

Date: February 12, 2015

To: Progressive community

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Evolving strategy for progressives: RAE⁺ Findings of multi-stage research project for WVVV Action Fund

The 2014 election was a disaster for the Democratic Party and the consequences of that November may be felt for many years to come in the congressional majority and in Republican governance at the state level. But that election did not realign the country politically or ideologically and it did not erode the Democrats' presidential majority. What is shocking is how short-lived the Republican wave proved to be.

This multi-pronged wave of research for WVVV makes very clear that the Democratic presidential majority is back, the Obama coalition arrived intact and Hillary Clinton begins this election cycle with a 6 point lead over Romney – who had not yet withdrawn and was the GOP's strongest potential candidate – and 12 points over Bush.

Her margin exceeds President Obama's in 2012, and is delivered by the Rising American Electorate of racial minorities, young people and millennials, and unmarried women, as well as strong support from women college graduates. Obviously, maintaining and delivering this support is the most important task for progressives.

Yet, that presidential majority is not deep or broad enough to break the Republican hold on Congress and key states. It is not producing wave elections.

There are three inter-related reasons for the shortfall:

1. Some parts of the RAE could be giving Democrats bigger margins and turning out in bigger numbers, including unmarried women where Clinton's vote is down 4 points compared to Obama's 2012 total;
2. Democratic presidential candidates (including Clinton) are only getting about a third of white working class voters;
3. Those who are living with the restructured, new economy are struggling and turned off by elite (and presidential) talk about the great macro economy. That includes parts of the RAE (e.g., white unmarried women) and the white working class, two groups of voters who share more than most realize. Currently, white unmarried



women divide their presidential vote (48 percent Clinton, 47 percent Republican candidates) while Obama won 52 percent in 2012.

That leaves the progressive political project falling short in critical ways – and requires an evolution of strategy – to ***RAE⁺: consolidating support within the base while reaching groups outside it who share some values and priorities.***

The goal of progressives now is to get more support and engagement from the RAE, including white unmarried women and Millennials, and to broaden support with struggling white working class voters, both men and women.

This report makes recommendations based on three distinct research projects executed over the last month, including a focus group with white working class voters in Tidewater, Virginia, a national survey of 950 likely voters and dial testing and on-line focus groups conducted during the 2015 State of the Union Address.¹

The strategic turn

To evolve the strategy and meet its goals, progressives need to make progress in the following areas.

1. Understand and identify with the economic challenges that a majority of people are experiencing – even as the elites and perhaps Democratic leaders celebrate the macro economy.
2. Target both parts of the Rising American Electorate, especially unmarried women but perhaps also millennials, and parts of the swing electorate, including white working class voters. We know from this research they share a lot.
3. The economic agenda must be led by government reform. Target groups are disgusted with politics and government because of the role of big money, perceptions of waste and special interest spending. A reform agenda opens up these targets.
4. Champion a middle class economic narrative that seeks rising incomes for all and opportunities for all that make the effort. That narrative is 20 points stronger than the conservative, small government narrative.
5. Champion a middle class economics that starts with protecting Social Security and Medicare, help for working moms, reforming government, equal pay for women, long term infrastructure investment that creates jobs, and making college affordable

¹ See appendix for research specifications.

