

# DEMOCRACY CORPS

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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps  
**From:** Stan Greenberg  
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## **Getting Heard**

### ***Points of Engagement for a Change Election***

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While it is very possible the fall will bring a political upheaval, we still believe Democrats need to do much better in advancing their message, engaging the debate in ways that get heard, and in elevating the economy – their most important task. We base this memorandum on Democracy Corps surveys but also on a recent survey for NPR and polls conducted in actual races.

Voters want to be rid of the Republicans, but Democrats have not yet raised their own standing. Democrats need to advance messages and choices in a way that raises their credibility and believability as agents of change. That means offering things that involve a little sacrifice, going against conventional wisdom and proposing change that is plausible, not just “sounds nice.”

Republicans are not throwing in the towel, and are moving on to the attack on conservative issues; mostly tax and spending, but also immigration. If Democrats dominate the choice, however, and move to the economy in the right way, they can press their advantage.

## **Points of Engagement**

To make news and get heard, Democrats have to be advancing ideas and critiques that are newsworthy, real, that force a comparison, and ultimately, lead people to an overall conclusion about the choice in the election. Here is where we would start.

- 1. No congressional pay raise for the life of the next Congress (2 years), until the minimum wage is raised.*** Democrats should keep raising the ante – attacking the Washington insiders that are indifferent to what is happening in the lives of ordinary Americans. They should renounce the pay raise that puts Democrats outside of Washington, and give up perks. Linking that to an increase in the minimum wage or a rising income for ordinary Americans shows they understand what is happening in

people's lives. (In multiple polls, this is our strongest reassurance and strongest offer in future policies.)

2. ***No more Terri Schiavo all-nighters in the next Congress, until Congress does something about gas prices, health care costs and creating American jobs.*** We believe voters are open to an even bolder statement – no more debates about changing abortion and gay marriage, either way; no more constitutional amendments; and no more Terri Schiavo all-nighters for 2 years, until Congress does something about high gas prices and American jobs. (In one test of this message, 63 percent said they were more likely to vote Democratic, including 45 percent saying “much more likely.”)
3. ***Congress should reclaim its oversight role and use its investigative powers to see how \$9 billion went missing in Iraq, look at the no-bid contracts to Halliburton and poor services to our troops, all at great expense to U.S. taxpayers.*** This is Democrats’ strongest message on Iraq that shows an attention to cost and government waste. It is also believable and contentious. (Note that Democrats win this argument decisively, even when the Republicans attack this effort as undermining the morale of our troops.)
4. ***Repeal the orgy of corporate tax breaks and wasteful spending projects to save \$75 billion, with the money dedicated to reducing the deficit and to cutting college costs by making tuition tax-deductible.*** Voters are very alert to the fiscal mess of the country and strongly support this idea to reduce spending and taxes, and to stop passing our bills on to the next generation.

These all have the virtue of creating points of engagement. They all take the debate to the economy and financial pressures facing Americans. And they all lead to a conclusion that we need a new direction – a strong America that works for everyone.

### Concrete and Specific Commitments

The Democrats in their “Six for ‘06” have moved to a specific set of policies that are real, seem doable and that re-enforce our overall choice in the election. We highlight our own form of the policy agenda to make it as concrete and non-rhetorical as possible.

- ***No pay raise for members of Congress until the minimum wage is increased.***
- ***Repeal Bush’s new tax breaks that encourage the export of jobs and create a new law that rewards companies creating American jobs.*** (In the last Democracy Corps national poll, as well as one of white rural voters, the strongest definition of the election posed a choice between Bush for outsourcing and Democrats determined to create American jobs.)
- ***Repeal the energy bill laden with oil company tax breaks and replace it with an energy bill with one purpose – to make viable alternative energy and alternative fuels – the creation of a new American energy industry.*** (In our individual polls, Democratic candidates get immense credit for advancing energy policies and

ideas that will reduce gas and heating prices, produce new industries and stronger American economy and create American jobs; in races this year, Democrats have moved significant numbers with this approach.)

- ***Give Medicare back the authority to negotiate with drug companies to lower drug prices for seniors.*** (In our battery of new initiatives, this had the highest recall and importance, particularly for high-turnout, older voters.)
- ***Restore cuts in college loans that are hurting the middle class and make college tuition tax deductible.*** (With Republicans using ‘tax and spend’ so prominently, Democrats need to have middle class tax cuts central in their agenda.)

### Taking the Economy to a Whole New Level

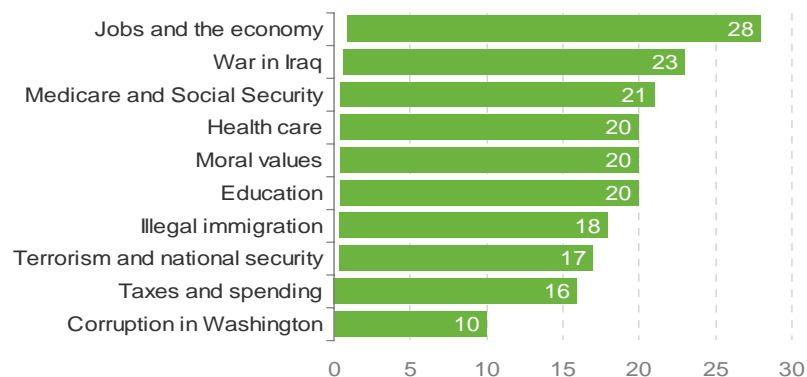
For voters, this is a change election centered on two things: Iraq and the economy. Iraq and security are frontline issues that are being shaped by on-going events. Candidates will be raising Iraq, and our data shows the more it is discussed, the better for Democrats. Candidates will be criticizing Bush for a foreign and defense policy that makes us less secure, undermining the main rationale for electing them.

