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To: Interested Parties

From: Stanley Greenberg

Getting heard by our discontented working class voters

Democratic fortunes in the midterms depend on how well they are running in their working base among Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans (AAPI), unmarried women, the Millennial and Gen Z generations, as well as with the under-fifty white working class women. These voters are deeply discontented with the state of the country, and they are not yet listening to the Democrats in advance of the midterms.

So, to get to a midterm strategy, Democracy Corps conducted focus groups using Change Research to conduct focus groups with Black, white millennial and unmarried women, and white working class women under 50 years. These were the groups we should have the best chance of getting heard, if Democrats were to shift the momentum this year.

Well, Democrats can get heard if they get to a different place on anger with corporate excess and monopoly power, deep anger about the cancellation of Roe, and an escalated attack on the Republicans. They have the potential to raise Democrats' fortunes. And they have the potential to be heard by both Biden and Trump voters, Democrats and Republicans.

Corporate power

President Biden delivered a speech on inflation that was mostly on the mark. He got me. The speech hit the right culprits and causes. He called out the big oil companies and big corporations who without competition can readily drive up prices and profits. And he described two very different partisan plans, a Democratic one set to help families with high prices and a Republican one that raises their taxes and threatens Social Security. The Democratic plan negotiates drug prices down and finally gets the big corporations and billionaires to pay taxes. He called out a MAGA faction of the Republican Party that intends unmitigated harm to the country.

And regrettably, after listening to them, I believe our voters and targets would pay it little attention.

They have concluded Democrats always "disappoint." They promise big change and nothing happens. The Republicans, by contrast, seem much more united and deliver on what they promise to do.

Their [Republicans'] overall willingness to come together for whatever they deem is important. (Biden voter, Black woman)

They seem to care about following the rules and norms rather than accomplishing anything even if no one else is following them. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

I'll support the Democrats but it would be nice to say, Democrats have done such and such. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z woman)

They always put out an agenda and sometimes the agenda isn't followed through with. (Biden voter, Black woman)

They deliver a lot of empty promises. They're in office and say they'll do this and that. The Democrats constantly give us empty promises and we sit here with our hands open saying, is it coming, is it coming? (Biden voter, Black woman)

At the heart of President Biden's inflation speech was his contrasting the Democratic and Republican plans, but our base and targets do not believe we will pass any of it. Absent Congress passing something important soon, it will just reinforce the belief Democrats are all talk, no action.

But they also have a kind of social, rather than economic template for what Democrats prioritize. President Biden gave a very good speech on inflation, corporate wrongdoing, and his economic plans. But when thinking positively about Democrats, they see them involved with social issues, rights, diversity, and openness to others. In the written exercise, they wrote the following: "equality; civil liberties and rights; empathy; civil rights; police reform; social issues; and focus on the environment."

These are things they value and believe Democrats fight for them, but it is like Democrats have a different songbook than the one President Biden tried to read from. They think Democrats were for working people "when they started" and under Presidents Truman and Roosevelt and mention no recent example.

I was going to say that the Democrat Party was formed to represent the working class originally. Right now, I think they've completely lost touch with the working class. People are struggling. I'm just saying. (Trump voter, White non-college woman under 50)

The lack of advocacy for working people and focus on economic issues created hurdles for President Biden and Democrats, but most important may be the disbelief Democrats really will challenge corporate power.

They were offered what they assumed was a Democratic analysis of the economy — a set of facts created by Robert Reich on how company monopolies are driving up profits, prices, and stock buybacks. The Reich facts were the most unifying and energetic moment in the groups.

They were treated as having a biblical “truth” that they were finally getting heard. Nobody disputed them and Trump and Biden voters were enthusiastic that the facts were out of the box.

