



Date: September 25, 2018

To: Interested Parties

From: Stan Greenberg, Greenberg Research  
Page Gardner, Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund  
Nancy Zdunkewicz, Democracy Corps

## **Will Democrats be brave enough to get to the bluest wave?**

New battleground phone and web-panel surveys show GOP vulnerable on corruption

The most competitive battleground states are breaking against President Trump and the congressional Republicans, millennials are showing signs of life, disaffected Republicans are fracturing, and voters are angry about corrupt deals for wealthy corporate donors and self-dealing politicians. Something new and fundamental is happening, but will Democrats do what they must to win this election in a way that produces the biggest wave possible? If progressives crystalize the frustration with corruption into a powerful closing critique of out of touch Republicans, then they can push their advantage to its most politically destructive potential.

**Too many leaders divide the country and cut corrupt deals for themselves and their wealthy corporate campaign donors at the expense of working people and the middle class. The Republicans say your wages are great and it's the best economy in history. But their tax scam for the rich recklessly drives up the deficit to justify their cuts to Medicare and Medicaid and less investment in education and health care. I won't take contributions from corporations or Super PACs and the very richest must pay more in taxes so we can invest in education and make health care more affordable.**

This is according to the third wave of *WVWVAF's* battleground research program conducted by *Democracy Corps* in 12 states with competitive races for governor, including 10 competitive Senate races and 42 competitive Cook congressional races.<sup>1</sup> Our ambitious dual-mode polling program consists of representative phone polls of 1,000 registered battleground state voters and a coordinated on-going web-panel of the Rising American Electorate of minorities, millennials, and unmarried women, plus white working class women. The on-going web-panel permitted us to interview the same 1,085 respondents three times. The web-format allowed us to pose many

---

<sup>1</sup> On behalf of *Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund*, *Democracy Corps* conducted a series of three phone surveys with accompanying web-surveys among an on-going panel of minorities, millennials, unmarried women and white non-college educated women (RAE+) in 12 states with Governor races (10 Senate races): Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Wisconsin. The phone survey of 1,000 registered voters with 66% cell-rate was conducted September 4-10, 2018. The voter-file matched web-panel of 1,085 "RAE+" registered voters was conducted August 28-September 10.

open-ended questions and to economically interview a large sample. The large sample allowed us to split-test messages and employ an experimental design, with powerful results.

This survey of the battleground and web panel of the Rising American Electorate and white working class women points to an emerging wave, but will Democrats push their offensive so Republicans face the greatest possible political risk? What could leave the Democrats short of a transformative victory and leave the progressive world desperately disappointed again?

- Progressives could fail to target and mobilize the voters who are still uncertain to vote in large numbers: millennial women and Hispanic women.
- With all of the excitement about college educated women, they may fail to realize college women are 16 percent of the registered voters in the battleground and a big win with women means getting to a big vote with the unmarried women who comprise 23 percent of the registered voters, including the white unmarried women who may give Democrats a big off-year vote for the first time.
- They might not notice, and fail to take seriously, the fracturing of the GOP base where one-quarter of the moderates are open to voting for a Democratic candidate.
- They might not appreciate the surge in voters seeing Trump and the Republicans as self-dealing, enriching themselves and their donors, and losing touch with working people.
- They might believe Trump and the GOP's elite characterization of the economy, fail to empathize with the great majority who believe this economy is not producing wage gains that keep up with the cost of living, and fail to hit the GOP for being out of touch with working people. They might fail to show they prioritize an economy where jobs pay enough to live on.
- They may fail to show their frustration with corporate influence over government and show where they stand by criticizing the role of corporate lobbyists, corporate donors, and Super PAC money.

### **State of the federal and state races**

The Democrats have increased their congressional margin in the battleground states to 5 points (48 to 43 percent) – up 3 points from June and April. Since Trump carried these state battlegrounds by 3 points, this might well translate into a 10-point advantage in the national generic congressional ballot. Democrats also lead in the Republican-held Cook seats by 3 points (47 to 44) percent, though that is slightly but not significantly down from June.

