

Date: March 1, 2017

To: Progressive community

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

President's tone and agenda increase optimism, but gains could be modest *Report from dial groups of Donald Trump's first Joint Session to Congress*

The president began the night with a majority disapproving of his performance, and he ended with a majority feeling more optimistic about him. The speech raised his personal favorability and job approval 11 points and got the attention of minority voters, though Trump's overall gains trailed the 2009 gains of Obama, who was not digging out of a hole. This is according to dial meter groups conducted for WVVAF by Democracy Corps among white working class men and women, white unmarried women, millennials, and minorities.¹

Trump's performance got high marks from white working class voters and the white working class women in particular who broke for him late in the campaign. He clearly consolidated and built intense support with his white working class base.

His tone and promise of jobs, "massive" middle class tax cuts, and paid leave helped him with minority voters and white unmarried women, as well as with white working class women. Whether these gains become real depend on a Republican Congress passing such an agenda. His focus on safety and crime and securing America also resonated with minority voters. Overall, speaking to a Joint Session made him appear less threatening broadly, though again, whether that is sustainable depends on whether this is really a "New Donald Trump."

Trump's personal gains

Trump's uncharacteristic optimism, calls for bipartisanship, and patriotic solutes allowed him to receive a more positive reaction than he has in the past months. Our dials rarely fell into negative territory, even among millennials and minorities. In terms of his image, he made big gains on being presidential (+15) and loving America (+14) as well as keeping the country safe (+10) and looking out for the middle class (+13). He also saw increases in the numbers saying he "shares their values" (+13) and is "good for women" (11).

¹ On behalf of Women's Voice Women Vote Action Fund, Democracy Corps conducted online dial meter research among 150 voters during the joint session address: 30 millennials, 31 minorities, 30 white unmarried women, 31 white working class women and 31 white working class men. Surveys were administered before and after the live dial meter session. This research is qualitative and results are not statistically projectable onto a larger population.



Trump Attributes (% describes well)	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift
Presidential	41	56	+15
Loves America	67	81	+14
Will keep our country safe	50	64	+14
Looks out for the middle class	49	62	+13
Good for women	42	53	+11
Will create jobs	59	70	+11

Trump also made modest gains in personal measures: an 11 point increase in his job approval overall and a 12 point increase in personal favorability, including favorability increases across key groups. White working class women produced some of the greatest shifts in attributes and in job approval (+19) for Trump, and indeed gave the strongest responses of the night in the dials. The white working class men maintained their high levels of support and favorability, and the president's strong foreign policy commitments and infrastructure investment plans impressed them greatly.

Still, President Trump failed to achieve the gains in personal favorability and job approval that President Obama was able to achieve in his first Joint Session address. We actually expected a more significant bounce in reaction to Trump's improved tone and promised agenda, as Trump came into this address with particularly low ratings, and because with all presidents, these post-debate bounces are artificially high and pretty quickly dissipate.

Donald Trump	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift
Job Approval (percent approve)	47	58	+11
Personal Favorability (percent warm)	46	58	+12

Barack Obama 2009	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift
Job Approval (percent approve)	68	82	+14
Personal Favorability (percent warm)	62	76	+14

Trump did make respectable gains in personal favorability (+8) and job approval among minorities (+21). At the end of the night, half of minorities (47 percent) said they were more optimistic about Donald Trump. Minorities also became more assured that Trump understood the challenges facing people like them (+27), would keep the country safe (+25) and would be good for women (+24). Those gains should not be ignored.

There was evidence of white unmarried women, a Democratic-leaning swing group, listening and reacting positively to Trump on health care cost and coverage guarantees, tax cuts for the middle class, and policies to help working women. This was evident in their dial reactions and he did make gains with them on creating jobs (+20) and safety (+14). But critically, he achieved very small or no improvements at "being on their side" or on questions of character, like honesty. As a result, Trump achieved only a +3 point gain in approval with white unmarried women.



Trump made no inroads with millennials. His approval was up only 5 points after the address, and he failed to achieve any gains in important attributes like honesty, keeping our country safe, and being good for women.

Support for Trump’s “great” promises

Trump did raise his personal standing and hopes for his presidency among voters, but these improvements are rooted in increased confidence in how he will handle health care, infrastructure, ensuring there are good jobs, and draining the swamp. He made his biggest gains on international trade (+14), investing in infrastructure (+13), changing the Affordable Care Act (+13), reducing the influence of big money and lobbyists (+12), and making sure jobs pay enough to live on (+12). Again, whether that is real or sustainable depends on whether he really meets the expectations he created.

