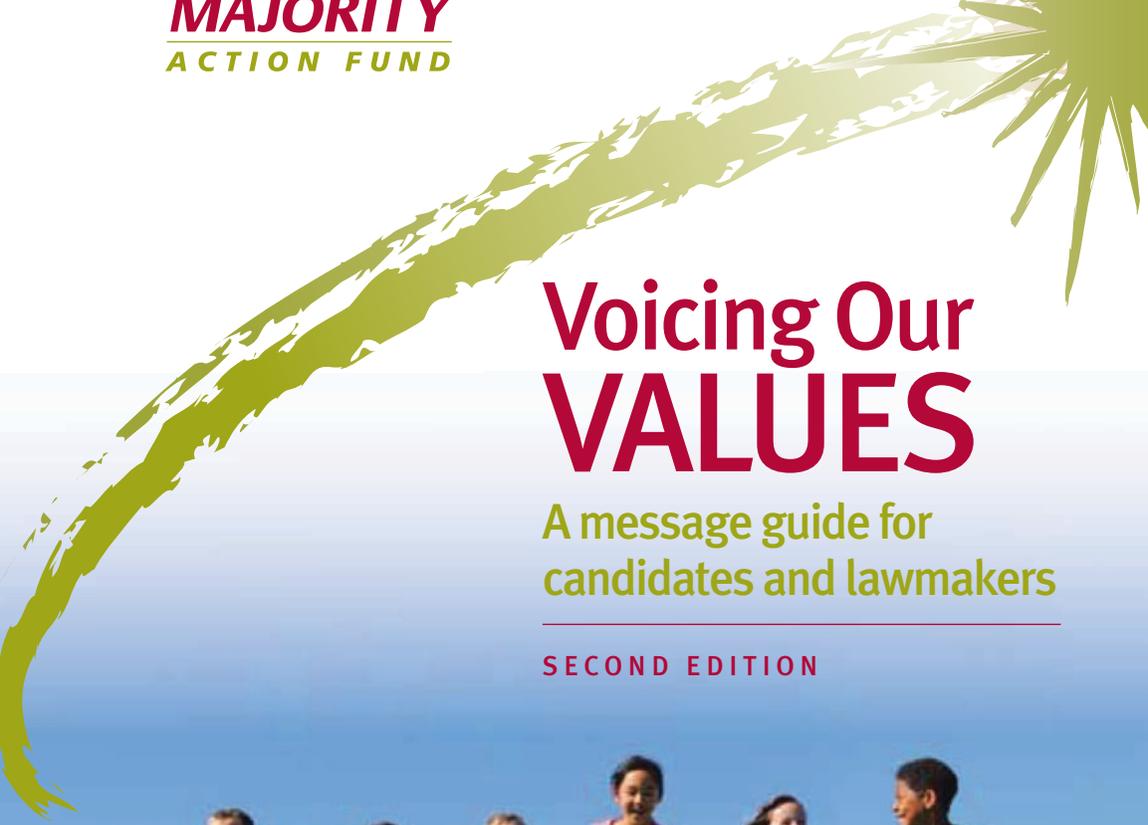




**PROGRESSIVE
MAJORITY**
ACTION FUND



Voicing Our VALUES

A message guide for
candidates and lawmakers

SECOND EDITION



BERNIE HORN AND GLORIA TOTTEN

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by Bernie Horn and Gloria Totten

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www.progressivemajorityaction.org

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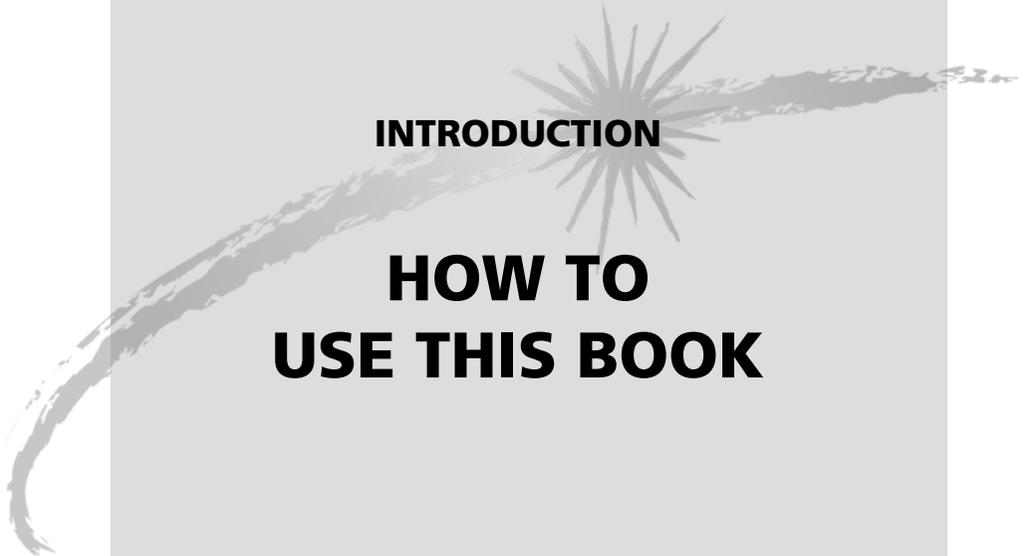
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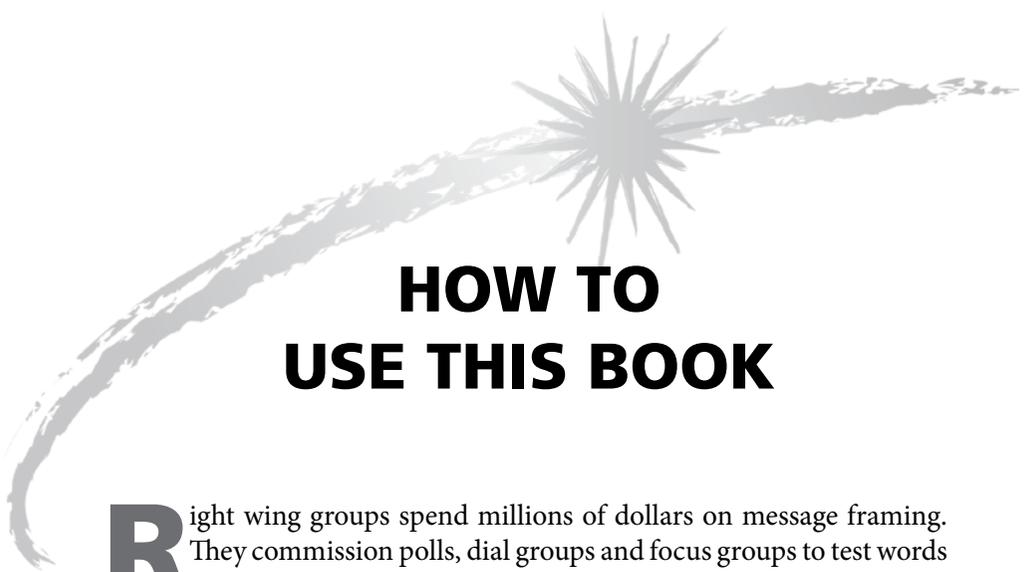
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:	How to Use This Book	1
SECTION ONE:	How to Persuade	5
SECTION TWO:	How to Talk About Economic Fairness	15
SECTION THREE:	How to Talk About Basic Campaign Issues . . .	23
	Budgets and Taxes	25
	Climate Change	31
	Criminal Justice	36
	Education	38
	Environment	42
	Government, Regulation and Social Services .	44
	Gun Violence	48
	Health Care for All	56
	Immigrants	60
	LGBT Rights	65
	Medicaid Expansion	70
	Minimum Wage	74
	Reproductive Health	78
	Tobacco	88
	Torts and Civil Justice	90
	Voting	92
SECTION FOUR:	How to Talk About Partisans, Politics and Values	97
	How to Talk About Ourselves	99
	How to Talk About the Opposition	101
	How to Talk About Progressive Values	104
SECTION FIVE:	How to Answer Twenty Tough Questions . . .	109
SECTION SIX:	How to Communicate Effectively	121
SECTION SEVEN:	How to Create a Campaign Theme and Deliver It	133
ENDNOTES	143
INDEX	153
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	159
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	161



INTRODUCTION

**HOW TO
USE THIS BOOK**



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Right wing groups spend millions of dollars on message framing. They commission polls, dial groups and focus groups to test words and phrases, and then distribute their poll-tested advice to candidates, interest groups and activists. The right wing persistently repeats that language, such as: activist judges, class warfare, death panels, death tax, exploring for energy (instead of drilling), government-run health insurance, job creators, job killer, nanny state, personal injury lawyer, tax relief, union boss and values voter.

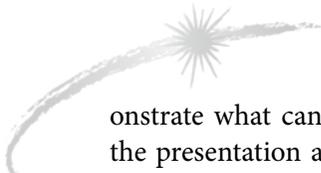
Progressives, on the other hand, don't receive much practical advice. So we tend to use the same language to communicate with voters that we use to talk with each other. That's a mistake because persuadable voters aren't like us. They're the citizens least interested in politics and least

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aware of the facts behind public policy. Persuadables simply don't speak our language.

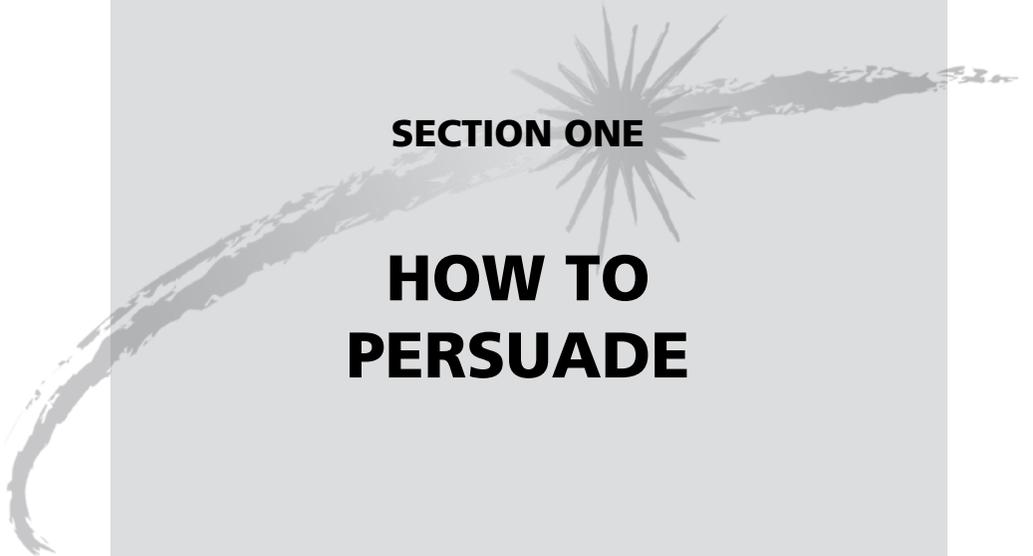
The solution is to frame the issues that are most important to them in language that appeals to them. The way to know these voters' interests and preferred language is through public opinion research. Good message framing requires good polling. It is important to note that using polls does not mean that progressives should moderate ideology, sell out, or sink to the lowest common denominator. Polls don't tell you what to stand for; they identify where to begin the conversation with voters. Most of the messaging advice here is based on work by one of the best progressive pollsters in America, Celinda Lake.

Throughout this book, we place suggested language inside boxes to dem-



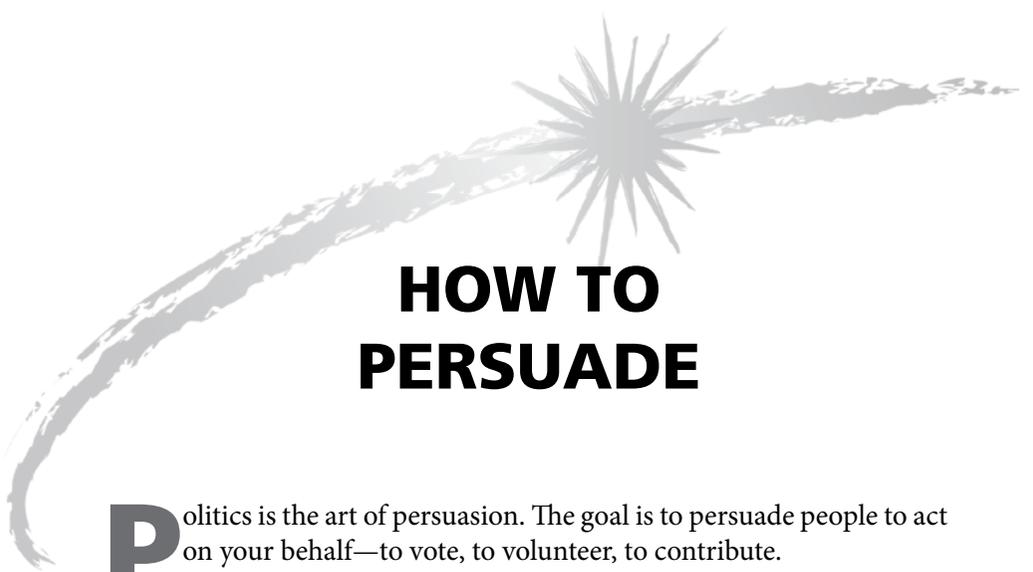
onstrate what candidates should and shouldn't say. We hope it makes the presentation as easy to use as possible. As long as you understand the reasons behind these words and phrases, we encourage you to adapt them to your own voice. After all, you are promoting yourself—your values, your vision, your commitment. Make the language authentically yours, fully integrated with the knowledge and personal history you offer to voters. Similarly, when given the opportunity, you should add specific examples that personalize the issues; tell a story that helps voters picture the problems you seek to address and the solutions you propose.

Message framing is not a silver bullet; it's just one political tool among many. But because there are so many close campaign battles, a little better messaging could make a big difference in our fight for economic and social justice.



SECTION ONE

**HOW TO
PERSUADE**



HOW TO PERSUADE

Politics is the art of persuasion. The goal is to persuade people to act on your behalf—to vote, to volunteer, to contribute.

Even though persuasion is central to political success, progressives rarely talk about how to do it better. That’s the point of this book. It suggests how candidates, lawmakers and allies can improve the way they talk about a wide range of issues, from the economy, healthcare and immigrants’ rights, to marriage equality, reproductive rights and gun violence. But no matter the issue, there are three basic principles that make any argument more persuasive.

First, always begin in agreement with your audience.

It is extremely rare, in the short term, to change anyone’s belief. Everyone has biases, stereotypes, and other preconceptions that they carry around in their heads. When a new “fact” doesn’t fit people’s preexisting beliefs, they are almost certain to reject the fact, not their preconceptions.

The goal is...to show them that they agree with you already.

So to persuade, you have to find a point of agreement and work from there. You need to provide your audience with a bridge from their preconceptions to your solutions. The goal is not to change people’s minds, it is to show them that they agree with you already. The way to begin is by expressing empathy and shared values.

The most direct and essential method of connecting with voters is to empathize. Demonstrate that you understand their problems and concerns. Voters quite reasonably conclude that you can’t fix their problems if you can’t understand them.



Before you make your pitch, find out what voters think. If you're walking door-to-door or talking to individuals one-on-one, ask them what the community needs to fix. If you're speaking at a meeting, find out the audience's concerns ahead of time. And obviously, if you're paying for mass media, research public opinion first.

You never have to compromise your political principles to demonstrate empathy. Rather, you need to search for some element of the debate where you sincerely agree. For example:

- If a voter complains about taxes (even in a conservative fashion), agree that our tax system is unfair.
- If the voter worries about government budgets (even when there's really no problem), agree that our government has an obligation to be careful with taxpayer money.
- If the voter is concerned about crime (even in a very low-crime community), agree that personal safety must be a top priority for the government.
- If the voter thinks the neighborhood is going downhill (even when that doesn't seem to be the case), agree that we need to preserve the quality of life.

Start any political conversation this way, and then reinforce your empathy with shared values.

In politics, values are ideals that describe the kind of society we are trying to build. The stereotypical conservative values are small government, low taxes, free markets, strong military and traditional families. It is important to understand that these oversimplified conservative values are extremely popular, and too often progressives have no effective response.

Here's how progressives can answer. When you're talking about an issue where government has no proper role—like free speech, privacy, reproductive health or religion—declare your commitment to *freedom* or use a similar value from the chart below. When you discuss an issue where government should act as a referee between competing interests—like court proceedings, wages, benefits, subsidies, taxes or education—explain that your position is based on *opportunity* or a value from that column. When you argue about an issue where government should act as a protector—like crime, retirement, health care, zoning or the environment—stand for *security* or a similar value.

Say . . .

Freedom

or similar values:



- Liberty
- Privacy
- Basic rights
- Fundamental rights
- Religious freedom

Opportunity

or similar values:



- Equal opportunity
- Justice; equal justice
- Fairness; fair share
- Level playing field
- Every American

Security

or similar values:



- Safety; protection
- Quality of life
- Employment security
- Retirement security
- Health security

You can also put these values together and say you stand for “freedom, opportunity and security for all,” a progressive statement of values that polls very well. But more important, it’s an accurate and politically potent description of what we stand for. The right wing favors these principles for some—the affluent. Progressives insist on providing freedom, opportunity and security to each and every American. (For a more detailed discussion of freedom, opportunity and security, see p. 103.)

Empathy and values alone can win over persuadable voters. Let’s say you are a candidate for state legislature and you are asked what you’re going to do to clean up the stream that runs through that neighborhood. Let’s also say it’s not really the state legislature’s job; it’s the county or city that has jurisdiction over the stream.

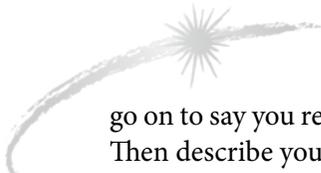
A typical progressive candidate would launch into an explanation of the clean water legislation he or she supports. A particularly inept candidate might say the stream is the responsibility of the city or county and there’s little the state can do. A good candidate would start with empathy:

Say . . .

It’s a terrible shame that our stream has deteriorated like that. It’s unsafe, it’s unhealthy, it’s wrong for our community.

Why . . .

That’s what the voter already thinks and it’s easy to make a connection by agreeing wholeheartedly. Note that you should call it *our* stream and *our* community, even when you live in a different neighborhood. If you can,



go on to say you remember what the stream was like when it was healthy. Then describe your positive values, your goals:

Say . . .

I'm running for office because I want to fight for cleaner streams and safer parklands. I'm going to work to protect the quality of life in our community.

Why . . .

These are values that you share with every voter: *cleaner, safer*, and a better *quality of life*. At this point you are welcome to explain your clean water legislation, but keep it simple; you have probably already won that vote. A persuadable voter is listening for one thing, really: Is this candidate on my side? You've already proven that you are.

Every time you have the opportunity to speak to a persuadable audience, don't forget to express empathy and values. This is especially true when you are asked a question because that person is focused on what you are saying. Even if the listener disagrees with your policy solution, you might very well win his or her vote if you have made clear that you share the same concerns and are trying to achieve the same goals. Again, that's what persuadable voters want to hear—that you are on their side.

Second, show your audience how they benefit.

Progressives favor policies that benefit society at large. We want to help the underdog. We wish that a majority of Americans were persuaded, as we are, by appeals to the common good. But they aren't.

In fact, it's quite difficult to convince persuadable voters to support a policy that appears to benefit people *other than* themselves, their families and their friends. Celinda Lake, one of our movement's very best pollsters, explains that "our culture is very, very individualistic." When faced with a proposed government policy, "people look for themselves in the proposal. People want to know what the proposal will do for me and to me."

That means, whenever possible, you need to show voters that they personally benefit from your progressive policies. This may sometimes be a challenge. For example, if you're arguing for programs that benefit people in poverty, do not focus on the way your proposal directly helps the

poor, instead highlight the way it indirectly benefits the middle class. Persuadable voters are rarely in poverty themselves and they will relate better to an argument framed toward them.

For example, when arguing for Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, say something like:

Say . . .

It will benefit *everyone*. It will energize our local economy and create thousands of new jobs. It will save millions in taxpayer dollars that are currently spent treating uninsured people in emergency rooms. And it will help our own hard-working families and friends who are hurting in this economic downturn.

Or when you argue for an increase in the minimum wage:

Say . . .

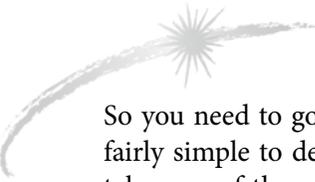
Raising the minimum wage puts money in the pockets of hard-working Americans who will spend it on the things they need. This, in turn, generates business for our economy and eases the burden on taxpayer-funded services. It's a win-win. Raising the minimum wage helps build an economy that works for everyone.

Why . . .

Every progressive policy benefits the middle class, often directly but at least indirectly. In contrast, nearly every right wing policy hurts the middle class, even if it more directly hurts the poor. Since persuadable voters want to know how policies affect them personally, you must tell them.

That does not mean you can explain your positions without mentioning program beneficiaries. In fact, the examples above mention them. The important thing is to connect with persuadable voters and frame the beneficiaries, in one way or another, as deserving.

Americans are not very kind to the poor. Outside of the progressive base, a lot of voters assume that people in poverty did something wrong: they didn't study in school, did drugs, got arrested, got pregnant, or something else. Voters who are not poor think, "I didn't get government assistance," (even when they did) "so why should they?" They think the poor need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.



So you need to go out of your way to describe them as deserving. It is fairly simple to defend aid to children because they cannot reasonably take care of themselves. This is also true of some elderly and disabled Americans, and voters are generally sympathetic when they are the beneficiaries. But when program recipients are able-bodied adults, suggest that they are hard-working and/or supporting families. Bill Clinton's steady repetition of "work hard and play by the rules" was designed to communicate that a program's beneficiaries are deserving of assistance, and that phrase still works.

Third, speak their language, not ours.

Persuadable voters aren't like partisan activists. They don't pay much attention to politics, public policy or political news. They don't understand political ideologies. They don't care a lot who wins elections. In general, they're the citizens who are least interested in politics. After all, with America's highly polarized parties, anyone who pays attention has already taken a side.

Too many facts and figures mean your argument will fall on deaf ears.

In talking to these less-enlightened and less-interested fellow citizens, candidates and lawmakers tend to make three mistakes.

(1) Progressives often rely on facts instead of values to persuade. Advocates will pack a speech with alarming

facts and figures like: "50 million Americans are uninsured;" or "one in five children live in poverty;" or "32 million Americans have been victims of racial profiling." When you speak this way, you are assuming that listeners would be persuaded—and policy would change—if only everybody knew what you know.

But that's not how it works. Facts, by themselves, don't persuade. Statistics especially must be used sparingly or listeners will just go away confused. Your argument should be built upon ideas and values that the persuadable voters already hold dear. A few well-placed facts will help illustrate why the progressive solution is essential. Too many facts and figures mean your argument will fall on deaf ears.

(2) Progressives often use insider language instead of plain English. Incumbents especially tend to speak the technical language of lobbying and passing legislation. Insiders carry on a never-ending conversation about bills from the past, measures under consideration and current law.

You probably realize that Americans don't know anything about CBO scoring or Third Reader or the Rules Committee. But average voters also don't know an amendment from a filibuster. Insiders tend to use abbreviations freely, like ENDA for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act or TABOR when talking about a Taxpayer Bill of Rights. They refer to SB 234, paygo requirements, the ag community and the Akaka amendment. It's a tough habit to break.

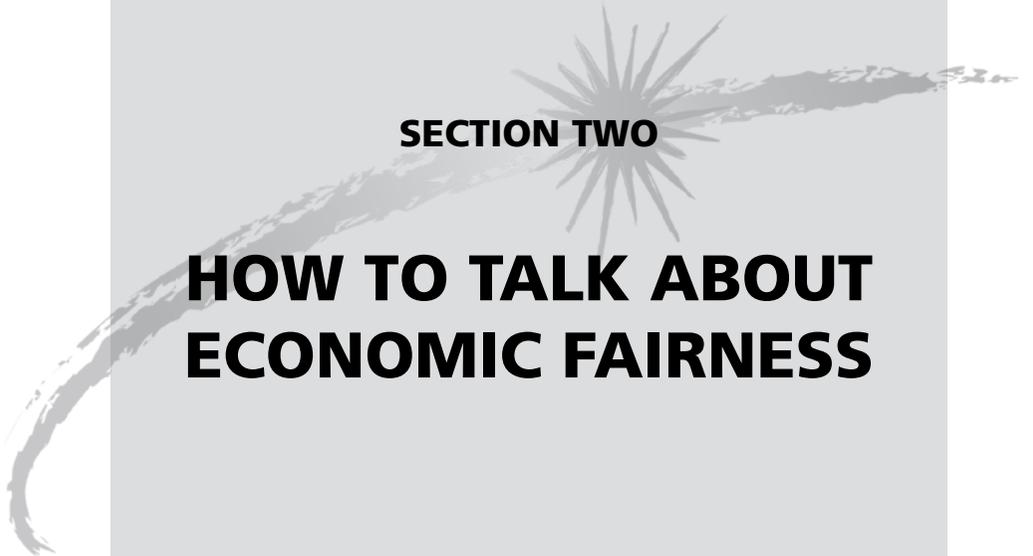
You need to accept persuadable voters as they are, not as you wish they were.

Insider jargon serves a useful purpose. It is shorthand—it allows those who understand the shorthand to communicate more efficiently. But it

is also a way to be exclusive, to separate insiders from nonmembers of the club. That's exactly why such language is pernicious; you can't expect persuadable voters to understand a language that was designed, in part, to exclude them.

(3) Progressives often use ideological language even though persuadables are the opposite of ideologues. You should not complain of *corporate greed* because Americans don't have a problem with corporations. You should not say *capitalism* or any *ism* because most Americans don't relate to ideology. And please don't say *neo-* or *crypto-* anything. Like technical policy language, ideological language is a form of shorthand. But to persuadable voters, this just sounds like the speaker isn't one of them.