The Democratic Senate candidates maintain their strong +8 lead in the states where they are seeking re-election, particularly in the Rust Belt+ states where Democrats have a 13-point advantage. Even more impressive is the 10-point growth in the margin for Democrats running in GOP-held Senate seat states – Arizona, Nevada, and Tennessee.

The governor's ballot is increasingly competitive as Democrats have grown their advantage in the states where they govern to a forbidding 24-point advantage, and Republican-held states have also grown their lead for governor in the Rust Belt+ battleground to 15 points. Diverse state GOP-incumbents, on the other hand, only hold a 2-point advantage.

### **Which women need to be targeted if 2018 is really to be the Year of the Women?**

It really does appear that this will be the 'Year of the Women,' based on the strong enthusiasm and support for Democrats among African American, college educated, and unmarried women; and that is true for white college and white unmarried women too. But all the attention paid to college women may be obscuring the challenges of turning out unreliable midterm voters in the Rising American Electorate – including unmarried women, but particularly Hispanic and millennial women who make such a difference in the diverse states which are so competitive.

The media has put a spotlight on white college educated and suburban women marching and organizing in reaction to Donald Trump. This poll confirms they are poised to vote in historic numbers and to give Democrats unprecedented levels of support.

- College women are giving the Democrats a 33-point margin in the battleground states (65 to 32 percent) – up 12 points since June.
- White college women are giving Democrats a 27-point margin (62 to 35 percent), up 17 points since June and 20 points greater than Democrats' impressive result in 2016.
- A stunning 74 percent of college women say this midterm is more important than prior midterms, 63 percent say it is much more important, higher than for any other group.

Those are stunning numbers, but progressives must recognize college women are 16 percent of registered voters in the battleground. For women to produce historic numbers in November, Democrats must drive up their performance and vote with unmarried women, who make up an even greater share of the battleground electorate, though they are historically less reliable midterm voters (unmarried women are 23 percent of registered voters and white unmarried women are 16 percent). Fortunately for Democrats, unmarried women could break the pattern of disappointment from 2010 and 2014 and be as impressive as college women in their turnout and vote.

- Unmarried women are giving Democrats a 32-point margin and they are close to college women in their interest in the election and its importance relative to other midterms.

- White unmarried women are giving Democrats a real majority, and their margins in this battleground are 10 points greater than for Clinton nationally in 2016.

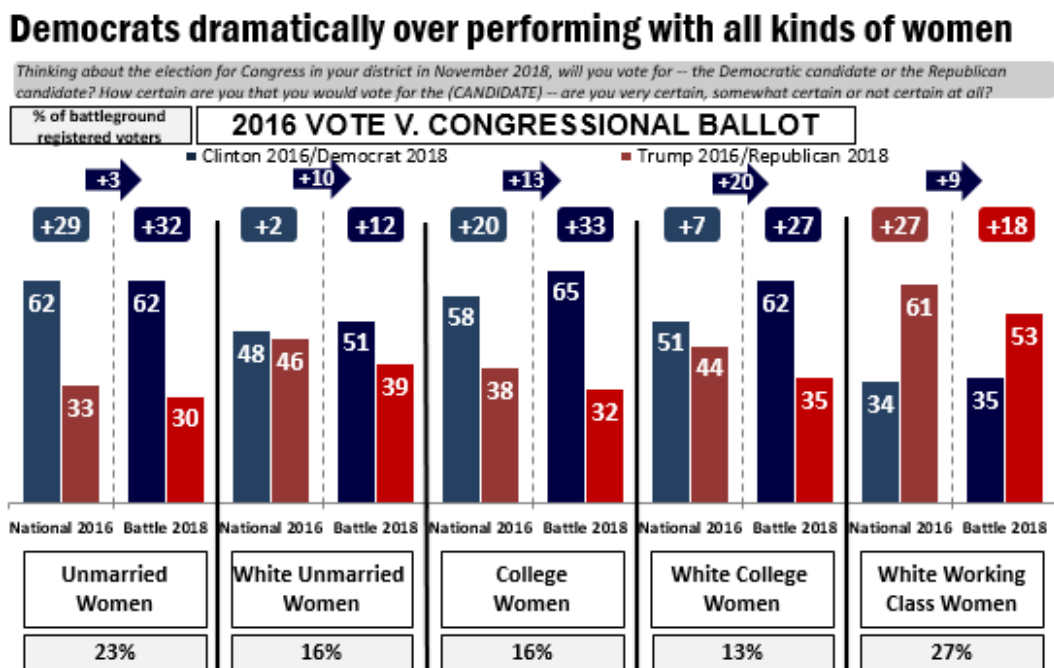
They have an even greater potential to impact the outcome of the election than college educated women if progressives prioritize getting them to the polls.

