

**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** James Carville  
Stan Greenberg

**Date:** October 26, 1999

**RE: POSITIONING TO WIN IN 2000**

*Strategic ideas based on a national survey released by Democracy Corps*

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This is a personal memorandum to Democratic candidates around the country – the first in a series that we will write between now and the 2000 elections. We are offering strategic advice based on our reading of a national survey conducted and released to the public by Democracy Corps.

This memorandum is motivated by a belief that 2000 is a year of opportunity for Democrats – if they act with confidence, grab hold of issues that matter (the budget, retirement, education and health care), put Republicans on the defensive, become the voice of change, and, importantly, if they address important concerns about values.

The October survey conducted by Democracy Corps is based on a national sample of 1000 likely presidential year voters. This is the first in a series of surveys. It shows Bush ahead of Gore and Bradley, as in the other public polls. Buchanan takes around 7 percent and hurts the Republicans more than the Democrats. The margin in the presidential contest should not be a preoccupying concern right now, as that race will narrow and become very competitive, for reasons we will discuss later.

Significantly, in the race for Congress, the Democrats lead by 5 points in the generic congressional contest (47 to 42 percent), though the lead narrows to 3 percent among the most likely voters, or core electorate, and 2 percent in the swing congressional districts. At the moment, the race for control of the Congress is very close.

However, our focus is not on the current horse race figures for the election next year. Rather, we are focused on the opportunities that will enable Democrats to make gains this year.

## Positioning to Win in 2000

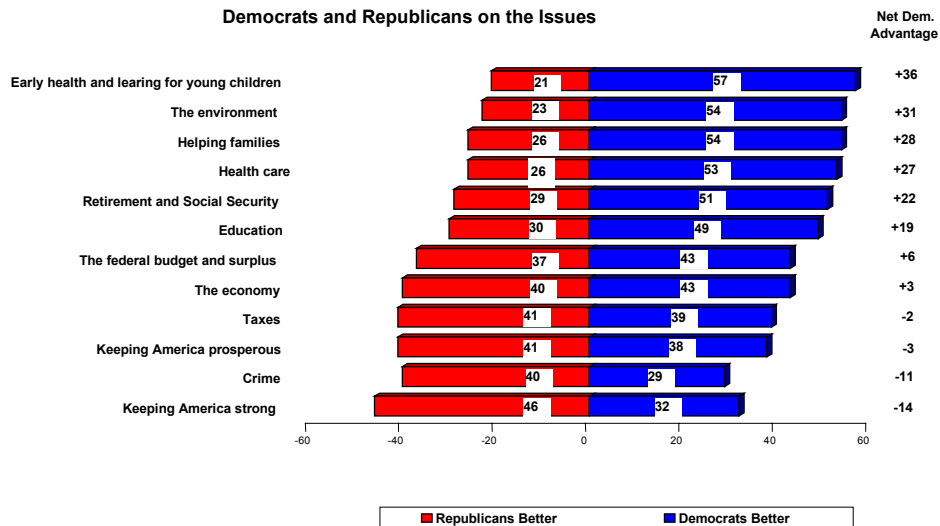
### Democratic Issue Environment

The issues that matter most to people are Democratic issues. This is a sea change and ought to serve as the cornerstone of any 2000 strategy. Candidates need to understand that voters are with us on almost every major public issue.

The top two issues by any measure are *retirement and Social Security* and *education*, followed closely by *health care* and *the budget*. That set of priorities is evident in people's main concerns, as well as their priorities for the next President.

The three issues ranked at the bottom are all the issues on which Republicans are competitive or ahead – *crime*, *taxes* and *pressures on the family*. Among issues on which Republicans are favored, only *moral decline*, which ranked third among people's main concerns, reaches the top tier of issue concerns. (We will address that concern below.)

On a vast range of issues, voters favor the Democrats – by gigantic margins on early health and learning, the environment, health care, retirement and Social Security, education, and helping families. The Democrats have a small lead on the budget and how to handle the surplus. The economy and taxes are toss-ups, while the Republicans have small advantages on national strength and crime. There are no significant public issues in which the Republicans enjoy strong advantages.



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### **Democrats: For the family**

Democrats are in a strong position to be the party of the family in 2000. On *helping families*, Democrats are favored over the Republicans by 28 points; by 10 points, it is Democrats who are seen to be *on your side*. On both indicators, Democrats have made important gains this year. In addition, Democrats are even with the Republicans on commitment to family (no advantage) and sharing your values (1-point advantage) – dimensions that they trailed Republicans on last year.

The Democratic advantage on the family is rooted in our dominance on a number of issues: retirement and social security, education, health and learning for young children and health care. These add up to a cumulative advantage that Democrats should re-iterate, almost as a mantra.

***Advocacy for families and people.*** In our statistical model of the congressional vote, which party is *on your side* is by far the most important factor in predicting how people will vote. Democrats have to be advocates for people and families in order to maintain their current advantage.

