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Why Democrats Can Win in 2022, and How We Will Do It

Between the last half of 2021 being a little rocky and the challenging history of midterm elections for a president's party, pundits are pronouncing doom and gloom for Democrats, Republicans are gloating, and too many of us are hanging our heads, fearing that we will lose big in 2022.

Don't believe it.

Yes, our country and party have challenges, but those challenges can be overcome. Yes, history is not on our side, but the president's party has picked up seats in Congress in two of the last six midterms, and in recent years -- in case you hadn't noticed -- historical norms have frequently been upended. Besides, pundits do often get things wrong.

What Democrats need to do is shake off the doldrums, get over the pessimism, and get about the business of fashioning a winning strategy for 2022. We can't -- and our democracy can't -- afford to let pessimism become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here's why we can win this election year, and not only hold onto the House and Senate, but add to majorities there:

1. Whether or not we ever get Joe Manchin's vote allowing all the great things in BBB to become a reality, Democrats have plenty of popular things they have delivered to the American people, including:

- the \$1400 pandemic relief checks just when they were needed the most
- over 200 million shots in arms, including boosters, which made people far less likely to get sick and die
- stopping the practice of health care providers doing surprise medical billing
- getting high speed broadband delivered to rural America and other parts of the country that have been left behind
- making the biggest investment in roads and bridges since the Interstate Highway System was built
- making the biggest investment ever in ensuring clean water for all Americans
- making major investments in strengthening the electric grid, so that electricity outages are less likely
- making investments in manufacturing and jobs here in America, and
- releasing petroleum reserves to lower gas prices.

In most cases, either the large majority or every single Republican voted against all of these things. It's easy to imagine ads listing some of these issues with a voice telling voters that the Democrats delivered and the Republicans voted no. Democrats can certainly run successful campaigns on that contrast.

2. Republicans have profound liabilities going into this election year. The election will be a choice between the party that is trying to meet and solve problems, and get popular, much needed things done for the country versus Donald Trump's party. Donald Trump remains deeply unpopular, as do his election lies, and his embrace of violence and extremism. In fact, Trump's approval ratings have been headed downhill and a big majority of American adults – 70% according to [new polling](#) – don't want to see him run again in 2024. The fact that most Republicans have voted against all the popular things Democrats are getting done is a powerful contrast.

3. Besides the overall brand liabilities Republicans are weighed down with as we head into the election, they are also faced with the specter of a series of ugly primaries dominated by one question: who is the most obsessively willing to suck up to Donald Trump and the Trumpiest media figures on the right like Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity. Having to fully embrace the toxic legacy of Trump and his allies is going to make the general election tougher for a lot of Republican candidates.

4. The [House redistricting process](#) looks like it won't be as bad overall as was previously feared. That's not to say everything is going to be fair, or that there aren't several states where the maps will be outrageous. It's also not to say that everything is settled, partly because of court challenges and partly because there are plenty of states and districts still undrawn. But the bottom line is that the fears some Democrats had about a decisive blow being struck against our chances of keeping the House were overblown by more than a bit.

5. The Senate map really is pretty good. If it's a very bad Democratic year, it will be tough to hold the Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, and New Hampshire seats, but in any normal year, we have a very strong chance to hold all four. All of them have well-liked incumbents; in all of those states, Biden won and we have won at least the last two Senate races. Adding to this good news, in NH, by far the strongest potential opponent, Gov. Sununu, decided not to run (one of several tough candidates the Republicans have not been able to recruit for this cycle). In GA, the likely winner of the primary is Trump-endorsed Herschel Walker, who has big weaknesses to exploit, particularly when his bio is compared with the sterling credentials of Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock. And there is a truly brutal GOP primary going in in AZ.

On the red-to-blue pickup opportunity side, we have some real possibilities. Pennsylvania, a state won by Biden, has an open seat and another ugly, weird GOP primary fight, with two leading candidates who don't live in state, while an earlier frontrunner had to suspend his campaign after a judge ruled that he had abused his wife. In Wisconsin, another state won by Biden, the unpopular incumbent Ron Johnson decided to run again, and is a strong target for Democrats. North Carolina, the last state

in the country called in both the presidential and Senate races for 2020, is an open seat, with another wild and tough GOP primary. Ohio, which has an open seat, trends red, but it has one Democratic senator and we came very close to winning the governor's seat last time. Missouri has an open seat, and while this is a Republican leaning state, the leading candidate in the polling for the Republican primary is former Gov. Eric Greitens, who was forced to resign in disgrace to avoid being impeached and he'd be a very weak candidate. In Florida, which always has competitive statewide races, Democrats have a potentially very strong candidate, Val Demings, running against Marco Rubio.

That means there are four states we have to defend, all of which we are in pretty good shape in unless there is a wave election against us. And there are six states we have a shot to pick up, three of which I would rate as at least a 50-50 shot in a respectable year for Democrats.