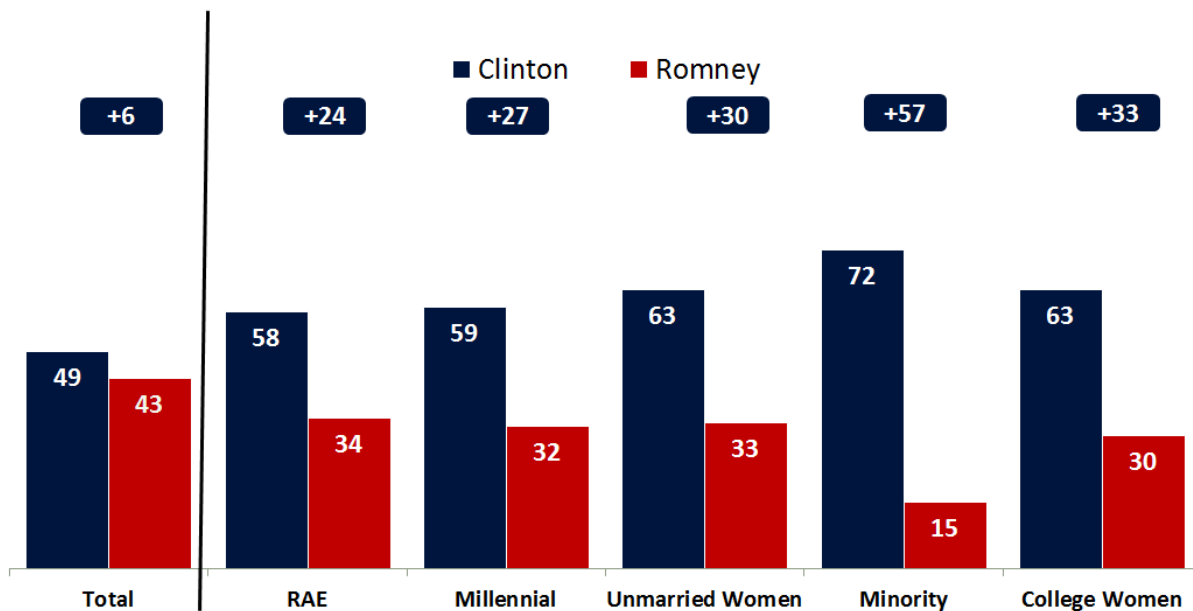


6. Recognize that white unmarried women and non-college women and men share common feelings about what is happening and what needs to change. They want to first protect the existing social safety net of Social Security and Medicare and reform government, and then help working families with affordable childcare and paid sick leave, invest in long term infrastructure projects that create jobs, and make sure women earn equal pay.
7. Recognize that specific references to helping “working women” or gender-directed issues such as pay equity do not alienate white working class men.

The starting challenge

The Rising American Electorate with the support Democrats earn among women college graduates produce a 6-point margin against Romney – and 12 against Jeb Bush. With Clinton winning each group by almost two-to-one, the coalition that elected Obama in 2008 and 2012 remains in place.

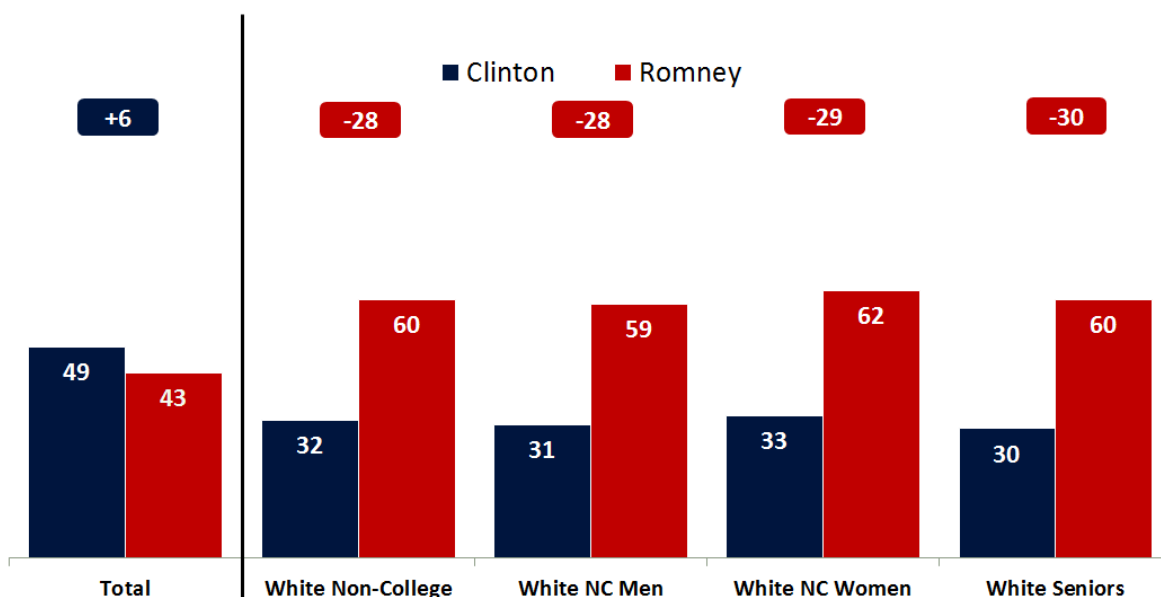
I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for President in 2016, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for -- Democrat Hillary Clinton or Republican Mitt Romney?



