story coverage include:

- Was Shanker's collection of "liberal" and "conservative" views contradictory? How could he ally with neoconservatives on defense spending and multiculturalism one day and endorse Ted Kennedy for president the next? Does a commitment to democracy reconcile support for public education and trade unionism and opposition to racial preferences and Communism?
- In a long line of tough liberals – including Scoop Jackson, George Meany and Bayard Rustin – was Shanker the last of a dying breed? What happened to the unique political space traditionally occupied by the AFL-CIO before it moved in a dovish direction on foreign policy and made its peace with racial preferences?
- Is the New Deal and Cold War liberalism that Shanker embodied a remnant of bygone eras as the names suggest, or is the combination of economic populism and a tough stance on national security particularly relevant in a time of rising inequality and increasing terrorist threats?
- In 2008, could Shanker's brand of tough liberalism, centered around a commitment to democracy, address the central vulnerability of liberalism, which is sometimes seen as soft and elitist and out of touch with the way the world

works? What would happen if a candidate embraced economic populism and the toughness on foreign policy at the same time?

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

- U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy
- U.S. Senator and former Education Secretary Lamar Alexander
- Former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt
- Former West Virginia Governor and College Board President Gaston Caperton
- Ed McElroy, President, AFT
- Randi Weingarten, President UFT
- Linda Chavez, political commentator and former AFT publications editor
- William Bennett, political commentator and former U.S. Secretary of Education
- Rachelle Horowitz, former political director, AFT
- Joshua Muravchik, scholar, American Enterprise Institute

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.

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*; *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action*, and *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School*. Previously, Kahlenberg was a Fellow at the Center for National Policy, a visiting association professor of constitutional law at George Washington University, and a legislative assistant to Senator Charles S. Robb (D-VA). Kahlenberg's articles have appeared 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.

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