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Phrases, Politics, and Paul

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Kathryn Krajewski

Phrases, Politics, and Paul

Presidential candidate Rand Paul gave his campaign announcement speech on April 7, 2015 in Louisville, Kentucky. The reason Paul gave this speech was to announce that he was going to run in the Republican primary election for president. In his announcement speech, Paul positions himself as the strongest candidate on the issue of unemployment by framing it as a problem which has been worsened by the Democratic Party, but that the American people can readily revive through work. To gain support for this issue framing, Paul constructs his character as a hard-working family man and incites the emotions of anger and hope in his audience.¹

Paul sets the agenda on the issue of unemployment in his announcement speech. Paul states that he has, "...a vision for America where everyone who wants to work will have a job." Paul goes on to explain that he wants, "...to see millions of Americans back at work." The statements Paul makes about unemployment implies that he is prepared to and will take the necessary steps to begin to fix this issue if he is elected president.

Paul frames the idea that the government, specifically the Democratic Party, is responsible for the problem of unemployment. In his speech, Paul states that, "Liberal policies have failed our inner cities...the poverty gap continues to widen." Poverty is a result of many people being unemployed; if people are not working and are therefore not earning money, then those who are poor remain in this situation while those who are already successful continue to grow wealthier. Paul reminds the audience that liberal policies have not created many jobs or opportunities for people to find employment. By using the word "liberal," Paul distances himself from the policies which have, as he claims, helped to increase the problem of unemployment.

¹ This essay applies Medhurst's (2005) conceptual overview of presidential campaign rhetoric – agenda-setting, framing, character construction, and emotional resonance.

This word also isolates the Republican Party from the Democratic Party, expressing to the public that if Republicans were in charge, the issue of unemployment would be handled differently. Paul also associates words with negative connotations with the word “liberal” in his speech, and this helps make conservative views sound more appealing. Paul associates the word “liberal” with the words “fail” and “poverty gap,” words which have negative connotations. If this is what the word “liberal” stands for, then anyone who supports these policies must not be capable of resolving the issue of unemployment. Paul claims that liberal policies have already failed the public, and this may cause the audience to believe that liberal policies will continue to do so in the future. At the same time that Paul associates “liberal” with a negative meaning, he associates the word “conservative” with a positive one. Usually, liberal and conservative policies oppose one another. If liberal policies hurt the economy, then it stands to reason that conservative policies would benefit the economy. Paul leads his audience down a path of logic which, if the audience agrees that the government has not helped the unemployment issue, cannot help but follow. This indicates to the audience that if they want a positive change in terms of unemployment, it might be in their best interest to support the Republican Party when voting, specifically Rand Paul.

By framing the problem of unemployment in this way, Paul takes away responsibility for this issue from the public. Within his speech, Paul explains that he is “...convinced that most Americans want to work.” Paul frames the American public as a people who believe in the value of hard work and want to earn their own success. Yet he says, “I want to be part of a return to prosperity, a true economic boom...” This implies that America is not prospering now and that the country is in a poor economic state, further indicating that the job market is not in the best shape either. Since Paul has framed the American public as a people who want to work, his

audience cannot be unemployed due to laziness. Instead, Paul implies that the public is attempting to find jobs but are not succeeding because there are not enough opportunities to find a job and become employed. Paul paints a favorable picture of the American public in his speech, and this expresses to the audience that Paul is on the side of the people. Paul frames American citizens as a people who desire to work hard and create their own success story. If the audience accepts this frame, then they must accept the idea that changes must be made in order to begin to fix the issue of unemployment, specifically to the government.

Paul constructs his character as a hard-working family man. In his speech, Paul tells the audience that, "From an early age I worked. I taught swimming lessons, I mowed lawns, I did landscaping, I put roofs on houses, I painted houses." This is a standard list of jobs which a fair amount of people in the audience could probably recall doing themselves. This demonstrates that Paul has multiple perspectives within the job market, expressing to the audience that Paul understands how the economy and job market works for average Americans. Paul implies to the audience that he would be a good candidate to choose on the issue of unemployment because he understands the economy from the public's perspective. Later in his speech, Paul states that, "Two of my sons work minimum wage jobs while they go to college." Paul demonstrates that his family has to work hard to get by just like everyone else; this indicates to the audience that Paul understands their frustrations about unemployment. Paul may be wealthier than the average American, but he does not give off this impression. Instead, Paul demonstrates that he knows how vital it is to have a job and the frustrations which come with not being employed and not being able to support your family. Paul understands not only the audience's worry about the economy, but he also understands how the economy works. Paul wants to help the audience find jobs and thereby better the economy in America, something which Paul appears to have the

knowledge and capability of doing.