African American voters, and women in particular, have been playing a very big role in the Democrats’ strong performance in special elections since 2016. This panel shows they are poised to continue this strong showing in November, giving 96 percent of their vote to the Democratic candidates, though their interest in voting falls short of that of white college women (42 and 51 percent expressing extreme interest in the election, respectively.)

The two groups of women that could leave Democrats short are millennial and Hispanic women:

- Millennial turnout has been the toughest nut to crack in midterms (and frankly, in general elections). While their interest in the election has ticked up slightly since June, at 34 percent their enthusiasm remains well short of other groups. But we know there is a tremendous opportunity with millennial women, who are 13 percent of the registered voters, because they have become dramatically more supportive of the Democrats since we last polled (their margin is up 24 points since June, putting them at an impressive 71 to 19 percent), and because they respond so well to our new messages.
- Hispanic women are giving Democrats two-thirds of their vote for Congress, but they are the least intent on voting of the women surveyed. Only 31 percent of Hispanic women say they are extremely interested in the election.

These are the groups of women that must be targeted the most by progressives.



White working class women are currently giving the Republicans an 18-point margin (53 to 35 percent), which will bring down the Democrats’ performance with women in November. But the impact of their preference for Republicans may be less than imagined. First, the 18-point margin is 9 points short of Trump’s performance with them nationally in 2016. Second, the proportion giving the highest interest in the election has fallen 6 points since the last poll.

### Trump and the GOP

President Trump’s actions are motivating for Democrats. As he hits the campaign trail, his overall approval is down from 48 to 45 percent, and strong disapproval has reached 42 percent. A stunning 79 percent of African Americans, 68 percent of unmarried women, 67 percent of Hispanics, and 63 percent of college educated women want “to elect leaders who will be a check on President Trump.”

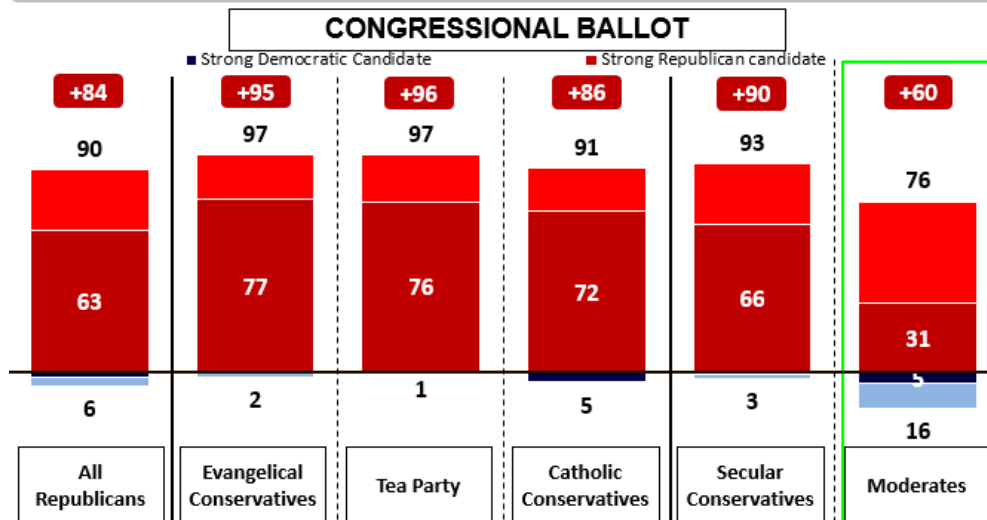
What is often overlooked but is clear in this poll is how the Trump presidency has fractured the Republican Party. On the one hand are the Trump loyalists, and on the other, the less enthusiastic GOP voters who are potential targets for midterm messages from opportunistic progressives.