You need to accept persuadable voters as they are, not as you wish they were. They don't necessarily know what you know or believe what you believe. And yet, if you empathize with persuadable voters and use language they understand, you have the upper hand in any argument. Progressive policies benefit nearly all Americans, the 99 percent. Progressive values reflect the aspirations of the vast majority of our fellow citizens. You're absolutely on the voters' side. You simply need to sharpen your persuasion skills a bit so they will understand and believe that.



SECTION TWO

**HOW TO TALK ABOUT
ECONOMIC FAIRNESS**



HOW TO TALK ABOUT ECONOMIC FAIRNESS

Every winning campaign needs a compelling theme that acts as the central guiding principle for all communications. It's your elevator speech. It illustrates the clear contrast between you and your opponent. It answers the question "Why are you running?" In various forms, this is the argument that should be repeated to voters in campaign literature, speeches, debates, media appearances, fundraising appeals and even signs and bumper stickers. It takes hard work to develop a great theme. It depends on the specific nuances of the candidate's background, the opponent's record and voters' top concerns.

We believe that, for the foreseeable future, most progressive general election campaigns should incorporate an economic fairness theme. This is usually the most powerful contrast between progressive and conservative opponents—essentially that we side with the middle class while they side with the rich. Such a populist message works in almost any winnable jurisdiction or election district as long as it is presented in language that voters understand and appreciate.

If your campaign theme is based on economic fairness then your argument might be something like this:

Say . . .

Our economy is a wreck. To fix it, our policies must benefit all the people, not just the richest one percent. Our system works when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share and everyone plays by the same rules. My opponent's policies are not fair; they rig the system to benefit the rich over the rest of us. My policies would ensure that every American who works hard and plays by the rules has the opportunity to live the American Dream.



Why . . .

Persuadable voters believe in a series of stereotypes about progressives and conservatives. You need to focus on and reinforce assumptions that help the progressive side. In economic policy, persuadable voters like the concept of a conservative who supports low taxes and free markets. But they also believe that today's conservative candidates favor the rich rather than the middle class. At the same time, persuadable voters like a progressive who fights for economic fairness. But they also believe that liberal candidates favor the poor rather than the middle class.

So, pretty obviously, you need to emphasize conservatives' support for the rich and progressives' support for the middle class, while at the same time, de-emphasize your advocacy for the poor. That does not mean you should lessen your commitment to fight poverty or move your policies to the right, it means focus attention on the fact that your economic policies benefit the middle class while conservative policies don't.

The monologue above uses simple, non-ideological language to express that idea. The first sentence is a generic expression of empathy. If you know something more specific about your audience's economic woes, use it. You should assume your voters think the economy is worse than the national economic data suggest; do not imply that the economy is okay because you're likely to get a very angry response.

The sentence "everyone gets a fair shot ..." is an effective description of progressive economic values. It was used successfully in President Obama's reelection campaign and it remains popular. Emphasize that what differentiates you from conservative opponents is that their policies primarily benefit the richest one percent; yours benefit the rest of Americans, the 99 percent. Polls show this populist message works. Here's another version of the same theme:

Or say . . .

Our economy is upside down. The majority of America is in recession but the richest one percent is doing better than ever. We need an economy that works for Main Street, not Wall Street. I want to ensure that every hardworking American can earn a decent living, afford high-quality health care, get a great education for their children, and retire with security. My opponent's policies support the rich, mine support the rest of us.

Why . . .

Why do these messages keep referring to “my opponent’s policies”? It’s not enough to say what you will do; you must also draw a contrast between yourself and your opponent. But keep the focus on his/her policies. Voters don’t like personal attacks.

Just as you shouldn’t sound too personal, don’t sound anti-capitalistic. Most voters believe that “free enterprise has done more to lift people out of poverty, help build a strong middle class, and make our lives better than all of the government’s programs put together.” So don’t attack capitalism, indict economic unfairness.

More specifically:

Don’t say . . .

- Corporations/businesses are bad
- Anything negative about small business

Say . . .

- Wall Street speculators
- Unfair breaks and bailouts to Wall Street, giant banks, and major corporations
- Anything positive about Main Street

Why . . .

Voters feel positive toward corporations and businesses—most work for one. Voters believe that businesses create jobs and right now America needs more jobs. Americans especially adore the concept of Main Street. And as pollster Celinda Lake says, “Americans are in love with ‘small business.’ It’s a concept that voters see as almost synonymous with America.” By small business, they mean family-run businesses with five or perhaps 10 employees.

Don’t say . . .

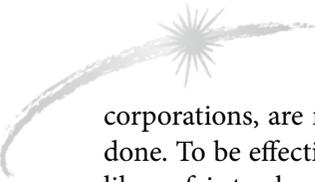
- Income inequality
- Economic disparity

Say . . .

- Richest one percent, the other 99 percent
- Economic injustice or unfairness
- The disappearing middle class

Why . . .

By all means use the populist language of the 99 percent and the top one percent, but understand that the rich or wealthy, or the major banks and



corporations, are not unpopular for who they are, but for what they've done. To be effective, you need to connect the bad guy to the bad deed, like unfair tax breaks, moving jobs overseas, accepting bailouts, or paying outrageous CEO bonuses. Americans don't begrudge the wealthy their money and they expect some to earn more than others. It's not income inequality that voters oppose, it is economic injustice, economic unfairness and people who cheat or rig the system.

Don't say . . .

- Capitalism
- Free markets, free enterprise, free trade

Say . . .

- The economic system isn't working for the 99 percent
- Level playing field, fair markets, fair trade
- Rigging the rules, gaming the system
- Stacking the deck
- An economy that works for all of us

Why . . .

If you attack the market system, you will marginalize yourself. In addition, there are a lot of economic phrases that, in the minds of most Americans, may mean something different from what you intend. Don't say *capitalism*, *socialism*, or *fascism* because the far-right has succeeded in confusing voters about their meaning. Don't use the phrases *free markets* or *free enterprise* because they trigger in voters' heads positive thoughts about conservative economics.

And yet, you need to explicitly support a fair market system. You need to draw a distinction between conservative anything-goes economics and a progressive system that enforces basic rules-of-the-road to level the playing field and keep markets honest and fair for everyone.

The argument for capitalism is that by harnessing individuals' economic drive, all of society is enriched by their hard work and innovation. Progressives are for that. But society does not win—in fact, it loses—when people get rich by gaming the system, by exploiting tax or regulatory loopholes, by dismantling viable companies, or by creating scams that aren't technically illegal but should be.

Conservatives relentlessly warp markets to benefit the rich and powerful. They use subsidies, loopholes, trade policy, labor law and economic complexity to corrupt markets. It is progressives who seek to build *fair* markets. Help voters visualize such a system.

Say . . .

We need an economy that's fair to everyone. That means structuring a system that not only rewards people for hard work and innovation, but also discourages people from gaming the system or passing costs to the community. We need rules of the road that make economic competition fair and open and honest. My opponent wants to tilt the playing field even further in favor of the rich, draining more and more money out of our communities. I will work to ensure that everyone gets a fair shot, does their fair share, and plays by the same fair rules. A fair market system will energize our economy, create jobs and allow everyone who works hard and acts responsibly to live the American Dream.

Why . . .

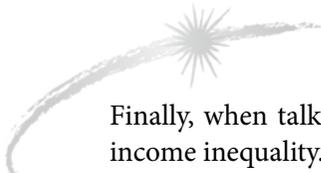
The monologues above rely on the concept of the American Dream. This is an important form of shorthand in our nation's politics. Everyone who is running for office should be able to describe the American Dream in glowing terms. It is a positive way to talk about inequality, and it allows you to pull your audience deep into progressive economic values.

Say . . .

I'm running because I want every American to have the opportunity to live the American Dream. That means a good job that fully supports your family. It means high quality, affordable health insurance. It means the chance to buy a home, if that's what you want. It means your children and grandchildren are well-educated in grade school and you can afford to send them to college. It means you retire with economic security, knowing that you are passing an even better America to the next generation.

Why . . .

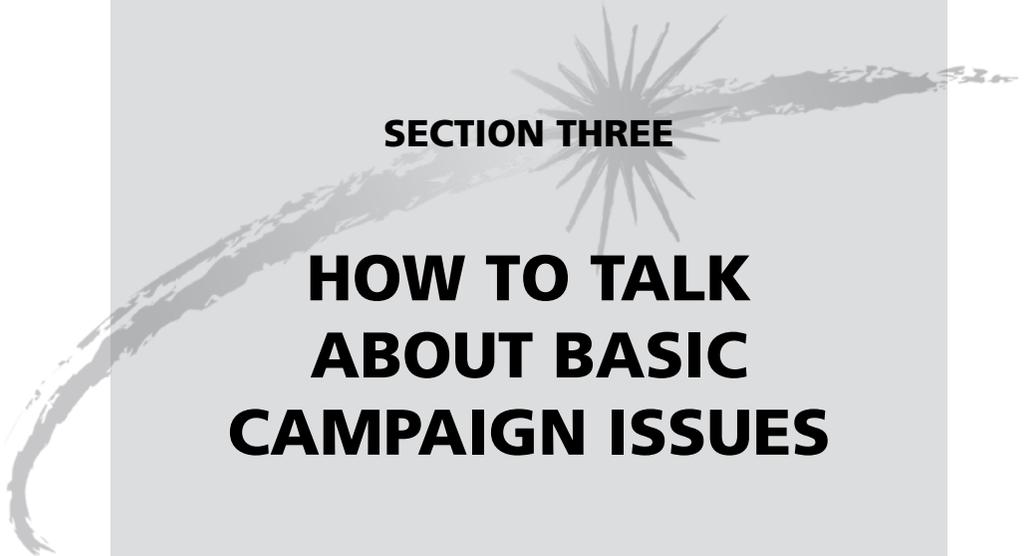
When you talk about the American Dream—fair pay, health insurance, homeownership, education, retirement security—it provides the opportunity to explain that none of this is possible without a change in direction. It lays out an overarching goal; only progressive policy will ever get us any closer to turning that Dream into reality.



Finally, when talking about economics, don't limit the conversation to income inequality. In our country the biggest inequalities involve assets.

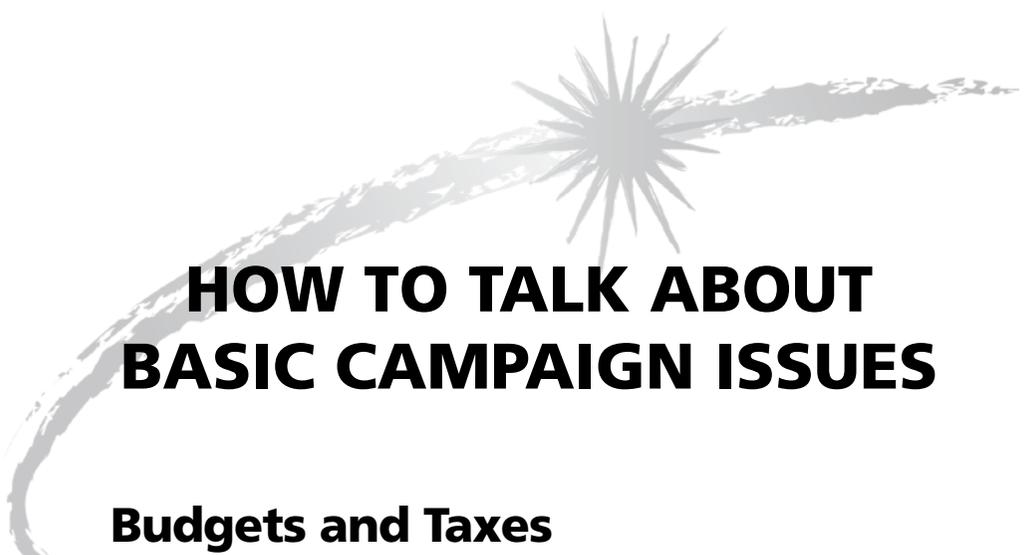
Say . . .

Our economic system should reward hard work and innovation. That's the American way. But right now the richest one percent in America own over one-third of all the combined wealth in our country—stocks, bonds, businesses, real estate, cars, jewelry. The richest five percent own nearly two-thirds of all the wealth. The rich don't need more subsidies and loopholes. They need to pay their fair share.



SECTION THREE

**HOW TO TALK
ABOUT BASIC
CAMPAIGN ISSUES**



HOW TO TALK ABOUT BASIC CAMPAIGN ISSUES

Budgets and Taxes

Persuadable voters are extremely conflicted about budget and tax issues. First the bad news: According to the Gallup poll, Americans think that on the federal level 50 cents of every tax dollar is wasted, on the state level 42 cents is wasted, and on the local level 37 cents is wasted. Remarkably, independent voters think more money is wasted than voters in the Republican base. Not coincidentally, most voters are wildly misinformed about how much governments spend on specific programs, especially for the social safety net.

But there's also good news: When named program-by-program, with just a few small exceptions (such as federal foreign aid), Americans favor spending more rather than less. They understand we need to spend more for schools, roads, health care and environmental protection—and they know we need to spend less on subsidies and tax loopholes for the rich and special interests. About two-thirds of Americans think that the rich and large corporations are paying too little in taxes.

These conflicting beliefs mean that message framing is especially important when talking about budgets and taxes.

Don't say . . .

- You favor more spending without being very specific about the program
- You favor higher taxes without being very specific that your policy targets the very rich who aren't paying their fair share

Say . . .

- Tax/budget fairness or justice
- A level playing field for everyone
- A tax/budget system that works for all of us
- Rigging the rules, gaming the system, stacking the deck



Why . . .

Voters are for tax and budget *fairness*, and so are you. There are a number of phrases that express the idea of fairness, listed above. Whatever you do, express your goal early and often in the conversation—without an expression of progressive values, voters may think conservative policies are the fair ones.

Right wingers try to blame tax and budget problems on the poor, immigrants, government employees or penny-ante cheaters. Voters are perfectly willing to embrace that narrative. It is your job to direct attention to the real problem—that wealthy individuals and big corporations have rigged budgets and taxes on all levels of government in order to further enrich themselves. While arguing for fairness, you need to be explicit in explaining that your policies are designed to take a system that is stacked in favor of the rich and make it more equitable for middle class Americans.

In general, this is what you should say:

Say . . .

Our tax and budget policies must be fair to everyone. The fact is, my opponent's policies are not fair; they rig the system to benefit the rich over the rest of us. I will work to ensure that everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules.

Why . . .

This short narrative begins and ends with the value of fairness. It distinguishes you from your conservative opponent and it ties the fairness problem to the rich.

Specifically about state and local budgets

Don't say . . .

- There is enough money
- Investments

Say . . .

- There are real limits on what our state/city/county can spend
- I support a responsible, balanced budget
- Let's strengthen the state/local economy for the long term
- A plan for our future

Why . . .

No matter the actual situation in your local jurisdiction, voters remain worried about budget deficits and government debt. You must acknowledge that you share those concerns and pledge to support a reasonable, balanced budget. At the same time, voters understand that radical cuts are shortsighted and the prudent course is to “strengthen the state/local economy for the long term.” Voters do not respond well to the claim that “there is enough money” to fund new programs. Voters believe governments face very real limits on what they can or should spend, and language that seems to imply a desire to write blank checks will undercut your message.

Talking about budget expenditures as a series of *investments* doesn’t work because it makes voters think they are consumers of government who should get a personal rather than a community return on that investment. But you can use a related concept—talking about a budget as a plan or blueprint for our future.

Say . . .

Our state/city/county has no money to waste. I will pinch every penny I can to help craft a balanced budget that’s fair to everyone. But remember, a budget is a plan for our future. It’s about what we need to spend today in order to build a better tomorrow. So I’m going to look for solutions that build our state/local economy for the long term. My opponent calls for extreme cuts, which over time will benefit the rich and hurt all the rest of us. I’m for a fair budget that works for all of us.

Why . . .

This narrative begins by empathizing with voters’ concerns and reassuring them that you are on their side. It focuses on fairness and suggests that the rich are the problem. And it makes the argument that we need to build for the future. All of these ideas are popular.

Specifically about state and local taxes

Voters are pretty cynical about taxes. They think that taxes are unfair, and you certainly agree that tax laws have been engineered to unfairly benefit the rich and special interests. So don’t defend taxes, defend tax fairness.



Don't say . . .

- Tax relief
- Taxes are a necessary evil

Say . . .

- Tax fairness
- Tax giveaways and tax loopholes
- Private tax subsidies
- Rigged system

Why . . .

Don't say *tax relief* because it frames taxes as an affliction in need of a remedy. The problem is not the existence of taxes, it is that federal, state, and local taxes are riddled with giveaways and loopholes for the politically powerful. You might also call them *private tax subsidies*. Whatever you do, don't defend the unpopular tax system. And don't begin with a raft of statistics either. Start by empathizing with voters.

Say . . .

Our tax system is unfair. The tax burden on working families has increased while rich people and large corporations pocket more and more tax giveaways, and that's wrong. My opponent's policies would make the current rigged system even more unfair with greater tax cuts for the rich. My policies are based on the principle of equal opportunity—everyone should pay their fair share.

Why . . .

No one likes to pay taxes, and persuadable voters don't want to hear a lecture that taxes are the dues we pay for a civilized society. But people reluctantly accept that they should pay their fair share. Interestingly, a progressive monologue about taxes becomes less popular if it begins with unfairness and then goes on to say what government could do with the money. This is because persuadable voters don't really believe the

My policies are based on the principle of equal opportunity—everyone should pay their share.

government needs more money; they believe one-third to one-half of tax dollars are wasted. Talking about the good things government can do with the taxes it collects also evokes voters' biases against tax-and-spend politicians. So stick with your plea that the powerful need to pay their fair share.

Here's an illustration of how to use this language to respond about a specific tax:

Say . . .

You asked about eliminating the inheritance tax. First, let's admit that our tax system is unfair. It is rigged with tax giveaways and loopholes that benefit a few, usually the rich, at the expense of all the rest of us. So if we eliminate the inheritance tax, who benefits and who's hurt? For every two hundred people who die, only the estate of the single richest person pays any federal tax at all. Eliminating that estate tax means enriching that one wealthy family, but it also means hurting all of us because our taxes would be raised to make up the difference. My opponent's policy would make the current rigged system even more unfair with yet another tax cut for the rich. My policies are based on the principle of equal opportunity—everyone should pay their fair share.

Here are a couple of debating points you may have to deal with:

Right wing argument: Forty-seven percent of Americans pay no taxes.

Say . . .

Everyone pays taxes, although it's true that children, the elderly, and the unemployed generally don't pay one particular type of tax—the federal income tax. Nevertheless, everyone who earns a salary pays taxes for Social Security and Medicare. Everyone who buys products at a store or owns a home pays taxes. Everyone who has a telephone or cable service pays taxes. When all the federal, state and local taxes and fees are added together, almost everybody pays about 20 to 30 percent of their income. But, the fact is, the richest one percent of people own over one-third of all the combined wealth in America—stocks, bonds, businesses, real estate, cars, jewelry. The richest five percent own nearly two-thirds of all the wealth. They do not pay anywhere near their fair share in taxes.



Right wing argument: Our government is paying too much for social welfare programs.

Say . . .

The great majority of government spending on individuals is for programs like Social Security, Medicare and veterans benefits where Americans have already done their service or paid their money into the system. They're not getting a hand-out, they're getting what they are owed. The real hand-outs are subsidies and tax loopholes that overwhelmingly benefit the richest individuals and biggest corporations. That's what we need to cut.

Climate Change

This section is an abbreviated version of *Climate Solutions for a Stronger America: A guide for engaging and winning on climate change & clean energy*, a booklet developed by Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions.

Organize your arguments around this messaging triangle:

- (1) We must address extreme weather for our kids: We can't ignore the growing reality of destructive weather—we owe it to our children to protect them, and that means addressing climate change before it's too late to fix.
- (2) We can do it, we have the ingenuity: No one should doubt America's ingenuity and resolve. Those who say nothing can be done about climate change forget who we are and what we can do.
- (3) We will break fossil fuel's stranglehold on government: It's time to end Big Oil's extreme influence in Washington. We can build a secure, affordable energy future and address climate disruption if we put people, not fossil fuel companies, back in charge of our democracy.

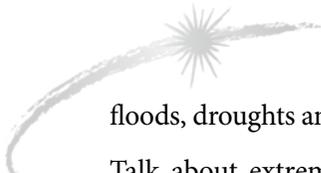
Let's begin with a monologue detailing the first point, that we must address the problem:

Say . . .

We can't ignore the increasingly severe weather: it's already causing billions of dollars in damage and it's only getting worse. We owe it to our kids to protect them and their futures, and that means addressing climate change before it becomes irreversible. Running away from tough problems only makes them worse. That's not how America works. We need to apply commonsense strategies now. We know what's right, we know how to implement clean energy solutions and we know that reducing fossil fuel dependence will make America stronger and our kids safer. It's time to step up and get it done...our children are counting on it.

Why . . .

Scientific facts generally don't persuade swing voters. For years, scientists have told us that climate change is real. Yet, propaganda campaigns sponsored by oil and coal companies left many Americans confused. All that misinformation is now being overridden by the force of the wildfires,



floods, droughts and violent weather that people see with their own eyes.

Talk about extreme weather in ways that create mental pictures—severe storms, droughts, wildfires—rather than using the less-descriptive phrase *global warming*. Employ both your own experience and recent destructive weather in the news, preferably from your geographic area. For details on extreme weather in your state, go to climatecentral.org or look at the impacts section of the dailyclimate.org website. You can use this as an opportunity to introduce the phrase *climate disruption* when talking about extreme weather and local impacts. *Disruption* makes it slightly harder for people to dismiss unusual events as being caused by natural weather cycles.

Then pivot to the second point of the triangle, we can find climate solutions:

Say . . .

No one should doubt America's ingenuity and resolve. Those who say nothing can be done about climate change forget who we are and what we can do. We already have the energy technologies to run our economy cleanly and affordably. American businesses and scientists have developed amazing renewable energy technologies, including solar mirrors that magnify the power of the sun, efficient wind turbines, and jet fuel from algae. America can build a healthier, more secure future by leading the world in clean energy solutions. Developing clean energy creates jobs, strengthens local economies and helps us gain control of our energy future.

Why . . .

Because climate change denial is now a losing tactic, the oil and coal companies have shifted to the argument that clean energy is unrealistic, or too expensive, or it will cost our economy jobs. We know that voters are seeking confident leaders who are willing to take on the complex problems of our times. Without strong leadership, climate change can be intimidating. Remind voters about practical, available clean energy technologies and solutions available *today* instead of focusing primarily on solutions projected for the future.

This is the patriotic high ground—America can do it. Include supporting stories or facts to back up your claims. Focus on local success stories—not using numbers but visual images. “In Albuquerque, we’re installing solar on firehouses, schools, and we’ve got them on the airport roof.” In fact, solar power is growing at an extremely fast pace and the federal National Renewable Energy Lab estimates that renewable energy could

meet the vast majority of our electricity needs by mid-century.

Some of the most effective political narratives include a villain, and it's not difficult to find one on the topic of climate change. Pivot to the third point of the triangle, that despite all opposition, we *will* address the issue:

Say . . .

It's time to break the stranglehold that the oil and coal companies have on government. They are rigging the system to pad their profits, blocking clean energy innovation and preventing responsible action to protect our kids from climate disruption. They are paying for deceptive campaigns to spread doubts about climate science and the role of fossil fuels in causing climate change.

Why . . .

Voters recognize that big fossil fuel companies have an unfair amount of influence over energy policy decisions in government. They see Big Oil as a greedy corporate actor that coordinates with superPACs, the billionaire Koch Brothers, and corrupt politicians to suppress clean energy innovation. Nearly 6 of 10 voters are troubled “a lot” or “a fair amount” by “oil

Fight back against corporations that are *rigging the system* against clean energy and *not playing by the rules*.

companies pouring tens of millions of dollars into superPAC advertising campaigns in order to influence key elections.” They are not just promoting fossil fuels. They are aggressively working to block wind power, solar energy, mass transit and energy efficiency programs. Polling shows that the public reacts with anger when they learn about these details.

So insist that we hold oil and coal companies accountable and fight back against corporations that are *rigging the system* against clean energy and *not playing by the rules*. Remind the public that, “What’s best for the oil companies is not what’s best for the American economy and the American people. And especially not what’s best for our children’s future.”

The following arguments and answers come verbatim from *Climate Solutions for a Stronger America*.



Right wing argument: Clean energy costs too much.

Say . . .

What costs too much is what we're doing now. 1,300 counties have been declared disaster areas due to drought, losing billions of dollars in crops, exports and income. This year's wildfires have cost us billions more in firefighting and emergency aid. Clean energy is practical, affordable and inexhaustible—it's the fastest growing energy sector around the world. America has the know-how to power our economy with clean energy—if we break Big Oil's grip on Washington.

Right wing argument: We still don't have proof that this is caused by humans.

Say . . .

We're all entitled to our own opinions, but we're not entitled to our own facts. Nine out of 10 of the hottest years on record have been in the last decade. Destructive weather is getting more common—just like the scientists warned it would if we did not reduce our carbon emissions. These are facts, not political positions. The longer we delay solutions, the more expensive they get. Denial is not a responsible strategy. It's time for solutions.

Right wing argument: Clean energy sounds good, but it's unrealistic.

Say . . .

What's unrealistic is expecting our weather to go back to normal if we just ignore it, or relying on fossil fuel industries to do what's best for Americans. Clean energy technology is proven and economical. Other countries are gaining a competitive edge, by using our technology, while oil company lobbyists tell us it's unrealistic here. Building a healthy, secure future for our kids isn't unrealistic. It's our job.

Right wing argument: Oil creates jobs here and it's cheap. Why are you so opposed?

Say . . .

Oil dependence is an economic dead end. It's too costly, too dangerous, and it lets oil companies and the Koch Brothers control, and seriously harm, our future. We can create far more jobs and tackle climate change with clean energy. We already have the know-how; we just have to break Big Oil's stranglehold on Washington so we can move forward with solutions.