White working class voters and white unmarried women remain a challenge. At 32 percent among white working class voters, Clinton does no better than Obama in 2012 or congressional Democrats in 2014. She runs even with white unmarried women (48 to 47 percent).



I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the election for President in 2016, if the election for President were held today, would you vote for -- Democrat Hillary Clinton or Republican Mitt Romney?



RAE base targets and working class share a common economic perspective

White working class voters and unmarried women will not be embracing the positive macro-economic news anytime soon and both struggle with wages, as illustrated in our focus groups. These are people who are working multiple jobs with longer hours for less pay.

Don't want to have to work two full time jobs just to survive.

I don't think there's enough increases in pay.

So people can live and afford food, gas, health insurance

You can't keep living on wages of the 90's

Those that pay lower gas prices also pay higher grocery bills and health care costs. As one Virginia woman put it: *"You got lower energy costs today than you did last year, but you got higher healthcare costs so how did you move ahead?"*

The new strategy needs to have as its heart a recognition that the improvements we have seen at the macro-economic level have not reached most target groups.

This problem is vividly demonstrated in the dial testing of the President's State of the Union Speech. The President connected with voters when describing the tough times that millions of Americans continue to endure. However, when he described the state of the union as "strong," boasted of a revived manufacturing base or asserted "middle-class economic works," he



produced flat or downward-trending lines among white non-college and white unmarried women participants watching the speech.



America, for all that we've endured; for all the grit and hard work required to come back; for all the tasks that lie ahead, know this: The shadow of crisis has passed, and the State of the Union is strong. At this moment -- with a growing economy, shrinking deficits, bustling industry, and booming energy production -- we have risen from recession freer to write our own future than any other nation on Earth. It's now up to us to choose who we want to be over the next fifteen years, and for decades to come.

Nor were these white unmarried women and white working class voters very excited when they heard about the claim of a breakthrough year.



Tonight, after a breakthrough year for America, our economy is growing and creating jobs at the fastest pace since 1999. Our unemployment rate is now lower than it was before the financial crisis. More of our kids are graduating than ever before; more of our people are insured than ever before; we are as free from the grip of foreign oil as we've been in almost 30 years.



RAE targets and white working class are aligned in much of their thinking

Democrats need not choose between reaching white working class voters and key parts of their base, like unmarried women. These voters share a sense of struggle, look at the economy in similar ways, see themselves as blocked from the middle class and have an overlapping policy agenda. This affinity is hardly surprising. Fully one in five (22 percent) of white working class voters are unmarried women.

These voters do not participate in the upward trend in voters' mood. A 76 percent majority of white working class voters still describe the country as off on the wrong track. White unmarried women are similarly pessimistic (68 percent wrong track). In the focus group discussion among white working class voters, participants paint a portrait of their lives quite set apart from a record stock market:

Here you just suffer and hope you get through.

I keep looking at coupons and sale papers and making myself aware of what things should cost. If I didn't watch every penny, and I'm not kidding, every penny, you know I'd be out on the street. It requires a great deal of effort to stay solvent right now.

Like working more to stay the same, or having to do a little extra there to kind of float at the same level.

