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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

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Shifting the Economic Narrative

What is clear from this fresh look at public consciousness on the economy is how difficult this period has been for both non-college-educated and college-educated voters – and how vulnerable the prevailing narratives articulated by national Democratic leaders are.¹ We will face an impossible headwind in November if we do not move to a new narrative, one that contextualizes the recovery but, more importantly, focuses on what we will do to make a better future for the middle class.

It is elites who are creating a conventional wisdom that an incumbent president must run on his economic performance – and therefore must convince voters that things are moving in the right direction. They are wrong, and that will fail. The voters are very sophisticated about the character of the economy; they know who is mainly responsible for what went wrong and they are hungry to hear the President talk about the future. They know we are in a new normal where life is a struggle – and convincing them that things are good enough for those who have found jobs is a fool's errand. They want to know the plans for making things better in a serious way – not just focused on finishing up the work of the recovery.

We are losing these voters on the economy, but holding on because Romney is very vulnerable. They do not trust him because of who he is for and because he's out of touch with ordinary people; he is vulnerable on the Ryan budget and its impact on people; he is vulnerable on the choices over taxes. But in the current context, it produces a fairly diminished embrace of Obama and the Democrats, the lesser of two evils, without much feeling of hope.

But we underscore the sentiment they expressed in the postcards to the President they wrote at the end of the exercise: overwhelmingly, these voters want to know

¹ This report is based on findings from four focus groups conducted in Columbus, Ohio with non-college-educated men and non-college-educated women on May 29, 2012 and in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania with college-educated men and college-educated women on May 30, 2012. All participants were independents, weak Democrats, or weak Republicans.



that he understands the struggle of working families and has plans to make things better.

With the economy faltering, we conducted fairly open-ended focus groups among white non-college-educated voters in Columbus, Ohio and college-educated suburban voters in suburban Philadelphia. We excluded strong partisans from both camps. These were all independents or weak partisans and ticket-splitters—swing independent voters—and the groups included an even mix of 2008 Obama and McCain voters.

Job losses have left them struggling to pay the bills.

The discussion always begins with discussion of their experience with job losses for themselves and their families -- and how that has left them struggling to pay for groceries. Most have jobs now, but speak about their lower wages and benefits. Because wages are down, there has been a dramatic rise in discussion of very basic pocketbook issues. And this does not seem like some passing phase.

This has not been a pocketbook-level recovery for ordinary Americans. This is especially true for non-college-educated voters, who have been uniquely hit by this economy. They, their families, and people they know are on food stamps, on unemployment, and on disability.

We've had a lot of layoffs in our family and my husband just got over that. He drew unemployment for a year and a half. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

I had to go in for hernia surgery on Friday. I'm unemployed, you know it's expensive, they don't care. Nobody cares. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

They have trouble finding work that will pay the bills. And for many older workers, it is difficult to find work at all.

I'm getting paid \$7.70 an hour ...I'm 53 years old...If I want a job, that's what I've got to do. And actually... I'm having problems trying to get a full-time job because people are looking at it and saying, you know, we've only got a couple years. Most companies are looking and saying, we probably got a couple good years out of you, possibly less, that's about it. And I mean, they all – used to be the laws were there that says, actually, you're supposed to get two, 10-minute breaks... and a half hour lunch. Laws have changed now, companies don't have to give that... And they're working us to the bone. It's like, wow, we're back in



the 1900s, you know...Because you're just slave labor, you know. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

Things are really tough, I'm self-employed, I'm just drumming up work and it's just, like, living, like, from pay to pay, from job to job. And you know, I can't buy things for my kids or my grandkids like I – like I was before. And it upsets me, because you know, come Christmas time and stuff like that, their birthdays and stuff like that, you know, I can't give them what I want to get them. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

Moving in and what can you do for free?

They are consumed with the costs of things and how to adjust creatively to this new economy. That includes moving back in with an ex, moving in with a parent or the kids moving in with you. The family situation in the non-college-educated group was part of the economic struggle.

The creative economy of necessity has forced many of these non-college-educated voters to adjust their living situations.