6. Right now, Republican voters are almost entirely talking to their most hard core, pro-Trump base. They have no other choice if they want to survive or fend off primaries, and keep raising money from Trump-obsessed donors. When they do finally turn to focusing on swing voters, especially women, it may well be too late. In a year where abortion rights are in danger, where child care and universal pre-K and health care are big issues, Republican candidates being slow to talk to swing voters could be fatal -- especially when they are taking stands that voters don't like.

7. Finally, this point needs to be made: Democrats are the majority party in this country. We have won more votes than the Republicans in seven of the last eight elections, and Biden won by over 7 million votes in the heaviest turnout election in history. Fifty Democratic senators represent 41 million more voters than the 50 Republican senators. The voters agree with us, and disagree with the Republicans, on the vast majority of our parties' respective issue agendas: Joe Biden's policies get 60-65% or more approval. Voters agree with us, and disagree with the Republicans, on whether the 2020 election was valid. If we can get Democrats to turn out in big numbers, by the combination of inspiration and on the ground field organizing, we will win the 2022 elections.

What we need to understand is that cynicism is a far greater problem than opposition: the voters are on our side.

How Democrats Will Win in 2022

So what is it the Democrats need to do to forge a winning strategy in 2022? We strongly recommend that all candidates and groups test their own ideas on language, but based on our general sense of the political dynamics right now, here are our general recommendations:

1. We need to promote our big accomplishments, specifically the great things we have already delivered for working families (which the Republicans have mostly opposed), but we also must talk about what we are fighting for and against. Our

focus should be on kitchen-table economics: the \$1400 pandemic checks when people needed them the most, getting roads and bridges built, delivering clean drinking water, getting high speed internet into rural America and other communities left behind, stopping surprise medical billing, creating new jobs in solar and wind power, raising wages more than they have been raised in generations. And we talk about how Big Pharma, Big Oil, Wall Street, the Big Food companies, and Big Tech are profiteering from the pandemic and battling us every step of the way, but how we will keep fighting for you. And again: Republicans have joined these big corporations to oppose every step of the way. Moreover, one of the major problems is that the ultra-wealthy and corporations are not paying their fair share of taxes.

Democrats are working hard to make sure our economy thrives, and that American families thrive. We have delivered a lot of important things since we took power. We have a lot left to do, miles to go before we sleep, but we are getting things moving again in spite of the hard core opposition from huge global corporations and most Republicans. These are the things Joe Biden focused on in winning the 2020 election by over 7 million votes.

And we also need to make clear that **Democrats are doing everything in their power to fight for small business**. From fighting corporate monopolies that are trying to crush competition from smaller businesses, to helping build the network of child care providers, to helping keep the restaurant industry going with the American Recovery Plan in the worst of the pandemic, to helping boost new solar and wind clean energy businesses, Democrats are proud to be doing everything they can to help small businesses.

The small business message is crucial in reassuring swing voters, but small business in general is arguably the most beloved institution in America -- including by Democratic base voters. Talking about small business is not about a centrist message vs a progressive message: it helps us with everyone.

It can be boiled down to this: Democrats are building things. Republicans just want to break them, and are opposing all efforts to fix anything.

2. Build a broad economic narrative about the changes Democrats are working to make in order to make it help working families more; and how Big Business, in league with the Republicans, is fighting the positive change Democrats are working to deliver. Democrats have delivered important things to the American people through the legislative process, but whether or not we pass more major legislation, we can tell the story about how we are taking on corrupt and abusive big corporations. Even if we don't win every legislative battle, voters should know we are fighting hard for them, and that the wealthy special interests, CEOs, and lobbyists are doing everything in their power to block us. Democrats must have a compelling, constantly repeated economic narrative.

The Biden administration has already been moving steadily in this direction, and other Democrats as well as the broader progressive movement should amplify this narrative

every chance they get. Candidates on the campaign trail in 2022 need to be all about fighting corporate corruption. They can talk about how President Biden and the Democrats in Congress are fighting hard to help working families, but that Big Business CEOs and billionaires are spending tens of millions of dollars to fight everything we are working to do. We want to raise workers' wages and give them more bargaining power; we want to cut the costs of pharmaceuticals and health insurance, of energy prices and groceries. We want to force big profitable multinational businesses to finally pay their fair share in taxes, and help the small businesses that are trying to give them some competition so that prices will come down. But these companies -- many of which have been profiteering off the pandemic and jacking up their prices unnecessarily, out-sourcing jobs to get cheap labor overseas, and trying to stomp out any competition from small business -- are fighting us tooth and nail.

3. Use the race-class narrative approach to frame responses to Republican attacks. (Thanks to Anat Shenker Osario and Ian Haney Lopez for their help with this section). Historically, some Democrats have seen the multi-racial composition of their coalition as a weakness. After all, the Republican messaging strategy for the last 50 years has focused on pushing racial wedge issues, most recently, for instance, the supposed threats from critical race theory. And too often, Democrats themselves believe they must pursue distinct mobilization and persuasion strategies for different racial groups.