- Tea Party and Evangelicals form 39 percent of those who identify as Republicans in the battleground, and they are delivering for Trump. A stunning 97 percent approve of Trump, 78 percent strongly – up 8 points from June. Their strong turnout intention also jumped 10 points. The campaign rallies and *Fox News* are working.
- The less enthusiastic bloc of Catholic and secular conservatives and moderates form 61 percent of the GOP base in the battleground. A more modest 73 percent approve of Trump, and critically, their approval of Trump is down 13 points since June. They are not more motivated to vote, unlike the Trump loyalists, and 9 percent are now voting Democratic, doubling their vote from June.

These unenthusiastic Republicans, particularly the moderates, can be targeted for persuasion and turnout and that is a new opportunity evident only now.

### Moderate GOP very weak in their congressional certainty

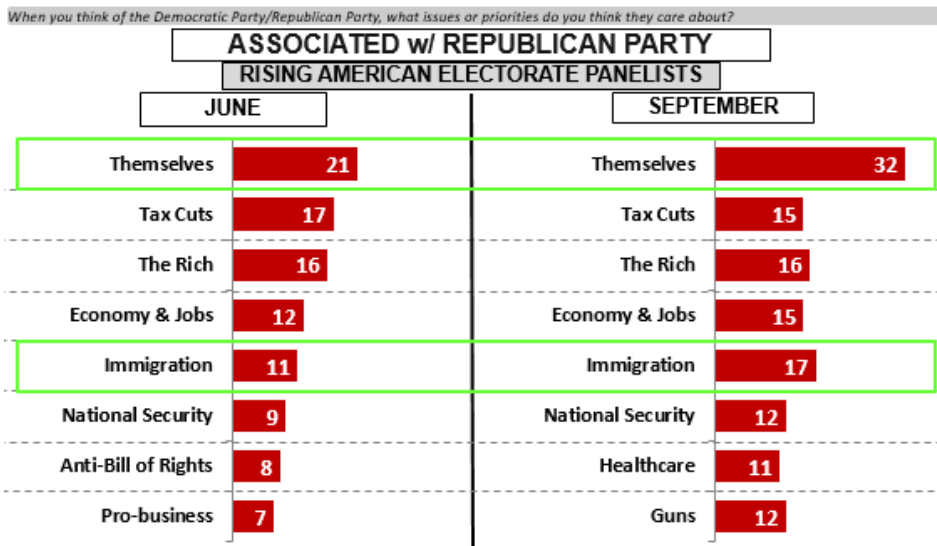
Thinking about the election for Congress in your district in November, will you vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate? How certain are you that you would vote for the (CANDIDATE) are you very certain, somewhat certain or not certain at all?