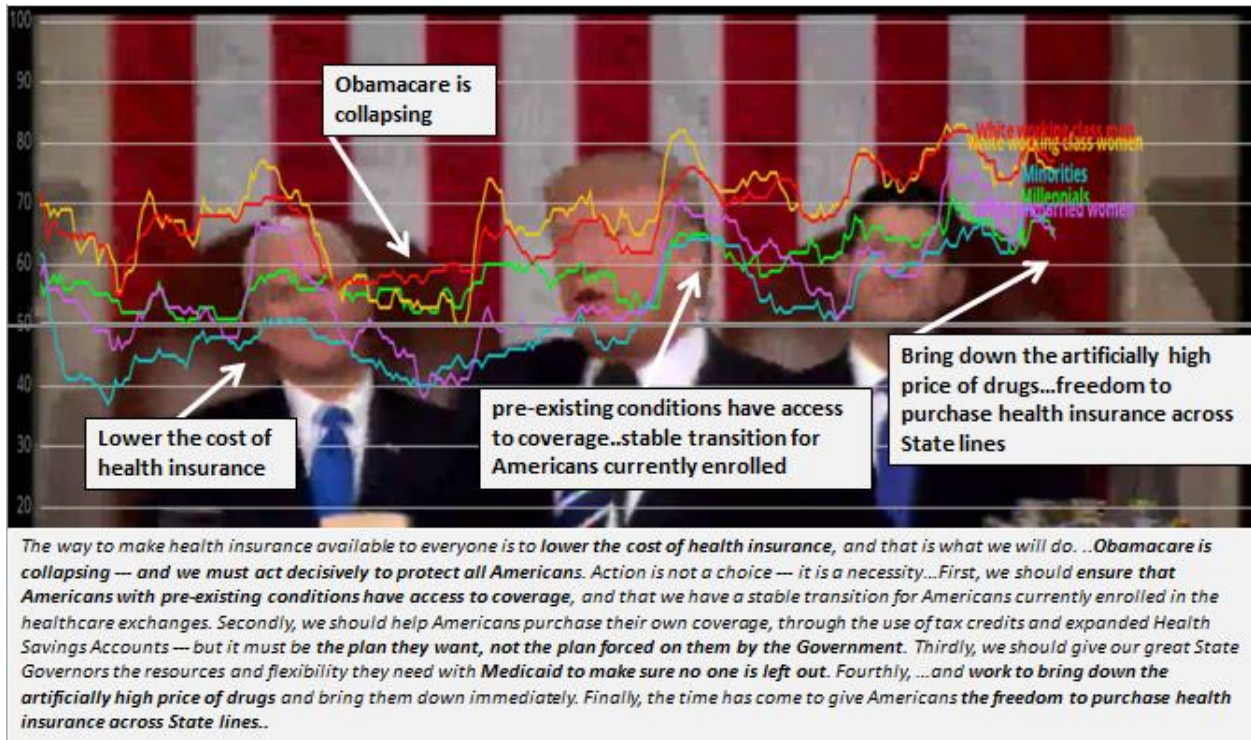
Confidence (% trust Trump more)	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift
International trade	44	58	+14
Investing in infrastructure	53	66	+13
Changing the ACA/Obamacare	43	56	+13
Reducing influence of big money/lobbyists	46	58	+12
Making sure jobs pay enough to live on	42	54	+12
The economy	55	60	+5

The white working class participants in our dials gave uniformly strong results in these areas. Beyond the white working class, the story is more complicated. In general, millennials and minorities are skeptical of the President’s big ticket items – health care, immigration, and tax reform. Critically, white unmarried women listened and were open to many of Trump’s proposals on health care cost and coverage guarantees, tax cuts for the middle class, and policies to help working women.

Health care. There were mixed reactions to Trump’s health care plans. The four principles for an acceptable replacement saw surges in support from all voters. There was universal support for protecting those with pre-existing conditions and accommodating those enrolled in the exchanges, bringing down high drug prices, allowing inter-state insurance purchases, ensuring nobody is left out through Medicaid coverage, and lowering insurances costs.