I live with my first husband, which is not the greatest thing in the world but anyways, I do have two children, 31 and 26. The oldest has three kids who lives with us...And I'm hoping to get this job so I can get out of the house. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Right now I live with my family. I moved to Columbus two years ago...And I'm unemployed right now. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

And the economy is very difficult for young people. Both college-educated and non-college-educated participants talk about their grown children living back at home while they look for work, pay off student loans, or get back on their feet.

Have two kids, one's a high school junior, the other is 26 years old, both living at home. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

My daughter is back with me at home, she's 25 ... Very expensive and in this day and age to try and get a college education, a lot of young people can't afford to be on their own. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

After that they look to see how to be creative in reducing costs in the face of this new economy.



When they talk with their friends over coffee or in their kitchens, they talk about what they can do for free -- finding new ways to do old things. There is simply no budget for leisure. One non-college-educated woman in Columbus said “By the time I pay my car payments, utilities, and property taxes, three-fourths of my retirement check is gone.”

Probably what can we find to do that's free. I was just saying I'm a total expert on that with four kids. I can find something for all of them to do and I was offended when I was expected to pay \$5 at the Columbus Commons this weekend for all day. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Many have found new ways to make extra money, engaging in a kind of creative economy of necessity. One non-college-educated woman in Columbus, Ohio noted, “I make and earn extra money, like yard sales.” They talk about the ingenuity required to make or save money—like collecting bottles or scrapping unwanted metal.

We recycle, we do cans, we do metal. On trash [day] when people set their garbage out, we go trash picking. I know it sounds nasty but dumpster diving, whatever. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

[When we sold our house we made money by] scrapping...we took the personal possessions that we had...and sold it to the scrap yards. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Tough in the more affluent suburbs too.

Even if they don't know people at the scrap yard or on food stamps, college-educated suburban voters are struggling with new realities too. They find themselves in situations they did not anticipate or budget for years ago. Some who had previously retired have gone back to work or are looking for part-time work. One man retired and started working in real estate part-time to supplement his pension, but noted that his income from that has gone down over the last few years. College-educated suburban voters worry about the cost of college education and have suffered from stagnant incomes, pay cuts, and layoffs.

Well my salary went down quite a bit and my husband would have liked to retire too but... with the stock market and everything else and it's frustrating. And I have three granddaughters and you know I worry for them because of... especially college, where's the money coming from you know? (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)



At work, salaries were frozen a few years ago. Everybody took a ten percent cut. There were layoffs. Health care is going up. My take-home pay is...less than it was five years ago. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

Losing ground, a new focus on groceries.

Both groups complain that their bills keep going up but their paychecks have remained stagnant or decreased. This is made tangible every week at the grocery store. The shopping list has not changed but the bill at the checkout line takes a much bigger bite out of the paycheck. The people in these groups are so keenly aware of prices at different grocery stores that the college-educated men in suburban Philadelphia began giving each other tips on where to shop and where to find the best coupons.

I feel like I'm slowly losing ground...we took a pay freeze. And it just seems like going to the grocery store is more of a shock than it was a couple years ago. I don't feel like I'm eating much more than I was. I've even lost weight! So I feel like I'm not keeping pace. And you hear about some positives with this or that, but I don't see it, I don't feel it at all. I get excited when gas goes down a cent. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

I think if everyone just stopped at a certain price on cereal, milk, gas, everything, they cannot go above this price, you know what I mean? (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Everybody likes to eat fruits and vegetables but can we afford fruits and vegetables? (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

The grocery thing--groceries are ridiculous. I keep changing stores to try and get by, and I will say that the Bottom Dollar does actually save you forty percent, and it is good stuff. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

But I am very frustrated that you spend everything you have every time you go to the grocery store, it's always a dollar more and I never spent this much at a grocery store. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

I was just talking about every day living expenses. Milk being [expensive]– is it going to be \$5 again? (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

And like, I think he said about the price of everything. Everything from I mean food to [basic] supplies and stuff like that. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)



These pocketbook realities do not stop at the grocery store checkout line. Prices at the gas pump, cable bills, and medical insurance now take a larger share out of increasingly smaller paychecks.

