

That “Adorable” Special Interest Group

by Brooks Berndt
Minister for Environmental Justice

A move is afoot in certain sectors of our society to put a permanent muffler on a special interest group that has been variously labeled as “whiney” and “obnoxiously persistent.” In an effort to combat “dependency,” government officials are cracking down. No longer will the largesse of public funds be used to protect this group declared to be “vulnerable” and “threatened.”

A bold and sizable step in this direction was taken by the administration in its recent budget proposal. In outlining a strategy to rid our country of “waste,” the White House took aim at funds that benefit a certain group more than others.

Wise readers undoubtedly know the nefarious special interest group to which I refer. The troublesome antics of this group likely keep some lying awake and agitated at night. Yes, the seemingly innocent group to which I refer is that of children—also known as little squirts, brats, and nippers.

You might not recall recent headlines declaring that children would suffer from budget cuts, but that simply reflects the principal strategy deployed: avoid calling them by name at any cost. That only empowers them and gives their concerns a spotlight. After all, this group originated the concept of being a “poster child.”

The goal of the proposed cuts, however, is to act before any posters get raised and public sentiment is swayed with sentimentality for those who happen to be under the age of 18.

Thus, the focus of comments by government spokespersons is on anything but concerns related to the present and future realities faced by children. This is particularly the case in certain policy areas. There is no denying that any effort to address matters pertaining to pollution and the climate disproportionately benefits youngsters.

To avoid any such bias, the administration framed its actions as an aggressive attack on regulations rather than anything that might be described as “cute” and “loveable.” The battle over words and meaning was soon won as one headline read “EPA Hit Hardest as Trump Budget Targets Regulations.”

Can you imagine the public hysteria that would ensue if the headline read “EPA Hit Hardest as Trump Budget Targets Little Tykes”?

Just think of the PR disaster that would have occurred if people connected the proposed budget cuts with a major report released a day earlier by our nation’s leading medical organizations. A central finding of this report on climate-related health impacts declared that children face the greatest risks and burdens as temperatures rise.

If parents made connections like this, they would be in an absolute moral panic. Helicopter moms and dads would be marching in the streets. A revolution would occur!

Needless to say, if politicians want to be re-elected, they have to use “kids’ gloves” to deal with this “adorable” special interest group. Surely, it is best if they talk about “regulations” rather than high asthma rates or anything that makes you think of risk to your children’s health.

Are budgets really “moral documents” as some would have us believe? Only if we let ourselves think of troublesome special interest groups that otherwise go unnamed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brooks Berndt is Minister for Environmental Justice of the United Church of Christ.

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