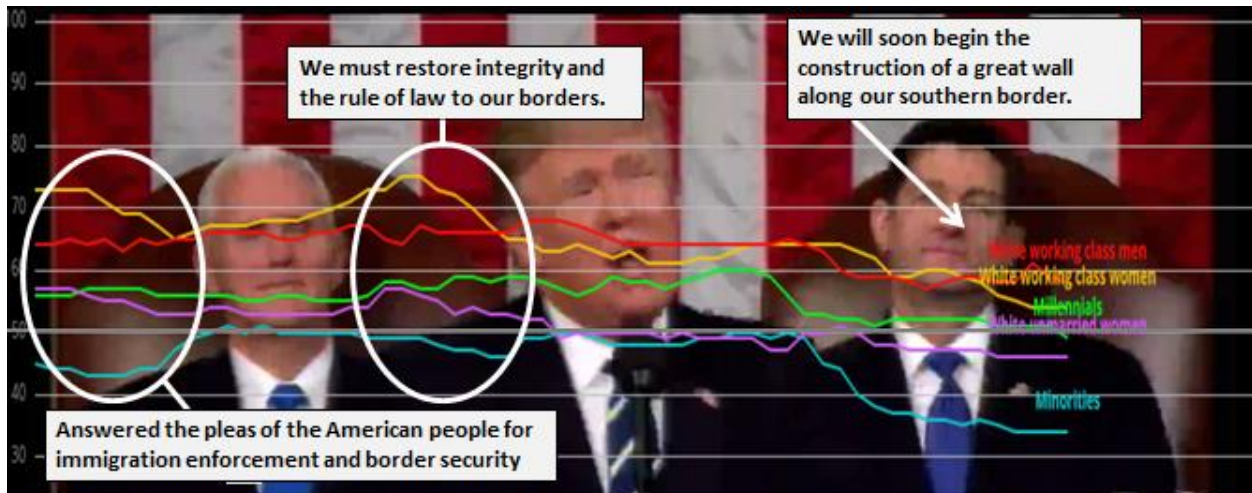
All of the lines dropped, however, when Trump spoke of the massive failure of Obamacare and his call on Congress to repeal and replace it. Minorities were very wary of his plans and defensive of Obamacare, and last night Trump made no gains in confidence with them to make changes to the ACA.

White unmarried women grew more confident in Trump’s approach to changing health care (+16), but their real-time dial reactions to his plans were particularly volatile. They are looking for results and may punish Trump and Republicans if they are unhappy with their replacement.



Immigration & Border Security. Trump’s strong statements on deportation, immigration enforcement, and border security got one of the highest reactions among white working class women. Reactions across the key groups were mixed, but he did produce sizeable shifts in confidence on handling the issue. One of the most polarizing moments of the night occurred when he touted his fulfilled campaign promise to enforce immigration laws, with white working class men and women giving high marks and minority support underwater.

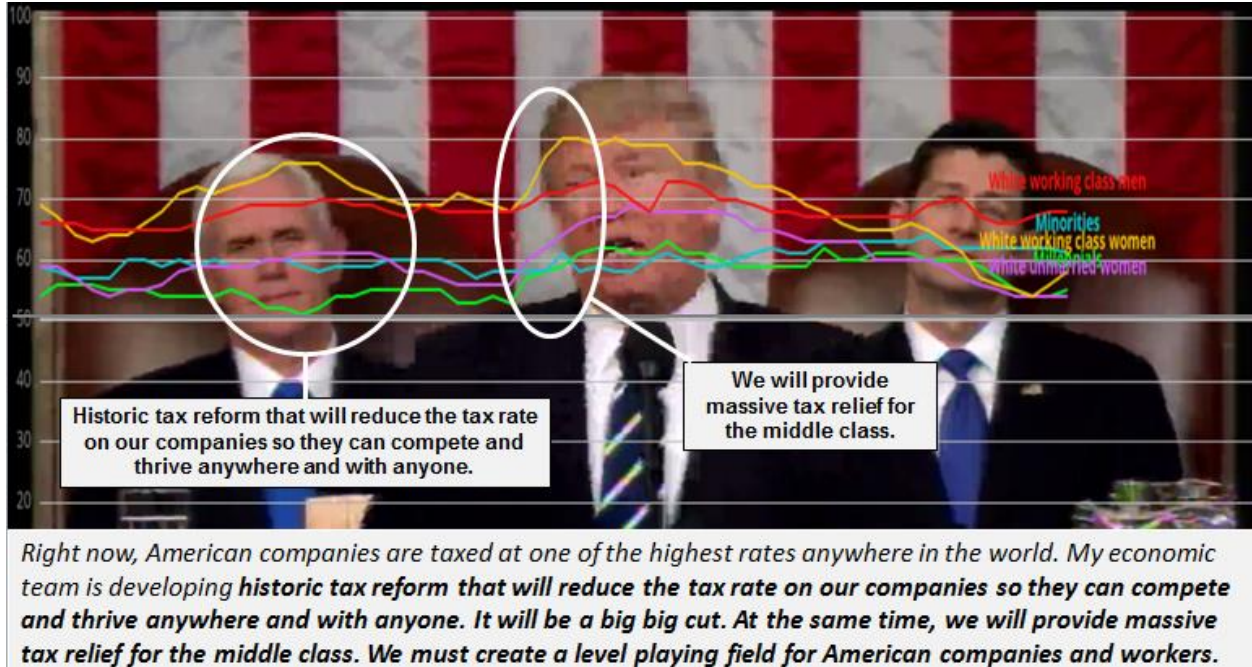
This issue also has the potential to be fracturing as the white unmarried women more closely resembled millennials and minorities in their reactions, and pulled away at his tough language. He ultimately made only small gains on immigration with these women. Also important was the reaction to his plans to build the border wall – which no longer included the vow to make Mexico pay for it. All of the lines fell at his border wall proposal, including the lines of white working class women and white unmarried women



