

To: Progressive Leaders and Allies  
Fr: Lake Research Partners  
Re: Message Guidance: Countering Trump and the Republican Majority  
Date: October 13, 2017

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Our Story – The Hub for American Narratives and The HUB Project partnered to build a narrative that mobilizes progressive base voters and persuades swing voters against the conservative issue agenda being promoted by Congressional Republicans and President Trump. As part of this initiative, Lake Research Partners conducted a national online dial survey of likely 2018 voters, building on previous research to refine and test progressive economic messaging.

The research shows that progressives have the opportunity to frame the issues around economic issues in a way that significantly shifts how voters perceive Congress. We believe this could lead to a dramatically different and better Congressional agenda in 2019. However, we also know that competing on this terrain will require crisp, populist messaging, as the other side's right-wing populism frame is also very strong. This memo outlines our best messaging guidance from this extensive research project.

## Key Principles of an Effective Message

### **1. Focus on Congressional Republicans and their actions directly, not as enablers of Trump.**

It is much easier to move the needle on perceptions of the two parties in Congress than to persuade voters that Trump and Republicans are the same. Voters are making separate judgments about Trump based on vastly more information.

### **2. Start aspirationally.**

While people already have negative views of Congressional Republicans, they are hungry for a more positive vision of what could be accomplished if Congress really worked for working people. The best messages begin with these aspirations, such as:

*“As a country, we have a duty to take care of those of us who are vulnerable, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and our children”*

*“We are supposed to have a government of, by, and for the people”*

*“We the people deserve a government that listens to us and works for us”*

*“We expect our elected officials to work together”*

### **3. Invoke a shared, unifying value statement.**

This takes voters out of their partisan (or anti-partisan) shells and into a set of widely shared goals that also happen to be progressive policies.

*“We need members of Congress to work more for our working families”*

*“We shouldn't have to live paycheck to paycheck”*

### **4. Bring in a couple of examples of negative actions by Congressional Republicans.**

Cite examples in issue areas where Democrats are perceived to have an advantage (e.g., health care, education) but avoid giving a laundry list of problems.

*“Republicans in Congress are taking away health care, education, and retirement benefits”*

*“Eliminating health care for seniors in nursing homes”*

*“Cutting children’s health care”*

5. **Put a human face on the problem.** This is testing with renewed force. People respond to helping the real, vulnerable (e.g., elderly, people with disabilities, our children), and working people who are hurt by Congressional Republicans’ actions.

*“We should watch out for children and seniors, but the Republican budget cuts children’s healthcare and help for the disabled.”*

6. **Focus on solutions, not problems.** However, avoid lists of policies that just lose people. Instead, use policies that are values-oriented.

*“Protect Medicare and veterans’ benefits”*

*“Focus on creating safe communities where our children can thrive”*

*“Watch out for vulnerable children and seniors”*

*“Raise taxes on millionaires, billionaires, and wealthy corporations”*

7. **Invoke political reform as part of the solution.** Republicans and Trump have huge advantages, especially with independents, on reducing the influence of special interests in Washington and draining the swamp. It is critical to contest this terrain.

*“We the people deserve a government that listens to all of us not one that tries to jam through legislation behind closed doors.”*

8. **Ensure messaging has an economic component.** Democrats start behind Republicans, and far behind Trump, on the economy and jobs. Democrats need to pull ahead on the economy to win.

*“Working families shouldn’t have to live paycheck to paycheck.”*

9. **End on a positive, active note:**

*“We need to get things done for our communities”*

*“We need elected officials who will respect all our families”*

*“We need elected officials who will restore economic stability and security for all Americans”*

*“We need elected officials who will fight for an economy that works for all of us”*

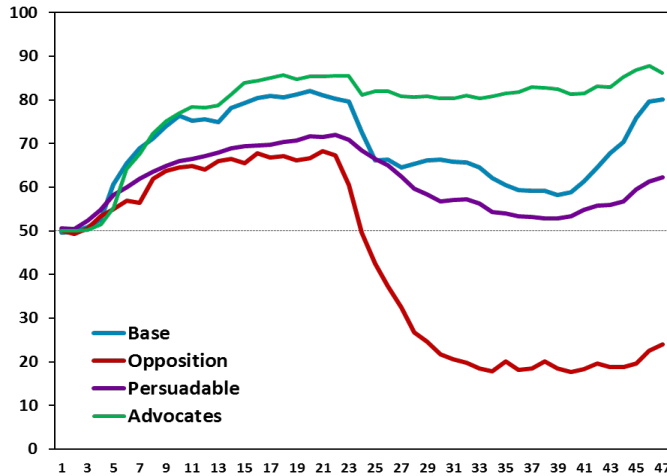
### **How to Talk about Trump and Republicans in Congress**

- **Deciding whether to include Trump should depend on your audience.** Adding Trump’s name to statements about Congress or Republicans in Congress makes them more powerful for Democrats, less powerful for independent voters, and has no effect for Persuadable voters. The best openings against Trump start with talking about his political deals behind closed doors and his wealthy corporate agenda.
- **Name Republicans in Congress first, then Trump second.** Starting with Trump alienates swing voters and causes them to turn off for the rest of the message.
- **Saying Trump is “dangerous” is better than saying he is “incompetent.”** “Incompetent” implies that Trump is weak and can’t get things done, whereas many voters see him as a strong figure who would even more done if Washington would get out of his way.
- **Attacking Trump for moving the corporate agenda is more powerful than attacking him for working in a partisan way behind closed doors.** Voters expect partisanship and are more offended by his siding with corporate America over working people.

