



Congressional Message and Research Toolkit

With 49 days left before elections, a majority of the country thinks we are on the wrong track, and the unemployment rate is still at 9.6 percent. Seventy percent of those polled by the Center for American Progress Action Fund and Democracy Corps say they or their family and friends have lost a job, and 70 percent say they or their family and friends are experiencing reduced wages or hours at work.¹ New CAP Action Fund and Democracy Corps research shows there are winning messages that candidates can use to break through in this tough environment and beat back Republican economic attacks.

More important to voters than policies, records, and resumes are three fundamental questions they want answered about candidates: Does this candidate know how bad it is? Is this person part of the mess in Washington, or are they committed to changing the system? And is this candidate going to fight for the middle class, or for Wall Street and special interests?

We outline some advice below for candidates on winning economic messages, traps to avoid, and facts and phrases that stick based on our research.

The tax cut debate offers a contrast opportunity

The current debate over tax policy provides a potent entry point for Democrats to **connect with voters on the economy, drive home core Democratic messages, and remind voters of their lingering doubts about Republicans and who they stand for.** This debate exposes perhaps the core divide between the parties: Democrats fight for the middle class, working people, and small businesses in tough economic times, while Republicans are looking out for the wealthy and special interests at almost any cost to the rest of us.

The economic message environment

The economy is the only issue that matters and when talking about it you must keep in mind what its impact is on people's lives. People don't feel economic indicators—they feel anxious.

DON'T:

- Try to convince people things are good or getting better. That's out of step with what they see and feel everyday.
- Read your resume of accomplishments. Things aren't good enough as they are. Explain how you will do better.
- Run on the past. People are more concerned with how we get out of the mess than how we got here.

The GOP is vulnerable on middle-class issues

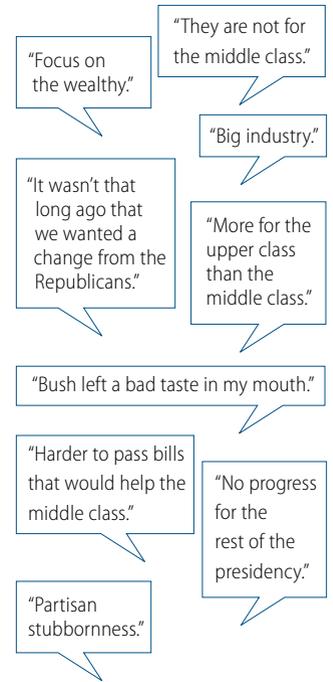
Our research reveals that there are widespread perceptions that Republicans favor banks and special interests over the middle class. One focus group participant put it best. When asked what holds him back from voting for the GOP, he answered, “They are not for the middle class.” House Minority Leader John Boehner’s (R-OH) break from Republican orthodoxy and the backlash that ensued exposes a **concern that voters already have about the GOP—they’re too focused on the rich.**

Remind voters that the GOP favors special interests and the wealthy

Rep. Boehner is right to be worried about carrying the mantle of tax cuts for the rich. The GOP brand is seen as fighting for millionaires and disconnected from the middle class. Your job is to remind people what they already believe to be true—Republicans prioritize policies that benefit the rich over the middle class. The fight to create middle-class tax cuts or extend Bush tax cuts for the wealthy plays to the message strengths of Democrats and the weaknesses in the Republican brand. When it comes to defending tax giveaways to the rich, **Republicans are even out of step with many in their own party (44 percent) who support ending the Bush tax cuts.**

Focus groups

What holds you back from voting for the Republicans?



Focus group participants consisted of college-educated men in Pittsburgh, PA.

Headlines demonstrate what the public believes:

The GOP is looking out for the wealthy and special interests

“A G.O.P. Leader Tightly Bound to Lobbyists,”

— *The New York Times*, September 11.

“Steele: Small Businesses Don’t Need Line of Credit,”

The Washington Post, September 10.

“Top House Republican: Stop Demonizing the Oil Industry,”

The Hill, September 1.

“Wall Street Banking on Republicans to Push Legislative Goals,”

Bloomberg News, September 14.