*My Administration has answered the pleas of the American people for immigration enforcement and border security. By finally enforcing our immigration laws, we will raise wages, help the unemployed, save billions of dollars, and make our communities safer for everyone. We want all Americans to succeed --- but that can't happen in an environment of lawless chaos. **We must restore integrity and the rule of law to our borders.** For that reason, **we will soon begin the construction of a great wall along our southern border.** It will be started ahead of schedule and, when finished, it will be a very effective weapon against drugs and crime.*

Taxes & Spending. Trump’s corporate tax cut plans won him strong support with white working class voters, but it took the promise of “massive” tax relief for the middle class to get white unmarried women to turn up their dials. All of the key groups in our dials agreed that there needs to be middle class tax relief, earning him some credibility on the issue (+9). Again, will Congress deliver for the middle?

The president’s proposed “historic” corporate tax cuts were less unifying and popular; minorities and millennials expressed skepticism and white unmarried women were unsure what to make of the proposal. Some believed this means “*he wants to bring corporations back to America to put people back to work*” (Minority) while others say it means “*He is for the rich*” and warn “*trickle down DOES NOT work---it never has and everyone knows it*” (White unmarried woman).

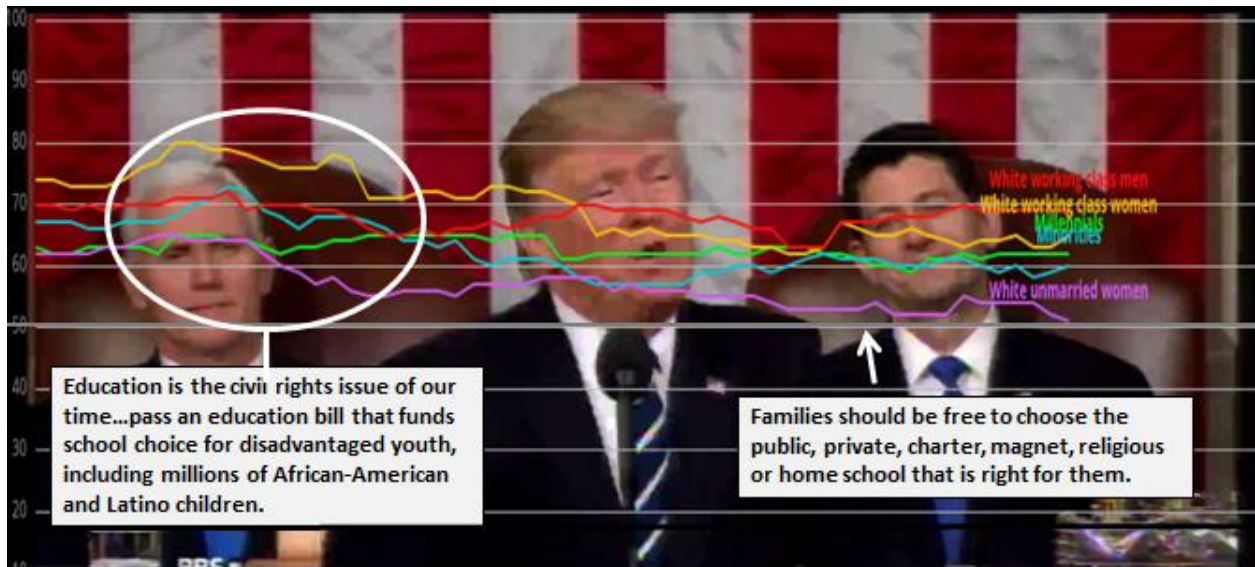


White unmarried women open to persuasion

White unmarried women, as we have seen in their responses to health care, taxes, and immigration, are conditional in their support for Trump’s agenda. For now, a slim 52 percent majority say they want Democrats to work with Trump to pass his agenda. But they are poised to break from Trump and Republicans, and perhaps take some white working class women with them, if they do not see the benefit of his proposed changes on many key issues.