Words to Embrace	Words to Replace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We need Congress to <b>work more for working families</b></li> <li>✓ We need Congress to <b>get things done for our communities</b></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We need elected officials who will fight for an economy that works for all of us</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Republicans are taking away health care, education, and retirement benefits that help working and vulnerable people in this country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>X</b> Republicans are carrying out Trump’s agenda</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ In America, we are supposed to have a government of, by, and for the people</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reducing the influence of special interests in Washington</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>X</b> Draining the swamp</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Raise taxes on millionaires, billionaires, and wealthy corporations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>X</b> Need more revenue for government programs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Republicans are trying to divide us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>X</b> Republicans are trying to manipulate us</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Economic security</li> <li>✓ Shouldn’t have to live paycheck to paycheck</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Vulnerable (the elderly, people with disabilities, and our children)</li> </ul>	

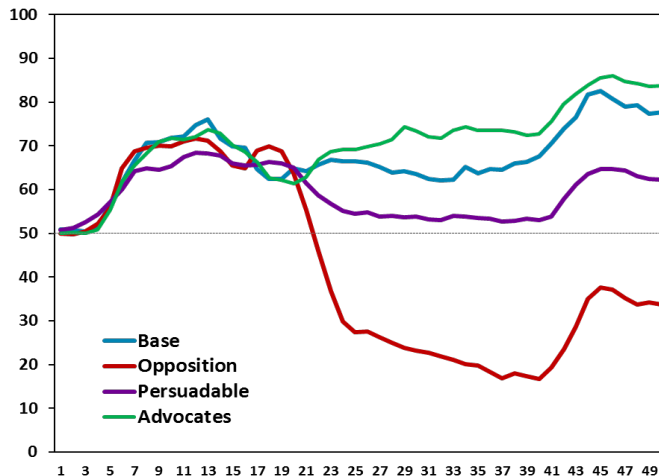
## Winning Messages

Using an online survey to register moment-to-moment preferences and attitudes, we dial tested a sample of more than 900 representative likely 2018 voters and a sample of advocates. Below are our top four messages that counter Trump and Republicans in Congress. The most effective phrases are underlined.



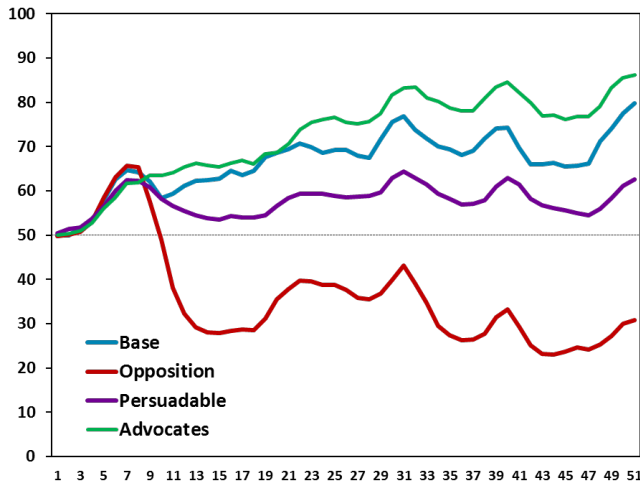
### Take Care Of (With Trump)

As a country, we have a duty to take care of those of us who are vulnerable, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and our children. That's why we created Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, and why we focus on creating safe communities where our children can thrive. But Republicans in Congress and President Trump are taking actions that will devastate our most vulnerable citizens, dramatically cutting Medicaid, eliminating health care for seniors in nursing homes and cutting child nutrition, after-school programs, and meals on wheels. It shouldn't be like this. We need elected officials who will respect all our families.



### Behind Closed Doors (With Trump)

In America, we are supposed to have a government of, by, and for the people. Our elected officials are supposed to fight for our best interests. Congressional Republicans and President Trump promised to change Washington and increase transparency but they are cutting secret deals with corporate lobbyists behind closed doors, like the health care plan, and they're shutting out the American people. We the people deserve a government that listens to us and works for us, not one that tries to jam through legislation developed behind closed doors.



## We All Agree

We expect our elected officials to work together and find solutions to our problems. Instead, Republicans in Congress are dividing our country, fighting with everyone – including each other - and getting nothing done. We all agree on closing tax loopholes that allow wealthy corporations to ship jobs overseas and hide profits. So why haven't we seen action? We should protect Medicare and veterans' benefits, but the Republican budget proposes cuts and raises the retirement age. We should watch out for vulnerable children and seniors, but the Republican budget cuts children's healthcare, afterschool programs, and help for the disabled. We need to get things done for our communities.

## Economic Security

Working families shouldn't have to live paycheck to paycheck, but this is the reality for too many Americans. Wages have stagnated across the country while costs for health care, housing, and utilities have continued to rise, putting serious pressure on family budgets already stretched thin. An unexpected event or illness or change in the stock market can wreck an entire life's savings. Republicans in Congress will only make the problem worse by eliminating paid overtime and minimum wage, cutting Social Security and Medicare, and forcing workers to put in longer hours for less pay. We need elected officials who will restore economic security and stability for all Americans.

With these messages, we shift voter opinions dramatically. Opinions of Republicans in Congress go down 5 points while opinions of Democrats in Congress go up 6 points. Voters also move away from the Republican Party and toward the Democratic Party on a variety of key issues, including jobs and the economy (+10 net shift), budget priorities (+10), reducing special interests (+10), health care (+9), and being better for working families (+9).

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For more information, please contact Celinda Lake (clake@lakeresearch.com), David Mermin (dmermin@lakeresearch.com), or Zoe Grotophorst (zgrotophorst@lakeresearch.com) at 202-776-9066.