



# RESURGENT REPUBLIC

## MEMORANDUM

**TO: Interested Parties**  
**FROM: Luke Frans**  
**DATE: January 27, 2014**  
**RE: Messages that Appeal to the Center of the Electorate in 2014**

Since President Obama took office, Resurgent Republic has closely followed the opinions and intensity of Independent voters. The center of the electorate first stepped away from President Obama during the summer of 2009 due to concerns over the amount of federal spending in the stimulus and budget. Since then the opinions of swing voters have been remarkably stable when considering the fundamental issues facing the country.

Today the economy remains their top priority, as many working class families believe quality jobs are too scarce. In focus groups these voters describe in detail their financial insecurity as the cost of living rises while incomes stay flat or decline. They're frustrated over the direction of the country. They feel anxiety about the known and unknown pieces of Obamacare, and they voice disdain for anything Washington.

Winning the center of the electorate often proves decisive in elections, and these central themes serve as a starting point for appealing to swing voters in 2014. The following message recommendations are based upon numerous Resurgent Republic national surveys and focus groups from 2009 to 2013 on topics where Independents aligned with Republicans rather than Democrats.

### **1. Economy**

- DO message beyond surface level buzzwords like “fiscal discipline,” “tax cuts,” and “small businesses.” Highlight the personal benefits of a conservative economic vision, not the policies themselves.
- DO talk about the need for good-paying jobs, increasing take home pay, and upward mobility to empower people out of poverty and grow and strengthen the middle class.
- DO talk about how the federal government has too many regulations that hurt the economy.

In political terms, the economy is only as strong as voters perceive it to be. Many voters believe the economy is stuck in neutral, or worse, still in a recession. The national unemployment rate is declining, but voter attitudes about their personal economic situation do not evidence corresponding optimism.

Struggling middle class families continue to express frustration about how increasing costs – gas, food, utilities, education, and health care – usurp a higher percentage of take home pay each month. Many voters under 40 years old who have employment, or a string of part-time jobs, feel far off from a growing career.

During President Obama's first term, Independents perceived the president as trying to fix things, but today they are discouraged by the lack of personal progress. Address the lingering, unanswered question swing voters have about the economy, "Is this the best we can do?"

## **2. Health Care**

- DO talk in the affirmative about supporting health care reforms that lower costs and allow working class families and individuals to keep the coverage and doctors they have and like.
- DO say Obamacare increases health care costs, health care premiums, taxes, spending, and the deficit, while decreasing the quality of care.
- DO talk about health care as a pocket book issue. Anxiety due to skyrocketing health care costs weighs heavily on voters' personal economic outlook.
- DON'T put the message emphasis on process arguments (pass, repeal, amend, etc.) or defend the status quo.

According to the left, the central question for Republicans in 2014 is, "How are you going to help fix Obamacare?" This seems reasonable, but in reality this question is flawed and assumes Obamacare is the only and best way to solve the nation's health care challenges. Moreover, this debate constrains responses to Washington language (pass, repeal, amend, and the like) that is lost on those outside the Beltway (i.e., the working mom trying to schedule family health check-ups).

When Washington is viewed as part of the problem, voters have limited faith that more Washington spending and regulations are needed to make Obamacare work. After all, the negative consequences voters feared during the Obamacare debate are sadly proving true. Obamacare is increasing health care premiums, the cost of health care, government spending, taxes, and the deficit. It lessens the quality of care and does not allow those who like their health care plan to

keep it. By the way, the latter point is the one promise voters believed during the Obamacare debate that has proven not to be true with the cancelation of insurance policies.

Talking in the affirmative on health care includes in part advocating for policies that empower individuals to choose a health care plan that fits their needs, increasing competition with the purchase of health care plans across state lines, incentivizing health care savings accounts, and allowing individuals to both take a new job and keep their current coverage. The end goal of these and other conservative reforms is to help control the cost of health care. If you're not talking about the cost of care, you're bypassing voters' top priority on this issue.

### **3. Fiscal Issues (Spending, Taxes, Deficits, and Debt)**

- DO say it's time Washington stops spending money we do not have.
- DO talk about how individuals and families are making do with less and that Washington needs to do the same and live within its means.
- DO talk about federal spending, debt and deficits in personal terms rather than aggregate totals.