Paul also paints himself as a family man who wants to make sure his own family and the public, as his extended family, understands the value in working. Within his speech, Paul says that he is proud of his sons, “as I see them realize the value of hard work.” Paul expresses that he believes it is important for his children to work and understand the value in it. Since Paul wants his own children to understand the value of work, it stands to reason that this is an important value to Paul and that he would want the same for all Americans. When Paul brings up his family, he makes himself appear as a fatherly figure who cares about the American people achieving their own success. While Paul wants everyone in America to achieve success, he talks more specifically about the children in America. In fact, Paul states that, “I want all our children to have the same opportunities that I had.” One of these opportunities which Paul had was to work in various job positions. Paul thinks it is highly important to understand the value of hard work, and he wants to instill this ideal into not only his own children, but all children. By focusing on the children, Paul adds more power to the persona of the family man, as him being a fatherly figure to the American people. Although Paul may want the American people to understand the value of hard work, this cannot become a reality unless more opportunities are created for people to find jobs. As a fatherly figure, Paul will help the American citizens get back on their feet and watch them become successful and prosperous again.

Paul uses the emotions of anger and hope to make the audience aggravated with the current economic situation and hopeful for a positive change to this problem under his leadership. As has already been discussed, Paul points the blame of the issue of unemployment towards the government, specifically the Democratic Party. The statement Paul uses to frame the problem of unemployment also serves to evoke the emotion of anger. Paul causes the audience to

feel frustrated when he states that, “Liberal policies have failed our inner cities...the poverty gap continues to widen.” The use of the word “fail” implies that it is the government’s job to better the economy and create more opportunities and jobs for people to become employed. However, the government has, as Paul claims, “failed” to help the public in a time of need, to do the job they are supposed to do. This provokes the public to become aggravated with the government because they have not done their job, which is to better the economic situation of the American people and the nation itself. A phrase within this quote which would also evoke the emotion of anger is when Paul states that, “the poverty gap continues to widen.” The use of the word “widen” implies that there is already a poverty gap. Now, this problem is continuing to grow instead of being decreased or at the very least controlled. The words “poverty gap” reminds the audience that while a small percentage of people get wealthier, the general public remains in a position where many people are simply trying to make ends meet. This makes the emotion of anger resonate with the audience, causing the public to start to believe that a change in the government might be beneficial to them.

After causing the public to feel aggravated with the current government, Paul gives the audience hope by implying that things will change if he is elected president. Paul explains that he has, “...an ambitious vision, a vision that will offer opportunity to all Americans, especially those who have been left behind.” The word “ambitious” implies that Paul has large plans for America and its’ citizens to help better their economic situation. The fact that he has a “vision” gives the audience hope because this word indicates that Paul has ideas about how to fix this problem. Instead of wondering about how to fix the issue of unemployment, Paul will take this issue by the horns and begin to fix the problem right away. Paul also states that, “Although I was born into the America that experiences and believes in opportunity, my trips to Detroit, to

Appalachia, to Chicago have revealed what I call an undercurrent of unease.” Paul acknowledges that he has not had to live or experience firsthand the feelings of despair and anger which are present in areas where there is little opportunity for employment. However, Paul does explain that he understands that these areas are suffering and he would like to help these people get out of these unfortunate situations. Paul also lists a variety of cities, and this implies to the audience that Paul recognizes that unemployment is a problem everywhere. When Paul acknowledges this, it may make the audience feel hopeful that no matter where they are, he will try to improve their situation. Paul also states that, “Many Americans though are left behind. The reward of work seems beyond their grasp.” He recognizes that there are many citizens who do not seem to believe that they will find employment any time soon. Paul helps make the people who feel they have been left behind and ignored hopeful that they are finally going to be listened to and taken care of. Paul appeals to the general public on the issue of unemployment, giving everyone in his audience a sense of hope.

In his announcement speech, Paul positions himself as the strongest candidate on the issue of unemployment by framing it as a problem which has increased due to the actions of the Democratic Party. To gain support for this issue framing, Paul constructs his character as a hard-working family man and evokes the emotions of anger and hope in his audience. As has been demonstrated, there are various tools which candidates can and will use in order to make themselves and their ideals sound more appealing to voters. This is something which can be dangerous for the voter because a candidate might, with the power of language, convince the audience to support something which goes against their own beliefs. This is why it is important for the audience to look more closely at the language the candidates are using and determine what effect those words have on the audience. By doing so, the audience can ignore this

ornamented language and vote for the candidate which will truly represent their ideals best in the government.

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