Right wing argument: You think higher gas prices are good.

Say . . .

The only way to beat high gas prices is to reduce oil dependence. Clean energy opponents want to increase our dependence. Let's get real. We're seeing how big banks rig interest rates. How Enron rigged electricity rates. And how oil companies rigged gas prices. We can't have affordable energy and transportation choices until we break the stranglehold that the big oil companies have on Washington. All clean energy companies need is a level playing field to compete with Big Oil so America can innovate, move forward and develop clean energy solutions. But the right wing supports policies that stack the deck against home grown clean energy.

Right wing argument: Solar panels and windmills cannot provide enough energy for the U.S.

Say . . .

There's no shortage of sun or wind or American ingenuity. Many of our competitors, like China and Germany, are racing ahead of us while oil companies try to intimidate Americans into thinking we can't compete. We need to step up to the plate and not let Big Oil hold us back with obsolete technology and backward policy.



Criminal Justice

When you're talking about crime, you must tell voters how your policies will make them safer, not how they benefit the criminal.

Don't say . . .

- Rights (of criminals)

Say . . .

- Security, safety, protection
- Responsibility
- Justice

Why . . .

Do not begin a discussion of crime with the ideas of fairness or equal opportunity. Persuadable voters want to know how your criminal justice policies protect them. Explain how your solutions make citizens safer. That's what all good progressive criminal justice policies accomplish—they prevent crime, reduce recidivism and improve the quality of life for everyone.

Conversely, right wing policies—like giving long prison sentences to nonviolent drug offenders—take hundreds of millions of dollars away from strategies that more effectively fight drug abuse and prevent crime.

Say . . .

Among the most fundamental jobs of government is to protect residents from crime. I want to make law-abiding people safer. For serious felons, we should lock 'em up for a long time. For nonviolent and young offenders we need to do everything we can to divert them from crime and make sure they don't become hardened criminals. For example, nonviolent drug offenders sentenced to treatment facilities instead of regular prisons are far less likely to commit future crimes. My opponent's policies would throw those people in jail with violent felons and make them more likely to victimize us when they get out. That's the wrong approach. I favor a justice system designed to reduce crime and make all of us safer and more secure.

Why . . .

Everyone wants safer communities. But what if the progressive policy is specifically about the rights of the accused? For example, policies to

require electronic recording of interrogations, reform police procedures for lineups, and create commissions to research whether imprisoned people are actually innocent.

Emphasize that for every wrongly convicted person there is an actual perpetrator who has escaped justice and remains a threat to our public safety. Don't blame the police, but suggest that there are more modern practices that have been proven to work better than current police procedures. Say that we owe it to the victim, as well as the whole community, to find and punish the real criminal. For example:

Say . . .

An important part of my job is [or will be] to help protect you from crime. The question is, which policies make you safer? A lot of other jurisdictions get better evidence from suspects and witnesses by requiring that all police questioning be recorded electronically. It eliminates disputes about what was said, it protects the innocent and makes it easier to convict the guilty. I'm not saying our police have done anything wrong in the past, it's just that technology has changed rapidly and we should take advantage of it. If we can do something that simple to help get some felons off our streets, it's my responsibility to make it happen—so we can all be safer and more secure.



Education

Public education is under attack from conservatives who are, essentially, promoting a corporate takeover of public schools. To push back, you need to understand where voters stand on K-12 education issues. According to the Gallup poll:

On standardized testing: Only 22 percent of Americans believe increased testing in the public schools have helped school performance. Thirty-six percent say it has hurt schools and 41 percent think it's made no difference. Fifty-eight percent oppose linking teacher evaluations to students' standardized test scores. The public is simply not on the testing bandwagon.

On charter schools and vouchers: Two-thirds express support for charter schools, but surveys of parents show that what they want for their children is “a good quality neighborhood public school” (68 percent)

You should lean heavily on arguments based on how an education policy will impact local schools and schoolchildren.

much more than “more choices of which schools I can send my children to” (24 percent). Seventy-six percent of parents oppose spending on charters that comes at the expense of traditional public schools. Seventy percent of Americans flatly oppose private school vouchers.

On trust in teachers: By a margin of 3-to-1, Americans trust public school teachers. Many other polls show that

teachers are among the most trusted of all professionals. Teachers are substantially more trusted than police, judges and clergy, and trusted three times more than bankers, lawyers and business executives.

On the quality of schools: When asked to grade schools “A, B, C, D or Fail,” only 18 percent say that public schools nationally deserve an A or B. Among the same Americans, 53 percent believe public schools in their own communities deserve an A or B. And among Americans with a child in school, 71 percent would give the school an A or B.

Because Americans like and trust their local schools and teachers, and because voters generally care more about how policies affect their own communities, you should lean heavily on arguments based on how an education policy will impact local schools and schoolchildren.

Say . . .

For our families and our communities, we need public schools that provide each and every child the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential in life. But to accomplish that, we should recognize there are no standardized children; every child has different strengths and weaknesses. That's why our schools must offer a complete curriculum provided by professional teachers who have the training to give the individualized attention every child needs.

Why . . .

The monologue above uses four strategies that should be employed in any discussion of education.

- (1) Focus on the listener's own children and neighborhood schools rather than education in the abstract.
- (2) Indirectly push back against the overuse of standardized tests and teaching-to-the-test by explicitly pointing out something that every parent knows—every child is different and requires individualized attention.
- (3) Change the narrative about school quality from average test scores to how well our schools provide each and every student the opportunity to learn and excel.
- (4) Insist that only professional teachers, rather than amateurs or computer programs, have the knowledge and skills to do the job right.

Don't say . . .

- The nation's schools
- High-poverty schools
- Failing schools, failing teachers
- Soft bigotry of low expectations
- Student achievement

Say . . .

- Our children, local schools, schools in our community
- Opportunity to learn, to succeed
- The American Dream
- Teaching-to-the-test, one-size-fits-all
- Each and every child is different, is unique, is an individual
- Professional teacher; teaching profession



Why . . .

Our progressive goal is to offer high-quality public schools that provide each and every child the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential in life. The American value behind public education is equal opportunity for all.

Instead of addressing the problem that too many children are denied an equal opportunity to learn, the right wing tries to exacerbate it with vouchers, or as they call them, *opportunity scholarships*. Their strategy is take advantage of the fact that Americans believe public schools outside their own communities are failing and, instead of fixing them, offer vouchers to enable individual students to escape. The political point of vouchers is to set some parents against others.

The right wing also appeals to Americans' fervent belief in the market system and urges that parents be treated as consumers and schools be run like corporations. But schools are not businesses, teachers are not factory workers, and students are most certainly not products for sale. After more than a decade of right wing education policy, there is still no evidence that any of their proposals actually benefit schoolchildren.

The major difference between the partisans on education is that progressives accept responsibility for improving our public schools while conservatives want to abandon them. That's how we distinguish our positions in public debate. For example, say you are arguing against larger class sizes:

Say . . .

Each and every child in our community deserves the opportunity to grow up to live a successful life. So every child needs excellent schools and professional teachers. Smaller class sizes help children learn because they allow teachers to spend more one-on-one time with each student, providing the individualized instruction they need. My opponent's education policies would help only a few students and abandon the rest. I guarantee you, I won't give up on the American Dream for any of our kids.

Why . . .

Whatever your progressive solution—whether it's smaller class sizes, modernized school facilities and equipment, programs to attract and re-

tain excellent teachers, a broader and richer curriculum—press the underlying value of equal opportunity. And also focus on what’s best for “each and every child,” which our listeners hear as their own child or grandchild. If your solution is more resources for public schools, specify how you’d use the money: “for art, music, science labs, technology—what every child needs to succeed.”

Finally, don’t repeat the anti-teacher and anti-child message frames. They do not support progressive arguments.

Don’t say . . .

- School “reform”
- Run schools like businesses
- Achievement gap
- There’s a “crisis”

Say . . .

- Each child deserves an excellent education, personalized instruction
- Opportunity gap

Why . . .

Our nation’s future is on the line. Progressives need to re-take the moral high ground on public education. A little smart message framing can make a real difference.



Environment

In most voters' minds, environmental issues are local. They are thinking about their own parks, streams and wetlands. That fact allows you to personalize your language—it's about the *air we breathe*, the *water we drink*; it's about health and safety *for our children*. Here is a generic message that you can adapt to fit the issues in your community:

Say . . .

We've got to protect our community's health and safety, and our quality of life. We understand that includes [keeping our rivers and streams clean. The Big Bend Project would eliminate a great deal of our city's water pollution problem.] My opponent opposes the plan. But I believe this is the time to take the responsibility to preserve the quality of life in [Big Bend]—not just for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren.

Why . . .

First empathize with the audience and explain the progressive values that underlie environmentalism which are all under the *security* column of values: safety, health and quality of life. Make the issue personal by talking about our rivers and our health, and remind them that any environmental cause benefits their families.

Of course you need to explain how your specific solution delivers the security that voters seek, and some audiences require more facts than others. If you're speaking one-on-one or in a small group, let your listeners ask for more facts. When people do that, they're helping you persuade them. But keep in mind that progressives almost always give too many facts and do too little message framing. Focus more on empathy, values and letting your audience understand how they benefit.

Don't say . . .

- Opportunity

Say . . .

- Our safety, security, health
- Our quality of life
- For our children and grandchildren

Why . . .

In the environmental debate, the right wing tries to use the value of *opportunity*—the opportunity to mine, drill or develop, for short-term profit. Your job is to move your audience from an opportunity or business/consumer conversation to one about our families' current and long-term security.

For example, let's say you are arguing for restrictions on the natural gas drilling technique called hydraulic fracturing, which you should refer to as *fracking*.

Say . . .

We need to guarantee that our drinking water is safe. We need to protect our community's rivers and streams. There is plenty of evidence that fracking may be polluting groundwater. Right now, companies engaged in fracking aren't even required to disclose information to scientists so we can tell how dangerous it is. We need a fully effective system [or a moratorium] to protect our health and safeguard our quality of life.

Why . . .

Like other environmental issues, base your arguments on the value of security and personalize the issue to your audience.

Anti-environmentalists want to soften the negatives associated with exploiting the environment, so they call drilling and mining *exploring for energy*. Obviously, say drilling, mining, fracking and exploiting instead.

Don't say . . .

- Exploring for energy

Say . . .

- Drilling for oil/gas
- Fracking
- Exploiting our natural resources



Government, Regulation and Social Services

Progressive policies often involve regulation or the delivery of social services. In other words, they require the active participation of government as a protector, manager or referee. You need Americans to accept government in those roles, but it's a challenge.

Voters, however, like the results of government—public health and safety, public infrastructures and amenities...

Dēmos, a widely respected public policy organization, carried out a comprehensive study that tells us how Americans think about government. Essentially, the public holds two stereotypes: one views government in terms of partisan and corrupt government officials, while the other depicts it in terms of a bloated and wasteful

bureaucracy. That's not to say that voters believe "government is the problem" or that it's futile to attempt public solutions. But progressives have to navigate a minefield of negative preconceptions.

When we describe progressive policies, what's the best way to talk about government? The short answer is to avoid the *processes* of government and focus on the *benefits*.

Don't say . . .

- Government
- Bureaucracy
- Washington

Say . . .

- Public health and safety
- Roads, schools, parks, libraries
- Consumer protection

Why . . .

Persuadable voters don't like the processes of government. The words *government* and *bureaucracy* bring to mind scenes of unfairness, inefficiency and frustration, so don't provoke those negative associations. Similarly, don't call the federal government *Washington* unless you intend to invoke a powerful negative frame.

Voters, however, like the *results* of government—public health and safety, public infrastructures and amenities, and a powerful entity mediating disputes and protecting residents from harm. So when you can, focus on the *ends* of government and avoid the *means*.

In fact, avoid saying *government* altogether.

Don't say . . .

- Government

Say . . .

- Community, Society
- America
- We

Why . . .

When voters hear the word *government*, they think of stereotypical examples of frustration: the surly health inspector, the incompetent IRS help line and the slow-as-molasses Department of Motor Vehicles.

Instead of government, talk about how *we, our community or our society* should do things like reduce health care costs, clean up the environment and protect Americans from fraud. Government may not be popular, but we are. People will understand what you're saying.

Specifically about regulation

Regulation is quite an unpopular word.

Don't say . . .

- Regulate
- Regulation

Say . . .

- Make sure the rules are fair
- Act to enforce the rules
- Create a level playing field
- Act as a referee or watchdog

Why . . .

Americans accept that we need government to make and enforce rules. Instead of regulation, say *fair rules*, or *level playing field* or the need for a *public watchdog* or *referee*. All these phrases appeal to persuadable voters.

When you're arguing for rules that apply to businesses, *accountability* is an especially effective term—you can call for corporate accountability and corporate responsibility.



Don't say . . .

- Corporate greed
- Anything that is broadly anti-corporate or anti-business

Say . . .

- Wall Street
- Main Street
- Accountability
- Responsibility

Why . . .

When talking about regulation of business, you may be tempted to denounce *corporate greed*. But that sounds too broad and too ideological to persuadable voters. You can, however, use the phrase *Wall Street*—which suggests greed.

Conversely, when you want to talk about protecting businesses from unfair competition, use the term *Main Street*. Voters adore the concept of Main Street, even if they bypass it on the way to their local Wal-Mart. Similarly, Americans love the idea of small business. And whatever the regulation, it's always a plus to call it a *commonsense* solution or use commonsense language like “deal with it now to avoid a much bigger problem later.”

Specifically about social services

Today, even our most basic social services are under attack.

Don't say . . .

- Welfare
- Social services
- Safety net

Say . . .

- Basic needs
- Necessities
- Assistance, support

Why . . .

As you surely know, there is a major stigma attached to the word *welfare*; don't use the term. The stigma is connected to the idea that recipients of government assistance are lazy and/or cheaters. Whenever possible, avoid phrases like *social services* and *safety net* and instead talk about basics or necessities.

Even more important than the way you describe a social services program is how you describe the people who receive services.

Don't say . . .

- Beneficiaries
- The poor, people in poverty
- Welfare recipients
- Seniors

Say . . .

- People in need of temporary assistance
- Children, people with disabilities, the vulnerable
- Working families
- Elderly

Why . . .

As we have explained before, it is difficult to convince persuadable voters to support a policy that appears to benefit people other than themselves, their families and their friends. So whenever possible, show voters that they personally benefit from your policy, even when that benefit is indirect. Argue that the policy is for *us*, not them.

When you can't avoid talking about aiding other people, make sure to describe them as deserving. You can explain they are the vulnerable in society—such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities—some of whom need assistance. When the recipients are adults, say that they are *hard-working* or *want to work*. And because the programs you support undoubtedly benefit them, freely use the word *families*. We are pro-family, the radical right is not.

One final tip: persuadable voters are more strongly moved by a plea framed as protecting people from being *denied* needs, necessities or protections than one framed as *giving* the exact same public service, especially when it's called a right or benefit.

Don't say . . .

- Give rights or benefits

Say . . .

- Don't deny necessities or protections



Gun Violence

Any time you talk about gun legislation you need to lay out the problem and your solution in very simple terms. While pro-gun advocates know (or more accurately think they know) a lot about gun laws, persuadable

You need to make it clear that you are taking what voters perceive as a *moderate* position.

Americans have no idea how easy our system makes it for dangerous people to buy handguns, assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines.

Be aware that if you get into a debate about gun policy you will spend most of your time trying to steer the conversation back to the legislation at

hand. The main strategy of pro-gun advocates is to sidetrack the debate so that you're talking about something other than the need for background checks or the advisability of limiting access to the most dangerous types of guns.

Don't say . . .

- Gun control
- Stricter gun laws
- You oppose the 2nd Amendment

Say . . .

- Preventing gun violence
- Stronger gun laws
- Support for the 2nd Amendment goes hand-in-hand with keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous people

Why . . .

The National Rifle Association (NRA) has done a good job of making people think that *gun control* or even *stricter* laws means banning the possession of handguns or the confiscation of guns. Of course, no one is proposing that. You need to make it clear that you are taking what voters perceive as a *moderate* position. Like them, you support the 2nd Amendment. Like them, you don't have a problem with NRA members in your community. (If the situation requires you to attack the NRA, then condemn "NRA lobbyists" or the "NRA's out-of-touch leaders." Never attack average NRA members or local NRA leaders; that doesn't work.)

To introduce your argument, start with the fundamentals:

Say . . .

We need to do everything we can to keep our community safe and secure from violence. But every day, far too many of us are victims of gun violence. Dozens of Americans *will* be murdered, hundreds of others *will* be shot, and nearly one thousand *will* be robbed or assaulted with a gun—*today*. (If you can, tell a personal story here.)

Why . . .

Don't skip the universally shared values we are fighting for—safety and security. And then, don't ignore the fundamental facts that motivate us to fight: there are about 10,000 gun murders, about 100,000 people shot, and about 350,000 Americans robbed or assaulted with firearms—every single year. Let people recognize that every day, wherever we go in America, we are all at risk of gun violence. And then:

Say . . .

It is obvious why so many people are killed or victimized with guns, day after day—we have some of the weakest gun laws in the world. To make us, our families and our communities safer, we need to change a few of those laws—now.

Why . . .

Don't assume people understand why we need new laws. Link the problem to the solution.

To require background checks for all gun sales—this is your basic argument:

Say . . .

Our community can't be safe if we allow guns to be sold to felons or the dangerously mentally ill. That's why current law requires that no gun can be sold by a *licensed gun dealer* without a criminal background check. But millions of guns are sold by *unlicensed* sellers at gun shows and through Internet sites with no background check. We need a simple change in the law in order to cover all gun sales. The few minutes it takes to complete a computerized check will save lives. It's just common sense.



Why . . .

Since 1968, federal law has banned the possession of firearms by convicted felons, domestic abusers and people who are dangerously mentally ill. The Brady law, enacted in 1993, requires a criminal background check before any licensed dealer can sell any firearm. (Some states require more.) A National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) for gun purchases, operated by the FBI, began in 1998. Poll after poll shows that Americans overwhelmingly support background checks for all gun sales.

The only direct argument against background checks by the pro-gun lobby is that “criminals will get guns anyway.”

Say . . .

The federal background check law has blocked more than 1.5 million illegal gun sales over the past 15 years. It works. The problem is that the law doesn't apply to private sales, so felons can currently avoid a background check and get any kind of gun, no questions asked. Both the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the national Fraternal Order of Police have endorsed mandatory, universal background checks because they know it will save lives. It's time to close the private sales loophole.

Why . . .

Nobody suggests this law will stop all criminals. To be successful, it doesn't have to. No law stops *all* crime. It's simply common sense to block as many illegal sales as possible.

All the other arguments raised in this debate are designed to change the subject: background checks will create a gun registration list that will lead to confiscation; they will keep women from defending themselves in the home; they would put us on a “slippery slope” leading to extreme laws in the future; they're the first step toward fascism; they would violate the 2nd Amendment. We deal with such arguments below. But the most important thing is for you to quickly bring the conversation back to the question of whether we should sell firearms at gun shows and in parking lots with no documentation and no questions asked. Don't be diverted from the simple matter of background checks when nearly every persuadable voter is already on your side.

To ban military-style assault weapons—this is your basic argument:

Say . . .

Our community can't be safe if any unstable person can walk into a gun store and walk out with military weapons. That's why, for nearly 80 years, federal law has banned machine guns, sawed-off shotguns, silencers, very high-caliber firearms, grenades and bombs. Military-style assault weapons—like the one used to murder defenseless children in Newtown—are semiautomatic versions of military weapons that are designed for rapid fire. They are weapons of war and our communities will be safer if we stop their manufacture and sale.

Why . . .

It's important to point out that we have been banning particularly dangerous guns for years.

Keep in mind it is okay to be emotional about assault weapons. Just consider the three most prominent school massacres: Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut—20 children and six faculty murdered with a semiautomatic copy of the U.S. military's M-16 rifle;

What makes these guns different is they were originally designed for military, not sporting, use.

Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado—13 killed and 23 wounded with four guns, including 55 rounds fired from a TEC-9 semiautomatic assault pistol; Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California—five small children killed and 30 wounded with a semiautomatic copy of the Soviet military's AK-47 rifle.

What makes these guns different is they were originally designed for military, not sporting, use. So they have features—like large-capacity magazines, pistol grips and barrel shrouds—that enable the shooter to fire a lot of bullets very rapidly and still keep control of the gun. In the hands of someone with practice, an assault weapon can fire almost as fast as a machine gun. Search YouTube for “bump-fire AR-15” and see for yourself.

There's really only one direct argument made by pro-gun debaters against an assault weapon ban: “There is no proof the 1994-2004 federal ban on assault weapons prevented crimes.”



Say . . .

In the ten years that the federal ban on assault weapons was in effect, the percentage of assault weapons traced to crime fell by 66 percent. The ban worked and countless lives were saved.

Why . . .

Gun tracing statistics provide the best measure because they cover all types of crime and accurately distinguish assault weapons from other guns.

The rest of the arguments against an assault weapon ban are designed, once again, to change the subject: women won't be able to defend themselves in the home; these guns aren't really called *assault weapons*; the Swiss and Israelis have military weapons in their homes; British gun control doesn't work; military rifles are useful for shooting coyotes and varmints; veterans like them because they're used to them; this is what Hitler would do.

To ban high-capacity ammunition magazines—your basic argument:

Say . . .

To protect our families and communities, we need to keep the most dangerous gun accessories out of the hands of felons and the dangerously mentally ill. This is not unusual. Silencers have been banned for nearly 80 years. The fact is, high-capacity ammunition magazines are designed to shoot a lot of people, fast. There is no hunting or sporting purpose for them. Just like silencers, high-capacity magazines should be banned to make our communities more secure.

Why . . .

Like assault weapons, it's important to show that we have banned particularly dangerous gun accessories for years. And high-capacity magazines are very common in mass shootings. The killer in the Newtown, Connecticut massacre used at least three 30-round magazines. The shooter in the Tucson, Arizona massacre—in about 15 seconds—fired 31 shots from one magazine, hitting 19 people, including Rep. Gabby Giffords, and killing six, including a nine-year-old girl and a federal judge. The shooter in the Aurora, Colorado, movie theater had a 100-round magazine.

Again, there is only one direct argument against the proposal: “A magazine ban wouldn’t save any lives.”

Say . . .

The Tucson massacre, where Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot, is a good example. The shooter had an ammunition magazine with 31 bullets. He was tackled after he shot out his clip and was trying to reload. If the magazine had only 10 rounds, a lot of people would have been saved.

Why . . .

Our past six Presidents—Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush—all endorsed a ban on high-capacity magazines. It’s just common sense.

As we’ve explained above, the standard pro-gun tactic when arguing against gun laws is to change the subject. Whatever else you say, bring the debate back to the specific legislation on the table. Here are some examples:

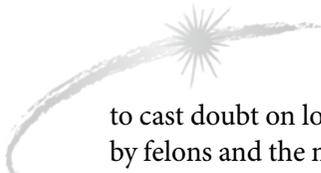
Right wing argument: The Second Amendment forbids the proposed gun law.

Say . . .

I support the 2nd Amendment. Hunting and shooting are part of our national heritage. But the Supreme Court ruled, just a few years ago, that reasonable gun laws, like this one, are constitutional. The Court explicitly upheld the current ban on possession of guns by felons. There is no constitutional difference between having that ban and enforcing it with a background check. The Court affirmed the current ban on sawed-off shotguns. There is no constitutional difference between that ban and one on semiautomatic assault weapons or large-capacity magazines. Over the last few years, federal and state courts have consistently ruled that modest gun laws like these do not violate the 2nd Amendment.

Why . . .

The 2008 Supreme Court opinion in *District of Columbia v. Heller* guarantees Americans the right to have a handgun in the home for self-protection. The Court also said: “[N]othing in our opinion should be taken



to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms.” And that ruling explicitly reaffirmed the Supreme Court’s 1939 *U.S. v. Miller* opinion that upheld a law banning sawed-off shotguns (the same law bans machine guns, silencers and grenades) and also agreed that lawmakers have the power to prohibit “dangerous and unusual weapons.”

Right wing argument: The assault weapon law wouldn’t have stopped Newtown or other claims that one particular gun law wouldn’t have prevented one particular crime.

Say . . .

We don’t make *any* laws that way. The law against murder doesn’t stop all murders; we don’t expect it to. The law that lowered the blood alcohol level for driving didn’t stop all drunk driving; we didn’t expect it to. The question is not whether this law would have certainly stopped any particular crime, it is whether our communities would be safer with this law. They would be safer; it’s common sense.

Right wing argument: This proposed law puts us on a slippery slope that will lead to worse laws down the road.

Say . . .

You can make that argument against any law. Why not claim we shouldn’t have driver’s licenses because it might lead to bicycling licenses, walking licenses, and the confiscation of cars? Let’s return to the real issue: isn’t it simple common sense that we should stop selling these guns to just any adult, no questions asked?

Right wing argument: This law will give the federal government the data to create a gun registration list, and that’ll lead to us getting our guns taken away.

Say . . .

There is nothing in the background check proposal that creates a registry. In fact, existing law forbids the federal government from establishing a gun registration list.

Right wing argument: That gun law will inhibit the right to self-defense.

Say . . .

I support the right to self-defense and nothing in this legislation would prevent law-abiding citizens from defending themselves with a gun. Americans will still have access to thousands of different kinds of guns.

Right wing argument: We should provide armed guards/do something about mental health/make parents take responsibility/ban violent video games instead.

Say . . .

We should make our communities safer. If you've got a good proposal, that's fine. But this is not an either-or debate; one policy does not exclude another. Can we get back to the legislation on the table—why should we sell these guns to just any adult, no questions asked?

Right wing argument: The answer to gun violence is to have more guns. An armed society is a polite society.

Say . . .

The states with the highest gun ownership rates have more gun violence—by far. But more important, this legislation will not prevent law-abiding Americans from buying or owning guns. The point is irrelevant; let's return to the real debate.

Right wing argument: The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.

Say . . .