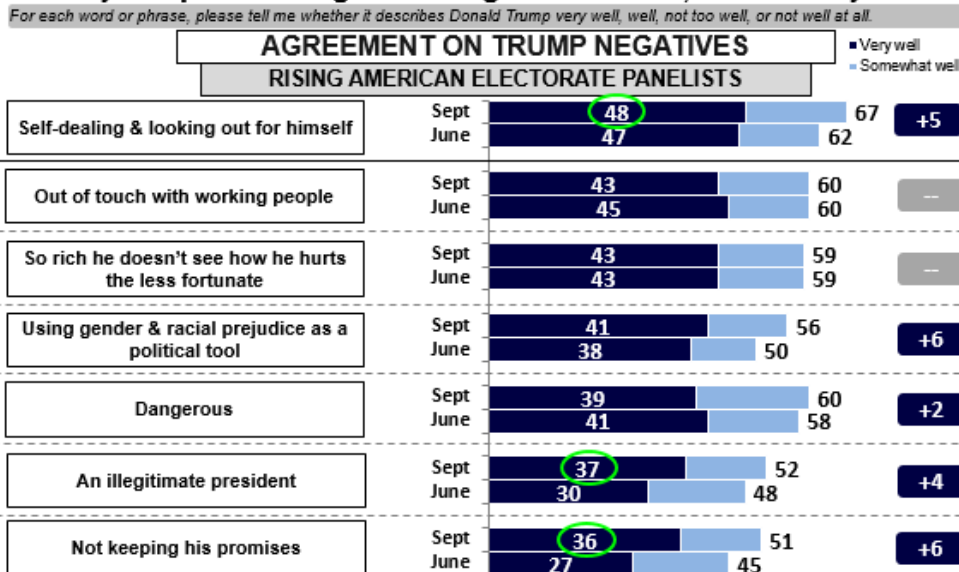
**The politicians are self-dealing and cutting corrupt deals for corporate, big money donors, while being maddeningly out of touch**

The perception among the Rising American Electorate that the Republican Party and Donald Trump are self-dealing and only looking out for themselves and the rich at their expense has surged. The number who wrote the party is for “themselves” jumped 11 points since June. Two-thirds now say Trump is “self-dealing and looking out for himself” while 60 percent say he is “out of touch with working people.”

**Big jump in perception of the GOP being for themselves**



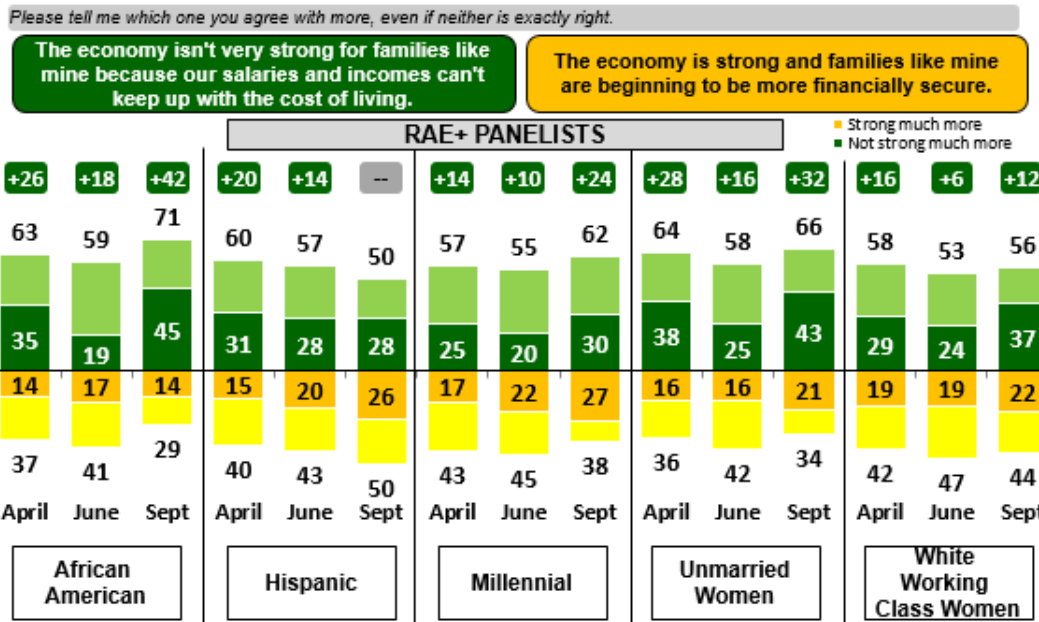
**More say Trump self-dealing and looking out for himself, with intensity**



The definition of being out of touch is taking up their tone deaf elite narrative on how great the country is doing and how they are delivering for the American people. It is a *noblesse oblige*

message masked in populist clothing. A growing majority of the Rising American Electorate, including a large majority of white working class women, say this is an economy that is not very strong for families like theirs because their wages aren't keeping up with rising costs. That is why any hope the GOP had that the 'great economy' will save them is lost. It magnifies voters' anger with the GOP and about the corrupt deals for the rich.