But recent work using race and class gives the Democratic Party the power to turn its multi-racial identity into a core strength. Race-class narrative and fusion politics frames racial conflict as a divide-and-conquer strategy that threatens us all, people of every race and across the broad economic spectrum. The real enemy we all face is those who profit by intentionally stoking racial division. The Trumpist politicians fueling group hatred, the media personalities like Tucker Carlson harping on the "great replacement theory," and the dark money think tanks that promote attacks on affirmative action, welfare, and most recently the 1619 Project. These are the real enemies we face. And by naming them as such, Democrats can shift the basic us-them conflict in American politics. The core opposition in American life is not between white people and people of color. It's us all, against those who profit by promoting social strife.

There's good evidence from multiple polls that the race-class narrative works. The reason it works is that it represents to Democrats a single story that can be genuinely owned by everyone in the party. Fusion politics addresses the core concerns of those focused on racial justice, speaking powerfully to communities of color while directly confronting racism without calling the voters we are trying to win over racists. Race-class messages also bring along majorities of white voters and focus attention on the economic issues we have talked about elsewhere in this memo.

4. Telling our story about rising prices. Inflation is probably our number one challenge right now in terms of our success at delivering a positive economic message. It is definitely something voters are worried about and thinking about a lot, and Democrats should not discount or avoid the problem.

Candidates often do not like to talk about tough issues, but in this case we think that approach would be a mistake. In fact, we recommend that they address the issue head on.

Inflation is being caused by two things. First, of course, are the supply chain issues caused by Covid. The Biden administration is aggressively moving to unsnarl these supply chain problems. It is going to take a while to solve, but we are making steady progress. For example, most Christmas gifts people wanted to buy were available in time last year after predictions that they wouldn't be. And we are working on longer term solutions to keep supply chains in better shape, especially with Biden's tough, new Made in America Executive Order, which is very popular with voters.

The other big issue is pandemic profiteering: big multinational corporations -- many of them with near-monopoly power in their industry -- are taking advantage of the situation to jack up their prices on a variety of foods, on energy prices, on consumer items of all kinds. All while avoiding paying their fair share of taxes. The Biden administration and Democrats in Congress are taking on corporate profiteering hard: we released oil from the Federal Oil Reserve to drive down oil prices; we are helping family farmers and small food processing companies compete against the Big Food companies; and we are having the Federal Trade Commission investigate unjustified price hikes.

Democrats reject the idea that wages should go down to curb inflation. We are working hard to get the prices of prescription drugs, health care, energy, housing, and child care down to affordable levels. We will wrestle this problem to the ground.

5. Non-profit and party organizations have developed voter registration and GOTV strategies targeted to key Democratic leaning constituencies like people of color, young people, and unmarried women that have been proven to work in elections year after year, but they are always underfunded. We are going to need to fund those strategies at a higher level than ever in this election year, because the media is in a relentlessly negative cycle; Covid has people discouraged and wary; and wherever they have control, Republicans are passing new election laws that will make it more difficult to vote. As we said above, if we turn our voters out, we will win this election, but it will be a big challenge. There is no higher priority in terms of winning the 2022 elections than a strong, well-funded GOTV strategy.

We Don't Have Time to Be Discouraged

We know this is a discouraging time for Democrats. Covid's ravages have all of us down. Manchin and Sinema are driving everyone crazy. The Supreme Court keeps issuing awful decisions and is likely to overturn Roe v Wade. Republicans keep getting more and more extreme. Democratic base groups are unenthusiastic.

But we have time to turn things around, and plenty of factors that are in our favor. We need to begin moving right away to build a strong narrative telling people why they should vote for us. We need to get our accomplishments out there, front and center. We have to build a strong, clear economic narrative about how Democrats are, in the midst of great challenges, fighting hard against big money special interests that Republicans

are supporting at every turn, and are getting things done for working families: we have to remind people what Democrats delivered while the Republicans voted no -- many voters still believe Republicans supported the relief effort, so we need to be very strong on the fact that they did not. And some of what we have to do is go back to basics in terms of grassroots organizing. We know how to turn out our voters if we just put the money we need into making it happen.

Most of all, our elected leaders and our candidates have to inspire people. Voters need to know we are battling every day, and in every way, to make their lives better. We won't win every battle, but people don't expect that from us. As long as we are fighting, they will show up for us.

Democrats can do this. We can win in 2022, increase our margins in the House and Senate, win more governorships and state legislative bodies, win local races throughout the country. We have to have a message that inspires and persuades; we have to pick fights with Big Business and Republicans that voters get excited about; and we have to redouble every effort to turn people out to vote.