It just doesn't work that way. Columbine High School had an armed deputy sheriff. Virginia Tech had an entire police force, including a SWAT team. At the Tucson shooting, not only was there an armed civilian who failed to stop the shooter, but he almost shot one of the brave unarmed people who tackled and disarmed the shooter. The Fort Hood massacre happened at a military base filled with soldiers. President Reagan and his press secretary Jim Brady were surrounded by armed police and Secret Service, and yet both were shot. Let's get back to the real debate.



Health Care for All

We should all understand the critical importance of educating Americans that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is a success. The entire conservative philosophy is based on the idea that government cannot handle major challenges like quality, affordable health care for all. That is why right wingers are hysterical about the ACA and are willing to do almost anything to undercut it. The ACA's success threatens to destroy their entire “government is the problem” narrative.

In the debate against the “repeal Obamacare” extremists, keep two things in mind. First, persuadable voters know almost nothing about the ACA. They simply don't understand what it is or how it works. Second, voters overwhelmingly believe that the ACA is flawed and needs to be fixed. At the same time, only the conservative base wants to repeal the ACA—persuadable voters don't support repeal.

Say . . .

For years, our health care system was unfair. Insurance companies charged too much and their coverage was full of holes. We needed a better system. The new health care law, called the Affordable Care Act, is intended to provide you and your family with the security of quality, affordable health care. For most Americans, the law strengthened your coverage—for example, now companies can't kick you off coverage when you get seriously ill. The ACA isn't perfect and we need to improve it. But it would be foolish to repeal it. Repeal would hurt you and your family by handing our health care system back to the insurance companies, allowing them to deny coverage because of preexisting conditions, drop coverage when you get sick, and charge women more than men.

Why . . .

Among persuadable voters, nearly everyone will agree with these first three sentences. Then you need to give a very brief explanation of the ACA, assuming your audience knows almost nothing. Persuadable voters tend to be insured and they are worried about their own coverage, not the uninsured. So focus on their concerns, not yours.

Make it clear that you recognize the ACA needs fixing and you will work to improve it. But don't be too defensive; quickly pivot to the most persuasive point, that we can't go back to the old, flawed, insurance company-dominated system. This language works:

Say . . .

We must not put insurance companies back in charge of our health care, allowing them once again to deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions, drop your coverage if you become sick, and charge women more than men.

And so does this:

Say . . .

We must not put insurance companies back in charge of our health care, allowing them once again to discriminate against women by charging women higher rates than men, and by refusing to cover mammograms, screenings for cervical cancer, birth control, and other services.

Here's a short version:

Say . . .

We can't go back to letting insurance companies do whatever they want. Instead of repealing the health care law, we need to keep what's right and fix what's wrong.

Why . . .

Don't fall into the right wing trap of letting the choice be between the ACA and something imaginary. Voters don't have to love the ACA, they just have to understand that it's better than the real-life alternative—being victimized by insurance companies.

Don't say . . .

- Them
- The poor, people in poverty
- Give health insurance

Say . . .

- You and your family
- Hard-working Americans
- Families, children, people with disabilities
- Don't deny the security of health care



Why . . .

As we have emphasized earlier, it is hard to move persuadable voters to support any policy that appears to benefit people other than themselves, their families, and their friends. So whenever possible, talk about how the ACA directly benefits your audience. When the conversation turns to the uninsured, avoid language about poverty because it evokes negative ideas about *welfare*. Say *hard-working* and *families, children and people with disabilities* because it suggests the recipients need and deserve basic medical coverage. And as we have explained above, it's more effective to say "don't deny them the security" instead of "give them the security."

Here are some responses to common anti-ACA talking points:

Right wing argument: Obamacare hasn't helped Americans.

Say . . .

Actually, it has. The ACA has provided millions of Americans free access to preventive services like check-ups and mammograms; slashed the costs that seniors pay for prescriptions; allowed millions of young adults to stay on their parents' insurance; ended lifetime limits on coverage; and forced insurance companies to pay \$1 billion in rebates to overcharged customers. The ACA enables Americans to get the care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. It works.

Right wing argument: Obamacare will increase health insurance costs.

Say . . .

It's the opposite; the law will save you money. As you know, health insurance companies have jacked up our premiums for years. The Affordable Care Act has many cost controls built into it, including a limit on the percentage that insurance companies can spend for overhead such as executive salaries and marketing. It's clear that if the ACA was repealed, and the insurance companies were put back in charge of our health care system, that's when we'd be paying a lot more.

Right wing argument: Obamacare will increase the federal debt.

Say . . .

It's just the opposite. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the ACA reduces the deficit by \$100 billion over the next 10 years and by more than \$1 trillion over the following decade. The ACA is good for the economy and is a very good deal for taxpayers.

Right wing argument: Obamacare's Medicaid expansion will force states to raise taxes.

Say . . .

In fact, states will save money by expanding Medicaid under the ACA. That's because it reduces wasteful spending, like unreimbursed emergency room care. It will save our state more money than we spend.

Right wing argument: Obamacare will drastically increase costs for young people.

Say . . .

Nonpartisan studies show that the law's built-in subsidies make health insurance a good deal for young people. Loud cries of "rate shock" are just not true.

Right wing argument: Obamacare cuts funds from Medicare, thereby hurting seniors.

Say . . .

The Affordable Care Act prohibits cuts in guaranteed Medicare benefits. What it reduces is inefficiency, fraud and waste by private insurance companies that profit from Medicare. Saving this money has already strengthened the Medicare Trust Fund. The truth is, the ACA's supporters are fighting to protect Medicare and the ACA's opponents have been working for years to destroy Medicare by cutting benefits and trying to privatize the system.



Immigrants

The best messaging for immigration advocates was created by the New Immigration Messaging Project. This section relies on that research and part of their advice is reprinted verbatim. When state and local officials and candidates address public policy involving immigrants, it is usually not a discussion of federal immigration reform. Rather, the conversation tends to begin when a constituent asks what can be done about “illegal” immigrants.

Say . . .

America deserves a commonsense immigration process that reflects the American values of freedom, opportunity and security. The current patchwork of immigration policies and programs is broken; everyone knows that we are never going to deport millions of people. So both Democrats and Republicans recognize that the practical way forward is to create an immigration process that is based on our fundamental values and includes a roadmap for new Americans who aspire to be citizens. Members of Congress are working on creating such a process and I support that effort.

Why . . .

Right wing advocates want to make this debate about upholding the rule of law: “But they broke the law!” they will say. If these are the terms of debate, you will lose; it strongly suggests the solution is to treat immigrants as criminals. You must move the conversation to our nation’s broken patchwork of immigration policies.

It is fairly easy to empathize with voters on immigrant-related issues—they think the current system is a wreck and that “America deserves a commonsense immigration process.” The values of “freedom, opportunity and security” are extremely popular and wholly applicable to this issue.

The difficult part is getting some of the persuadable voters past their existing feelings about *illegal* immigrants. Depending on how it’s asked, as many as 40 percent of voters believe that “illegal immigrants” should be deported. You cannot change the minds of those voters about what *should* happen—that’s why you raise the obvious point that mass deportations are never going to happen. Persuadable voters recognize that fact; that’s why they generally support reforms that end in citizenship. The suggested language “everyone knows” may not be literally accurate, but

it is an effective device that helps move your audience from an emotional to a practical point of view. The rest of the suggested narrative takes advantage of the fairly well-known effort at the federal level. State and local officials can't fix the broken process, only federal officials can.

Nothing you say is going to sway the right wing base. In a one-on-one conversation, it is futile to keep arguing with an anti-immigrant stalwart. But if persuadable voters are watching you debate the issue, you may need to reemphasize the deportation argument.

Say . . .

Due to years of gridlock in Washington, the immigration system is a mess. It's time to stop playing politics and focus on creating a commonsense immigration process that puts our values first and moves us forward. No reasonable person believes we can deport all immigrants living here—especially since it would take decades and cost many millions of dollars. We have the chance in Congress, right now, to break the gridlock and create an immigration process that is both realistic and fair to everyone. That's what we must do.

It is important to move the conversation from individual immigrants to the immigration process so that new immigrants are not unjustly portrayed as bad people, criminals or second-class citizens. The narratives above make a number of word choices that require explanation.

Don't say . . .

- Illegal aliens
- Illegal immigrants
- Undocumented immigrants

Say . . .

- New American immigrants
- New Americans
- Aspiring citizens

Why . . .

Don't say *aliens* because that implies they are different from us, which is both inaccurate and offensive. Don't say *illegal* because it suggests that such people are criminals deserving of punishment, which is false. *Undocumented* has been thoroughly tested and, unfortunately, does not work. If you have to be more specific, you might say "immigrants who are not authorized to be here." On the positive side, "new American immigrants," "new Americans" and people who "aspire to be citizens" are poll-tested and move the conversation in a productive direction.



Don't say . . .

- Reform the immigration system
- Pathway to citizenship
- Immigrants pay taxes

Say . . .

- Create an immigration process
- Roadmap to citizenship
- Immigrants contribute to America

Why . . .

Don't say "reform the system" because that implies the current system provides a solution when, in fact, there is no line to get into. Say instead that we need to "create a process," which suggests no process currently exists. *Pathway* doesn't work as well as *roadmap*. And persuadable voters don't believe immigrants pay taxes so don't waste your time trying to educate them—they do believe that "immigrants contribute to America" so say that instead.

Americans are not inclined to *give* anything to immigrants, but at the same time, they generally don't want to *deny* rights or necessities. So frame your arguments accordingly. For example, if you are arguing for a state DREAM Act to allow the children of new American immigrants to be eligible for in-state tuition rates:

Say . . .

We should reward hard work and responsibility. When young aspiring Americans graduate from a local high school after they have lived here for years and stayed out of trouble, we should not deny them access to college tuition rates that are available to all their graduating classmates. Education is the cornerstone of our democracy and our economy, so when we enable young people to go to college we all reap the benefit.

Or if you are arguing to allow immigrants access to driver's licenses:

Say . . .

The laws about driving on our highways should be designed to make us all safer. So it doesn't make sense to deny new American immigrants the ability to get a driver's license. We should want them licensed to ensure that every driver on the road is trained, tested and covered by insurance. It's a policy that benefits all of us.

The following answers to right wing arguments come verbatim from the New Immigration Messaging Project, a collaboration of America's Voice Education Fund, Lake Research Partners, ASO Communications and The Opportunity Agenda.

Right wing argument: Immigrants are not real Americans.

Say . . .

It's not what you look like or where you were born that makes you American—it's how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country. How we treat new Americans reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans. We believe that families should stick together, that we should look out for each other and that hard work should be rewarded. No matter where you are from, what makes you American is your commitment to the country we call home.

Right wing argument: Immigrants steal our jobs, drain public services and don't pay taxes.

Say . . .

All types of immigrants, regardless of how they came here, contribute to our culture and economy. As Americans, we all do our part to contribute, and we're all better for having hardworking new immigrants as contributing members of our communities by being customers in our stores, paying payroll taxes and giving to local churches and charities. People around the world have moved here throughout history to work hard in order to make life better for the next generation, and the constant revitalization of the American spirit—bringing new energy, new cultures and new ideas here—makes us strong as a country.

Right wing argument: Immigrants don't have rights.

Say . . .

All men and women are created equal. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people have rights, no matter what they look like or where they came from. In every generation, we've had brave individuals who choose to defend liberty and justice for all—no exceptions. Whether motivated by a sense of justice or a moral belief, the land of the free is always moved forward by brave people of good conscience standing on the correct side of history.



Right wing argument: Immigrants should come here the right way or not at all.

Say . . .

Everyone agrees that the current patchwork of policies and programs is broken, and it breaks up families. For those currently striving for citizenship, there's often no line to get into for becoming a fully participating American. For aspiring citizens, the essential rights of citizenship should be attainable by taking a test of our history and government, paying an appropriate fee and pledging allegiance to our country. In order to do our part to welcome newcomers, we need to make America the most attractive place for the best, brightest and the hardest working people from around the world. That's why America deserves a commonsense immigration process, one that includes a roadmap for new Americans who aspire to be citizens.

LGBT Rights

The LGBT Movement Advancement Project provides a broad range of messaging resources. Much of the following quotes or relies on that work.

Most Americans don't understand the inequalities faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people—and how those inequalities

Americans have moved rapidly to accept marriage equality and reject discrimination.

affect their lives. Yet, in just the past few years, Americans have moved rapidly to accept marriage equality and reject discrimination against gay and transgender people.

For example, as recently as 2011, a majority of Americans opposed marriage between same-sex couples and

it was still a fairly effective wedge issue for conservatives as recently as 2009. Today, marriage equality is approaching 60 percent support and, depending on how the question is asked, Americans oppose various forms of discrimination by margins as high as 5-to-1.

We can continue this trend by pointing out that, when it comes to what's important about being an American, LGBT people have the same values as everyone else.

Say . . .

This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country and take care of the ones they love.

Why . . .

Say that all of us want the same things in life; we should all be treated fairly and equally.

Don't say . . .

- Protect or grant rights
- Benefits
- Civil rights

Say . . .

- Fairness and equality
- Equal opportunity
- Remove unfair barriers



Why . . .

Talking about *rights, benefits or what gay people deserve* does not help persuadable voters understand the issues and it tends to sound like you want something different or special for LGBT people. Also, civil rights

comparisons can alienate some African Americans.

Most states do not have anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT people.

Use language that is inclusive—language that shows unfair barriers prevent LGBT people from doing things that we hold dear or even take for granted, like fulfilling obligations to

their loved ones, their families, their friends, their neighbors, their communities and their country. Use examples that help Americans acknowledge LGBT people as average, hard-working Americans who should be treated as such.

About discrimination

Polls show that about nine out of 10 Americans don't realize hardworking gay and transgender employees are not protected by federal non-discrimination law. They don't realize that LGBT people can lose their jobs or be denied housing simply because of who they are. So you need to tell them.

Say . . .

All hardworking people in our community, including gay and transgender people, should have the chance to earn a living, provide for themselves and their families, and live like everyone else. But in our state/city, it's currently legal to fire employees or refuse to rent an apartment to people just because they are gay or transgender. Nobody should have to live in fear that they can be legally fired or evicted just because of who they are.

Why . . .

Most states do not have anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT people and fewer still cover transgender people. In states that don't provide protection, it is usually possible for cities and counties to enact their own local law and scores of them have done so.

Don't say . . .

- Employment or housing rights
- Discrimination

Say . . .

- Employment or housing protections
- Treating people fairly and equally
- Equal opportunity

Why . . .

As we have explained in other sections of this book, avoid talking about *giving* or *granting* any *rights*; instead say that we should not deny protections or necessities. Obviously we oppose discrimination but that language can lead to a polarized debate, so it's better to talk about treating people fairly, or protecting equal opportunity.

About marriage

Focus on communicating what marriage is about—love and commitment:

Say . . .

Marriage is about loving, committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other, for better and for worse.

Why . . .

Make it clear that gay couples want to marry for the same reasons as straight couples. Then appeal to American values.

Say . . .

If America stands for anything, it's equal opportunity for all. If you have two children or grandchildren, and one is straight and the other gay, you still love them equally. You know the government should treat them fairly and equally. Nobody in our families or communities should be denied the happiness that comes with being married just because they're gay.



Why . . .

This not only frames the issue as one of equal opportunity and fairness, it brings voters into the story and suggests that the matter could directly affect their own friends and family.

An interesting thing about the marriage issue is that you can discuss it in terms of any of our progressive values—not just the *opportunity* frame above, but also *freedom* and *security*. For example, many would agree that:

Say . . .

Freedom is America's most cherished value. Our nation was built on freedom. But freedom has to mean freedom for everyone, and that includes the idea that people should be free to marry the person they love.

Why . . .

Certain audiences most want to hear about freedom. But for the very most persuadable voters—the ones who are the least familiar with the facts of the issue—the value of security may provide your strongest argument.

Say . . .

Our community is stronger when we have the kind of stable family relationships that come with marriage. The sick and injured have people who tend to them. The elderly are cared for. Children are safer. That's just as true for gay couples. All of us benefit when people can make decisions for their incapacitated spouses, obtain family health insurance and are authorized to visit their loved ones in the hospital. Stable families make stable communities.

Why . . .

This monologue doesn't rely on any kind of sympathy or soft values. It tells listeners how they personally benefit from marriage equality.

Don't say . . .

- Gay marriage
- Same-sex marriage
- Marriage rights
- Marriage benefits

Say . . .

- Marriage equality or just marriage
- Exclusion or denial from marriage
- Love, commitment, responsibility
- Taking care of the one you love

Why . . .

Avoid *gay marriage* and *same-sex marriage*, which de-personalizes the issue. If the matter isn't clear to your audience, say "marriage for same-sex couples." There is sometimes a misperception that gay couples only marry for rights and benefits. To avoid this, focus on the values of love, commitment and responsibility that go with marriage.

Finally, we may be sorely tempted to take some swings at our political opponents, to brand them negatively. But it is better to let them negatively brand themselves.

Don't say . . .

- Hate, haters, hatred
- Bigot, bigots, bigotry
- Prejudice
- Religious extremists
- Anti-gay Christians

Say . . .

- Love, standing for love
- Exclusion, rejection and intolerance
- Anti-gay activists
- Far-right activists

Why . . .

When we make clear that we're on the side of love, our opponents are against love. The implication is enough. It's not useful to employ emotionally charged words like haters or bigots. And we certainly don't want to use language that seems to imply that an entire religious tradition or denomination is anti-gay. You can say "this is the kind of exclusion and intolerance that divides our community" or "the hurtful rhetoric of the anti-gay activists." But generally, stick to the positive and your audience will understand you believe that everyone deserves the same chance at happiness and stability, while our opponents simply don't.



Medicaid Expansion

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) makes federal funding available to provide adults earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level (about \$16,100 for an individual) with health coverage through Medicaid. Under the ACA, the federal government will fund 100 percent of the costs for states to cover newly eligible adults from 2014 to 2016, gradually moving to 90 percent of the costs by 2020.

The question now is, do we turn down money that will boost our state's economy and help hard-working families in our communities?

Because of a 2012 Supreme Court ruling, each state has the right to accept or refuse this expansion of coverage. A little more than half of the states—mostly Democratic-leaning jurisdictions—have accepted the money and

are providing expanded coverage. There is no deadline and any state can switch positions.

Average voters know almost nothing about this. You will have to explain it to them, but the need to explain is also an opportunity to convey your values.

Say . . .

Our economy is a wreck and families are really hurting. We have to energize our state's economy and also provide some security to hard-working people. Now we have a chance to do both. Under the Affordable Care Act, the federal government is offering millions of dollars to states to expand health insurance for working Americans who can't afford it. This money would cover the entire cost of expanding health coverage through 2016—our state pays nothing. After 2016, the federal share gradually declines to 90 percent of the program's cost. The question now is, do we turn down money that will boost our state's economy and help hard-working families in our communities?

Why . . .

As always, start with empathy and values. Explain the federal law as simply as possible and define the issue as a choice between accepting or re-

jecting the proffered federal funds. Do not make this a choice of whether or not to expand *Medicaid*. The word Medicaid turns off voters because it brings to mind negative thoughts—of bureaucracy and welfare. Once you have set up the choice between accepting and rejecting federal funds, make your case.

Say . . .

Our state should accept the money; it will benefit everyone. It will energize our local economy and create thousands of new jobs. It will save millions in taxpayer dollars that are currently spent treating uninsured people in emergency rooms. And most important, we all know hard-working people who are hurting financially, including friends and family. We should not turn down the federal funds and deny them the security of quality health coverage.

Why . . .

As we have explained above, when you argue for any policy that tends to benefit low-income Americans, explain that your listeners—or their friends or families—also benefit from the policy. Make it clear that Medicaid expansion benefits everyone. Right wingers want to pit voters (almost all of whom have health insurance) against the uninsured. Don't let them succeed.

Don't say . . .

- The poor, people in poverty
- Give rights or benefits
- Expand a government program

Say . . .

- Hard-working Americans
- Don't deny rights or necessities
- Security

Why . . .

Generally avoid language about poverty because it evokes negative ideas of *welfare* in voters' heads. These monologues refer to *hard-working* people because it means recipients deserve basic medical coverage, and they say "don't deny them the security" instead of "provide them the security" because persuadable voters are always more strongly moved by an argument about protecting people from being *denied* something than one about *giving* or *providing* that same right or benefit.



Right wing argument: This will require higher taxes and our state can't afford it.

Say . . .

It will *not* require higher taxes and, in reality, we can't afford to turn the money down. The federal government will pay the entire bill through 2016 and even after that the economic benefits to the state will be greater than the costs. This deal will benefit everyone in our state, both now and for the long-term.

Why . . .

The health care expansion “will reduce state and local government costs for uncompensated care and other services they provide to the uninsured, which will offset at least some—and in a number of states, possibly all or more than all—of the modest increase in state Medicaid costs,” explains the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. In addition, the state will get millions in new sales and income taxes from the use of the billions of dollars coming in.

Right wing argument: This is a partisan issue, only Democrats favor this.

Say . . .

Ohio Governor John Kasich, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and Arizona Governor Jan Brewer are just a few of the many Republicans who favored accepting these federal funds. It's because they understand it's a good economic deal for the state and for all its citizens.

Right wing argument: This is more big government and Americans oppose that.

Say . . .

Residents favor this health care expansion—polls show they want us to accept the federal funds. They support it because they understand it benefits everyone in our state.

Right wing argument: There is so much fraud in the Medicaid program, we'll just be wasting our money.

Say . . .

I strongly oppose wasting money and that's one big reason we should participate in this program. Millions of taxpayer dollars are currently wasted treating uninsured people in expensive hospital emergency rooms. We can fix the problem by accepting federal funds so people can get their medical care in a cost-effective way from doctors in their offices.

Right wing argument: The federal government has promised money that it doesn't have. Sooner or later, the federal government will renege on its commitment and leave the states to fund this on their own.

Say . . .

The Affordable Care Act reforms our nation's inefficient and wasteful health care system in a way that will save the government hundreds of billions of dollars. So this expansion in coverage will be continued because it saves money. But *even if* funding were cut sometime in the future, our state is allowed to pull out at any time. There is no downside to accepting the money.



Minimum Wage

By margins higher than 2-to-1, Americans support raising the minimum wage. This cause is both great politics and great policy. Every progressive should embrace the issue.

Raising the minimum wage helps build an economy that works for everyone, not just the richest one percent.

Generally, persuadable voters earn more than the minimum wage. So you need to show them that they indirectly benefit from an increase in the minimum wage and that the people receiving direct benefits are deserving.

Say . . .

America is supposed to be a land of opportunity, where hard work is rewarded. But today's minimum wage is not enough for a family to make ends meet. Raising the minimum wage provides hard-working Americans with income to spend on the basics they need. This, in turn, generates business for our economy and eases the burden on taxpayer-funded services. It's a win-win. Raising the minimum wage helps build an economy that works for everyone, not just the richest one percent.

Why . . .

Many progressive advocates want to start with facts and figures. Please don't. Most Americans are already on your side so take this opportunity to show how the policy they already understand and favor is based on your progressive values.

Here are the key arguments to make. An increased minimum wage:

- *Rewards work*—raising the minimum wage shows that we value hard work over welfare;
- *Boosts the economy*—the public already believes this, so say it loudly;
- *Saves taxpayer money*—if families make a decent wage, it diminishes the need for government benefits; and
- *Promotes fairness*—people remain quite angry about CEO pay and the unfairness that pervades today's economy; workers deserve a fair share.

There is also some language to avoid. Don't make the minimum wage about alleviating poverty. The reality is that persuadable voters will default to negative stereotypes they hold about people in poverty: they shouldn't have taken such a lousy job, they should have gotten a better education, they're lazy or unreliable or did something that got themselves into their situation. So it is particularly important to frame the minimum wage as good for the entire economy, or "all of us."

Don't say . . .

- Help the poor
- The working poor

Say . . .

- An economy that works for all of us
- An honest day's pay for an honest day's work

Why . . .

By all means you can say, as President Obama does, that "in the wealthiest nation on Earth, no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty." And it would be hard to testify on the minimum wage before a legislative committee without mentioning the federal poverty level. But when you're talking to average voters, avoid referring to beneficiaries in ways that evoke a *welfare* frame.

Right wing argument: The free market takes care of wages.

Say . . .

Minimum wage workers earn less than \$300 a week. No matter where you live, that's just not enough money to make ends meet. This is about people who show up every day and work hard so their employer can make a profit. At the very least, they deserve to be able to pay their bills.

Why . . .

An individual who works full-time at the current \$7.25/hour federal minimum wage earns \$14,500 a year (for 50 weeks)—which is below the poverty level for a family of two or more. Congress last raised the minimum wage in 2007. The minimum wage in 1968, if adjusted for inflation, would be \$10.75 today; so raising it to \$10 would be modest by historical standards.



Right wing argument: The minimum wage affects only a tiny percentage of workers.

Say . . .

Actually, an increase to \$10 an hour would improve pay for about one in four private sector workers in the United States. And it would benefit everyone else by putting money back into local businesses and getting our economy moving again.

Why . . .

A \$10/hour minimum wage would directly boost the wages of about 17 million workers. In addition, because of a “spillover effect”—that increasing everyone below \$10/hour would indirectly boost the pay of workers who earn between \$10 and \$11/hour—the minimum wage increase would benefit 11 million more.

Right wing argument: Raising the minimum wage will cost jobs.

Say . . .

First, hard-working people in our community deserve a wage that pays the rent and puts food on the table. But also, it will not reduce the number of jobs available. Over the past few years, many states have increased their minimum wage far higher than neighboring states, and economists have been able to study what happens to jobs in the state with the higher wage in comparison to its neighbors. According to seven Nobel Prize-winning economists, “increases in the minimum wage had little or no negative effect on the employment of minimum-wage workers.”

Right wing argument: Minimum wage workers are mostly teenagers anyway.

Say . . .

If the minimum wage is raised to \$10/hour, 12 percent of those who benefit will be teenagers and 88 percent will be older workers. Besides, anyone who works hard every day deserves to make a living.