**Trump & the media get it wrong: voters increasingly say economy is not strong**



At every point in the survey, voters say they hate politicians who are doing the bidding of big donors. There are so many ways voters show their frustration, anger, and determination to use this standard for judging politicians.

- That government is being handed over to wealthy donors and corporations at the expense of working people and the middle class was virtually the top most important idea recalled from the Democrats' strongest message.
- That politicians sell you out and have lobbyists and super PACs were the top important ideas recalled from a millennial-inspired message.
- The action that would produce the most trust in a politician: "They refuse to take money from Super PACs or corporate donations."

**Message on corrupt deals, corporate influence and being out of touch grows the vote**

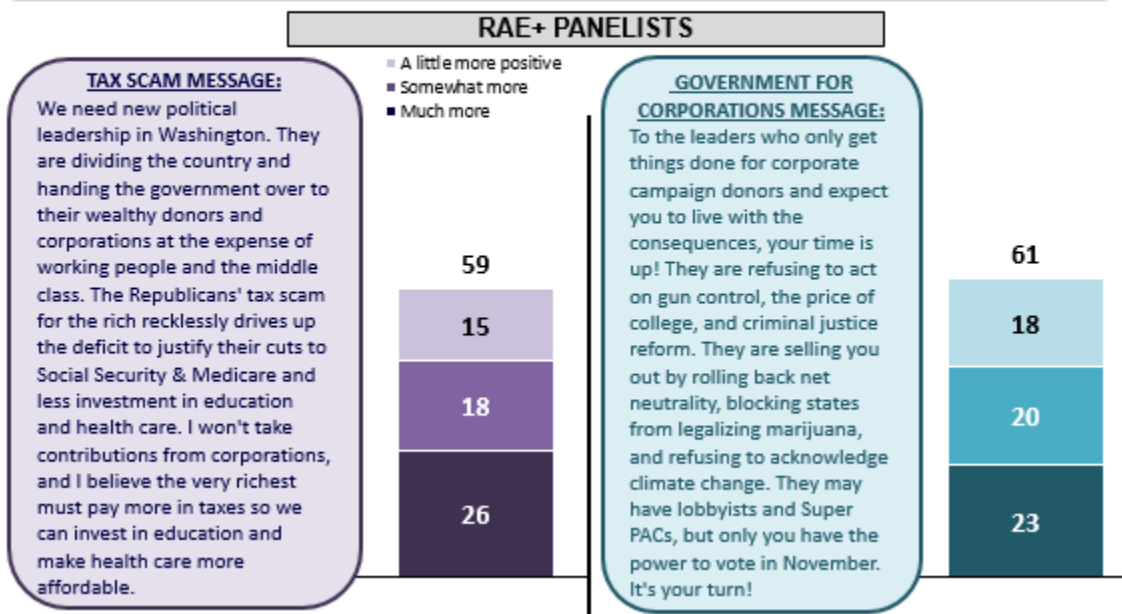
Voters are on a knife's edge and ready to punish the Republicans for their self-dealing, and Democrats who "get it" can get a further dividend in this election.

Understand, though, that Democrats are not exactly seen as prioritizing these issues. When asked the Democratic Party’s priorities in an open-ended question, “social justice” issues have moved to the top with the economy well down in the pack. So, if Democrats want to get more than a grudging vote, then they must embrace a corruption-centered message combined with attacks on the GOP as “out of touch.” This combination produces stunning shifts in the congressional vote and turnout among Democratic voters.

The two Democratic messages we tested are both very strong with the Rising American Electorate, but the “tax scam for the rich” message is super-empowering for African Americans, Hispanics, unmarried women, and particularly white unmarried women, as well as the white working class women. They flagged as especially important that this message called out politicians prioritizing the rich and wealthy donors and corporations at our expense, and that it meant less investments in making health care affordable.