Gasoline prices for me again. I'm just stuck on that. To me, that's what I mainly – takes a pretty good chunk of my armor at home is gasoline. You can't go nowhere unless you have gasoline in your car so to me that's the biggest problem I have. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

I try not to spend unnecessarily, but bills do continue to go up. Cable goes up, and your cell phone goes up, and...medical insurance. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

In both the college-educated and non-college-educated groups, people tell us that they feel like they have to fight hard just to get by.

I'm never going to catch up. It seems like you're always trying to catch up. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

I'm treading water. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

This reality has forced many non-college-educated people to think in increasingly short-term ways. As one non-college-educated woman in Columbus said, “Not thinking about the next year. I think about this week, do we have enough groceries.”

Right direction? It *can't* get worse.

These voters are not convinced that we are headed in the right direction. They are living in a new economy – and there is no conceivable recovery in the year ahead that will change the view of the new state of the country. They actually have a very realistic view of the long road back and the struggles of the middle class — and the current narrative about progress just misses the opportunity to connect and point forward.

More than half of these independent swing voters supported Obama, so they want to be hopeful. They will talk about some positive changes, but mostly, they say it cannot get worse and you have to believe it will get better.

While we hear some optimism, this is framed mostly by the sense that this has to be rock bottom. A non-college-educated man in Columbus professed this kind of pessimistic optimism, saying, “I don't think it's wishful thinking but it has to get better.



It really kind of has to... A couple of years ago, it looked like it was turning around just a little bit. And then it really...went downhill...And now, it's probably about the leanest that I've seen in what I do. And you know, it – I can only think that...it's got to get better sooner or later here." One non-college-educated woman in Columbus summed it up for all of the participants when she said, "It has to get better. We're just not going to be able to go on any more."

Despite the overarching sense that it "can't get worse," very few see the economy improving in the very near term and few believe it will get much better over the next year.

I think it might get better but I don't think within the next year. I think it's going to be longer term. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

I don't think it's going to happen overnight and I don't think we're going to see in the next year. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Yeah under another President Obama term I see us, as a people, continuing to struggle, and I don't see things getting appreciably better. Maybe this much better but not appreciably. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

The main thing is, it's uncertainty. It doesn't seem like there's growth around the corner. We read about, or I read about growth and positive numbers, lack of negative outcomes every month in the different reports that are published but it seems like that is just treading water. It seems like the economy is not really swimming yet, it's just sort of staying afloat. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

They are looking for leaders who understand the uncertainty and can lead a way forward.

Reactions to Advertising in Battleground States

In the sustained flood of advertising, the one thing that stands out is how strong the reactions to Mitt Romney are— particularly in Ohio – where he has been defined as hurting workers in his work at Bain. See more below about the resistance to Romney.

The Obama campaign's 60 second "Forward" ad tests okay and begins by acknowledging that this economy is still very difficult and that we still have a long way to go. It does talk about jobs gained, though it gains no support beyond 2008 Obama supporters.



The spots that simply talk about progress on the economy did not do well. The first offered a graphic depiction of job decline during the early months of the recession and job growth under President Obama. The second highlighted progress on jobs in the automobile industry. These ads did not win over most Obama voters.

It is possible the auto industry spot would have worked better in the northeastern part of the state, or that it did not imply it was a metaphor for the economy getting better in general. Half the participants in the groups had voted for Obama, but less than a quarter gave this spot a positive rating.

The spot displaying the job growth graph did not fare much better: only about one-third (12 out of 34) gave this a positive rating.

But this is not just a quantitative exercise, as you could see the resistance to the argument. Of the job growth graph ad, they say:

I think his numbers might be a little bit off, whatever the number was, 4.7 million new jobs. 4.7 new jobs, but 3.8 were let go elsewhere. I'd have to really – 20% of those jobs are customer service reps in India. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

All the positives they show for him, that hasn't happened. All the jobs returned and all, it's not there. But they're showing it like boy, this is happened. It was way down here and we've done all this. It's all exaggerated figures. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Is it created [jobs] or just people returning to work? (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

You need to see it in the grocery stores. You need to see it as the gas stations. You need, the consumer needs to see the result and there's no result of that yet. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

And the auto industry spot, surprisingly, produces a lot of resentment. Women in particular did not see how it related to them, and even some men working outside manufacturing thought it left them out.

