

For the Children

✘ Access to information and the broad education of the public should mean that cheap stunts or manipulative ploys would be difficult to get away with. Well that certainly doesn't seem to be the case, as we saw one heart tugging attempt after another this week. At issue is the use of children to manipulate the public to your political advantage. The President of the United States, and the NYC bus driver's union both exploited children in their pitch for people to rally to their causes this week. It is amazing that this does not turn people against them, but it must be working on someone.

The President showed up at his much anticipated speech about gun control surrounded by children and their parents. These were children who had written letters saying they were scared in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shootings. Did he use this opportunity to point to things that have worked in the past to reduce gun violence? Is he pushing for something like concealed carry laws, which have reduced gun violence wherever they have been tried? No, he just wanted to borrow these children as background props for a speech used to badger congress to pass gun control legislation. It doesn't really matter that the laws he is pushing for have no proof of being successful in the past. He got a chance to stand in front of children, and look like he cares. Apparently this means that whatever he says will help the children.

The NYC school bus driver's union decided to outdo even the President in child exploitation. They are on strike because the mayor is going to put the contract for school bus driving out for bid. The city uses a private company for bus service, but has not put it out for bid since 1979. As part of the bid process the union wants the mayor to require that all bidders must honor the union contract. The mayor has refused, and the union has gone on strike. The drivers can apply for work at the company who wins the bid, and likely will, but may not get

the sweetheart contract they have currently. Of course the taxpayers and parents will benefit if the routes are more efficient and less expensive. It is a good guess that waiting 33 years before bidding out the work has led to some complacency. Mayor Bloomberg took the rare step of apologizing for not addressing this sooner, since he has been the mayor for 11 of the years.

The TV and radio ad being run by the union to try to rally support to their position is perhaps the most shameful use of children in a long time. The 30 second ad playing on local media has pictures of crashed buses, while a voice talks about how inexperienced drivers and "for profit" companies will put your children at risk. Also, in the background are children singing "the wheels on the bus". The ad is so despicable in so many ways. No one is calling for less qualified drivers. In fact, there is nothing keeping the possible new company from hiring all existing drivers. The current company who the drivers work for is "for profit", and private already! The ad is basically laying out the case for 'no change or your children will die', and it is probably just a coincidence that this sounds like blackmail.

Whenever someone advocating a position is surrounded by children or invokes "protecting the children", we should all know that the manure is about to start flowing and run to turn off the broadcast. If their argument could stand on its own merits, they wouldn't need the children. We live in the age of communication, with more outlets for information than ever before. This type of sideshow pitch should not work with today's highly educated, highly informed public. This tactic is as common as ever, so it must work. Otherwise, why would they continue to do it?