It’s a really good explanation of what’s been happening, and I haven’t heard it before. I think that’s a big problem for people in the US. It’s just like a lightbulb went off in my head like oh that’s why it’s happening. I knew wealthy companies were doing it. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

It really covered all the important things-especially the wages and wealth gap. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

I think it comes across as really accurate and I agree with all of it, and it makes me angry. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

It makes it clear to me that we’re no longer a democracy but an oligarchy. (Biden voter, White Unmarried Woman)

Me personally, the wage increase, for my understanding, education and from there. The corporations so far-people will flock to these places. Instead of people paying higher wages for mom-and-pop stores is how they take over. (Trump voter, White non-college woman under 50)

Why aren’t we taxing oil giants to subsidize vets, senior citizens, and people with disabilities? It does get to be disparaging because the small people don’t have a say. There’s no checks and balances on the distribution of wealth. No one even seems to hear us. We say hey: maybe we need to readjust the tax brackets. This has gotten so grossly out of hand. The divide is so wide now and doesn’t seem like anyone is doing anything about it at all. (Trump voter, White non-college woman under 50)

Corporate profits are at a 70-year high. Yet corporations are raising their prices.

They are not raising prices because of the increasing costs of supplies and labor. In many cases they’re raising prices higher than those cost increases, using the cover of inflation to increase their profit margins even more. They’re doing so because they face little or no competition.

Corporations are using these near-record profits to boost share prices by buying back a record amount of their own shares of stock. This year, the oil giants are planning to buy back at least \$22 billion more.

Most American workers have barely had a wage increase in 40 years (adjusted for inflation). Any recent wage increases have been almost completely eroded by price increases.

As a result, income and wealth are being redistributed upward from average working people (many of whom live from paycheck to paycheck) to CEOs and shareholders, including the wealthiest people in America.

At the same time, wealthy Americans are now paying a lower tax rate than the working class. Some are paying no taxes at all. And big corporations have used their power to beat back lower drug prices and higher corporate taxes.

The Democrats want these giant corporations to face tougher enforcement of anti-trust laws, higher taxes on big corporations, and limits on secret corporate campaign donations. The Republicans only care about tax cuts for their rich donors. Instead, of catering to the rich and greedy corporations, we should cut middle class taxes and stop the abuses of economic power by large corporations and the super-rich. Enough is enough.

But we then asked whether they would translate this analysis of the economy into a political choice where Democrats want to tough anti-trust laws, higher taxes on big corporations, and limits on secret campaign donations. In every group, they declined to say, it made them more likely to vote for the Democrat. They do not believe Democrats have ever raised taxes on big corporations.

Only in the Black group did a handful said, yes, but:

It's in the hope that they'll do what they say and make them pay the taxes or whatever. But it's not necessarily saying they'll do it or holding them to do it so that's why I'd vote for them. (Biden voter, Black woman)

I'm saying yes [to being more likely to vote for Democrats] loosely because I'm actionable. ...If there's action, I'm on board. (Biden voter, Black woman)

Biden and Democrats will not get heard on economic plans unless they surprise voters and make corporations pay a minimum tax and find ways to tax billionaires and big corporations — and then, make sure people know.

At the end of the group, the millennial women wrote an email to the President. They appealed to him to embrace this analysis and check the power of the big companies. They called for taxing the rich, but they also wrote more about economic things, inequality and helping the poor, working class and middle class. And they also wanted Biden and Democrats to take strong action on Roe and climate change.

Hello Joe,

I think it is time to tax the rich, the big corporations, the church, and make everyone start taking responsibility for the country's financial issues. Next, we need to separate church and state and do what is best for our people and their health, leave Roe alone and instate universal healthcare. Erase student debt, take money from the military and boost our public education systems. It is time to take care of our people.

To whom it may concern:

The impending overturn of Roe vs Wade is a disgraceful precedent to set for our country. Rolling back civil liberties and rights are a blatant attack on the women (specifically minority women) in our country. This is an awful precedent to have at the supreme court level. Federal law must be put in place to keep women safe.

P.S. TAX THE RICH!!!!