Right wing argument: Tipped workers are already paid enough. They don't need a raise.

Say . . .

The federal minimum wage for tipped employees like waiters is only \$2.13 an hour and that minimum has not increased since 1991. Very few waiters make a good living on tips. Instead, the poverty rate for tipped workers is more than double the rate for other employees. Raising the tipped minimum wage does not hurt restaurants. In fact, seven states—including California, Minnesota, Nevada and Washington—have the same minimum wage for tipped workers as they have for everyone else, and the restaurants in those states are thriving. Everyone who works hard deserves to make a living.



Reproductive Health

Anti-choice activists prefer to frame the entire reproductive health debate around abortion because it helps cloak their real agenda, which is to not only ban abortion, but birth control and other reproductive health options as well. In fact, the vast majority of Americans support commonsense reproductive health policies, especially those that reduce unintended pregnancy, and they would prefer a broader discussion on the issue.

A broader view of reproductive health, one that goes beyond abortion, is also consistent with what it means to be pro-choice, which is to support everyone's right to safely and effectively prevent a pregnancy, end a pregnancy, have a healthy child, or place a child for adoption.

Much of this section relies heavily on and in some cases comes verbatim from the *Moving Forward* project, a collaboration of the Women Donors Network and the Communications Consortium Media Center.

Say . . .

I believe people need to make their own important life decisions for themselves and their families. These include decisions about whether and when to become a parent. To make these decisions responsibly, individuals need access to medically accurate information, birth control, and, when necessary, abortion. All Americans should have the freedom and the opportunity to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

Why . . .

Research indicates that *important life decisions* is a very effective frame to use with persuadable voters. It is broad enough to allow you to transition the discussion beyond just abortion to the full range of reproductive health options. Talking about decisions instead of choice lends the appropriate level of seriousness to the issue and conveys that women and their families are deliberate and thoughtful when making potentially life-altering personal decisions.

Too often, progressives use *pro-choice* and *anti-choice* as shorthand jargon to capture the full set of reproductive health issues. That's okay when talking to progressive base voters. But when regular voters, especially persuadable voters, hear these terms they do not assign the same meaning to them that we do. They hear them as political terms in a debate

they've heard over and over. They think they already know what you're trying to say and essentially stop listening. Use language that helps persuadable voters understand that the issue has changed and reproductive health matters they thought were long past debate are under new attack.

The core message above incorporates four values elements that you should also employ separately.

(1) Personal responsibility and a responsible government:

Say . . .

People need information and options so they can have the opportunity to make responsible life decisions. But we also need responsible government to provide safe, affordable and readily available options.

(2) Protection, planning and prevention:

Say . . .

People should have the ability to plan when they want to start a family, protect themselves from unintended pregnancy, and prevent serious problems in the future. These are important life decisions that everyone should make for themselves.

(3) Respect:

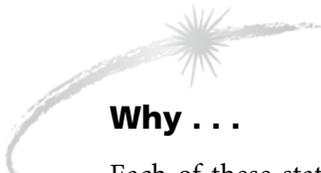
Say . . .

We need to respect people's ability to make their own life decisions and not impose our beliefs upon others. We should each appreciate and respect our individual opinions. Sometimes, we just have to agree to disagree.

(4) Individual decision making:

Say . . .

Individuals should be able to have the freedom and opportunity to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.



Why . . .

Each of these statements demonstrates that you empathize with most people's views that important life decisions are complex matters. They also embody four key values that should be communicated during any discussion on reproductive health: responsibility, opportunity, respect and freedom.

Four key values that should be communicated during any discussion on reproductive health: responsibility, opportunity, respect and freedom.

Here's another way to talk about *responsibility*:

Say . . .

A responsible government would focus on reducing the need for abortion by preventing unintended pregnancies, supporting women who choose adoption and making childbirth safer.

Why . . .

Polls demonstrate that Americans want to help prevent unintended pregnancies, making abortion less necessary. Here is another way to address the value of *respect*:

Say . . .

I appreciate that this is a complex issue. In fact, there are many medical reasons why women might need abortions, including high-risk pregnancies that endanger a woman's life, and miscarriages. We need to respect the difficult life decisions that can only be made by a woman and her doctor.

Why . . .

Some voters don't think about the circumstances that might make abortion the best medical decision. This version reminds them.

Don't say . . .

- Choice
- Prevention (by itself)
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Preventing abortion
- Personal responsibility (by itself)
- Emergency contraception (by itself)
- Who decides?
- Conscience clause
- Pro-life, Right-to-Life, Anti-abortion

Say . . .

- Important life decisions, choices (implies broader frame)
- Protection, planning and prevention
- Unintended, unwanted pregnancy
- Preventing unintended, unwanted pregnancy
- Personal responsibility, responsible government
- Birth control options, including emergency birth control
- Personal decision-making
- Refusal clause

Why . . .

Above all, don't limit the conversation to abortion. When Americans hear the word choice, they don't necessarily associate it with right wing attempts to limit access to birth control and unbiased information about reproductive health. And voters very strongly support access to birth control and unbiased information.

When Americans hear the word choice, they don't necessarily associate it with right wing attempts to limit access to birth control and unbiased information about reproductive health.

Use language—like *important life decisions*—that broadens the conversation to include the full range of reproductive health options that go beyond abortion and the fact that our anti-choice opponents are also cutting services and programs that would actually prevent unintended pregnancy.

In 2012, federal rules re-confirmed that churches would not be required to offer insurance coverage for birth control to church employees. But

corporations that run hospitals and universities, including those affiliated with a church, would have to make insurance-covered birth control available so female employees will have the choice whether or not to use it as their method of family planning.



Say . . .

I strongly support freedom of religion. Sometimes churches control corporations that run gigantic hospitals and universities, employing thousands of people of all faiths. Federal law, now being challenged in court, says those corporations are not allowed to discriminate when it comes to individual employees' access to birth control. I agree with that rule because it is female employees of different faiths, not their corporate employers, who should have the religious freedom to make personal decisions about their private use of birth control. We need to respect people's ability to make their own life decisions and not impose our views on others. Sometimes, we just have to agree to disagree.

Why . . .

Anti-choice advocates like to call the idea of denying coverage a *conscience clause*, which in this case refers to the *conscience* of the corporation that runs the hospital or university. You should use a more accurate term—it is a *refusal clause*. Also keep in mind that *birth control* polls a little better than *contraception*.

Conservatives control the majority of state legislatures and, as a result, have pursued a very aggressive strategy to restrict women's reproductive health, including attempts to ban abortion outright. The rest of this section focuses on the most common anti-choice efforts, and how you can use the values and messages described above to answer the right wing's many arguments.

Right wing strategy: Children don't need sex ed in schools, they need parents for that:

Say . . .

Young people deserve complete, medically accurate information about sexuality so they can make responsible decisions. Schools can do a good job, probably better than most parents, of providing comprehensive sex education—on the biological, medical and scientific facts. But it's still the parents' job to provide kids with moral and ethical guidance. Comprehensive sex ed doesn't take away from that. We need to do both.

Right wing strategy: Emergency contraception causes an abortion and should be banned:

Say . . .

Emergency contraception, also called *Plan B* or the *morning after pill*, is birth control women can use up to five days after unprotected sex. It does not cause an abortion. People should be able to plan when they're ready to start or expand a family. And when that plan doesn't work, they should be free to make the decision to use safe, tested options, such as emergency birth control, to prevent pregnancy.

Right wing strategy: We should ban abortion at 20 weeks of pregnancy (or earlier):

Say . . .

People need to make their own important life decisions for themselves and their families. This legislation is part of an effort to ban all abortions under all circumstances, something that Americans overwhelmingly oppose. There is no medical or scientific evidence to support the arguments behind this proposal. Rather, this legislation would hurt women and families who are facing heart-wrenching loss and unimaginable pregnancy complications. We need to respect people's ability to make their own life decisions and not impose our beliefs on others. They should have the freedom and opportunity to make the difficult decisions for themselves.

Right wing strategy: We should enact “personhood” and “fetal pain” laws (that would give a fertilized egg the same legal rights as a person):

Say . . .

We need responsible government to provide safe, affordable and readily available options. This proposal is irresponsible and even dangerous for women and families. It would ban abortions even for women who become pregnant as a result of rape or incest. But it wouldn't stop there—if passed, you wouldn't have access to the range of birth control you have now. Emergency birth control wouldn't be available. Women who suffer miscarriage could be under investigation. And, the government would be able to interfere in a family's personal decisions about fertility treatment. To make important life decisions, people need access to accurate information and appropriate medical care—not overreaching laws.



Right wing strategy: We should enact Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws:

Say . . .

People should have the ability to plan when they want to start a family, protect themselves from unintended pregnancy, and prevent serious problems in the future. These TRAP laws are designed to take away the opportunity for protection, planning and prevention. They single out women’s health centers and doctors who provide abortion services, placing severe requirements on them for the purpose of forcing them to close. That means women lose the opportunity to protect their own health and doctors lose the freedom to provide essential health services—we all lose. People need information and options so they can make responsible decisions. But we also need responsible government to make sure people can access safe, affordable and readily available services.

Right wing strategy: We should enact waiting periods for abortion:

Say . . .

We need to respect people’s ability to make their own life decisions and not impose our beliefs upon others. Waiting periods are nothing more than an effort to harass and shame women who have already made the difficult decision to end a pregnancy. They put emotional and financial strain on women and families, often requiring them to pay more for travel, hotel and childcare, and to take more time off from work. And they don’t cause women to change their minds about their decision. We need to respect the fact that women are capable of carefully considering and making decisions about important life events. What we don’t need is irresponsible government action that puts roadblocks in the way of people’s ability to plan for when they want to start or expand a family.

Right wing strategy: We should require “rape insurance”:

Say . . .

People need information and options so they can have the opportunity to make responsible life decisions. We also need responsible government to provide safe, affordable and readily available options. This legislation is completely irresponsible—it would ban health insurance plans from covering abortion and, instead, require women to purchase additional insurance riders to cover abortion care if they face an unintended pregnancy. [Most of] these laws do not provide any exceptions for women who become pregnant as the result of rape or incest—meaning women must anticipate that they might be victims of abuse. In most cases, insurance riders are simply not available—you can’t buy them. This is nothing more than a ploy to deny women the freedom and opportunity to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

Right wing strategy: We should impose ultrasound/sonogram requirements:

Say . . .

People need to make their own important life decisions for themselves and their families, including decisions about whether and when to become a parent. Mandating that a woman have a forced ultrasound/sonogram after she’s already made the difficult decision to end a pregnancy is invasive to the extreme. This proposal would do nothing to change a woman’s mind about ending her pregnancy. It would instead force an unnecessary medical procedure and drive up the cost of care. I believe we need responsible government leaders who will work to prevent unintended pregnancy and the need for abortion. But once a woman is faced with an unwanted pregnancy and has made the decision to end it, we need to respect her ability to make her own important life decisions.



Right wing strategy: We should cut family planning programs:

Say . . .

People should have the ability to plan when they want to start a family, protect themselves from unintended pregnancy, and prevent serious problems in the future. This proposal would make planning, protections and prevention much harder. Clinics that provide family planning services do more than dispense birth control—they provide many women with primary care, including vital health screenings and other basic services. There is a cost to every individual who cannot prevent an unintended pregnancy or get an early cancer diagnosis. And there is a cost to our state’s taxpayers, who will have to pay for unplanned births and the medical expenses for cancer and other diseases caught too late. Planning and intervention are important for improving lives and preventing serious problems in the future.

Right wing strategy: We should require parental involvement in abortion decisions:

Say . . .

Young people need information and options so they can have the opportunity to make responsible life decisions. We hope they can get their information from caring, responsible parents who will help them prevent unintended pregnancy, or help them navigate the range of decisions they will have to make if they do get pregnant unintentionally. However, we live in the real world, where not every parent is caring and responsible. When that’s the case, the government needs to be the responsible one and make sure young people can seek the advice of trained medical professionals who can help them navigate the full set of potentially life-altering decisions they’ll have to consider.

Right wing strategy: We should ban Medicaid funding for abortions:

Say . . .

We need to respect the ability of women to carefully consider and thoughtfully make their own life decisions. We should not impose our beliefs on others—certainly not by imposing funding restrictions for reproductive care on families that face constant financial burden. We expect everyone to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions. That means government must be responsible too and provide safe, affordable and readily available options.

Right-wing argument: There are too many abortions, and that's why we need to end it.

Say . . .

We need to focus on reducing the need for abortion by preventing unintended pregnancies, supporting women who choose adoption, and making childbirth safer. And in fact, because our country has increased access to birth control and improved the health curriculum in schools, the abortion rate is now the lowest it's been in 40 years. I believe that individuals and families have to make the important life decision when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. They'll make their decision based on their individual circumstances—their responsibilities, relationship, economic status, and many other factors. It is the government's responsibility to put programs in place that help prevent unintended pregnancy in the first place. If that fails, we need to ensure that people can make deeply personal choices, whether that is to end a pregnancy, to have a child, or to have a child and place it for adoption.

Why . . .

According to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2011 the U.S. reached its lowest abortion rate since 1973. The right wing argument is designed to frame the discussion around abortion in the abstract. The response brings it back to the individuals involved in the decision-making process.



Tobacco

Despite decades of education, smoking continues to be the number-one public health problem in the United States.

Don't say . . .

- Smokers' freedom or rights

Say . . .

- Smoke-free, secondhand smoke
- Health, disease, cancer, clean air
- Protect children, protect nonsmokers

Why . . .

People don't have the freedom or right to hurt others. There are a number of phrases that work for tobacco control, listed above. On the state and local levels, most of the debate revolves around two health policies. First, smoke-free workplaces:

Say . . .

We have a responsibility, whenever it's practical, to protect people from harm, especially children. It is clear that secondhand smoke is dangerous and cancerous. Doctors and scientists have concluded that the only way to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke is to require smoke-free workplaces. That's what we should do to defend everyone's right to breathe clean air.

Why . . .

Americans overwhelmingly believe that secondhand smoke is dangerous. They are concerned about their own health, and it is persuasive to talk about children's health. Less than 20 percent of voters smoke and even a good percentage of them support smoke-free laws.

Less than 20 percent of voters smoke and even a good percentage of them support smoke-free laws.

The other common tobacco-related political debate is about raising the tobacco tax.

Say . . .

As adults, we have a responsibility to protect children from harm. Sadly, one-third of kids who smoke cigarettes will die prematurely from smoking-related illnesses. The most proven, effective way to protect those children is to raise the cigarette tax. Studies show that when the tax goes up, teen smoking goes down. It's a small price to pay to protect the health of our children.

Why . . .

For voters, deemphasize tax revenues and focus on health benefits. Legislators are interested in what they can do with the tax dollars but that's not a strong argument to persuadable voters.

Right wing argument: Secondhand smoke is not a health hazard.

Say . . .

The Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Surgeon General, and all the other important health organizations unanimously agree that smoke is just as dangerous to another person exposed as it is to the smoker. Children are the ones most often affected. Scientists report that, in the U.S., secondhand smoke causes about 42,000 deaths per year.

Right wing argument: Anti-tobacco laws infringe on a person's right to smoke.

Say . . .

I feel for smokers—tobacco is extremely addictive. I would certainly support programs to help them. But everyone has the right to breathe clean air and to avoid damaging their own health. These laws do not stop anyone from smoking—they stop some of the harms that smoking inflicts on others.



Torts and Civil Justice

The system that handles lawsuits among individuals and corporations should be called the *civil justice* system.

Don't say . . .

- Tort reform
- Lawsuit abuse
- Trial lawyer
- Personal injury lawyer

Say . . .

- Civil justice
- Equal justice, justice
- Just and fair compensation
- Hold corporations accountable when they duck responsibility for misconduct
- Rig the system

Why . . .

The right wing tort *reform* strategy is to focus attention on the plaintiff's lawyer and ignore the victim, the injury and the misconduct that caused it. We must do the opposite—focus on victims, injuries and misconduct, not the attorneys. Americans understand that courts must deliver *justice*, so use that term. And polls show that voters are actually more worried about the corporate abuse of consumers, employees and shareholders than abuses by lawyers or plaintiffs.

Make it clear that what our right wing opponents call tort reform isn't reform at all—it's a cruel shifting of costs from rich companies that caused injuries to the unfortunate people who were injured. And that's unfair. Whenever possible, use local examples to make your case and get the focus back where it should be.

Say . . .

Our courts need to be in the business of delivering justice. We cannot deny innocent people just and fair compensation for injuries, especially when they're taking on the most powerful interests. We need a level playing field. My opponent's policies would rig the system to shift the cost of injuries from a company that's at fault to the victim who is innocent. I'm going to fight for equal justice for all.

Why . . .

Why say “we cannot deny . . . just and fair compensation” instead of “we must ensure [they] receive just and fair compensation”? Persuadable voters are more strongly moved by a plea framed as protecting people from being *denied* something than one framed as *giving* or *providing* that same right.

Don't say . . .

- Give rights

Say . . .

- Don't deny rights

Right wing argument: Tort reform saves everyone money by stopping frivolous litigation.

Say . . .

The goal of our legal system is justice. This kind of legislation rigs the system to make it harder for injured Americans to hold wrongdoers accountable. The rich, and big corporations, push for this legislation because it shifts the responsibility of paying for the cost of injuries from them—the ones who caused the damage—to the innocent victim. That's not justice.

Right wing argument: We need tort reform because medical malpractice lawsuits jack up health care costs.

Say . . .

First, the point of our court system is justice. We should not rig the system to benefit either one side or the other. Second, the Congressional Budget Office reported that restricting lawsuits for medical negligence would save less than one-half of one percent of health care costs. It would have virtually no effect on the price we pay for health insurance, and at the same time it would punish innocent victims. That's not justice.



Voting

In general, progressives seek to make voter registration simpler and more accurate, and voting more convenient. Right wingers try to make it harder for eligible Americans to register and vote. Your argument is based on freedom, patriotism and the modernization of our outmoded voting systems. Their argument is based on the fear of voter fraud, often imagined as fraudulent voting by *illegal immigrants*.

Whether you are arguing for a progressive reform or against a right wing restriction, begin with a statement of your values.

Say . . .

In America, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom. And because we are the leading democracy in the world, our election system ought to be completely free, fair and accessible.

Why . . .

You must put the conversation in context. When talking about voting, progressives have two great advantages that are too-rarely used by our side:

First, the most popular and powerful value in political debate is *freedom*. Use it here. If voting is understood as a basic right like freedom of speech, then it should never be curbed unless it risks an immediate, serious threat to public security (shouting fire in a crowded theater). Our freedom to vote should never be limited without an overriding reason—and none exists. If you can win the frame that voting is a fundamental freedom, you'll ultimately win the argument.

Second, Americans are proud of American democracy and an appeal to that feeling of *patriotism* will help persuade.

What about *Voter Fraud*?

If someone tries to cast a ballot by impersonating an eligible voter, that's a crime punishable by years in prison. Because the penalty is severe, with no real advantage to the perpetrator, this crime almost never happens. And yet, impersonation is the only kind of voter fraud that could be prevented by requiring people to display photo identification.

The problem is that Americans firmly believe that voter fraud exists. According to a *Washington Post* poll, 48 percent say voter fraud is a “major problem,” 33 percent think it’s a “minor problem,” and only 14 percent believe it’s “not a problem.” Americans probably believe that because we do have an anecdotal history of “voting from the graveyard,” and the 2000 election did expose the fact that some election administrators are extremely inept.

Don’t say . . .

- Voter fraud
- Illegal voting
- Voter suppression or disenfranchisement

Say . . .

- Fundamental freedom
- Most basic right in a democracy
- Free, fair and accessible
- Making it harder to vote

Why . . .

Expect the right wing to cry *voter fraud* no matter what legislation is being considered. The best messaging advice is—don’t say the F-word. You cannot win the argument by educating voters that fraud is rare. Instead, acknowledge the importance of protecting the integrity of our elections and push the debate away from fraud and toward the goal of making elections *free, fair and accessible*. That poll-tested phrase is discussed in the report *Talking About Voting 2012* from the Brennan Center for Justice and the Advancement Project. It works. And don’t use the language *voter suppression or disenfranchisement* because it is polarizing; say “making it harder to vote” or “making it harder to exercise our freedom to vote” instead.

When arguing against voter ID legislation, appeal to freedom and patriotism as suggested in the narrative above, and then:

Say . . .

It is essential to protect the integrity of our elections. But in the process, we cannot infringe on freedom; we cannot deny voters an election that is free, fair and accessible. If we require Election Day precinct officials to scrutinize each and every voter’s identification and limit the types of qualified ID to just a few, it will create long lines for everyone, increase election costs by millions of dollars, and make it much harder for Americans who don’t have a driver’s license—including senior citizens and military veterans—to have their votes counted. There are more effective ways to keep our elections honest without making it harder for all of us to exercise our fundamental freedom to vote.



Why . . .

This argument never uses the word *fraud* and does not dispute the existence of voter fraud. It suggests instead that this particular legislation is flawed. Specifically it makes three points:

1. *Long lines*—In considering any policy, people first want to know how it affects them personally. Voter ID will increase everyone’s waiting time at the polls, perhaps by a lot. Let voters understand they will be personally inconvenienced by this law.
2. *Taxpayer costs*—Right now any unnecessary government spending is unpopular. A photo ID requirement means the government will have to pay to educate voters about the new rules, educate precinct officials, and perhaps pay for staff or machinery in order to speed up the delays it will cause. This may sound like a small point, but it played a big role in winning the 2012 Minnesota referendum on voter ID.
3. *Making it harder to vote*—This is the most important argument but, to be effective, limit your examples to the most sympathetic victims. Average Americans can be persuaded by focusing on seniors and veterans who are lifelong voters; often they no longer have valid driver’s licenses and they would have a hard time getting substitute ID. Swing voters are less likely to be persuaded by hearing about people in poverty who lack identification.

Do not underestimate the difficulty of the progressive argument. Average Americans generally believe the conservative talking points are true.

You must be mindful of Americans’ beliefs and use the best-informed messaging to win them over.

After all, they have to show photo ID whenever they get on an airplane and even when they buy Sudafed at the drugstore. Why not require it to vote? Understand that you start this debate at a severe disadvantage, so you must be mindful of Americans’ beliefs and use the best-informed messaging to win them over.

Progressive Voter Reforms

In most states, the voter registration and Election Day systems are ancient, inefficient and inaccurate. That’s why we need to modernize these systems with processes and technologies that are commonplace everywhere else except in the administration of elections.

Say . . .

No eligible American should be prevented from exercising his or her freedom to vote because of errors or obsolete systems. The procedures we use to conduct elections now were designed for our great grandparents. They don't fit the way we live or the technologies available to us today. By modernizing the election process, we eliminate long lines, cut costs, make it more convenient for eligible citizens to vote, and maintain the integrity of the voting system. [Online registration/early voting/automatic transfer/other reform] will help make our elections free, fair and accessible for all of us.

Why . . .

Progressives usually want to talk about how automatic, online or Election Day registration helps people who are not registered. They want to explain how early or absentee voting helps people who aren't able to vote. But overwhelmingly, the audience you're trying to persuade is already registered and does manage to vote. So you need to talk about how progressive reforms benefit them personally—for example, how members of your audience deserve the convenience of their voter registration being automatically transferred to a new address when they move.

There are many important proactive election reforms. When you argue for any of them, appeal to modern technologies and modern life. “The system needs to be modernized and brought into the 21st Century.” “Today's outdated system is vulnerable to manipulation and human error.” “In this day and age, no one should ever be denied the fundamental freedom to vote when commonplace technology can ensure our elections are free, fair and accessible.”

Right wing argument: Online registration will lead to voter fraud.

Say . . .

We need to ensure that our elections are free, fair and accessible for everyone who is eligible to vote. Nineteen states use online voter registration because it saves money, reduces errors and speeds up the line to vote on Election Day. Those states have proven that online registration leads to more accurate voter rolls, not fraud. It's time to replace outmoded and inaccurate voting systems with modern technology.



Right wing argument: Early voting is not worth the cost.

Say . . .

Our elections should be free, fair and accessible for every eligible voter. Restricting the vote to one particular Tuesday is inconsistent with the requirements of modern life. That's why 32 states allow citizens to vote before Election Day at designated places and times and 27 states allow voting by mail for any registered voter who requests an absentee ballot. Both of these increase the opportunity for citizens to exercise their right and fulfill their responsibility to vote. At the same time, by enabling early voting, we diminish the number who vote on Election Day, which eliminates long lines at the polls. The fact is, it costs very little to replace our ancient and inefficient policy of Election Day voting with a modern system that benefits everyone.



SECTION FOUR

**HOW TO TALK ABOUT
PARTISANS, POLITICS
AND VALUES**

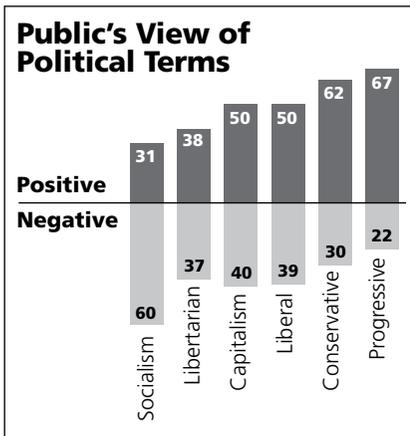


HOW TO TALK ABOUT PARTISANS, POLITICS AND VALUES

How to talk about ourselves

From blue states, we often hear the question, “Is it better to call yourself a liberal or a progressive?” From red states we’re asked, “Is it bad politics to call yourself a progressive when the jurisdiction seems conservative?” The answer to both is—say progressive.

A poll by the Pew Research Center compared common ideological terms. It demonstrates that *progressive* is the most positive political label in America. *Conservative* is the second most popular political brand. *Liberal* is substantially less popular, probably because Americans think that a liberal favors the poor over the middle class.