It's like how things are getting better? Where? I don't see it. Makes me mad. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Good job for the autoworkers but where does that leave my grandchildren? (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)



Out-of-Touch Romney.

Romney is damaged heading into this race. Many of his supporters have trouble saying anything positive, simply he is “not Obama.”

Respondents immediately volunteer that Romney is rich, out of touch, and in the pocket for Wall Street and big finance. That was true before we introduced any information – reflecting the outside advertising on Bain that was airing at the time of the groups in Ohio.

[Romney will enact] policies that keep himself and his class where they are. There's a certain – I think there's a certain level when you get so high up the business where you're making so much money that you don't need where you just lose some of your humanity and you just don't care. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Romney just strikes me as kind of out of touch. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

Romney still wants to keep it to where all the high rich people can still [have] low tax. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

Out of touch. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

I think he talks out of both sides of his mouth, I mean having all this money in foreign corporations, that's not right. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

He's a Wall Street man. I don't trust him. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

He doesn't have a clue. He made over 300 thousand dollars from ancillary income and he can't understand why the average American can't relate to him... He is disconnected. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

We gave respondents a fact sheet about Mitt Romney and asked them to indicate which items were most significant for them, both positive and negative. The top six responses were all negative and all focused on Mitt Romney's personal wealth, Wall Street connections, and cavalier attitude toward those less fortunate. The single most important issue for these voters was that Romney holds millions in an offshore



account. One college-educated man in Bala Cynwyd responded passionately: "I...didn't know this before I read this... How come nobody's talking about this? It's disgraceful. They talked about his Swiss bank account because it was in the tax return! That was bad enough. But he only made a thousand dollars so I'll give him a pass on that, but don't give me this crap. The other thing I didn't like...was the comment he made regarding saying he was unemployed and a couple times he worried he was going to get a pink slip. Talk about being out of touch with the way people are in the country today, how dare you say something so pandering as that when it's totally and patently untrue just to get a vote, you're not qualified to be President of this country."

He holds as much as \$8 million in accounts in the Cayman Islands to avoid paying taxes on it.	18
He has said "I'm not concerned about the very poor. We have a safety net there."	15
His five largest campaign contributions in the 2012 race are from large Wall Street companies: Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, and Credit Suisse. Thus far Romney has received over \$8.5 million from Wall Street and big investment banks.	12
He supports an economic plan that cuts corporate taxes by one-third and extends the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.	11
He endorsed the Paul Ryan budget that shifts rising health care costs onto seniors	11
He is estimated to be worth between \$190 and \$250 million	11
He was governor of Massachusetts for 4 years	9
As governor of Massachusetts, he eliminated a \$3 billion deficit without borrowing or raising taxes.	9

Romney's support for the Ryan budget is a real vulnerability. Many voters are not familiar with the Ryan budget or Romney's full-throated support for it. When informed about the budget's contents and Romney's endorsement, voters' worst fears about Romney are confirmed.

Well I think it's scary about the whole idea of cutting food stamps, nutrition aid to mothers and children. The whole idea of decreasing education funding, eliminating teachers, firefighters, police officers. I mean that's -- knee-jerk reaction that was scary. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

The lesser of two evils.

Despite Romney's clear weaknesses, when asked whether Romney or Obama would



do a better job on the economy, more chose Romney. That is some measure of the challenge we face, since many have heard the president's economic message.

However, when forced to choose, many of the Obama voters work to figure out a way to support him, though it lacks the kind of emotion and rationale that would drive engagement.

When asked which candidate they intend to support in November, these respondents lean toward Obama for many reasons—experience, sympathy, patience, and Romney's inability to connect with or understand the lives of ordinary voters. They say that Obama is “the devil you know” and believe he is the “lesser of two evils.”