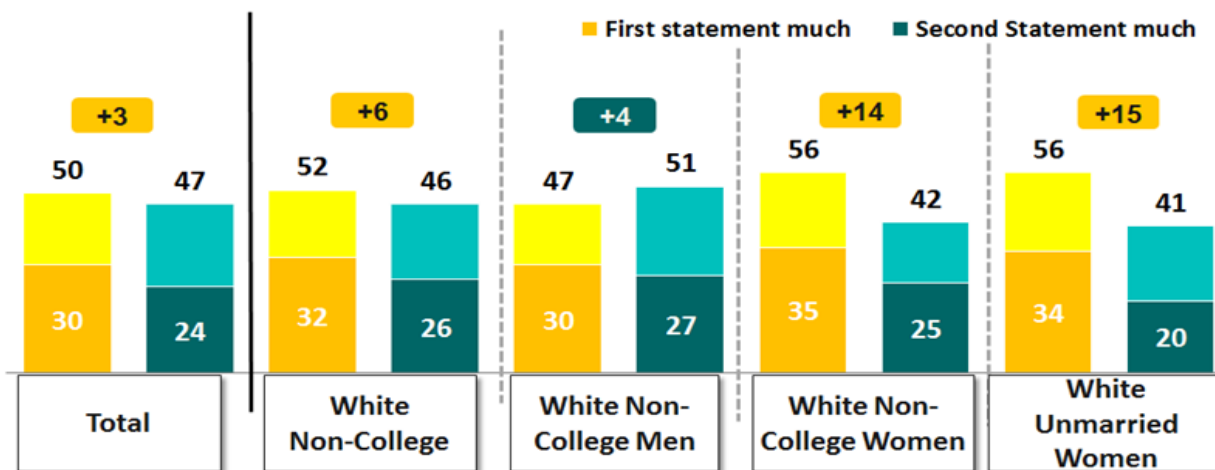
And both these groups believe they are blocked from the middle class. It is a sobering finding in the survey and a challenge to both political parties that a plurality of Americans believe, "Getting to or staying the middle class is harder than ever and nearly impossible with so many jobs that don't pay enough to live on." Unmarried white women and white non-college women are especially likely to hold this view.



Now let me read you some short statements. Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view.

Getting to or staying in the middle class is harder than ever and nearly impossible with so many jobs that don't pay enough to live on.

Times are tough but those who work hard can still reach or stay in the middle class.



As we shall see below, both groups respond similarly to the same set of policy proposals and both want to reform government. Moreover, white working class voters, including white working class men are in no way alienated from policies and narratives explicitly aimed at working women. Improving Democratic support among white unmarried women and white working class voters are inextricably linked.

The Democrats’ middle class economic agenda needs to be led by reform.

These voters remain deeply cynical about government’s ability to work for the middle class. One focus group comment captures the sentiment of millions of these voters.

It looks like the middle class is getting phased out. You’re either going to be extremely wealthy or you’re going to be struggling. And there is no middle class and nobody seems to get in there and see what the problem really is.

Big money corrupts government’s purpose and special interests take the money and run. In reacting to the President’s address, unmarried women and white non-college voters responded enthusiastically to the President’s “middle-class economics” policy proposals, but also betrayed doubts about their cost, efficiency and the ability of a grid-locked Washington to deliver for working people. We saw similar doubts in our focus groups in Virginia Beach.

Left unaddressed, this cynicism will block Democratic progress. However, Democrats can win a fair and broad hearing for their economic proposals if they lead with reform.



Now, thinking ahead to the presidential elections in 2016, I am going to read you something Democratic leaders are saying about how things in this country could be better. ...tell me whether you find it a very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing, or a not at all convincing statement about how things in this country could be better.

(Combined Econ Agenda)

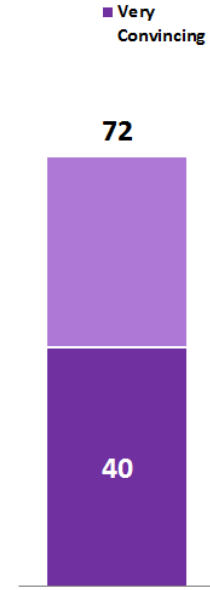
People are drowning because jobs don't pay enough to live on. We need leaders who know what it's like to work hard every day and still struggle to pay the bills. We must help people with affordable college, job training, and childcare.

(Working families should earn wages that keep up with the cost of living/Women must get equal pay so working women and families can keep up.)

We must help the vulnerable by reducing taxes for low-wage workers and give a tax break for lower and middle class working families. And we must always protect Social Security and Medicare. We need an economy that works for working people and the middle class again.