In recent years, a number of political organizations have embraced the term progressive. In addition to Progressive Majority (our sister group), there’s Progressive Democrats of America, Progressive States Network and Progressive Change Campaign Committee. The slogan of the Center for American Progress is “Progressive Ideas for a Strong, Just, and Free America.” And of course, there is no Liberal Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives—it’s called the Progressive Caucus.

A few years ago, Lake Research Partners looked more deeply into voters’



feelings about the term *progressive*. They found that Democrats, Republicans and persuadable voters all like a progressive candidate better than a liberal one. The big advantage in the progressive label comes not so much from the Democratic base, but from conservatives and persuadable voters. In a race where both candidates are otherwise unknown, the progressive begins with an edge over the conservative, while in a similar race the conservative begins with an advantage over the liberal.

Even Republican pollster Frank Luntz has said to his opponents:

Don't call yourself a *liberal*. Call yourself a progressive. It's a smart move. In polling we did following the 2004 election, a generic Republican beat a generic liberal by fifteen points. But a generic progressive beat a generic Republican by two points. Same ideology. Different label. Different result.

And yet, *progressive* is not yet the ideal political label because most voters don't really know what it means. Saying *progressive* doesn't win the battle, but it makes voters substantially more willing to listen as you explain what you propose to do.

All of this makes sense. Progressive sounds positive because it comes from the word progress. It gives the impression that progressives want to move forward, promote innovation and focus on the future—all popular ideas. Also, when progressive is compared side-by-side with conservative, we have an advantage because it sounds like *pro* versus *con*. On the other hand, the term liberal no longer benefits from the fact that it derives from the same Latin root as liberty and previously referred to *laissez-faire* policies. These days, nobody hears *liberal* and thinks of liberty—the word has lost its emotional center.

Don't say . . .

- Liberal

Say . . .

- Progressive

Why . . .

Liberal is polarizing. Too many negative stereotypes are connected to the term. If we call ourselves progressive, persuadable voters are more likely to keep an open mind and listen to what we say. Besides, we should be happy to be asked the question, “What is a progressive, anyway?” That gives us the chance to talk about our progressive values: freedom, opportunity and security for all.

How to talk about the opposition

When you can help it, don't say *conservative*. As the polls above demonstrate, conservative is no insult. The word and the concept are both quite popular. This is because, while conservative policies are awful, Americans overwhelmingly support stereotyped conservative principles—small government, low taxes, free markets, strong defense, traditional families. It is very clever framing. Who favors a bigger government than we need? Who wants to pay more taxes? Who can oppose freedom, an effective military, or families?

Don't say . . .

- Conservative plan
- Conservative solution
- Fiscal conservative

Say . . .

- Right-wing, extreme right-wing
- Far right
- Risky scheme
- Extreme agenda
- Outside the mainstream

Why . . .

When it fits, you can use the term *right wing*. Voters are somewhat unfavorable toward a right wing candidate (although they are much more unfavorable toward a left wing candidate). You can also call conservatives extreme. The current crop of conservatives at the federal, state and local levels are far outside of the American mainstream. They are extreme compared to Ronald Reagan!

When you're arguing against a conservative proposal, never call it a *solution*. It will never solve a societal problem.

Risky is another good word to use, because it highlights what America stands to lose by adopting any particular conservative measure. Finally, when you're arguing against a conservative proposal, never call it a *solution*. It will never solve a societal problem.

What about the Tea Party? Let's first understand the polling. There are two kinds of questions asked about political organizations: do you favor or oppose the group, and do you consider yourself a supporter or member.



Only 30 percent are favorable toward the Tea Party and about half are unfavorable. That has not changed much since 2011. Labeling someone as a Tea Party candidate is a negative, but not a terribly strong one. When asked, “Do you consider yourself a supporter of the Tea Party movement?” only about 20 percent say they are and by this measurement the Tea Party has declined by one-third over the past three years. The group does not represent a big percentage of all voters, but it remains a large and influential part of the Republican Party.

Don't say . . .

- Confederate
- Fascist, Nazi

Say . . .

- Partisan, political and divisive
- Polarizing
- Playing partisan politics
- Putting politics above what's best for America

Why . . .

We cannot call Tea Partiers *Confederates* or *fascists*, or compare their actions to the Civil War or World War II. Persuadable voters don't understand the comparison, it seems dated, and it alienates some of our friends.

Americans are increasingly aware that the Tea Party is far outside of the mainstream, and that its members are *divisive*, extremely *partisan*, and *playing politics*.

How to talk about our progressive values

The very beginning of this book provided a short primer on values. This section is for those who are interested in a deeper discussion of how progressive values reflect a consistent progressive philosophy.

To articulate a philosophy that persuades, you need to understand persuadable voters. They are, in fact, extremely individualistic. Even when

A realistic progressive philosophy is one that accepts our national culture of individualism and competition and, nevertheless, seeks to make the American Dream accessible to all.

they say they want what's best for the larger community, they are persuaded by how policies affect them personally.

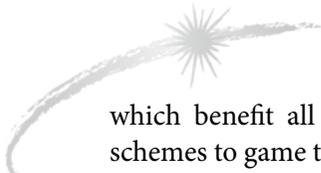
Individualism is our nation's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. It drives innovation and progress, but it has also consigned millions of Americans to lives spent in poverty. In the same spirit, competition is the very bedrock of our governmental, economic and social systems. Elections and court cases are competi-

tions. Education and job-seeking are competitions. Our economy is a gigantic and complex competition. Obviously, where there is competition there are both winners and losers.

Progressives would gladly accept and espouse a communitarian philosophy. We all wish American culture was more oriented toward altruism and community—but it isn't. A realistic progressive philosophy is one that accepts our national culture of individualism and competition and, nevertheless, seeks to make the American Dream accessible to all. How can one envision such a philosophy?

Imagine a balance scale—the old-fashioned kind with two pans, one suspended from each end of a bar. It's the kind of scale that symbolizes equal justice under law. In a progressive world, the role of government is to help balance the scale when powerful individuals or organizations compete against weaker ones. Government should function as a counterweight on the scale of justice. The greater the disparity of power between competing interests, the greater weight the government should provide to the weaker side. Balance is justice.

A system in balance rewards hard work, efficiency and innovation—



which benefit all of society, and discourages crime, corruption, and schemes to game the system—which rob all of society. The way we apply that broad principle of balance is by breaking down public policy into three situations, where: (1) government has no proper role; (2) government acts as a referee; and (3) government acts as a protector.

Where government has no proper role, because public action would violate our individual rights, progressive policy is based on **freedom**.

Progressives rarely say the word freedom. They're embarrassed or think it's been co-opted by the right wing or don't understand when to say it.

Freedom means the absence of legal interference with our fundamental rights—freedom of speech, religion and association; the right to privacy; the rights of the accused; and the right of all citizens to vote. In other words, we use freedom as a defense of our basic constitutional rights and civil liberties. This is simple enough, but nevertheless, progressives rarely say the word *freedom*. They're embarrassed or think it's been co-opted by

the right wing or don't understand when to say it. But freedom is the most popular political value in America. Polls show it is enormously powerful. If you can't cry *freedom*, you can't explain why you are progressive.

Where government acts as a referee between private, unequal interests, progressive policy is based on **opportunity**. Opportunity means a level playing field in social and economic affairs—fair dealings between the powerful and the less powerful, the elimination of discrimination, and a quality education for all. More than anything, opportunity stands for a fair marketplace. Although progressives tend to stress the rights of consumers and employees against businesses, opportunity also ensures fairness between businesses—especially helping small enterprises against large ones—and fairness for stockholders against corporate officers. Americans fervently believe in the opportunity to live the American Dream. Some progressives feel it is tacky or stilted to talk about the American Dream. But that's the vision that underlies our value of equal opportunity for all. It's an essential part of our philosophy.

Where government acts to protect those who cannot reasonably protect themselves, including future generations, progressive policy is based on **security**. Security includes protecting Americans from domestic criminals and foreign terrorists, of course. But it also means insuring the sick

and the vulnerable, safeguarding the food we eat and products we use, preserving our environment and, of course, there's Social Security. Progressives certainly support the concept of security, but we usually de-tour around that word. Like *freedom*, the word *security* seems to stick in the throats of progressives, perhaps because we're concerned that we'll sound like conservatives. But in fact, when you say security it makes you sound like a mainstream American.

You saw this chart previously on page 9.

Say . . .

Freedom

or similar values:



- Liberty
- Privacy
- Basic rights
- Fundamental rights
- Religious freedom

Opportunity

or similar values:



- Equal opportunity
- Justice; equal justice
- Fairness; fair share
- Level playing field
- Every American

Security

or similar values:



- Safety; protection
- Quality of life
- Employment security
- Retirement security
- Health security

Why . . .

You don't have to say the words freedom, opportunity and security over and over. But, as this book has tried to demonstrate, you should express at least one of these three concepts whenever you argue for any progressive policy.

Moreover, you can and should put these values together to create the phrase "freedom, opportunity and security for all." It polls well, but more important, it's an accurate description of what we stand for. The right wing favors these principles for some—the affluent. Progressives insist on providing freedom, opportunity and security to each and every American.

Progressives also believe in compassion, cooperation, communalism, generosity and mercy. But those soft values evoke negative stereotypes associated with "bleeding heart liberals." Freedom, opportunity and security project our strength; we accept the responsibility to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all while conservatives shirk that responsibility.



Don't say . . .

- Individual responsibility
- Personal responsibility *when talking about a public policy*

Say . . .

- Mutual responsibility
- Common responsibility
- I'll take the responsibility

Why . . .

When conservatives say social problems are a *personal responsibility*, they are, quite literally, blaming the victim. They are linguistically shifting *responsibility* for societal problems from the government to the individual. You should use responsibility as a strength—you are saying that progressives champion American values while conservatives run away from them.

Political values are not just talking points. They help you explain to fellow citizens what you stand for and what you're trying to accomplish. Instead of presenting voters with a laundry list of issue positions (as candidates have done for years), progressives should lay out policies in a manner that illustrates our values.

Here is one way a candidate or political organization could do so:

Declaration of Progressive Values

(This version highlights state and local policies)

As progressives seek popular support for our policies, it is crucial that we convey the values that underlie our political philosophy. Three pillars support our common vision for the role of government:

First, progressives are resolved to safeguard our individual freedoms.

For two centuries, America has been defined by its commitment to freedom. We must fervently guard our constitutional and human rights, and keep government out of our private lives.

Second, progressives strive to guarantee equal opportunity for all.

America's historic success has come by providing all citizens, not just the privileged few, with the opportunity for a better life. We must vigorously oppose all forms of discrimination, create a society where hard work is rewarded, and ensure that all Americans have access to the American Dream.

Third, progressives are determined to protect our security.

To make us truly secure, America must not only stop domestic criminals and foreign invaders, it must also promote our health and welfare. While forcefully

continuing to protect lives and property, we must strengthen programs that insure the sick and vulnerable, safeguard the food we eat and products we use and protect our environment.

Our progressive values differ fundamentally from those of conservatives. While conservatives work to protect freedom, opportunity and security only for a select few, progressives accept the mission and responsibility to extend these protections to all Americans, and to preserve them for future generations.

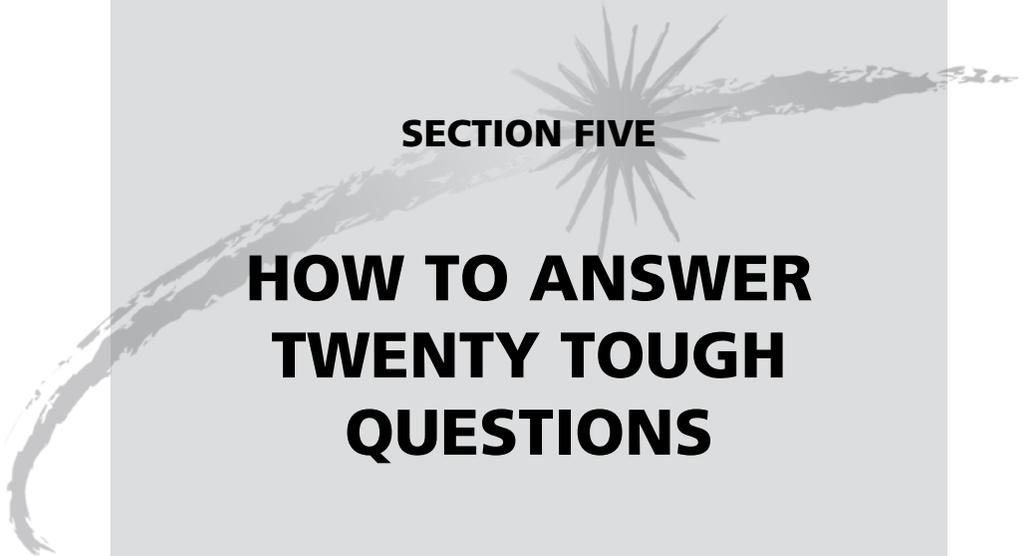
Our progressive values of freedom, opportunity and security mean that:

- 1. Progressives stand for decent wages and benefits for working Americans.** Our economy should provide the opportunity for all hard-working individuals and families to enjoy life. Therefore, we support legislation to increase the minimum wage, guarantee earned sick days, and create viable pensions for all.
- 2. Progressives stand for affordable, high-quality health care for all.** The security of comprehensive health insurance should be a right, not a privilege. Therefore, we support full and vigorous implementation of the Affordable Care Act and call for it to be strengthened with a public option.
- 3. Progressives stand for a public education system that is the best in the world.** Every child should have an equal opportunity to learn. Therefore, we support legislation to invest in our children's education through smaller class sizes, more after-school initiatives, and universal pre-K programs.
- 4. Progressives stand for a clean, safe environment.** We must conserve our natural resources both to secure our own health and well-being, and to fulfill our responsibility to future generations. Therefore, we support legislation to reduce air and water pollution, including greenhouse gasses, and encourage both energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.
- 5. Progressives stand for the elimination of discrimination.** Discrimination against anyone diminishes freedom for everyone. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate the practice of racial and ethnic profiling, ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and guarantee marriage equality.
- 6. Progressives stand for real security for the most vulnerable Americans.** We must protect the security of our nation's children, elderly,



disabled and disadvantaged. Therefore, we support legislation to make health care, child care, elder care, companion care and housing programs more accessible, efficient and effective.

7. **Progressives stand for the protection of privacy.** For Americans to be truly free, the government must stay out of our private lives. Therefore, we favor legislation to keep abortion safe and legal, and ensure access to all reproductive health services.
8. **Progressives stand for a criminal justice system that focuses on security instead of retribution.** Tough sentences alone don't make us safer. We also need to prevent crime with more programs for at-risk youth, education and rehabilitation. Therefore, we support legislation to strengthen deterrence programs and stop the cycle of addiction by requiring rigorous treatment instead of incarceration for non-violent drug crimes.
9. **Progressives stand for a tax system where everyone pays their fair share.** Instead of following the principle of equal opportunity for all, tax policies often deliver an unfair share of benefits, giveaways, and loopholes to wealthy special interests. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate wasteful tax subsidies and tax breaks that are both unfair and not worth the cost.
10. **Progressives stand for an inclusive, open government.** Every American must have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. But average Americans are increasingly shut out by the influence of big money in politics. Therefore, we support laws that protect our freedom to vote, and measures to reduce the influence of money in the political process.



SECTION FIVE

**HOW TO ANSWER
TWENTY TOUGH
QUESTIONS**



HOW TO ANSWER TWENTY TOUGH QUESTIONS

1. Do you favor abortion on demand?

Say . . .

I believe people need to make their own important life decisions for themselves and their families. These include decisions about whether and when to become a parent. To make these decisions responsibly, individuals need access to medically accurate information, birth control, and, when necessary, abortion. All Americans should have the freedom and the opportunity to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

Note . . .

Anyone who asks the question in such a biased manner is not going to be persuaded. Give your best answer and then move on. For a longer explanation, see page 78.

2. Do you favor gay marriage?

Say . . .

If America stands for anything, it's equal opportunity for all. If you have two children or grandchildren, and one is straight and the other gay, you still love them equally. You know the government should treat them fairly and equally. Nobody in our families or our communities should be denied the happiness that comes with being married just because they're gay.

Note . . .

The equal opportunity frame usually works best. For more discussion, see page 65.



3. Do you favor school vouchers?

Say . . .

We all want what's best for our own children. If parents decide private school is best for their child, I support their right to make that decision. But the parents should pay for it, taxpayers should not. We need to focus our scarce tax dollars on the goal of building top-quality public schools so that each and every child has the opportunity to succeed, achieve and live the American Dream.

Note . . .

About 70 percent of Americans oppose vouchers. Shift the debate away from failing schools and toward the importance of providing opportunity for all.

4. Aren't public employees like teachers, firefighters and police getting too much health and pension benefits that taxpayers just can't afford?

Say . . .

The state/city/county should pay fair wages and benefits—nothing more, nothing less. I do not believe that the teachers, police officers and firefighters in our community are overpaid for the jobs they do. But it is clear that we've got no money to waste and I promise you I will pinch every penny I can. One way to do that is to crack down on sweetheart contracts and outright subsidies paid to companies that do outsourced work for our state/city/county. Let's demand accountability from the contractors, insist on contract terms that are fair, open and honest, and—like public employees—pay those companies at a rate that is fair—nothing more, nothing less.

Note . . .

Polls show that die-hard conservatives think public employees are overpaid, but persuadable voters generally don't feel that way. Refer to teachers and other public employees "in our community" because voters are much more supportive of public employees they know, especially school-

teachers, than faceless bureaucrats. Then move the discussion to the related issue of overpaid government contractors. This works best if you can show an example of corporations being overpaid in your jurisdiction—it shouldn't be hard to find one.

5. Do you favor gun control?

Say . . .

I support the Second Amendment. Hunting and shooting are part of our national heritage. But like most Americans, I also support reasonable laws that help keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons, domestic abusers and the dangerously mentally ill. For example, it's just common sense that we should close the gun show loophole in the current background check system to cover all gun sales, not just sales by gun dealers. [And we should stop selling military-style assault rifles and extra-large capacity ammunition magazines.] We need to do what we can to protect our public safety.

Note . . .

Persuadable voters support the Second Amendment. At the same time, over 80 percent support closing the gun show loophole and requiring background checks for all gun purchases. By all means, appeal to “common sense.”

6. Do you favor prayer in schools?

Say . . .

I strongly support your freedom of religion. Children can voluntarily pray in schools now, and I'm all for that, of course. But government-sanctioned prayer was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court 60 years ago. It violates our freedom of religion for school boards, public schools or teachers to tell children how or when to pray.

Note . . .

People favor prayer in schools. But they also favor upholding our basic constitutional rights.



7. Do you favor the teaching of intelligent design in public schools?

Say . . .

The founders of our nation strongly supported freedom of religion. After all, many of their families came here to escape governments that imposed religion upon their citizens. So freedom of religion is the very heart of America. Virtually all scientists say that intelligent design is not science, it is religion. That's why children should learn about it in church, not in public school science classes.

Note . . .

Intelligent design is a tough issue because half of Americans believe in some form of creationism, so you've got to lean heavily on their values—religious people value freedom of religion.

8. Do you favor the display of the Ten Commandments in government buildings?

Say . . .

The Ten Commandments are a moral inspiration. I support their display on private property. But as you know, the first four Commandments are clearly religious. That's why our courts have repeatedly ruled, unless it's just secular art, that it violates our First Amendment freedom of religion to display the Ten Commandments on government property. I agree.

Note . . .

Again, lean on our constitutional right to religious freedom.

9. Shouldn't we lock up repeat criminals and throw away the key?

Say . . .

We certainly should lock up repeat violent offenders for a long time because it makes us safer. At the same time, we are safer if we prevent juveniles and petty criminals from becoming violent career criminals. For example, studies show we lower the rate of repeat crimes if we send nonviolent drug offenders to facilities that treat their addictions instead of putting them in prison. Let's focus on what works to make our communities safer.

Note . . .

Focus on public safety, not the criminal.

10. Do you favor the death penalty?

Say . . .

For cold-blooded murder, I would lock 'em up and throw away the key. I have two concerns about the death penalty. First, there is not an ounce of evidence that it deters crime and makes us any safer, and I want to focus the time and energy of the police, prosecutors and courts on measures that actually reduce crime. Second, there are many people who have been sentenced to death, and at least some who have been executed, who were later proven innocent. That's an awful injustice, and it also pretty well guarantees that the real murderer is never caught and never punished.

Note . . .

Again, as much as possible, focus on public safety instead of injustice.



11. Won't making emergency contraceptives more available increase promiscuity?

Say . . .

I'm for promoting public health. Right now, emergency contraceptives—a form of birth control—are widely available at drug stores without a prescription. There is absolutely no medical evidence that they increase promiscuity or cause any health problem. We need to provide individuals the freedom and opportunity to make important life decisions for themselves.

Note . . .

Make sure you understand that “Plan B” emergency contraception is birth control, it does not trigger abortion. It was approved for over-the-counter sale by President George W. Bush. The drug that causes a medication abortion, mifepristone, is a completely different drug.

12. Do you think that “corporations are people”?

Say . . .

Corporations are not people. They are contracts with the state. Corporations are necessary for doing business and our laws should enable people to run businesses successfully. But corporations don't deserve rights that are fundamental to people—like freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly. Those rights belong to you and me.

Note . . .

It was Mitt Romney who said, “Corporations are people, my friends.” The idea that corporations have the right to freedom of speech is central to the *Citizens United* ruling that has resulted in uncontrolled superPAC spending in elections.

13. Doesn't environmental regulation lead to higher energy prices?

Say . . .

None of us likes it when prices rise. Sometimes new rules increase prices, sometimes they lower prices. But I only support new rules that provide more benefit than cost. Environmental rules protect something that we all own together—our air, water, forests and parks—from abuse by just a few people. When they pollute for profit it is at our joint expense. We need fair and transparent rules to make sure environmental costs aren't dumped on all of us.

Note . . .

Make the environment real to listeners.

14. Do you believe in global warming?

Say . . .

We can't ignore the increasingly severe weather—it's already causing tens of billions of dollars in damage and it's only getting worse. We owe it to our children to protect them and their futures, and that means addressing climate change before it becomes irreversible. We need to apply commonsense strategies now. We know how to implement clean energy solutions, and we know that reducing fossil fuel dependence will make America stronger and our kids safer. It's time to step up and get it done—our children are counting on us.

Note . . .

Progressives say *climate change* rather than *global warming*. It polls a little better and it more accurately describes the impact of excessive greenhouse gases.



15. Shouldn't we require drug tests for welfare recipients?

Say . . .

We certainly should discourage people from using illegal drugs, but that plan has serious problems. First, when Florida did this they found that the drug testing costs a lot more than the savings from cutting people off assistance. In our state, we don't have extra funds to waste. Second, again in Florida, implementation was blocked after a few months by the federal courts. Again, we shouldn't waste time and money on useless litigation. Finally, I'm worried where drug testing would go. Florida followed up by imposing drug tests of government employees. What's next? Pee in a cup for unemployment benefits? To get a business license? To get a driver's license? Everyone in America deserves a measure of privacy, and I think we should respect that.

Note . . .

Polls show that voters support drug testing for public assistance. Right wingers have introduced such legislation in 36 states and passed it in 5 of them. It's a tough issue.

16. Wouldn't it hurt small businesses and cost jobs if we increased the minimum wage?

Say . . .

We absolutely must support our small businesses. At the same time, we need to make sure America really is a land of opportunity. With today's minimum wage, a parent working full-time doesn't even earn enough to make ends meet. Raising the minimum wage puts money in the pockets of people who will spend it, immediately generating business for the local economy. So if we do it right, raising the minimum wage is a win-win, and I support it.

Note . . .

In fact, about three-fourths of voters support raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.

17. Why are you running for office?

Say . . .

The economy is terrible, people are hurting, and our state/city/county is not doing enough to solve the real problems. I'm running because we can do better. Our system works when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone gives their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules. My opponent's policies are not fair; they rig the system to benefit the rich over the rest of us. My policies would ensure that everyone who works hard and plays by the rules has the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Note . . .

Everyone who runs for office must be ready to answer this question without hesitation. This is a generic example. Personalize it to your campaign and your community, and then memorize it and use it every chance you get.

18. Are you a tax-and-spend liberal?

Say . . .

I am a pragmatic and commonsense progressive. Understand first, unlike the federal government, our state/locality has to balance its budget every single year. I would maintain a balanced budget. Second, my policy is tax fairness. Our tax system is unfair and I would work to identify and cut tax breaks and loopholes that benefit a few at the expense of all the rest of us. Third, my spending priority is to create a local economy that's built to last. I would work to maintain and improve the quality of life here in [location], not just for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren.

Note . . .

Don't get defensive. Smack this softball out of the park.



19. Are you trying to knock down the free enterprise system?

Say . . .

No. I will pursue equal *opportunity* for everyone. That requires a system with rules of the road that make economic competition fair and open and honest. I will work to ensure that everybody gets a fair shot, does their fair share, and plays by the same fair rules. My goal is that everyone who works hard and acts responsibly has the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Note . . .

You are not opposed to the market system, you are opposed to economic unfairness. This harsh question gives you another opportunity to repeat your basic economic theme.

