

Former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer is helping families, educating governments and hopefully winning championships

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By Pete DeLaunay

President Mark described the day's main program speaker, former Microsoft CEO, Steve Ballmer, as a 'energy drink in human form' during an introduction that touched on Mr. Ballmer's 34+ years at Microsoft as employee #30. His remarks on this day focused on the non-profit [Ballmer Group](#), which aims to help increase the economic viability of families in need, and [USA FACTS](#), which he founded to source data points on government spending for better outcomes. And, of course, some discussion about his ownership of the Los Angeles Clippers' NBA basketball team.



Mr. Ballmer was interviewed by Geekwire co-founder and editor, Todd Bishop, who began by asking him about his 'portfolio of life' following his years at Microsoft. "I have more control over my time now than I ever did at Microsoft," Mr. Ballmer said, "with emphasis on golf, recreation and about 700 hours a year with the Clippers – so going to games is a fun way to work."

His philanthropic work at the Ballmer group leans to working on ways to provide better opportunities for kids born into the toughest circumstances. His work with USA FACTS uses data points to learn how effectively government is spending tax money on programs to help people.



He launched USA FACTS "to put data out there so people could make their own judgments" about what is working and what is not. He characterized the USA population of about 330 million as "shareholders" and taxpayers as the "customer".

Data assimilated by USA FACTS focuses on many areas. For example, the latest government overture to improve infrastructure

may not be of greatest need based on facts. He cited several ways infrastructure has improved over the past 37 years including better roads, bridges and generally flat commute times. Improvements in the criminal justice system may be more important, such as decriminalizing minor offenses and adding more jail time for more serious offenses.



He pointed out how difficult it is for children from low income families to move up in the world when they are held back by so many factors that are out of their control. "This isn't okay as everybody should have a shot," he said, "but the solution must come from communities, government and the capitalism that creates new jobs while driving down the cost of goods."

Regarding tax reform, he said it is important to know who pays for what with the bulk of taxes paid by top income earners. Based on USA FACTS data, those who make \$113K per year are among the top 20% of income earners.

When asked about the difference in leadership between Microsoft and owning the L.A. Clippers, Mr. Ballmer said "business claims to be accountable, but in sports you win or lose and the game is over." He said the fans send detailed recommendations about what he should or should not do, and that winning games is not identical to winning championships.

In terms of an NBA team in Seattle, he made it clear that the Clippers were not moving to Seattle and that losing the Sonics to Oklahoma came as a result of failure on many fronts. "The City of Seattle blew it, I was part of blowing it, our community didn't do what it needed to do and the team's owner at the time blew it," he said. "A team will eventually come to Seattle because of its affluence, and a new accessible arena – Seattle is the most affluent city in the U.S. that does not have an NBA team."



During a spirited Q&A session Mr. Ballmer said government can provide money but it takes the community to provide solutions. "Nobody has a magic answer to find a way for impoverished children to succeed since multiple things are impacting them," he said. "If you grow up hungry, it won't work; if your eyesight is poor it won't work; if your housing is not stable and you live in

fear from drive by shootings, it won't work." These issues come from struggling parents he concluded and "it's not fair for kids not to have a chance".

He rhetorically asked how government could do its work better by partnering with communities that want to come together to solve real problems – not just build a theory.

President Mark opened the meeting with George Twiss leading the day's timely invocation that gave some definition to the #MeToo movement as a precursor to next week's meeting. He was followed by Todd Summerfelt & the Rotary Rogues with the day's anthem, "This land is your land". Joel Paget introduced new member Paul Tsai, classification Financial Services - Real Estate. Joe Phillips introduced new member Charlie Farra, classification Real Estate - Tenant Advisory Services.