(Reform) There is too much money in politics and government. Big corporations and lobby groups spend millions getting their candidates elected, and then get tax breaks and special laws that protect their special interests. Billions are spent on government programs that are often out dated or don't even work--but special interests and government bureaucracy protect them. We need leaders who will clean up Washington by restricting the campaign dollars that come in, changing programs that don't work and using that money to help middle class working families--not big campaign donors.

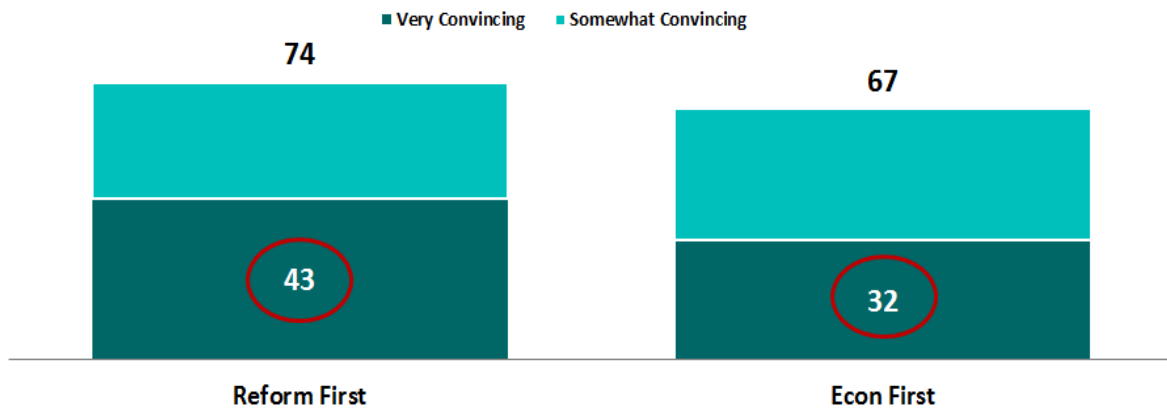


In one of the more dramatic findings in this survey, by sequencing a reform message first, Democrats open voters up to a progressive economic vision and win a hearing for their message. Among voters who heard the reform message first, 43 percent describe the larger economic narrative (“People are drowning...”) as very convincing. Without this antecedent, this number falls to 32 percent very convincing. Among white non-college voters, the order produces a 13-point jump in intensity for the Democratic message (40 percent and 27 percent, respectively).



(Reform) There is too much money in politics and government. Big corporations and lobby groups spend millions getting their candidates elected, and then get tax breaks and special laws that protect their special interests. Billions are spent on government programs that are often out dated or don't even work--but special interests and government bureaucracy protect them. We need leaders who will clean up Washington by restricting the campaign dollars that come in, changing programs that don't work and using that money to help middle class working families--not big campaign donors.

(Economic Agenda) People are drowning because jobs don't pay enough to live on. We need leaders who know what it's like to work hard every day and still struggle to pay the bills. We must help people with affordable college, job training, and childcare. (Working families should earn wages that keep up with the cost of living/Women must get equal pay so working women and families can keep up.) We must help the vulnerable by reducing taxes for low-wage workers and give a tax break for lower and middle class working families. And we must always protect Social Security and Medicare. We need an economy that works for working people and the middle class again.



Tested separately, reform policies constitute the most popular Republican policy proposal in the survey, and one of the most popular Democratic policies tested among unmarried women. Indeed, among white unmarried women, reform is more powerful than equal pay.

Middle class economics that acknowledge the on-going wage struggle of working class voters and preface their argument with reforming government will effectively frame the Democrats 2016 economic argument. This narrative outperforms the competing Republican narratives overall and dramatically outpaces Republican messages among likely voters and the RAE.

The middle class economic message reaches parity with the conservative economic message with white non-college voters, Democrats lost these voters by 30 points in 2014 and Obama lost these voters by 26 points in 2012. So, that is good news.

At the heart of middle class economics that has broad appeal with the target groups are values that were articulated by the president. They responded to an economic framework that offers a fair shot for everyone to succeed within a new middle class economy. The dials among white unmarried women and white working class voters all surge at the discussion of everyone playing by the same set of rules, and spike again with the mention of a plan to help working families with childcare, college, healthcare, and retirement.



That's what middle-class economics is—the idea that this country does best when everyone gets their fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules. We don't just want everyone to share in America's success—we want everyone to contribute to our success.



