

# In the **PublicInterest**

*A Comprehensive Resource Center on Privatization and Responsible Contracting*

**July 19, 2013**

*"We are privatizing ourselves into one disaster after another. We've privatized a lot of what our military is doing. We've privatized a lot of what our intelligence agencies are doing. We've privatized our very prison system in many parts of the country. We're privatizing the health system within those prisons. And it's not working well."*

[Ted Koppel on National Public Radio's "Fresh Air", 6/27/13](#)

Veteran newsman Ted Koppel was reflecting on the national conversation stimulated by whistleblower Edward Snowden about government surveillance and the [perils of out of control government outsourcing](#). The same lack of transparency, accountability and oversight also threatens public services in state and local governments across the country. There are lots of examples including: a 75-year long parking meter contract in Chicago that forces taxpayers to pay Wall Street investors to hold street fairs; bed guarantees in state contracts with for-profit prison companies; and outsourcing the management of toll roads in deals lasting as long as 99 years preventing local governments from improving the condition of nearby roads.

Earlier this month, In the Public Interest (ITPI) launched a proactive program to expose the privatization of public services and infrastructure as an assault on American democracy and open a new discussion about the vital role of government and public institutions. A centerpiece of our plan is the [Taxpayer Empowerment Agenda](#), a transparency, accountability and responsible contracting policy agenda we'll be introducing in cities and states across the nation.

The Agenda is an [11-point package](#) of policy proposals including requiring any company paid with tax dollars to open its books and meetings to the public (just as public agencies do), requiring companies that receive public contracts to pay a living wage with reasonable benefits, and banning language that promises profits even if public services are no longer needed.

ITPI announced the plan during a tele-briefing on June 2nd, along with Chicago Alderman Roderick Sawyer (Ward 6), former State Senator Paula Dockery (R-FL), and Katherine McFate, President of the Center for Effective Government.

Last year, Senator Dockery helped defeat Governor Rick Scott's proposal to privatize prisons in 18 Florida counties. She said, "Outsourcing our most vital public services like corrections, roads, schools shouldn't be about left versus right, it should be about right versus wrong."

Alderman Sawyer has already introduced legislation to protect taxpayers from future parking contract disasters. "[The parking meter contract] was a bad deal and has tied the hands of taxpayers ever since," [said](#) Sawyer.

Katherine McFate summed up the challenge to democracy. "You can't vote the president of the private water company out of office if the service is bad and the bills get outrageous."

You'll be hearing more from us in the coming months about the Taxpayer Empowerment Agenda and as we roll out some new projects. And of course, we always want to hear from you and your stories on how outsourcing is affecting the community you live in and ways we can help, so please find us and like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/InThePublicInterest](http://www.facebook.com/InThePublicInterest) or tweet us at [@PubInterest](https://twitter.com/PubInterest).

*Sincerely,*

*Donald Cohen*