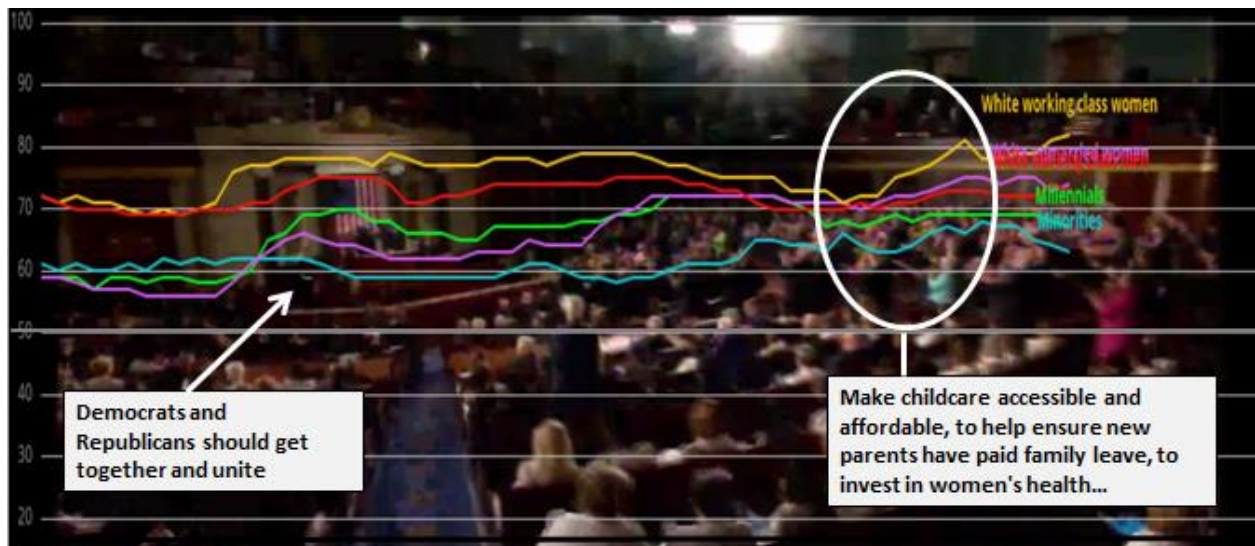
White unmarried women were skeptical of the president’s announcement of a budget to increase military spending; their responses nearing 50% and resembling millennials and minorities more than the white working class responses. Some say that our military is already well funded and warn of his plan “*it’s going to raise our taxes and how can people afford to pay for it. We have other things we should be investing in*” (White unmarried woman).

Education funding – specifically “funding school choice” – was once of the strongest reactions for millennials and white working class women of the night. But white unmarried women pulled back at the mention of choice for disadvantaged youth and especially children of color and had the lowest response of all the dials during this period.



Education is the civil rights issue of our time. I am calling upon Members of both parties to pass an education bill that funds school choice for disadvantaged youth, including millions of African-American and Latino children. These families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school that is right for them.

Finally, paid family leave, investments in women’s health care, and more affordable accessible childcare were extremely important to white unmarried women, as well as to the white working class women with whom they share so much in common. Trump’s pledge to help working women and their families was the highest point in their dials of the evening.



Our citizens deserve this, and so much more --- so why not join forces to finally get it done? On this and so many other things, Democrats and Republicans should get together and unite for the good of our country, and for the good of the American people. My administration wants to work with members in both parties to make childcare accessible and affordable, to help ensure new parents have paid family leave, to invest in women's health and to promote clean air and clear water, and to rebuild our military and our infrastructure.



This pledge also went a long way toward repairing his tarnished reputation when it comes to caring for women, and tells them he is listening and trying to understand their struggles, even if it is “pandering” or him “trying to appease women after they marched against him earlier in the year.”

He’s kinder than I thought about women less chauvinistic.

He’s becoming more rational.

He cares about children and understands how hard it is to work while having one.

He has compassion for women.