### Tax scam & government for corporations messages powerful

Please read this statement from a Democratic candidate from (STATE). Does that statement make you feel much more positive, somewhat more, a little more, or less positive about that candidate, or does it make no difference?



A message decrying leader who only get things done for corporate donors – which we wrote to appeal to millennials – did dramatically well with millennials, and obviously, their turnout is a priority. Because that message was developed to engage millennials, the issues selected are ones on which they have taken the lead: gun control, net neutrality, criminal justice reform, college affordability, and climate change. But when why that messenger can be trusted to govern for the right reasons, they focused not on policies, but rather on how it calls out politicians that “sell you out” and “have lobbyists and super PACs.” We think this could be made even stronger, especially beyond millennials, by mentioning the GOP’s tax scam for the rich threatening health care and education funding



The impact of these messages is multiplied for Senate and House candidates when it is combined with attacks on the Republicans for being out of touch on jobs, wages and taxes.

**OUT OF TOUCH ON ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Republicans say this is the best economy in history, but that growth isn't helping people like you who haven't seen a raise in years, while the cost of living increases are killing you. (48 percent serious doubts, 33 very serious)

**OUT OF TOUCH ON JOBS:** Republicans say there is record-low unemployment and their corporate tax cuts are keeping more good-paying jobs in the US. But most of the jobs pay a lot less than they used to, while outsourcing of good-paying manufacturing jobs has accelerated in the past 2 years. (47 percent serious doubts, 30 very serious)

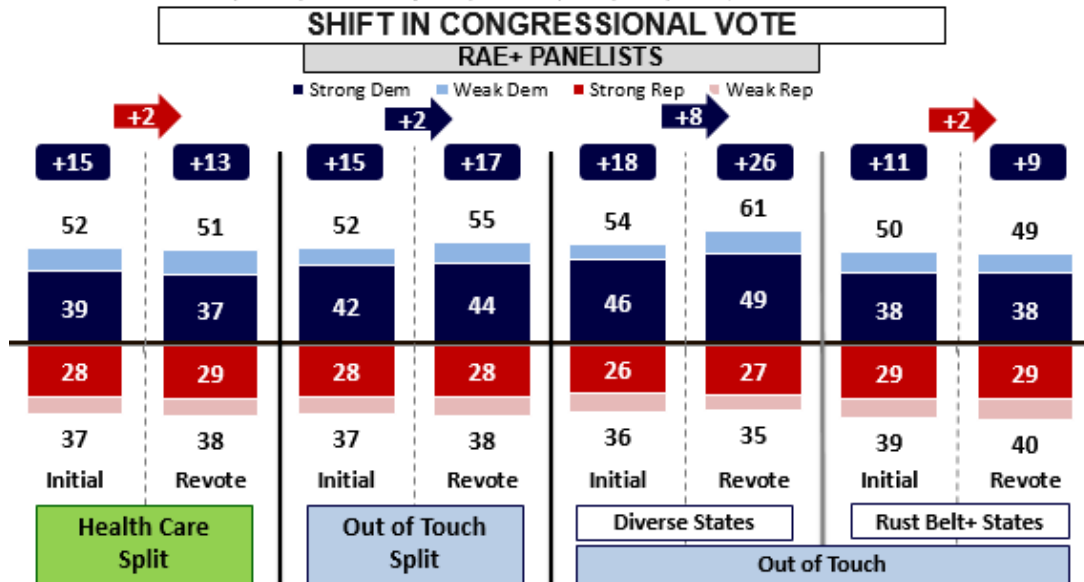
**OUT OF TOUCH ON TAXES & WAGES:** Republicans say that your wages are rising like never before because of the corporate tax cut. Instead, corporations gave all that money to their stock holders and hiked CEO bonuses, while salaries and wages went down over the last 3 months. That's a scam and greedy. (50 percent serious doubts, 29 very serious)

The Trump and GOP boasting about the economy is a slap in the face to these voters, making their corrupt deals and self-dealing more maddening. Incorporating that, rather than health care, makes all the difference. The exception are the governors' races where attacking on health care is equally strong.