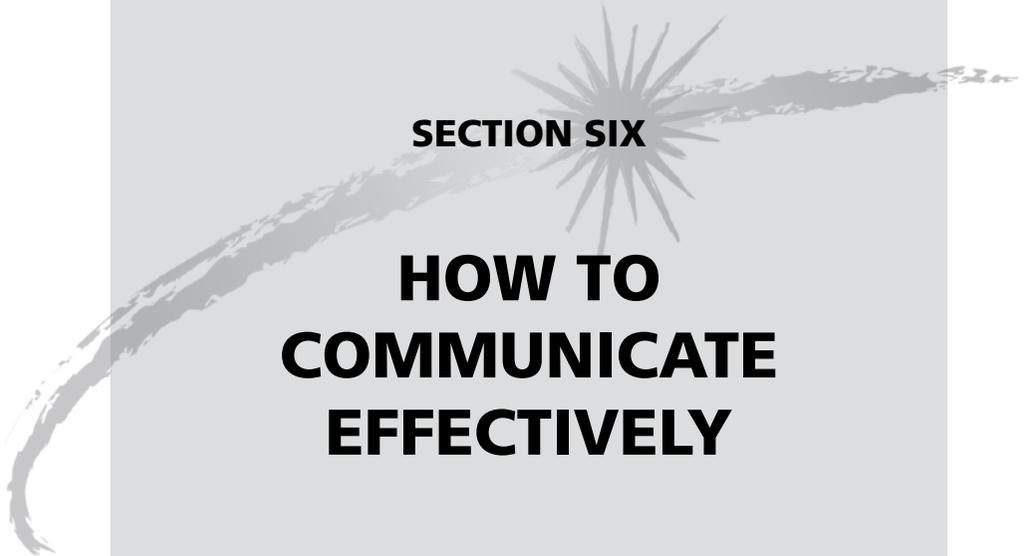
20. Are you a Socialist?

Say . . .

I support freedom, opportunity and security for all. We call that a Progressive.

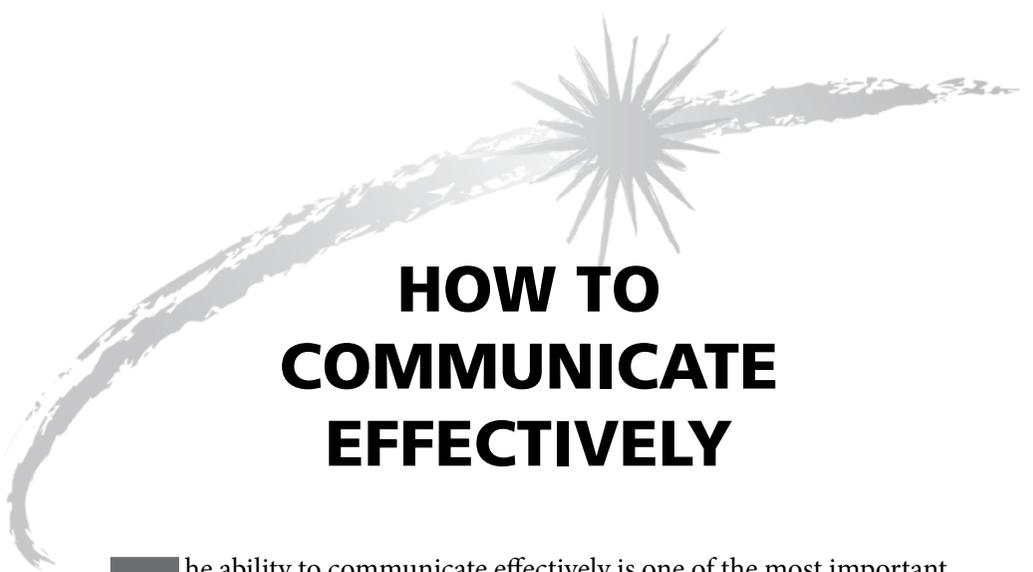
Note . . .

If you're in a crowd, smile. That ideologue just did you a favor.



SECTION SIX

**HOW TO
COMMUNICATE
EFFECTIVELY**



HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

The ability to communicate effectively is one of the most important and desirable leadership skills. It can make the difference between winning or losing your election, in ascending to power or staying stagnant.

Most of this book addresses powerful, poll-tested messages for your election campaign—*what* you say. This chapter addresses the mechanics of communication—*how* you say it. You need to be good at both; a poor

Whether you are speaking to four people at a house party or to 400 at a community forum, keep in mind that everyone who takes the time to listen to you deserves a motivating and memorable experience.

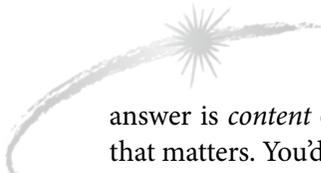
communicator with a great message will get nowhere, as will a great communicator with a poor message.

Always remember, communication is the process of getting information from one person to another. The communicator is responsible for the transfer of information. If the voter at the door or in an audience does not understand what you are trying to say, it's generally your fault, not theirs. Whether you are speaking to four people at a house party or to 400 at a community forum, keep in mind

that everyone who takes the time to listen to you deserves a motivating and memorable experience. Make every opportunity count.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

How do you spend most of your time when preparing to give a speech? If you are like most candidates and lawmakers we've worked with, your



answer is *content* or *the words*. You might even think the content is all that matters. You'd be wrong.

In face-to-face communication—whether you are giving a speech, making a fundraising pitch or talking to a voter at their door—*what you say* is easily overridden by *how you say it*. Voters overwhelmingly rely on non-verbal information—your body language and verbal tone—to determine what you *really mean*.

A famous study by Albert Mehrabian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at UCLA, found that an audience decodes the intent behind a speaker's words:

- from **visual clues** (body language) about **55 percent** of the time;
- from **tone of voice** about **38 percent** of the time; and
- from the speaker's **actual words** only about **7 percent** of the time.

Mehrabian's work also demonstrated that when a speaker's words and non-verbal messages are in conflict, the audience believes the non-verbal

every time. There are several common situations where this research matters a lot to you.

When people are trying to decide whether or not they *like* you, they will pay most attention to what you are expressing non-verbally.

First, when people are trying to decide whether or not they *like* you, they will pay most attention to what you are expressing non-verbally. Elections are popularity contests of sorts, and whether you win or lose depends on whether people like you enough to listen to what you have to say.

Second, when people are trying to decide whether they *trust* you, they will again pay most attention to non-verbal cues. For example, if you use strong words to say you are going to address a pressing problem but your shoulders are slumped, your hand gestures are weak, and your voice is high, they will simply not believe you.

Third, when people are trying to decide whether to *believe* what you are telling them—because they aren't familiar with the facts of the matter—they use non-verbal clues to decide what to believe. This is very important when communicating with persuadable voters because they pay the least attention to the nuances of politics or policy.

Fourth, if people *disagree* with your position on an issue they will still use non-verbal cues to make up their minds about you. For example, they may strongly disagree with your tax policy but decide to support you anyway because you come across, non-verbally, as a stable and trustworthy person.

In short, we all use our emotions to help us decide what to think. Often-times we will first form an opinion based on our emotions and then look for facts to support that opinion. When the verbal and non-verbal are in conflict, people trust the non-verbal. So it is essential to make your best possible non-verbal presentation.

Visual Clues

About your posture:

Don't . . .

- Stand with feet too far apart, or locked side by side
- Sway forward, slouch or crouch over
- Put all your weight on one hip
- Let your arms hang limply at your sides
- Droop your shoulders
- Look down
- Cross your arms
- Clasp your hands in front of you
- Put your hands on your waist
- Put your hands in your pockets

Do . . .

- Stand up straight, with your feet shoulder width apart
- Balance your weight over the balls of your feet
- Knees and hips should be in line with the middle of your feet (not forward or back)
- Relax your shoulders
- Keep your chest up, stomach in
- Hold your head upright and straight, chin elevated slightly
- Hold arms at your sides, in a controlled manner with fingers slightly curled (this takes a little getting used to, but it is a very open posture to assume)
- Stay alert, but relaxed



About your movement and use of space:

Don't . . .

- Move just for the sake of moving
- Rock, sway or pace
- Lean on the podium
- Race back and forth across the stage
- Move forward toward the audience too suddenly (aggressively)

Do . . .

- Own your space
- Move in a controlled, purposeful, yet natural manner
- Use gestures as you move, then re-establish good posture when you stop
- Scale your gestures to the size of the audience/room
- Step forward to establish a connection with an audience member, or to signal you are about to make an important point
- Step backward as you conclude an important point, or to create a verbal and physical pause
- Move laterally to strengthen a transition between thoughts

About your gestures:

Don't . . .

- Over-gesture
- Use gestures that don't feel natural; don't try to "play" politician
- Cross your arms (cold, closed)
- Clasp your hands in front of you (weak)
- Put your hands on your waist (too parental)
- Put your hands in your pockets (nervous)
- Touch your hair, face or neck (nervous)
- Put your hands behind your back (what are you hiding?)
- Use gestures that are much wider than your body (out of control)
- Use too many large gestures (chaotic)

Do . . .

- Use gestures purposefully; make sure your gestures match your points
- Incorporate natural gestures that you do spontaneously when practicing your remarks
- Use hands open, palm up at a 45 degree angle, to express honesty and openness
- Use hands open, palms down, to express certainty
- Use hands open, palms perpendicular, to express measurement or movement
- Use gestures that go somewhat wider than your body (for a large concept or idea)
- "Stay in the frame" even if there's no camera; not too wide
- Be sensitive to cultural differences; use gestures that mean the same thing to the audience as they do to you

About your facial expressions:

Don't . . .

- Smile constantly
- Lick or bite your lips
- Tighten your jaw
- Scowl
- Sneer
- Shake your head "no" when you mean "yes" (you'd be surprised how many people do this)

Do . . .

- Use facial expressions purposefully; make sure your expressions match your points
- Practice in front of a mirror, especially if you are naturally prone to having a "poker face"
- Smile
- Arch your eyebrows to indicate skepticism



About your eye contact:

Don't . . .

- Scan the room generally
- Look only at one area of the room
- Dart your eyes around the room
- Try to look at everyone
- Methodically work through the room section to section
- Look at your notes or slides more than you look at people
- Bore down on people
- Look at the top of people's heads, or at the back row

Do . . .

- Try to maintain eye contact 90 percent of your time
- Make natural eye contact
- Make eye contact with individuals in the room
- Make a connection with people who are nodding *and* frowning
- Connect with people who help humanize your points (i.e. look at a parent with her child when making a point about education)
- Maintain eye contact with the same person for one complete sentence or thought
- In a large room, focus on the sections about 2/3rds back from the front
- Be sensitive to cultural differences; gently look away if it seems someone is uncomfortable with you looking at them

Tone of Voice

About your breathing:

Don't . . .

- Forget to breathe
- Forget that shallow breathing will make your voice sound more shrill (louder, maybe, but not more powerful)

Do . . .

- Practice breathing deep and exhaling slowly
- Take a breath before you start speaking
- Use deep breathing to form a natural, powerful sound
- Breathe during pauses
- Breathe through verbal tics (i.e. "um," "ah")

About your voice:

Don't . . .

- Speak in a monotone
- Speak too quickly
- Mumble
- Use words you can't say (i.e. avoid "s" words if you have a lisp, don't use words you routinely stumble over)

Do . . .

- Practice an even but slightly varied tone
- Your breathing exercises if your voice is squeaky and high (more common with women)
- Pause just before and after an important word or concept to allow your audience to absorb that you are making an important point
- Speak in an appropriate voice (i.e. conversational at a house party, authoritatively in a debate)

About your volume:

Don't . . .

- Raise and lower your volume too many times (erratic)
- Try to use volume to convey power; a powerful voice comes from proper breathing
- Speak over applause, laughter, etc.

Do . . .

- Project your voice
- Articulate clearly
- Use volume purposefully, make sure you are using it to convey the proper tone
- Raise the volume to convey excitement, anger, indignation, energy
- Lower your volume to convey seriousness and draw people in
- Learn how to use a microphone properly
- Practice raising your volume if you are soft-spoken and generally hard to hear
- Lower your volume if you are a naturally loud speaker
- Minimize noise distractions (i.e., ask for lunch to be served before your speech, close windows)



About your pitch:

Don't . . .

- Keep your pitch high (unless you want to be perceived as weak, nervous and less truthful)
- Vary your pitch too frequently

Do . . .

- Lower your pitch to convey authority and credibility (women naturally have a higher pitch than men, but both genders usually benefit from lowering their pitch somewhat)
- Relax and take deep breaths
- Vary your pitch (higher to convey excitement, lower to convey seriousness)
- Practice your inflection

About your tempo:

Don't . . .

- Lift the end of your sentences unless you are, in fact, asking a question
- Lose the audience with long, run-on sentences

Do . . .

- Vary the tempo, or pace, of your speech
- Practice speaking 150-160 words per minute (a slow speaker speaks 120/minute and a fast speaker 190; planning 150-160 will allow you to vary your tempo)
- Use a faster tempo to convey excitement, importance, and a slower pace to convey seriousness
- Use appropriate sentence length to match your speaking style and to allow the audience to absorb what you are saying
- Use pauses to transition between ideas, call attention to an important thought and capture attention

Actual Words

How to write a speech:

Don't . . .

- Wing it
- Work from just an outline
- Phone it in—everyone who comes to listen to you is giving you their time, please make it worthwhile
- Use long sentences
- Use jargon, acronyms, bill numbers, etc.
- Use positive words to make a negative point (i.e. don't say "my opponent is a strong supporter of business"; say "my opponent is beholden to big business")
- Forget a speech is to be heard, not read
- Read your remarks
- Forget to pare down your content to three main points you know cold (this will give you more time to focus on the all-important non-verbal communication)
- Try to cram too much content into too little time

Do . . .

- Find out who will be in the audience, what they expect, and how much time you have to speak
- Determine the purpose of your remarks
- Decide what kind of speech you want to give (persuasive, informative, instructional, celebratory or to entertain)
- Prepare an outline (open, point 1, point 2, point 3, close)
- Write up the complete speech, including main points, transitions, stories, etc. (this will take several drafts)
- Write like you speak, not how you write
- Use short, simple sentences and active voice
- Pare down the number of words to the amount of time you have (see "tempo" above)
- Mark up the written speech to note pauses, highlight words you want to emphasize, aid with tempo, mark slide transitions, etc.
- Practice the speech
- Memorize the speech until you can give it without notes (or at least only glancing at notes)
- Practice again and again



About the opening of your talk:

Don't . . .

- Start in the middle
- Dive right into your first main point
- Use your entire opening to talk about yourself

Do . . .

- Grab the audience's attention
- State the purpose of your remarks

About the body of your talk:

Don't . . .

- Add more points, concepts or ideas because you have more time (stick to three)

Do . . .

- Limit the body of your speech to three main points, concepts or ideas
- Decide how you want to organize your content (i.e. chronological, topical or causal)
- Make sure your speech is audience-centric; this is about them, not you

About the closing of your talk:

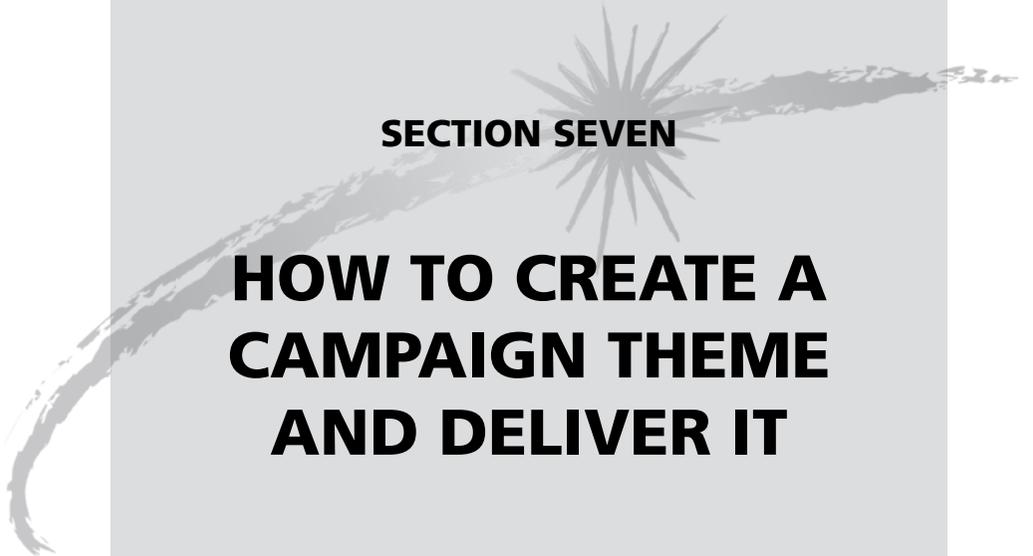
Don't . . .

- End in the middle
- Just stop

Do . . .

- Restate your three main points from the body of your remarks
- Make an ask (i.e. votes, volunteers, money)
- End strong

Finally, we recognize it is hard to pull advice out of a book and effortlessly apply it to your own campaign. Fortunately, there are a number of terrific organizations and consultants that provide training and coaching to help improve your ability to communicate effectively. Please contact the Progressive Majority Action Fund (www.progressivemajorityaction.org) to request a training in your state, to receive invitations to our bi-weekly online message webinars, or for a referral request to another organization or consultant. We're here to help.



SECTION SEVEN

**HOW TO CREATE A
CAMPAIGN THEME
AND DELIVER IT**



HOW TO CREATE A CAMPAIGN THEME AND DELIVER IT

Candidates and activists tend to think of local election campaigns as if they were small versions of presidential or statewide efforts. But that's not the case. A local campaign is fundamentally about two things: name recognition and a perception of which candidate is "on my side."

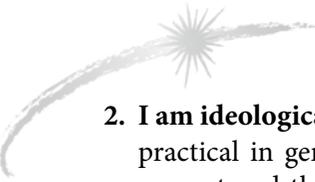
Name recognition is a matter of campaign mechanics and hard work, so this section will focus on how to persuade voters that you are on their side. First, understand that it's not a matter of *issues*. Activists judge candidates by their laundry list of issues; average voters don't. Issues are mostly useful as illustrations of a campaign theme. So what's a theme?

The idea is to frame the question you want voters to answer as they vote.

It is a narrative that explains why voters should favor you over your opponent(s). The idea is to frame the question you want voters to answer as they vote. "Which

candidate will protect me from crime?" or "Which will stop the developers from ruining our neighborhood?" or "Which will side with the middle class against the rich?" Generally speaking, themes fall into four categories:

1. **I am physically one of you.** This is an appeal to a common race, religion, ethnicity or geography. "Vote for the white guy/Baptist/Italian guy/guy from your local community..." It is not unreasonable for voters to assume that someone who shares demographic characteristics with them might understand their problems better or might be more likely to battle for their own. This kind of politics can get ugly, but it won't go away by pretending it doesn't exist.



2. I am ideologically one of you. We are most used to this and it's most practical in general elections where our candidate supports the 99 percent and their candidate favors the one percent. If you're going to distinguish your candidate from another based on ideology, you need to make it clear that your opponent is on the wrong side and use policy positions and votes to prove it. But be concise: voters are not going to understand if you say the opponent voted "to lower the upper tax bracket" or some complicated description of a specific policy. The average voter won't remember specific policy positions for any of the candidates, just a sense of which candidate seems to be most on the voter's side.

3. I will get things done for you. This is the theme that wins most city or county elections. "Our candidate is effective/experienced/gets results/is a leader." "Our candidate gets things done for you, your family, and your community." Anyone can vote right, both you and voters

The average voter won't remember specific policy positions for any of the candidates, just a sense of which candidate seems to be most on the voter's side.

know, but not everyone has the energy and skill to work the process and get results. When this is the theme, issues are used to demonstrate skill—the candidate increased wages, cracked down on criminals, built a new park, upgraded the local school. Or competence can be demonstrated by experience outside of government—she ran this business so she can balance the town's budget.

Endorsements from individuals and groups can be used to illustrate either a "gets things done" or an "ideologically one of you" theme.

4. I am your candidate for change. Americans are hard-wired to dislike government. They are always ready to believe the worst about incumbents. So there are many opportunities to run a campaign that is focused on "change." Bill Clinton's campaign in 1992 and Barack Obama's in 2008 were essentially about change. If voters strongly believe the state or local government is "on the wrong track," then this theme might work for you.

In crafting a theme, you can combine ideas from these four. A candidate can be one of us who is an effective advocate, or, like Barack Obama in 2008, represents change from bad policies to good ones.

Whatever the theme, notice that all of them are about *you* and *your*. We ardent progressives like to talk about the *common good*, but that is not what average voters care about. Voters are focused on themselves, their families and their own communities. Your theme has to be about how you are going to help them, personally. When you highlight issues, it should be to show how you will directly and indirectly improve the voter's quality of life. Parks will be cleaner; traffic problems will improve; government offices will serve citizens better; unwanted real estate development will be thwarted.

The Message Box

Before you get into the heat of the campaign, work with a trusted inner circle of advisors to develop your theme into a campaign message box. The *Tully Message Box*, developed by the pioneering Democratic strategist Paul Tully, visually separates the components of your message and that of your opponent into four categories: What your campaign says about itself; what your campaign says about your opponent; what your opponent's campaign says about itself; and what your opponent says about you. The Message Box displays clearly how the campaign will be defined if you control the message, and how it will be defined if you allow your opponent to do so.

What we're saying about us	What the opposing campaign is saying about itself
What we're saying about our opponent	What the opposing campaign is saying about us



The following is an example of a hypothetical state legislative campaign's use of the Message Box:

<p>What we're saying about us</p> <p>Ann Moore works hard for the people, not the powerful. As a teacher and elected school board member, she has helped lead the fight for lower class sizes, modernized libraries, and improved after-school programs for our kids.</p> <p>A mother of three who knows what it takes for families to make ends meet, Ann will fight to ensure that working families earn fair wages and benefits for a hard day's work.</p> <p>For two decades, Ann Moore has helped protect our parks' green spaces that make our community a wonderful place for people like you and me to live and raise a family.</p>	<p>What the opposing campaign is saying about itself</p> <p>Don Smith has managed a thriving company with a multi-million dollar budget and provided hundreds of local residents with good jobs.</p> <p>Don knows what it takes to create jobs and invest in small businesses and he has demonstrated a commitment to helping our community grow.</p> <p>Don Smith shares your values of faith, family, hard work and opportunity for our families.</p>
<p>What we're saying about our opponent</p> <p>Don Smith is a young millionaire from a prominent Wall Street family who is not on your side. He doesn't share a history with or the values of our community.</p> <p>Don values money over people. He has spoken out against raising the minimum wage and has fought to eliminate overtime pay for his own employees.</p> <p>Don is destroying our community's cherished parks, playgrounds and green spaces to build parking lots and strip malls.</p>	<p>What the opposing campaign is saying about us</p> <p>Ann Moore is ineffective. Since she joined the school board, test scores have dropped, school violence has risen, and schools have gone without much-needed repairs.</p> <p>Ann wants to raise your property taxes to throw money at the problems facing our local school system rather than solving them.</p> <p>Ann is more concerned with saving trees than creating jobs and investing in our community.</p>

The message box encapsulates the positives of our candidate and the negatives of her opponent; it also anticipates the way the opponent will portray himself and the charges he will make against our candidate.

Developed early in the campaign, the Message Box forms the four legs of the message platform upon which all campaign communication is built. Incorporate your campaign theme and core messages into every form of communication, including: digital media, direct mail, earned media, paid media, editorial board meetings, PAC and group endorsement meetings, and the messages of your surrogates.

The Stump Speech

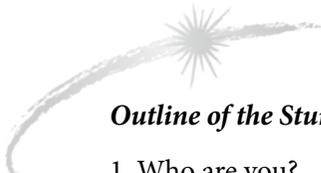
Throughout the campaign, you will use a prepared narrative to deliver your theme and messages. One of the most common mistakes candidates and lawmakers make is to think they can get by without preparing—and practicing—their stump speech. It happens at every level, from Congress to school board. Trust us, there is nothing more painful than listening to someone we're supposed to like stand in front of the room wandering verbally for what seems like hours and then expecting us to applaud.

Your stump speech is central to your campaign. Prepare it as early as possible, even before you declare your candidacy, if possible. Your stump speech is the one you will repeat the most, at your announcement, house parties, meet and greets, rallies and other campaign events. It contains your core message and main points, which will, in turn, be condensed into other communication methods, including fundraising pitches, endorsement appeals, media calls, etc.

Any candidate who intends to speak directly to voters—and that's all of you—needs a carefully crafted and executed stump speech. And it is especially valuable for candidates running in down-ballot races, from school board to statehouse, that depend on retail politics to win.

Write out your stump speech so you can edit it, practice it and perfect it. Memorize it so you can confidently shorten or lengthen it to fit any occasion. Change up the stories or examples to tailor it to specific audiences as the campaign continues.

If at any point in the campaign you feel like your stump speech needs to be rewritten, start the rewriting process again—don't just change it on the fly. Treat the stump speech as a foundational campaign document just as you would your GOTV plan or your donor list.



Outline of the Stump Speech:

1. Who are you?
2. Why are you running? (Your answer should be about voters and your community, not about you, e.g.: “I know I will be a great legislator” or “I’m a lawyer and an expert on environmental policy.” These are not acceptable answers.)
3. What problem(s) are facing your community? (Up to three.)
4. What is your plan for addressing the problems?
5. Create contrast between your opponent and his/her plan, and you and yours.
6. Make your ask—request a vote, money, endorsement, etc.

Quick Tips:

- Write from the audience’s perspective, not yours.
- Keep your main points (problems, plan) to three things.
- Don’t get too detailed.
- Use stories, real examples to illustrate your main points.
- Don’t spend too much time talking about your opponent, just enough to create contrast.
- Don’t be afraid to inspire.
- Keep it to 7-10 minutes.

Door-to-Door Canvassing

Door-to-door canvassing is one of the most effective ways to persuade voters to vote for you. Research shows that voters are most persuaded by personal contact, more than the content of what you say or what your literature says. And the positive effect of going door-to-door and talking to voters (not just leaving literature at the door) is greater with persuadable voters. This is because showing up at a voter’s door demonstrates that you are willing to invest one of your most important resources—time—to connect with that voter. It also reduces the social distance between you and the voter, making you more relatable and accessible.

That's not to say that you can just show up without a message; just that, as with all face-to-face communication, the non-verbal counts the most.

Quick Tips:

- Don't sweat it—just remember your main message points.
- Keep it short: Say hello, introduce yourself, ask if the voter has any top concerns she would like you to address, ask if she will take your literature, thank her for letting you come to her home, and say goodbye.
- Be yourself—develop rapport.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Just do it—there are endless other demands on your schedule, but don't compromise your door time.