Our principal strategic goal in the next three months is to drive as much of the debate as possible to the economy – high prices for gas and health care, financial pressure and stagnant incomes, and the loss of American jobs. For the rural voters who now make so many Senate races competitive, this is the top issue and the top critique of the Republicans. The focus on American jobs – and Bush’s indifference – creates one of our strongest choices in the election.

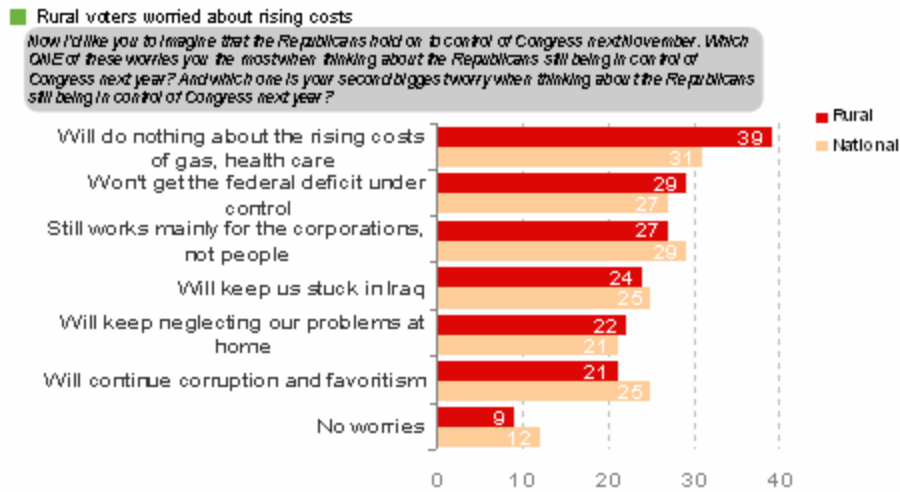
#### Jobs, economy and war top issues among rural voters

■ Terrorism and national security nears bottom of list

In deciding how to vote for Congress, which ONE of the following issues is MOST important to you? And from that list, which one of the following issue areas would be SECOND MOST important to you in deciding how to vote for Congress? (COMBINED)



Worries about Republicans: do nothing on gas and health care prices



We want the nationalized debate with Bush on the state of the economy. Currently, Democrats win the economic debate by almost 20 points. For the “wrong track” voters, their top issues are Iraq and the economy (jobs, gas prices, and health care).

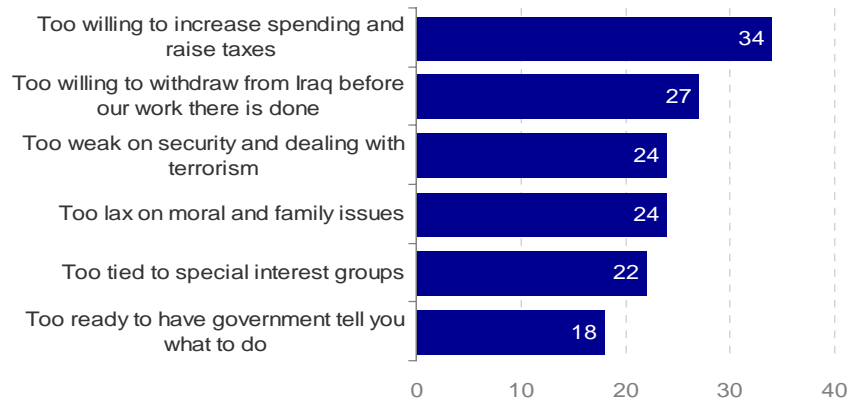
That means discussing virtually every issue in terms of the economy, jobs, prices and financial pressure.

**The Tax Battle and Financial Accountability**

Republicans are pushing back on a number of issues, particularly taxes, which enables them to focus on the economy and the financial pressures on people. They are seeking to define Democratic candidates as indifferent on the tax burden facing people and indifferent on spending. They are doing this because taxes and spending are actually the biggest concern people have about a potential Democratic Congress.

## Worries if Democrats control Congress

Now I'd like you to imagine that the Democrats take control of Congress next November. Which ONE of these worries you the most when thinking about the Democrats being in control of Congress next year? And which one is your second biggest worry when thinking about the Democrats being in control of Congress next year? (COMBINED)



That argues for pushing back and refuting any tax attack and hitting the incumbent on their failures on economic and financial issues: gas prices, drug prices, and lost American jobs. They should hit them for out-of-control spending that drove deficits through the roof. It also argues for Democrats stressing their own middle class tax cuts and their determination to cut wasteful spending. As we have stressed in our points of engagement above, Democrats need to demand financial accountability, oversight, and budget savings. The Republicans own the current financial mess and Democrats should run as outsiders holding them accountable.

## The Takeaway

When all is said and done – after they have engaged on these battles and raised their agenda – Democrats want voters to conclude some very simple but powerful things. They may or may not articulate them, but Democrats should understand where they want people to end up.

### *About the Republicans*

*They work for the few.*

For the corporate special interest

Corruption and greed

No rise in incomes and no relief from high prices in sight

No end in sight in Iraq

America needs a new direction

*About the Democrats*

*They're for me.*

American jobs

Relief on gas and health costs and middle class taxes

New course in Iraq

A new Congress that works for everyone

New direction - a strong America that works for everyone