So what does middle-class economics require in our time?

First—middle-class economics means helping working families feel more secure in a world of constant change. That means helping folks afford childcare, college, health care, a home, retirement—and my budget will address each of these issues, lowering the taxes of working families and putting thousands of dollars back into their pockets each year.

The new middle class economic agenda

The agenda that emerges in this strategy focuses strongly on economic advocacy—on helping working men and women. Issues like protecting Medicare and Social Security, help for working families that includes affordable childcare and paid sick leave, equal pay for women, a long-term



infrastructure investment plan for jobs and economic growth, and making college affordable and free at community colleges all speak to the immediate economic lives of many of these voters.

Focus groups jumped on the minimum wage and pay equity as critically important to their wellbeing. Interestingly enough, non-college women focused both on minimum wage and pay equality. But both men and women keyed in on pay equity. This is largely because these voters rely on two-income households:

I also look at it in the respect, there's a lot of households out there in the world that are single women and have kids. So they need the money.

...there are a lot of single women out there that they've got to pay bills just like everybody else. Most of the families now are two-income families, that would certainly help their overall outlook on the American dream.

...I think more along the lines of looking at them equally to mean as far as promotions.

The President successfully reached these voters by pulling in key parts of this agenda. Specifically, he produced huge spikes in the dials when focused on working families, paid sick leave and child care.



Today, we're the only advanced country on Earth that doesn't guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave to our workers. Forty-three million workers have no paid sick leave. Forty-three million. Think about that. And that forces too many parents to make the gut-wrenching choice between a paycheck and a sick kid at home. So I'll be taking new action to help states adopt paid leave laws of their own.



It's time we stop treating childcare as a side issue, or a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us. And that's why my plan will make quality childcare more available, and more affordable, for every middle-class and low-income family with young children in America -- by creating more slots and a new tax cut of up to \$3,000 per child, per year.

The President's community college proposal and making the connection between this policy and giving individuals willing to work an opportunity to thrive in the new economy produced the biggest spike of the night among non-college women.



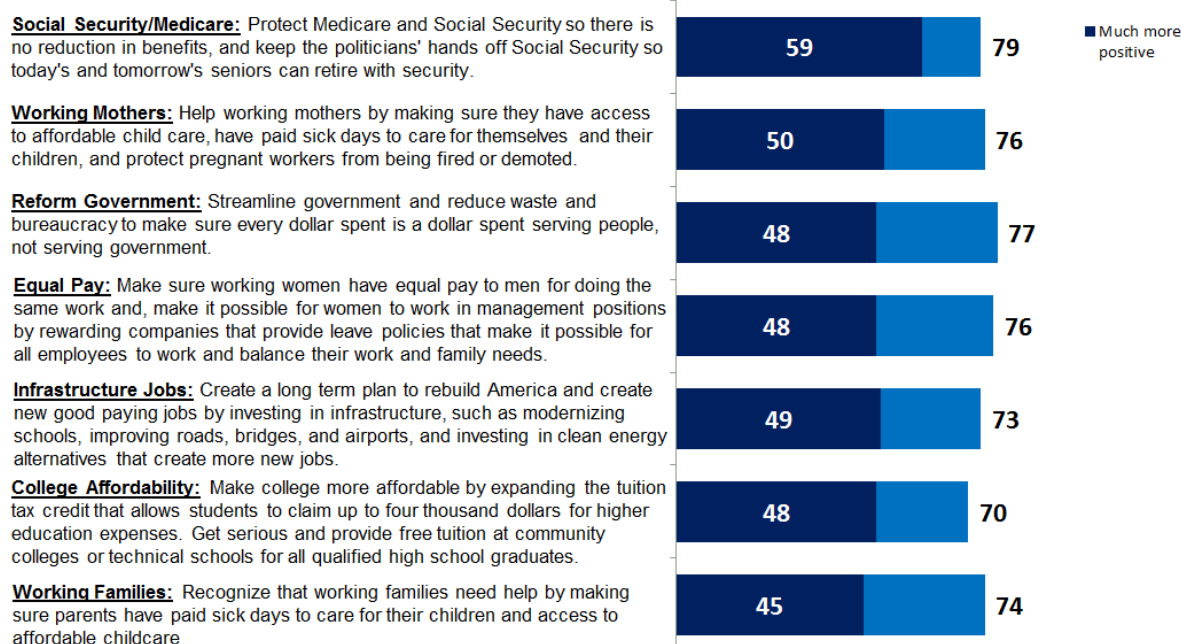
...lower the cost of community college -- to zero. Forty percent of our college students choose community college. Some are young and starting out. Some are older and looking for a better job. Some are veterans and single parents trying to transition back into the job market. Whoever you are, this plan is your chance to graduate ready for the new economy, without a load of debt.