Please support real action for the poor and middle class, and especially women at risk of the unfair reproductive rights laws. Please forgive loans or offer some sort of tuition assistance so we can get educated. And please take more aggressive action on climate change and implement better public transit

Things are really bad for the working class. We need help with rent and we're so worried about losing civil liberties. People are dying because of lack of action. Please enact executive orders to help us. We're desperate.

Of course, they were responding Reich's facts on inflation, not Biden's speech. Biden's speech began, "when you look at the economy today, it's clear that we've made enormous strides." Their work "produced the strongest job creation economy in modern times." And, "as I go across the country, our economy has gone from being on the mend to on the move."

The working class does not see that economy, obviously.

The President spoke of the growth of monopolies, companies profiteering and lack of competition but he was analytical, rather than moral, as Robert Kuttner notes in the American Prospect. Biden observed,

"Another problem we face is in some industries, it's just there isn't enough competition. And I've often said that capitalism without competition, isn't capitalism, it's exploitation. So we're promoting competition for everything from internet services to meat processing. We basically have four meat processors in the whole country, they process the meat that goes into the hamburgers you buy. So they set the price. When there's no competition, they can set the price higher and higher."

It may that President Biden has to call out, like Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro has, Abbott Nutrition that created a monopoly in the market for instant formula, produced contaminated products that killed babies, falsified records, and left the grocery shelves empty.

That is such a powerful example of Reich's analysis that Democrats and the President should embrace the whole narrative.

Democrats can get heard with working people, but they have to be as angry as their own voters that their wages have stagnated, while corporate excess and corruption allowed the top 1 percent to take all the economy's gains. And they have to visibly expose and regulate monopolies, tax the biggest corporations and billionaires and fight their corrupt hold on government.

Roe and MAGA

There is no question that the draft decision to declare Roe wrongly decided and reversed has dramatically changed the political temperament of the Democrats' female base: unmarried women and the working class women under 50 years of age. They are angry, now deeply attentive, and likely to change the political choices they make. Here was their reaction on the second day after the decision:

I felt sick to my stomach. It just felt very out of nowhere. I think someone showed me on Instagram and I felt shocked. If something were to happen to me what would my plan be. I felt I right away need to reach out and tell people around me, hey if this passes, this is what you need to do. I felt I needed to gather up my resources before it's too late. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

It made me sad. It's incredibly frustrating that they can take away a right just like that. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

It was faster than I expected. I'm more infuriated. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

My first reaction was anger that it even was leaked at this point and then I stated to think about all the harm overturning this decision could do. My overall feeling is just anger. Let it all play out. I hate the leaking thing because I think there's more to it. I'm just angry. I'm angry if it gets overturned, the leak. Everything infuriates me. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

My reaction was anger too. I think that women have come a long way but not far enough in equality and being treated as equals and being told what we can and can't do with our bodies is not for politicians to decide. (Biden voter, White Unmarried Woman)

It irritates the crap out of me that men get to decide what women do with their bodies. My first reaction was: I feel sorry for every girl who has been raped by an uncle, a cousin, or a dad and has to carry the baby and I worry about the women whose health will be affected by going through all 40 weeks of pregnancy; they can die because they don't have the right to control their own medical decisions. (Biden voter, White Unmarried Woman)

I can't even believe this is a conversation. It's 2022. Why are we-it blows my mind that it came up that there's a possibility that it will be illegal for women to have abortions. (Trump voter, White Unmarried Woman)

I want to see them [lawmakers] outraged and see what we feel. I want them to step out of a lawmaker's shoes and step into a civilian's shoes and see how we feel and think about women's rights completely. (Biden voter, Black woman)

They need to stop pushing this forward in any way, shape, or form in the court or anywhere else. Leave it where it was. Period. Move onto things that are important for the American people. (Trump voter, White Non-college woman under 50)

I do feel like it's us going backwards. There's so much more to be worried about. It should just be a woman's right. It's surprising they're even talking about it with everything else going on. (Trump voter, White Non-college woman under 50)

And in this case, they had no problem translating their anger into a political choice. They thought Democrats would do something about it and Republicans would turn back the clock. A high proportion of every group said this message made them more likely to vote for the Democrat. One of the millennial/Gen Z women said, it would make them more likely to vote for a woman candidate. After hearing the statement, all the Blacks, white unmarried women and a majority of the under 50 white working class women said they were more likely to vote Democratic in the mid-terms.