“K Street Files: GOP Leaders, Lobbyists Raise Cash for NRCC,”

Roll Call, September 15.

Arguments that stick and demonstrate the contrast

- **The tax cut for the rich equals a Republican TARP.** Republican tax cuts for the wealthy are the new TARP—\$700 billion in **Tax Assistance for Rich People**.
- We shouldn't be borrowing \$700 billion from China to write \$100,000 checks for millionaires.
- Let's be clear about what Republicans are suggesting we do. While most Americans are struggling to keep their jobs, **Republicans want to give tax cuts to millionaires that are on average twice the amount of most Americans' annual income.**
- This is about values. We believe **if there is \$1 of tax relief to spend, it should go to the middle class, the backbone of our economy.** Republicans take a different view that relief should go to millionaires and somehow people will someday see the benefit.
- The fundamental difference is who we believe drives the economy. **They think if Wall Street's OK, everyone's OK.** We know how that policy worked out. We think you can't wait for the benefits to trickle down. **You need to invest in the backbone of the American economy: the middle class.**
- Senator McConnell is fighting for tax cuts for the top 2 percent of Americans, which is **out of step with most Americans including 44 percent of people in his own party** who think now is not the time for tax breaks for the rich.
- **We need jobs and investments for 98 percent of Americans—not giveaways for the top 2 percent.** This is a matter of national priorities. Americans are working more and making less. We should be making investments that create jobs and rebuild our infrastructure, and that benefit 98 percent of Americans, instead of having \$100,000 tax cuts for the top 2 percent.

Winning Messages

Fifty-five percent of those who hear the message below say they are more likely to vote for a member who invests in the middle class instead of trickle-down economics.

"I voted to give a **permanent tax cut for the middle class because they are the heart of our economy and country.** Making sure they have more money in their paychecks means they have more to spend on the economy and create jobs. But **[Republican candidate XX] believes in trickle-down economics and thinks it is more important that the richest 2 percent get help.**"

Fact Check: GOP protecting abuse of tax loophole, not small businesses

Republicans claim that “small businesses” would be helped if the GOP-passed plan to allow taxes to increase on those making more than \$250,000 a year proceeds as scheduled. A closer examination of the facts, however, shows that the GOP is protecting CEOs, hedge fund managers, lobbyists, law partners, and other wealthy individuals in the name of actual small businesses—approximately 98 percent of which would be completely unaffected by the president’s tax plan.

- Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co., with \$55 billion in assets under management, 600 employees, and 14 offices around the world; and accounting powerhouse PricewaterhouseCoopers, with \$26 billion in revenues and more than 160,000 employees in 151 countries, are “small businesses” according to the GOP’s definition. By contrast, the Small Business Administration generally defines the upper bound of

small businesses as having less than 500 employees and \$7 million in annual revenues.

- The Tribune Company, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers, recently slashed its tax bill by \$1.8 billion simply by using a loophole to convert to a tax status that the GOP claims defines “small business.”
- Passive investment income qualified President George W. Bush as a “small businessman” when he was in the White House.
- Even Rep. Boehner conceded that almost all small businesses would be completely unaffected by a tax increase on those making \$250,000 a year.