I'm sure another President Obama term I see us continuing to struggle and I don't see things getting appreciably better...but if president Obama is reelected, it's better than if Romney is elected. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

It's the lesser of two evils. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

It's better to go with the devil you know! That's Obama's campaign pledge! Go with the devil you know! That's a great campaign pledge! (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

I say Barack just because he does have four years and Romney doesn't. That doesn't necessarily mean I'm for him... (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Nonetheless, many voters express patience with the President and want him to do well. Even if their patience is wearing very thin, they still want to believe in him. At the end of the exercise, we asked respondents to write postcards to the President. Many encouraged him to maintain the programs they rely on most and offered sympathy for the difficulty of his job.

I believe you have the best interests of the majority of American people at heart. I also believe that you are torn sometimes between your ideals and political reality. I want you to know that this is not an easy recovery for us – in fact, most times it doesn't feel like a recovery...Don't let the “safety net” be shrunk any further in the name of political compromise. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

We are going thru very hard times and you must let the citizens know that you know...Be empathetic. Be strong. Be smart. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

Take your job on Social Security and health care more serious and try to create



more jobs for the middle class people. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

The middle class desperately needs help. (College-educated woman, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

In the postcards, they are looking for the President to understand that the middle class desperately needs help and to show how the future will be better. All their ideas center on what he should do -- not what he has done.

Toward Economic Messaging: a middle class future.

In addition to spots from the two candidates, we developed and tested messages aimed at the middle class and the choices presented in this election.

By far, the strongest message was one focused on the future of the middle class -- with minimal discussion of the recovery and jobs created and maximal empathy for the challenges people face. Most voters identified with the line that “the middle class has taken it on the chin for years.” The message turns mid-way to what we will do, beginning with raising taxes on those earning over \$200,000 to make the economy work better for the middle class. It taps into their frustrations that began building before the recession even hit and recognizes that this election needs to be about the “future of the middle class.”

(MIDDLE CLASS) We've got to do everything possible to get people back to work. Unemployment is too high and we know that new jobs pay less and offer fewer benefits. It is really a struggle. That's why we have to address not just the recovery but the fact that the middle class has taken it all on the chin for years and that's got to change. We've been exporting American industries and outsourcing American jobs. The cause of healthcare, college, groceries and gasoline keep going up but the middle class can't catch a break. They've taken on more debt and can't save for education or retirement. At the same time, Wall Street's big banks and the richest got big tax breaks and oil industry got special interest subsidies. This election is about the future of the middle class. We will put tax rates for those earning over \$200,000 back up to where it was under President Clinton, eliminate special interest subsidies and cut our deficits over the long term. We have to protect retirement by securing Social Security and Medicare, expand support for education, training and innovation, American industries and make college affordable. We need an America where the middle class can prosper again.



Two-thirds of the participants responded positively to this message (23 of 34) -- far and away the strongest thing tested. Just four respondents (3 of whom were in the more Republican college-educated women's group) responded negatively to this message, and more than half responded positively.

MIDDLE CLASS MESSAGE	NC Women Columbus	NC Men Columbus	C Women Bala Cynwyd	C Men Bala Cynwyd	Total
Positive	5	6	5	7	23
Neutral	4	1	1	1	7
Negative	0	1	3	0	4

Respondents appreciated the reference to the Clinton era tax rates and economy, and focused intensely on investment in Social Security, Medicare, and education.

It made me feel like if I gave him a chance maybe he really did have a lot more clean up, had a lot more to clean up than I realized. Or whatever, maybe it was just a little bit harder for him to clean up so maybe I should give him a little bit more of a chance than I thought. Maybe, maybe. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Security of Medicare. That's the biggest thing. (Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

I think it's what he's been trying to do for the last three plus years. I think it, you know, I think if you're making more than \$200,000 a year you're probably going to be able to afford to, you know, take a bit of a larger hit, where Romney is in bed with all these bankers and Wall Street people and I think he's going to have their best interest in mind. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

About protecting the retirement and Social Security and Medicare, basically. To try and like, Robert said, you know, three some years at least try, and it's getting results, it seems like. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

We've done this before [tax rates under Clinton] —it didn't scare away millionaires. (College-educated man, Bala Cynwyd, PA)

We tested a second message in Bala Cynwyd, which we developed based on responses from the non-college groups in Columbus. This message did okay among the college-educated voters in Bala Cynwyd, but did not perform as well as the first



message. This message has also neither been fully developed nor tested among non-college respondents, which we will do in the coming months.