Hitting their corrupt deals and their wage claims together produces some of the biggest shifts we have simulated in a survey.

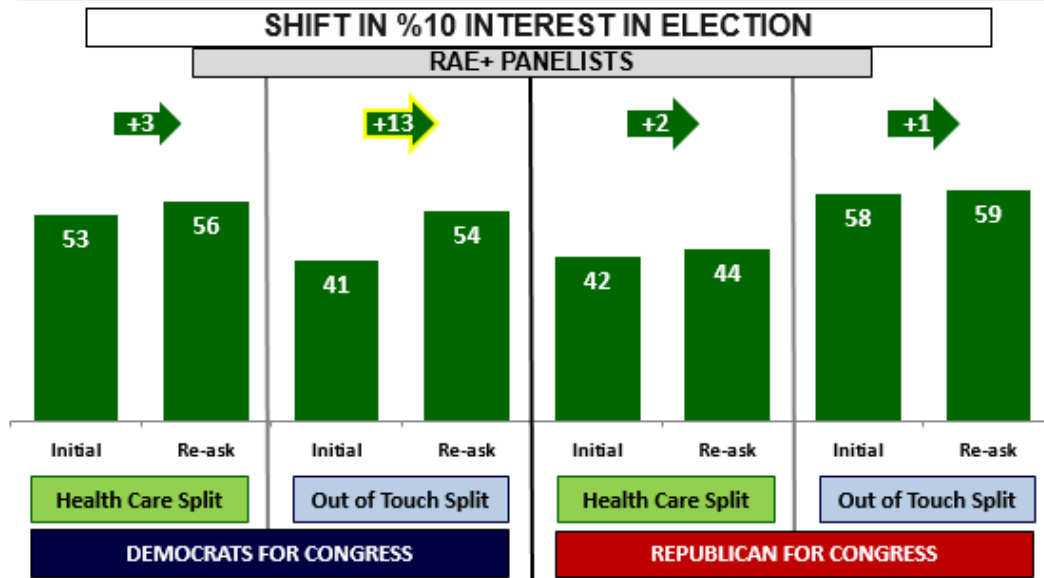
**'Out of touch' on economy focus shifts House votes, especially in diverse states**

Thinking about the election for Congress in your district in November 2018, will you vote for -- the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate? How certain are you that you would vote for the (CANDIDATE) -- are you very certain, somewhat certain or not certain at all?



### 'Out of touch' focus widens the enthusiasm gap with GOP voters

*How interested are you in the elections in November? Please rate your interest from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning that you have no interest in this election and 10 meaning that you are extremely interested.*



### Final recommendations

This is our best combined message which integrates the powerful parts of the message and attacks on the Republicans for being out of touch. It is on point.

**Too many leaders divide the country and cut corrupt deals for themselves and their wealthy corporate campaign donors at the expense of working people and the middle class. The Republicans say your wages are great and it's the best economy in history. But their tax scam for the rich recklessly drives up the deficit to justify their cuts to Medicare and Medicaid and less investment in education and health care. I won't take contributions from corporations or Super PACs and the very richest must pay more in taxes so we can invest in education and make health care more affordable.**

It is motivating that this message drives up turnout and the vote, but Democrats and progressives need to deliver it — and be much sharper and more focused on calling out corruption, self-dealing, big money, corporate influence and politicians out of touch with voters' lives. The Democratic Senate and House leaders and campaign committees are in the same ballpark, but not nearly as focused on the corruption of President Trump and the Republicans.

The recommended message does not use attacks on health care because hitting the GOP on being out of touch with respect to what is really happening with wages and jobs was demonstrably more powerful and because President Trump and the GOP help make the point each day by talking about the 'great' economic times.

To be sure, the attack on what Trump & the GOP have done on health care is still an important part of progressives' strategy. Most important, the health care attacks are effective in the governors' races in shifting the vote and turnout. Medicaid and the state handling of health care are top tier issues and readily fit with the big message we are proposing over the next six weeks.