There is no conflict or dissonance among white working class voters, including working class men, on issues that call out specifically the economic struggles of women, like help for working mothers or pay equity. Among all voters in the survey, an economic frame that includes equal pay performed just as well as one that did not (71 percent convincing for both). The white working class—and even white working class men—were not turned off by a frame that acknowledged the need for equal pay. This is not an esoteric social justice issue for these men but rather an issue that impacts the women in their lives who they know work just as hard and need the money. They know the economics of the family have changed; they understand the need for the law to change with it.

Further, unmarried white women and white non-college voters largely share the same agenda. Both identify protecting Social Security as one of their leading agenda items. Both focus on government reform. Help for working mothers resonates in both groups as well.

Now I am going to read you some things being proposed by Democrats as part of their plan to deal with the economy. After each item, please tell me whether that policy makes you feel much more positive about their plan, somewhat more positive about their plan, a little more positive, or not at all positive.



This agenda makes the evolving strategy real for the public and provides targets for progressives. As we look at the focus group, dial testing and the survey, some things seem to matter more at this point. Here are some of those that stood out to us.

- The impact of big money influence on government has reached a tipping point and being for change starts with changing government.



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- In addition to tackling the corruption of big money, progressives also need to find their voice in addressing issues of government waste and inefficiency. This starting point opens voters' up to a progressive and activist economic narrative.
 - Jobs matter more. That seems odd given that the recovery is “over,” but there is increased support in the poll and groups for a long-term plan to rebuild America through infrastructure projects. It is the strongest proposal tested for blacks and Hispanics and is important for white non-college women. Long-term growth was key for white working class men who do not trust Washington and politicians to do short term things.
 - Help for working families and working mothers has also reached a cultural consensus, with stunning support for child care and paid leave, and voters responding equally to “help for working women” and “help for working families”.
 - Equal pay for women has grown in importance and the issue has gone mainstream. It wins support, surprisingly, in both the male and female white working class groups. It produced one of the biggest responses in the dials.
 - Don't underestimate the importance of stopping the government from raising the retirement age. With that “reform” mentioned more by Republicans, stopping them from raising the retirement age for working people is a very big deal.
 - Tax credits matter and are trusted as a way for working people to get benefits. The middle class economic narrative included this offer centrally: “We must help the vulnerable by reducing taxes for low-wage workers and give a tax break for lower and middle class working families.” And when we gave people the choice of a college grant of money up front or a tax credit, they strongly preferred the credit as a way to help
 - Raising the minimum wage matters a lot more to them now, particularly the women who are in less stable and lower paid jobs. It matters more because of Seattle and California and other states that were pushing toward \$15.00 an hour. It now seems possible that it could help them.