The left's affinity for giving Washington a blank check is off-putting to swing voters. President Obama and congressional Democrats supported \$1 trillion in stimulus spending, rejected bipartisan recommendations from the president's budget commission, added new spending in Obamacare, provided the largest deficits in U.S. history, and racked up nearly \$7 trillion to the national debt. Independents believe Washington plays by its own set of rules, while personally they are forced to make difficult decisions on cutting back. The most persuasive phrase on this issue is, "It's time Washington stops spending money we do not have" which resonates with swing voters better than charges of "bankrupting the country" or "mortgaging our children's future."

### **4. Energy**

- DO talk about what conservative energy policies mean for the middle class: lower prices at the pump, cheaper utility bills and more savings to cover monthly needs.
- DO highlight the need for increased domestic energy production to create good-paying jobs, grow the economy, and become energy independent.
- DO talk about the harmful consequences of Obama's environmental regulations on domestic energy production and the economy, rather than if climate change is occurring.

Swing voters consistently support increasing domestic energy production in a clean and safe way and understand that such policies create good-paying jobs. They make little distinction between policies favoring natural gas, clean coal, drilling, wind, and solar energy. Alternative energy production is viewed as innovative and the future of energy and should be part of a broad-reaching energy policy.

Swing voters are also more likely to believe climate change is happening and that human activity is a cause, but they view fixing the economy as a higher priority and disapprove of addressing climate change in a manner that stifles job creation and hurts the economy. Conservatives are on the defensive with swing voters when the debate is about “true science” but are aligned with the middle when opposing heavy-handed environmental regulations that hurt the economy.

## **5. Education**

- DO advocate for education reforms that empower parents, not all-knowing Washington bureaucrats.
- DO talk about the need for more school choice and accountability to improve our education system, not an endless blank check of Washington spending.

Swing voters reject the notion that more and more federal government dollars are needed in order to improve our education system. Dollars spent is not a measurement of success. Independents, especially Latino voters, favor policy messages that empower parents during the learning years of their children, including messages highlighting greater school choice and accountability.

## **6. Entitlements**

- DO talk about strengthening and protecting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid to guarantee these programs are available for current recipients and future generations.
- DON'T talk about making changes to these programs in order to balance the budget. Swing voters negatively perceive this rationale as balancing the budget on the backs of seniors and the poor.

In talking about entitlement reform with swing voters, center-right candidates face a clear dividing line. Propose changes to entitlements in budgetary terms and be on the defensive, or frame necessary reforms as strengthening and protecting these important programs and be on the offensive.

The primary reason for this dichotomy is most voters are low-information decision makers when considering the federal budget. They're unaware that

nearly two-thirds of every federal dollar spent is allocated to entitlement spending. To balance the budget, they believe Washington needs to solely cut back on foreign aid and eliminate waste, fraud and abuse.

According to swing voters, advocating for entitlement reforms in order to balance the budget calls into question whether the government is keeping its promise to those who contribute to these programs – unless the rationale for reform is to strengthen and protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid for people today and tomorrow.

## **7. Direction of the Country & Unpopularity of Washington**

- DO say it's time Washington starts playing by the same rules working class individuals and families face.
- DO acknowledge that both Republicans and Democrats are responsible for the long-term fiscal challenges facing the country.
- DO highlight the inequality of the average pay and benefits package in the public sector being greater than the private sector.

Trust in the federal government's ability to solve problems is worse today. President Obama's job approval eroded in 2013. Both congressional Republicans and Democrats are unpopular. In other words, the only safe incumbent in 2014 is one who is retiring.

## **Conclusion**

In six of the past seven midterm elections, no party has picked up seats in the House or Senate without winning the center of the electorate. Democratic party identification over Republicans is smaller in these contests compared to presidential elections. Since 1984 the average Democratic turnout margin in midterms (+1.85) is half of presidential contests (+3.62) making it likely that whichever party wins the middle in off years enjoys a net gain of seats in Congress.

In appealing to the center, President Obama is a liability to Democrats in 2014. He lost Independents 50 to 45 percent in 2012 after winning a solid majority in 2008, 56 to 38 percent. To further complicate matters, President Obama's job approval among Independents registers in the low 30's today, casting a gloomy shadow over Democrats on the ballot in November. These messages – and President Obama pursuing a far left agenda – will further highlight the divide.