We have to respect women's freedom, and we can't turn back the clock to a time when politicians decide when a woman has a child. Women won't stop getting abortions, they just won't be safe or legal. Doctors and women are going to end up in jail and women's lives will be at risk if we do nothing. It's time to say, "No, to this Republican assault on women."

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My bingo card for 2022 didn't have us overturning Roe v. Wade. (Trump voter, White unmarried woman)

I have some thoughts about the lawmakers and at the very minimum, I want them to keep their hands off my uterus. That's what I want them to do. (Trump voter, White unmarried woman)

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We should always remember these voters are skeptical Democrats will deliver the changes they promise. That is why I think Democrats would have been well advised to have gotten a majority vote in the Senate for a restoring of Roe, Democrats have the hurdle with the support of pro-choice Republicans.

Fortunately, we were helped by Minority Leader Mitch McConnell saying he will bring the repeal of Roe for a Senate vote if Republicans win a majority in November. That makes the choice very real. And one hardly mistakes the anger and passion and emotions caught up with this political choice.

This decision has to change how we define and attack the Republicans. Thank God, the President is attacking Republicans as MAGA Republicans as "the most extreme party," but then he elaborated:

And that's what the Republican Party is now. Not everybody Republican believes that. But the fact of the matter is, they run the show — the MAGA Republicans.”

Democrats and the the President have to brand every Republican helping the biggest corporations and letting the religious fundamentalists take away your rights. This election will remain asymmetric as long as Republicans define every Democrat in office a threat to the Republic and Democrats are attacking a faction.

Also, Democracy Corps' research on Trump's Republican Party shows that the target has surely changed. The MAGA movement centered on the Trump loyalists whose history began with the Tea Party revolt against Barack Obama. They were pro-life, not libertarian, but they were an advance guard of the Evangelicals who need their courage to defeat a secular and multicultural America. Trump won the nomination and held his support by delivering for the Republican Evangelical conservatives.

We have already seen how much that victory is playing into people's interpretation of the Supreme Court decision.

When we ask people to write their doubts about the Republican Party, they see it as a party that is trying to jam down its version of religion and Christianity on other people.

Here is what they wrote:

Seems to have no separation of church and state: bigotry, racism, sexism. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z woman)

Pushing religious beliefs on others and referring to the US as a Christian nation. trying to control women's bodies. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

White supremacy, Christian dominionism (sic), accelerating climate change, supporting oligarchy, widening wealth gaps. (Biden voter, White Millennial/Gen Z Woman)

Pander too much to Evangelicals, don't see people different from them as deserving of freedoms (Biden voter, White Non-college woman under 50)

One of the Trump voters expressed her frustration:

I just wish there was one lawmaker on whatever side to say: this doesn't belong in politics. This is a moral decision for individual people. If you want to believe your church and what they preach, then keep it in your church. Separate the church and state. Keep it out of politics. You can believe not having an abortion yourself without making it a law. It causes chaos and fear and causes us to distrust each other and not value people for how they are as people and that's what is struggling in the country. (Trump voter, White unmarried woman)

That the Evangelical faction is calling the shots in the party and the country creates major tactical opportunities to fracture the Republican Party not evident yet this year.

- The moderate Republicans have gone from being a third of the party during Obama's second term to about 15 percent. They are secular and pro-choice and a target for major defection.
- The decision also reminds the Republican defectors – most of whom were college-educated pro-choice women — why they left the Republican Party. These mostly suburban voters who have been distracted on schools and crime may realize how much a threat their former party still represents.

This is a moment of high stakes with many angry working class voters who may well listen to the Democrats if they seize the opportunities right in front of them.