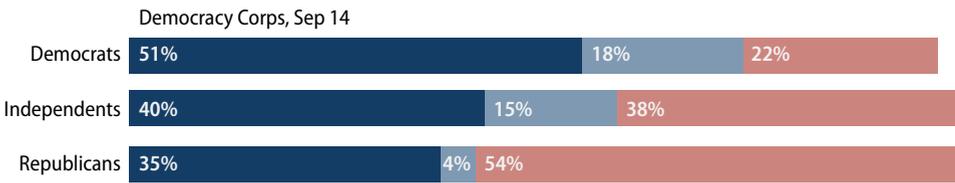
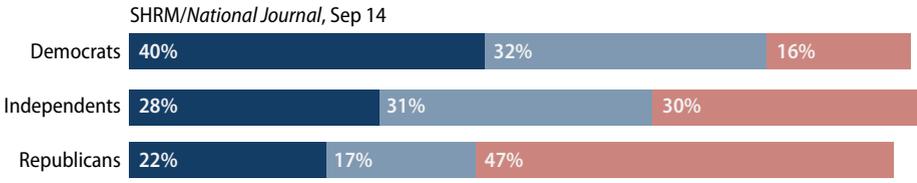
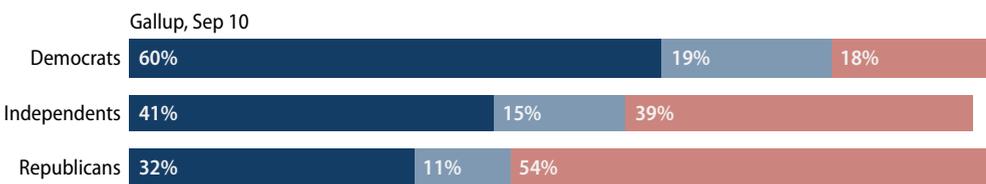
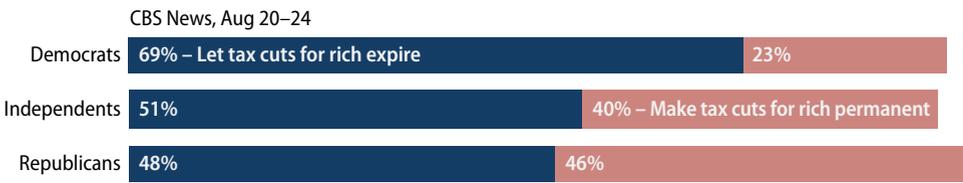
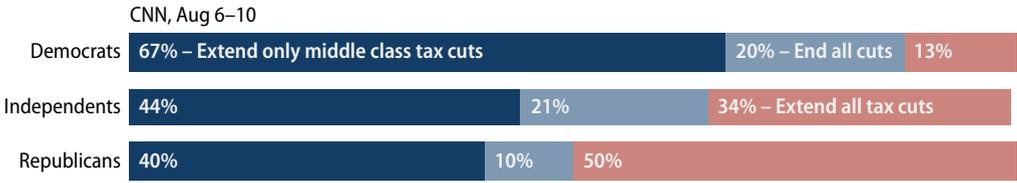
The GOP opposes billions of dollars in tax cuts and other aid to actual small businesses

- President Obama has signed **eight** small business tax cuts into law and is prepared to sign **eight** more—15 of which have been opposed by the GOP.
- The GOP has almost unanimously opposed numerous small business bills passed by the House and has attempted or succeeded in blocking all in the Senate:
 - The Small Business Jobs and Credit Act
 - The Small Business Jobs Tax Relief Act
 - The Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act
 - The Small Business and Infrastructure Jobs Tax Act
 - The Jobs for Main Street Act

Policies that show people where you stand

- Ending tax cuts for the top 2 percent of earners
- Eliminating subsidies for big oil
- Ending pay raises for Congress
- Stopping tax breaks for corporations shipping jobs overseas
- Ending the revolving door for lobbyists

Democrats, independents back expiration of tax cuts for rich, Republicans almost evenly split



Wide margins back expiration of tax cuts for the rich

CNN, Aug 6–10



CBS News, Aug 20–24



Newsweek, Aug 27



Gallup, Sep 10



Allstate/*National Journal*, Sep 11



SHRM/*National Journal*, Sep 14



Democracy Corps, Sep 14



Endnotes

1 The polling and focus group data in this memo comes from a web poll conducted by Democracy Corps and the Center for American Progress Action Fund from September 1–2, 2010, among 850 individuals who fall into the following demographic groups: the “rising American electorate,” which consists of youth, unmarried women, and minorities; and white non-college-educated respondents.

The two focus groups were conducted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on September 7, 2010, with white women aged 45 to 60 without a college degree and

white men aged 30 to 45 with a college degree. All participants were independents, weak Democrats, or weak Republicans.

Additional data in this memo are based on a poll conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps. The poll was conducted August 30–September 2, 2010, among 2008 voters nationwide. All data shown reflect results from 845 likely 2010 voters (895 unweighted; margin of error of 3.2 percentage points) unless otherwise noted.