Nothing was more important than keeping America from going off an economic cliff, helping the people who took a big hit, and building back the jobs we need to restore the middle class. We helped a lot of people, and now we are at least seeing more jobs each month. But I know that a lot of people lost a lot in this recession. Wages and salaries are not going up with prices, and many of the new jobs pay less and offer fewer benefits, like health care. It really is a struggle. In fact, the middle class has taken it on the chin for years and that's got to change. So, we've got a lot of work to do. Companies should no longer get breaks when they outsource jobs or overpay their CEOs. We will increase tax rates for those earning over \$200,000 so we can reduce the deficit over the long-term and absolutely protect Social Security and Medicare and support education and college affordability. We have got a lot of work to do, but I believe in hard-working Americans and I believe in America.

NEW MESSAGE	NC Women Columbus	NC Men Columbus	C Women Bala Cynwyd	C Men Bala Cynwyd	Total
Positive	X	X	1	4	5
Neutral	X	X	4	3	7
Negative	X	X	4	0	4

Responses to our final message, which presents the choice going forward, suggests tax choice could be a very strong motivator in this election. White non-college-educated respondents were really animated in their discussion of this message and clearly fear that Mitt Romney and the Republicans will cut things that matter to them because they not willing to cut taxes for the rich.



(CHOICE) We’re proposing to raise taxes on the wealthiest and get rid of special interest subsidies so we can invest in things that matter, like education, research and innovation, modernizing our infrastructure and making sure we don’t raise Social Security or shift Medicare costs from the government to seniors. The Republican won’t raise taxes on the wealthy. In fact, they want to cut them. In order to make these cuts and maintain subsidies for big oil companies, the budget will have to be balanced elsewhere. That means \$1.7 trillion in cuts to Medicaid, the end of Social Security and Medicare as we know it and cuts to food stamps and nutrition aid to mothers and children. In fact, Mitt Romney has embraced the Republican congressional budget and that means decreasing education funding by 20 percent and eliminating teachers, firefighters and police officers from local payrolls.

CHOICE	NC Women Columbus	NC Men Columbus	C Women Bala Cynwyd	C Men Bala Cynwyd	Total
Positive	5	1	0	3	9
Neutral	4	4	6	1	15
Negative	0	2	3	4	9

These participants—especially the non-college-educated men who have been affected personally or know someone who has—are very sensitive to cuts in Medicaid, to disability, and food stamps. People rely on these programs—and the protection of Social Security and Medicare. They just can’t fathom billions of dollars in cuts to these programs. Anger increases when the proposal is juxtaposed with cutting taxes for millionaires. In addition, the college-educated men seemed to recognize that when these programs are cut at the bottom, the whole economy is affected because people are unable to get ahead, spend money, and get the economy going again.

I like Social Security, I liked that. I like food stamps. I’m not on food stamps but I know people that are and mothers and children. And there’s more to it than I need to think about – I need to think more about other people than myself.
(Non-college-educated woman, Columbus, OH)

Where it says that means \$1.7 trillion in cuts to Medicaid and to Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, living with my parents, I’m in the kind of family. My parents highly rely on Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, and we’re working. I can’t imagine if it got worse. I can’t imagine. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

It’s all about Social Security, Medicare. He was saying that, you know, having to live with elderly parents, and about food stamps, Medicare, Social Security. And



I mean, you've got to work, too, on top of that. I just wonder if it's going to be there. Like I said, I'm 56, and I've got 10 more years for Social Security. And I've worked since I was like, 14 years old. (Non-college-educated man, Columbus, OH)

These responses create a clear outline for a message that will speak to and with voters and bring them in. This economy has made many voters feel disconnected from and at odds with the government in Washington. Messages that connect on a pocketbook level and commit to the programs voters rely on most have the capacity to be very powerful, particularly when the offer on the other side is suspicious and weak.