The Fundraising Pitch

Your core message should be incorporated into your fundraising pitch, since this is another valuable opportunity to communicate with supporters and potential supporters. Fundraising provides friends and family an opportunity to support you, gives progressives a tangible way to promote the issues they believe in and allows everyone an opportunity to participate in the politics of their community in a meaningful way. Approach asking for money with this in mind, and you'll convey confidence rather than appearing apologetic or hesitant.

Quick Tips:

- *Do your research.* Know the basics about the individual you're approaching, such as his/her giving history, issue interests and profession, as well as the name of his/her spouse or partner.
- *Make a personal connection.* Establish a friendly rapport that will facilitate not only your initial ask, but create the basis of a continued relationship. If you have a friend in common, your children attend the same school or you've both been publicly supportive of the local YWCA, make the connection. This will put you at ease, make the chat more conversational and help gain the donor's trust.
- *Make an ideological connection.* This donor is a member of a local union and has fought vocally for collective bargaining and you are a tireless



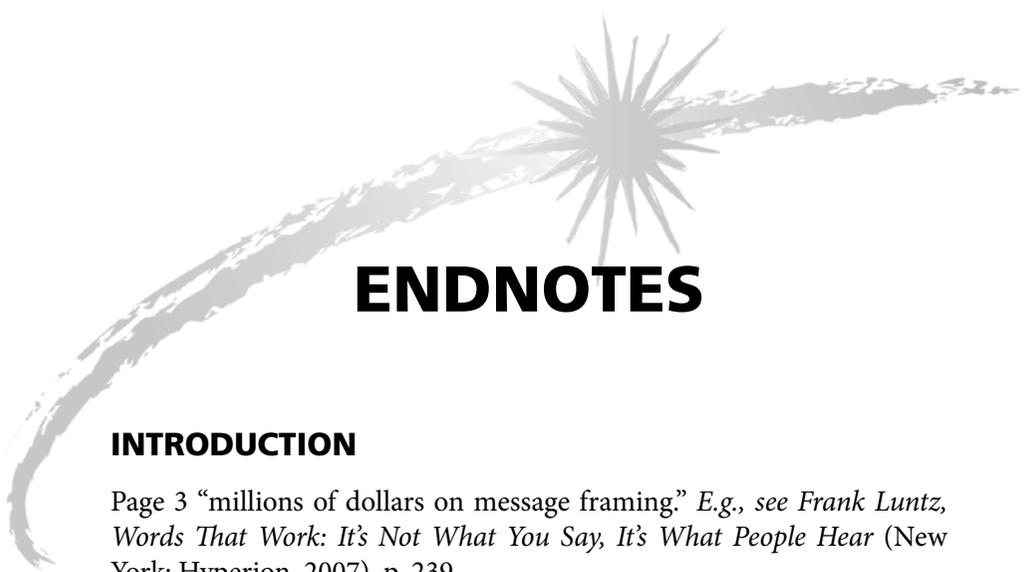
advocate of worker's rights committed to doing the same once elected. Highlight this shared value, and make it clear why electing you—and defeating your opponent—will make a difference on this issue.

- *Communicate viability.* People like to back the winning horse, or at least one that has a shot at the roses. Give a snapshot of how and why you can win this race. Share your fundraising success, key endorsements and statistics that show your district is winnable.
- *Make the donor relevant.* By explaining what their support will mean to your campaign, such as putting a radio spot on the air or funding a mailing, you are making support tangible and realistic for your prospective donor.
- *Make a specific ask and stop talking!* Always have a specific contribution goal in mind before making contact.

By explaining what their support will mean to your campaign, such as putting a radio spot on the air or funding a mailing, you are making support tangible and realistic for your prospective donor.

tion goal in mind before making contact. Ask for a specific dollar amount directly. Say, “Will you please give \$500 to help us win this race?” rather than “I’m hoping you will give...” or “Will you consider giving...” Hoping the donor will give implies she doesn’t need to answer you right now. Offering her the option to “consider” giving is easy, who wouldn’t “consider” it? And then after you’ve made your ask, be quiet. Don’t try to fill the silence or lower your request to fill the void. Give the donor time to respond.

- *Have options available.* If you request \$500 and the donor balks, provide other options. You can ask her to become a sustainer, or give \$100 a month for the next five months. You can provide additional incentives for the full gift by offering free tickets to your next event. You can ask the donor to give \$200 and raise \$300. Or you can simply lower your request. Don’t be afraid to negotiate, just keep it all donor-centric and know when to stop.
- *Say thank you and follow up.* Express your appreciation and ensure that appropriate follow up—such as donation collection, mailing of a thank you note, and updates to your database—are conducted. You’ll be resoliciting that donor before you know it!



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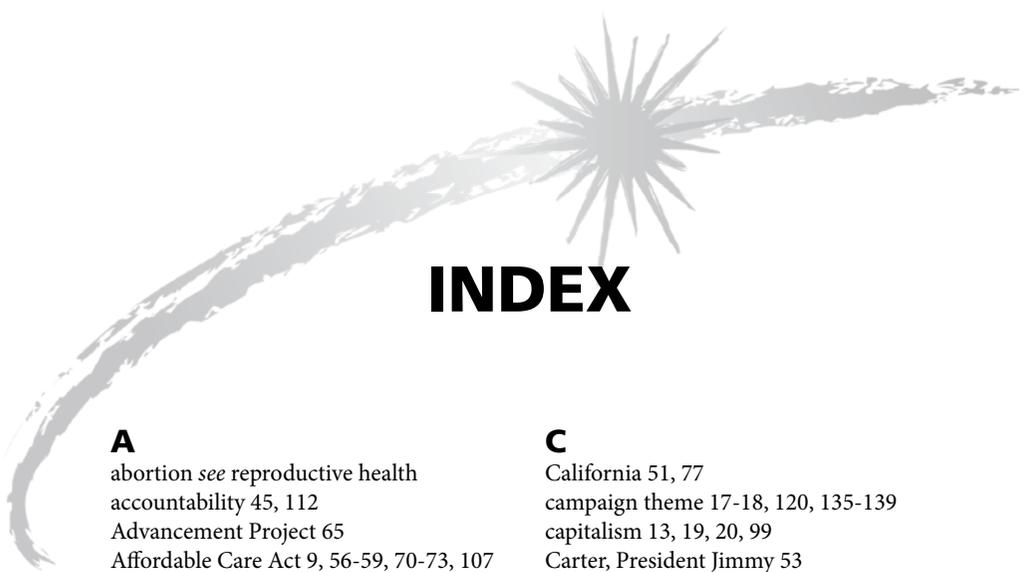
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INDEX

A

abortion *see* reproductive health
accountability 45, 112
Advancement Project 65
Affordable Care Act 9, 56-59, 70-73, 107
AK-47 assault rifle 51
Albuquerque 32
American Dream
 and school vouchers 112
 crucial in progressive values 103-106
 in economic message 17, 21, 120
 in education 39-40
 in Progressive Declaration of Values 107-108
 in why running for office 119
America's Voice Education Fund 63
anti-choice 78-84
AR-15 assault rifle 51
ASO Communications 63
Association of Chiefs of Police 50
Aurora, CO 52

B

balance is justice 103
balanced budget 26-27, 119
basic rights 9, 105
Big Oil 31, 33-35
birth control 57, 78, 81-84, 111, 116
Brady, Jim 55
Brady law 50
Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions 31
Brennan Center for Justice 93
Brewer, Governor Jan 72
budgets 8, 25-27
budgets and taxes 25-30
Bush, President George H.W. 53
Bush, President George W. 53, 118

C

California 51, 77
campaign theme 17-18, 120, 135-139
capitalism 13, 19, 20, 99
Carter, President Jimmy 53
Center for American Progress 99
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 72
Centers for Disease Control 89
charter schools 38
China 35
Christie, Governor Chris 72
cigarettes *see* tobacco
civil justice 90-91
Civil War 102
Columbine High School 51, 55
confederate 102
Congressional Budget Office 59, 91
Cleveland Elementary School 51
climate change 31-35, 117
climatecentral.org 32
Climate disruption 31, 33
Climate Solutions for a Stronger America 31, 33
Clinton, President Bill 12, 53, 136
common good 10, 137
communitarian 103
Congress, U.S. 60, 62, 75, 139
conservative(s)
 contrast with progressives 17, 18, 26, 94, 99, 100, 105, 106, 112
 economics 20
 education 38, 40
 how to talk about 101
 on abortion 82
 on public employees 112
 philosophy 56
 stereotypes about 8, 18
 wedge issues 65
consumer protection 44



corporate greed 13, 33, 45
corporations
 Americans like 13, 19
 and taxes 25, 26, 28, 30
 are people 116
 big 19-20
 in education 40
 in civil justice 90-91
 rigging the system 33
criminal justice 8, 36-37, 106
 and death penalty 115
 and repeat offenders 115

D

dailyclimate.org 32
death penalty 115
Declaration of Progressive Values 106-108
Democrat(s) 60, 70, 72, 99, 100, 137
Dēmos 44
discrimination 65-67, 104, 106-107
District of Columbia v. Heller 53
door-to-door canvassing 8, 140-141
DREAM Act 62
driver's licenses 54, 62, 94
drug tests 118

E

economic fairness 17-24
economic injustice 19-20
economic security 21
education 8, 18, 21, 38-41, 103, 104, 108
 and minimum wage 75
 and school prayer 114
 for immigrants 62
 school vouchers 112
Election Day 93-96
elections 12, 92-96, 103, 116, 124, 136
emergency contraceptives (EC) 81, 83, 116
empathize
 essential to 7, 9, 10
 on economics 18
 on environment 42
 on immigrants 60
 on Medicaid 70
 on reproductive health 80
employment security 9, 105
Employment Non-Discrimination Act 13
Enron 35
environment 25, 42-43, 45, 107, 117
 clean water 9
 regulation 105

equal justice 9, 90, 103, 105
equal opportunity *see* opportunity
estate tax 29
every American 9, 17, 21, 39, 105, 108

F

fair markets 20, 21, 104
fair share 9, 17, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 74,
105, 108, 119, 121
fair shot, fair share, same rules
 in economic message 17, 19, 21, 122
 in budgets and taxes 26
 in why running for office 119
fairness
 as a value 9, 104-105
 in budgets and taxes 25-30, 119
 in criminal justice 36
 in economics 17-22, 120
 in LGBT rights 65, 68
 in minimum wage 74
 in voting 92-96
fascist/fascism 20, 50, 102
FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) 50
First Amendment 114
Ford, President Gerald 53
Fort Hood 55
fracking (hydraulic fracturing) 43
framing 3, 4, 25, 41, 42, 101
Fraternal Order of Police 50
fundamental rights 9, 104-105
fundraising 17, 124, 139, 141-142
free enterprise 19, 20
free, fair and accessible 92-96
free markets 8, 18, 20, 101
free trade 20
freedom
 and the Ten Commandments 114
 don't say in tobacco 88
 in conservative message 101
 in intelligent design 114
 in marriage equality 68
 in progressive philosophy 104-108
 in reproductive health 78-80, 82, 84, 85,
 113, 116
 in school prayer 113
 in voting 92-95
 not for corporations 116
 when to use 8-9
freedom, opportunity and security for all
9, 60, 100, 105, 107, 120

G

Gallup poll 25, 28
Germany 35
gaming the system 20, 21, 25
Giffords, Rep. Gabrielle 52-53
global warming 32, 117
gun control 48, 52, 113
gun violence 7, 48-55

H

hard-working Americans 11-12, 47,
57-58, 70-71, 74, 76, 107
health 3, 18, 21, 25, 65, 68, 91, 105
and Medicaid expansion 70-73
and tobacco 88-89
health care for all 56-59
in environment 9, 34, 42-43
in Declaration of Progressive Values
106-108
protected by government 44, 45
reproductive 8, 78-87, 116
security 9

I

ideology
do not moderate 3
language 13, 100, 136
immigrants 7, 26, 60-64, 92
income inequality 19, 20, 22
independent voters 25
individualism 103
inheritance tax 29
insider language 12-13
insurance companies, health 56-59
intelligent design 114
IRS (Internal Revenue Service) 44

J

justice 4, 9, 19, 20, 25, 36-37, 63, 90-91,
103, 105, 115

K

Kasich, Governor John 72
Koch Brothers 33, 35

L

Lake, Celinda
advice from 3
on individualism 10
on small business 19
Lake Research Partners 63, 99
left wing 101

level playing field 9, 20, 25, 35, 45, 90,
104, 105
LGBT Movement Advancement Project 65
LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgender) rights 65-69
liberal 18, 99, 100, 105, 119
libertarian 99
liberty 9, 100, 105
Littleton, CO 51
Luntz, Frank 100

M

M-16 rifle 51
Main Street
economy works for 18-19
use concept of 45-46
market system
don't attack 20, 120
in education 40
marriage equality 7, 65-69, 107
Medicaid 11, 59, 70-73, 86
Medicare 29, 30, 59
Mehrabian, Albert 124
message box 137-138
message framing *see* framing
messaging triangle 31
middle class
in budgets and taxes 26
policies benefit 11
progressives side with 17-19, 99, 135
minimum wage 11, 74-77, 107, 118, 138
Minnesota 77

N

National Instant Criminal Background
Check System (NICS) 50
National Renewable Energy Lab 32
National Rifle Association (NRA) 48
Nazi 102
Nevada 77
new American immigrants 60-64
New Immigration Messaging Project 60, 63
Newtown, CT 51, 52, 54
ninety-nine percent 13, 18-20, 136
Nobel Prize 76
non-verbal communication 123-130
breathing 128
eye contact 128
facial expressions 127
gestures 127
movement 126
pitch 130



posture 125
tempo 130
voice 129
volume 129

O

Obama, President Barack 18, 75, 136
Obamacare 56-59
one percent
assets of 22, 29
in ideology 136
in minimum wage 74
populist message 17-18
say 19
opportunity
when to use 8-10
in criminal justice 36
in economic message 17, 21, 120
in education 39-41, 112
in taxes 28-29
in LGBT rights 65-68, 111
in minimum wage 74, 118
in progressive philosophy 104-108
in reproductive health 78-86, 11, 118
Opportunity Agenda, The 63

P

persuadable voters
aren't like progressive base 3, 12
don't speak our language 12-13
policies they like 9-11, 100, 103
on criminal justice 36
on economics 18, 74-75
on health care 56, 58, 71
on immigrants 60-62
on public employees 112
on regulation 45-47
on taxes 28
Pew Research Center 99
Plan B (emergency contraceptives) 83, 116
police 37, 38, 50, 55, 112, 115
polling
need for in framing 3
on budgets and taxes 25
on climate change 33
on education 38
on gun policies 50
on immigrant rights 61
on LGBT rights 66
on political labels 99-101, 104-105
on Tea Party 101
on voting 93

spending by right wing 3
shows language works 9, 18, 80, 82, 90, 94
poor, the
policies benefit the 11, 18, 26, 99
Americans not kind to 11
don't say on health 46, 57, 71, 75
don't say on minimum wage 75
populist; populism 17-19
poverty
and education 39
and Medicaid expansion 70-71
and minimum wage 75, 77
and progressive values 103
and the ACA 57-58
arguing to help people in 10-11, 18-19, 46, 94
prayer in schools 113
preparing for public speaking 131-132
privacy 8, 9, 104, 105, 108, 118
pro-choice 78, 81
progressive(s)
and voting 92-95
contrast with conservatives 17, 20
don't receive practical advice 3, 7
economic system 11, 17-22
favor the underdog, the common good 10
freedom, opportunity and security 105-107, 120
is popular 99-100
on education 40-41
philosophy 103-108
policies require government 44
speak the wrong language 10-13
stereotypes about 18
values 8, 9, 18, 21, 26, 42, 68, 74, 119
Progressive Change Campaign Committee 99
Progressive Caucus, U.S. Congress 99
Progressive Democrats of America 99
Progressive Majority 99
Progressive Majority Action Fund 132
Progressive States Network 99
public employees 112

Q

quality of life
as a value 8, 9, 105, 119
empathize 8
in criminal justice 36
in environment 10, 42-43
in theme 137

R

Reagan, President Ronald 53, 55, 101
regulation 44-46, 117
Reproductive health 8, 78-87, 108, 111, 116
Republicans 25, 60, 72, 100, 102
responsibility 9, 36, 37, 40, 42, 45, 55,
62, 68-69, 79-81, 87, 88-89, 90-91, 96,
105-107

retirement security 9, 21, 103

rich, the

- assets of 22, 29
- conservatives benefit 17-18
- in budgets and taxes 25-30, 108
- in minimum wage 74
- in torts and civil justice 90-91
- side against 17-22, 30, 121

rigging the rules/system 20, 25, 35

right wing

- favors values for affluent 3, 9, 11, 26, 105
- on education 40
- on health care 56-57
- on immigrants 60-63
- on Medicaid expansion 71
- on reproductive health 81-82, 87
- on voting 92-93
- say 101
- spending on polls 3

Romney, Mitt 116

S

safety

- and death penalty 115
- as a value 8-9, 49, 105, 113
- in criminal justice 36-37, 115
- in environment 42
- protected by government 44

Sandy Hook Elementary School 51

schools *see* education

school vouchers 38, 40, 112

Second Amendment 48, 50, 53, 113

Secret Service, U.S. 55

security

- when to use 8-9, 18, 21
- in criminal justice 36
- in environment 42-43
- in health 56-58
- in marriage equality 68
- in Medicaid expansion 70-71
- in progressive philosophy 104-108

small business 19, 46, 118, 138

smoke-free 88

Social Security 29, 30, 105

socialism 20, 99, 120

standardized tests 38-39

Stockton, CA 51

stump speech 139-140

Sudafed 94

Supreme Court, U.S. 53, 54, 70

Surgeon General, U.S. 89

T

Talking About Voting 2012 93

taxes

- and Medicaid expansion 59, 71-72
- and public employees 112
- empathize 8
- immigrants don't pay 62-63
- in conservative message 18, 101
- in progressive message 11, 20, 74, 94,
108, 119, 136
- fairness 25-30
- tobacco 88-89

Taxpayer Bill of Rights 13

Tea Party 101-102

TEC-9 assault pistol 51

Ten Commandments 114

theme 17-18, 120, 135-139

tobacco 88-89

tort reform 90-91

torts and civil justice 90-91

Tucson, AZ 52-53, 55

Tully, Paul 137

U

UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) 124

U.S. v. Miller 54

V

values

- are ideals 7-9
- progressive 4, 8-10, 12-13, 26, 42, 49, 60,
68, 74, 103-108
- in economics 18, 21

veterans' benefits 30

voting 92-96

vouchers, school 38, 40, 112

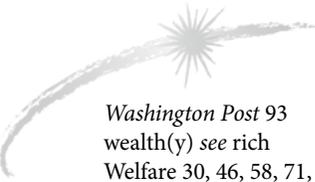
W

Wall Street 18-19, 45, 138

Wal-Mart 46

Washington (D.C.) 31, 34, 35, 44, 61

Washington (state) 77



Washington Post 93

wealth(y) *see* rich

Welfare 30, 46, 58, 71, 74, 75, 118

 drug tests for 118

work(s) hard and play(s) by the rules

 Bill Clinton's refrain 12

 in economic message 17, 21, 119, 120

World War II 102



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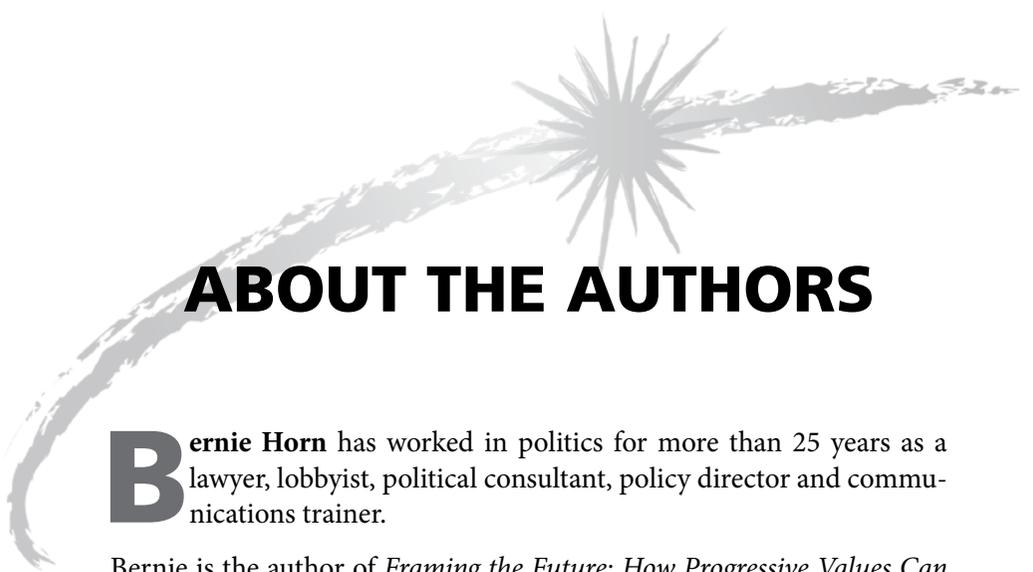
The great majority of message framing advice presented here comes from polls and focus groups conducted by Celinda Lake, who is one of the very best pollsters in the nation.

Much of the recommended language comes from research published or provided by: American Federation of Teachers (education); Americans for Tax Fairness (taxes); America's Voice Education Fund, ASO Communications and The Opportunity Agenda (immigrants); Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions (climate change); Brennan Center for Justice (voting); Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (tobacco); Dēmos (government); Fair Elections Legal Network (voting); LGBT Movement Advancement Project (LGBT); OMP and KNP Communications (gun violence); Opportunity Action (education); Topos Partnership (wages); and Women Donors Network/Communications Consortium Media Center (reproductive health).

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bernie Horn has worked in politics for more than 25 years as a lawyer, lobbyist, political consultant, policy director and communications trainer.

Bernie is the author of *Framing the Future: How Progressive Values Can Win Elections and Influence People*, published in 2008 by Berrett-Koehler. He is currently a Senior Advisor for Progressive Majority Action Fund and the Public Leadership Institute, and was previously a Senior Fellow at the Campaign for America's Future, working on domestic policy and message framing. Between 2000 and 2008, Bernie was Senior Director for Policy and Communications at the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA). Among other things, he wrote CPA's flagship policy books: eight editions of the *Progressive Agenda for the States* and two editions of the *Progressive Platform for the States*. While at CPA, he taught message framing to hundreds of elected officials and candidates.

From 1994 to 2000, Bernie was President of Strategic Campaign Initiatives, Inc., a political consulting firm that helped elect and reelect hundreds of federal, state and local officials. Additionally, he helped win issue campaigns for increased gun control, tobacco taxes, and health care, and against casino gambling and restrictions on abortion. Between 1988 and 1994, Bernie directed legislative strategy in all state legislatures for Handgun Control, Inc. (now the Brady Campaign), and served as one of the chief lobbyists for the Brady Bill, drafted and lobbied for the federal ban on semiautomatic assault weapons, and conceived the federal ban on handgun sales to minors. Earlier, he was a campaign manager and issues director for congressional campaigns. Bernie is a graduate of the Johns Hopkins University and the Georgetown University Law Center.



Gloria Totten is the founder and President of Progressive Majority, Progressive Majority Action Fund, and the Public Leadership Institute. For more than 20 years she has directed political nonprofits and led advocacy and electoral campaigns on the federal, state and local levels.

Gloria helped form Progressive Majority in 2001 with the distinct mission to elect progressive champions. By 2004, Gloria had redirected the organization's focus from supporting congressional candidates to the recruitment and election of progressive champions at the state and local levels. Progressive Majority has run the nation's largest, most comprehensive candidate recruitment operation ever since. In 2010, Gloria led an expansion of the mission by creating two sister affiliates, Progressive Majority Action Fund and the Public Leadership Institute. Under her leadership, Progressive Majority Action Fund develops winning messages and state-of-the art communications training for candidates and lawmakers. As head of the Public Leadership Institute, she coordinates multi-state policy strategy and a national network of progressive lawmakers that is nearly 14,000 strong.

Gloria served as Political Director for NARAL from 1996-2001 and Executive Director for Maryland NARAL from 1993-1996. In her home state of Minnesota, Gloria worked on a number of electoral and issue campaigns, as the Education Director for Pro-Choice Resources, President and Lobbyist for the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Media Chair for It's Time Minnesota!, a campaign to expand anti-discrimination protections to LGBT individuals under the Minnesota Human Rights Code.

Currently, Gloria serves as chair of the board of directors for Brave New Films and as a board member for ALICE, the New American Leaders Initiative and PowerPAC+. She is an Advisory Committee Member for the Drum Major Institute Scholars Program, Political Parity, Progress-Now, Wellstone Action and the Women's Information Network. Gloria was named a "Rising Star of Politics" in 2002 by *Campaigns & Elections* magazine and was awarded the "Progressive Champion Award" by Campaign for America's Future and the "Progressive Leadership Award" by Midwest Academy in 2006.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Right wing groups spend millions of dollars on message framing and then send poll-tested advice to their candidates, interest groups and activists who persistently repeat that language, *e.g.*, activist judges, class warfare, death panels, death tax, job creators, job killer, nanny state, personal injury lawyer, tax relief, union boss and values voter.

Progressive message framing advice is rarely that specific. Until now!

Voicing Our Values offers research-based language that addresses a wide range of domestic issues—from economic fairness, taxes and budget deficits to health care, education and the environment. And it doesn't shy away from hot-button issues like reproductive health, marriage equality, immigrants' rights, gun violence and voter ID. Throughout the book, suggested language is highlighted inside boxes to demonstrate what progressives should and should not say.

Although it is written for progressive state and local candidates and lawmakers, *Voicing Our Values* is also an excellent guidebook for grassroots activists who want to learn how to connect with voters.

PROGRESSIVE MAJORITY ACTION FUND is a nonprofit advocacy group that helps turn grassroots activists into progressive champions.



Progressive Majority Action Fund
1825 K Street, NW, Suite 450
Washington, DC 20006
www.progressivemajorityaction.org