Toolkit

	2016 LV	RAE	Unmarried Women	Millennial	White Unmarried Women	White Non-College	White Non-Coll. Women	White Non-Coll. Men	Independent	Baby Boomers
Off the Chart	Medicare / SS	Infra. Jobs	Medicare/ SS	Working Moms	Medicare / SS	Medicare/ SS	Reform Gov.	Medicare / SS	Medicare/ SS	Medicare/ SS
	Working Moms	Working Families	Reform Gov.	College Afford.	Reform Gov.	Reform Gov.	Medicare/ SS	Business Jobs	Reform Gov.	Reform Gov.
Major	Reform Gov.	Medicare / SS	Working Families	Medicare / SS	Infra Jobs	Equal Pay	Working Families	Reform Gov.	Equal Pay	Working Moms
	Equal Pay	Equal Pay	Infra Jobs	Infra. Jobs	Working Families	Infra. Jobs	Equal Pay	College Afford.	Working Families	College Afford.
	Infra. Jobs	Reform Gov.	Equal Pay	Equal Pay	Equal Pay	Working Families	Infra. Jobs	Working Moms	Citizens United	Equal Pay
Important	College Afford.	College Afford.	Tax Fair Share	Business Jobs	Tax Fair Share	Business Jobs	Tax Fair Share	Equal Pay	Infra. Jobs	Citizens United
	Business Jobs	Tax Fair Share	College Afford.	Reform Gov.	College Afford.	Tax Fair Share	Health Care	Infra. Jobs	Business Jobs	Infra. Jobs
	Tax Fair Share	Minimum Wage	Minimum Wage	Citizens United	Minimum Wage	College Afford.	Citizens United	Citizens United	Tax Fair Share	Business Jobs

**only top scoring between working moms/working families included in table.*

Social Security/Medicare: Protect Medicare and Social Security so there is no reduction in benefits, and keep the politicians' hands off Social Security so today's and tomorrow's seniors can retire with security.

Working Mothers: Help *working mothers* by making sure they have access to affordable child care, have paid sick days to care for themselves and their children, and protect pregnant workers from being fired or demoted.

Infrastructure Jobs: Create a long term plan to rebuild America and create new good paying jobs by investing in infrastructure, such as modernizing schools, improving roads, bridges, and airports, and investing in clean energy alternatives that create more new jobs.

Reform Government: Streamline government and reduce waste and bureaucracy to make sure every dollar spent is a dollar spent serving people, not serving government.

Equal Pay: Make sure working women have equal pay to men for doing the same work and, make it possible for women to work in management positions by rewarding companies that provide leave policies that make it possible for all employees to work and balance their work and family needs.

College Affordability: Make college more affordable by expanding the tuition tax credit that allows students to claim up to four thousand dollars for higher education expenses. Get serious and provide free tuition at community colleges or technical schools for all qualified high school graduates.

Working Families: Recognize that working families need help by making sure parents have paid sick days to care for their children and access to affordable childcare.

Tax Fair Share: Raise taxes on those with the highest incomes and close corporate tax loopholes and special interest subsidies so they pay their fair share in taxes.

Minimum Wage: Raise the minimum wage to ten-ten an hour so those who work full time are not forced into poverty, and connect it to inflation so the minimum wage is not diminished over time.

Citizens United: Pass a Constitutional amendment to prevent the wealthy and big corporations from spending unlimited amounts of money on elections. Increase transparency laws so everyone can keep track of who is donating to campaigns, and empower small donors by matching small contributions from voters.

Business Jobs: Cut government red tape, expand lending programs for business owners, and provide tax credits for businesses, so they can grow and create more good paying jobs.

Health Care: Implement and improve the Affordable Care Act so everyone has access to affordable health care with discounts for most workers, small businesses and independent contractors and where nobody has to worry about pre-existing conditions or life-time limits.



Appendix

The survey of 950 likely 2016 voters was conducted from January 7-11, 2015. Voters who voted in the 2012 election or registered since were selected from the national voter file. Likely voters were determined based on stated intention of voting in 2016. Data shown in this deck is among all 2016 likely voters unless otherwise noted. Unless otherwise noted, margin of error for the full sample= +/-3.2 percentage points at 95% confidence. Margin of error will be higher among subgroups. 50 percent of respondents were reached by cell phone, in order to account for ever-changing demographics and trying to accurately sample the full American electorate.

State of the Union research was conducted on January 20, 2015 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund. Participants were 61 white swing voters nationwide who split their votes fairly evenly between Democratic and Republican candidates over the past several Presidential and Congressional elections, though there were slightly more Obama voters than Romney voters. The group's self-identified partisanship was 33 percent Democratic, 34 percent Independent, and 33 percent Republican. The group included 27 women and 34 men, including 13 unmarried women.

The focus groups were conducted on January 8th, 2015 in Virginia Beach among white non-college educated men and white non-college educated women who were weak partisans and Independents, roughly half were Obama voters, and they had a household income under \$50,000.