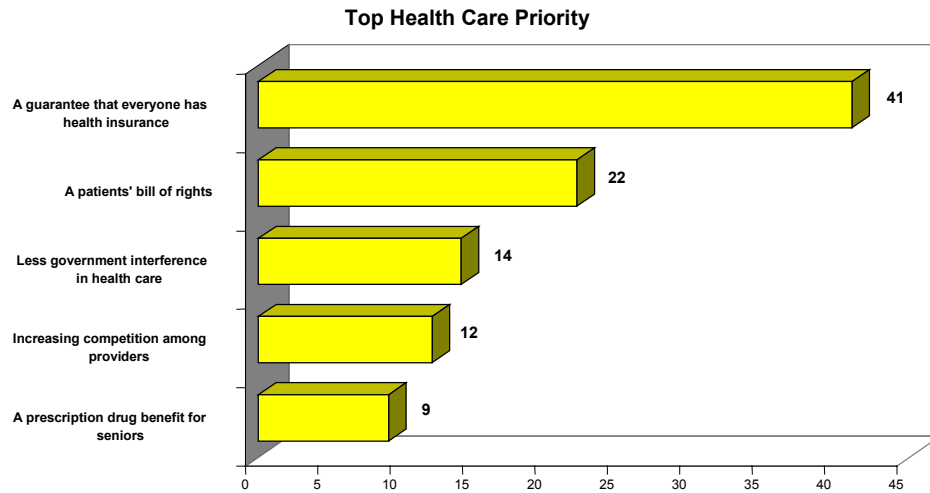
***Medicare, Social Security and retirement.*** It is hard to overestimate the importance of retirement issues. We have a growing advantage on retirement issues. There are more single-issue Medicare voters than single-issue voters on any other issue. And critically, we have moved ahead among white seniors – who we had lost in 1998. Senior issues could fade in importance if we do not continue to draw the battle lines and pose the choices right up until the election.

***Education and children's well-being.*** Again, Democrats have a growing advantage, and as a result, Democrats are winning non-college younger women – essentially, working and lower-middle class mothers. These are the most contested voters in the electorate – “winnable” in our statistical model for both Democrats and Republicans.

***Health care.*** Health care is back big time. It is a top priority for the electorate and Democrats are seen as the only party seriously addressing it. Voters' top health care priority is universal coverage (41 percent), followed by a patients' bill of rights. There is very little interest in the various Republican approaches to the issue.

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As part of an overall health care message, *Democrats need both universal coverage and a patients' bill of rights*:

- Universal coverage is favored by 2-to-1 over a patients' bill of rights by non-college women – a primary target.
- A patients' bill of rights and universal coverage are equally favored by independents, voters in swing districts, and college women.

### Addressing Values

The Democratic position on values has improved since the last election, when White House revelations and the impeachment process eroded the Democratic position. (On non-values issues and overall position, Democrats gained during that period.) The values erosion was very serious, particularly with seniors and men. Fortunately, Democrats are now in a better position on values concerns, gaining with both groups in the most recent survey.

In broad terms, Democrats are competitive on *sharing values* and *commitment to family*. But Democrats fall short of Republicans on *knowing right from wrong* (a 16-point Republican advantage) and *personal responsibility* (a 23-point GOP advantage). This values contrast makes a difference in voting and has to be addressed over the next year.

The values contrast makes Democrats vulnerable to charges of softness on discipline, law, and criminality. The most effective attack on Democrats is not tax-and-spend, as in the old days, but being out of touch on crime. The charge that Democrats are for early parole and needle

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exchanges which encourage drug use raises doubts among 68 percent of the electorate – far more powerful any other attack.

Until we see further research, we would urge Democrats to take seriously the value, *responsibility*. Democrats should be in a position to insist on both greater public responsibility and greater personal responsibility.

Republicans also have an advantage over Democrats on *keeping America strong* (14-point advantage), which should be narrowed during the next year. This concern with national strength does impact the vote, and Democrats need to address the issue.

### The National Budget Debate: Responsibility

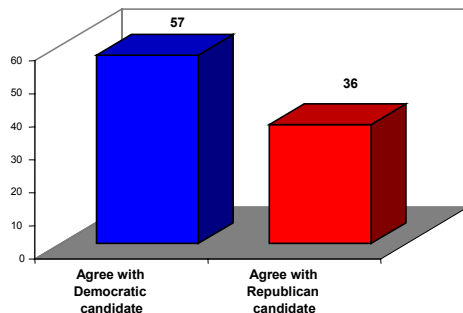
The Republicans are in trouble on the budget and, above all, on taxes. The voters believe they are acting irresponsibly, which we must underscore in the months and year ahead.

*The budget surplus and the 800 billion-dollar tax cut are political landmines for the Republicans.* First, the Republicans have lost any advantage on the tax issue, which may reflect public reaction to the Republican budget. Second, the Democrats are favored over the Republicans to handle the budget and surplus. Third, the biggest vulnerability of both the Republicans in Congress and George W. Bush is their support for the 800 billion-dollar tax cut.

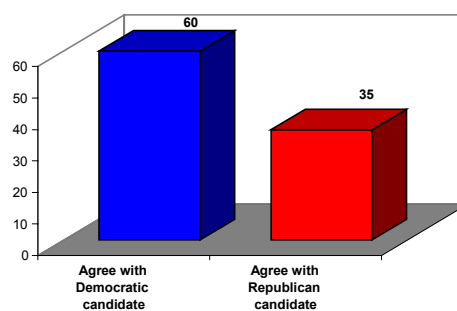
When the Democratic and Republican arguments are presented in the 800 billion-dollar tax cut debate, the Democrats win the argument by an astonishing 57 to 36 percent.

#### The Budget Debate\*

The Democratic candidate is opposed to spending the surplus on a massive 800 billion dollar tax cut for the wealthy. The Democratic candidate says use the surplus responsibly to protect Social Security and Medicare, reduce the national debt, and provide targeted tax cuts for the middle class.



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\*Each statement asked of half sample (510 respondents).

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Republicans get in trouble for supporting this massive, irresponsible tax cut, and it hurts them on a variety of fronts. They get in trouble, particularly with women, for cutting spending available for education and Medicare. They get in trouble, particularly with younger men, for cutting these programs to offer tax cuts mainly for the wealthy.

The Democratic standing on the budget is actually increased somewhat when voters hear they want to increase spending for “education and child care.”

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We are entering a period of close scrutiny on the budget – at a time when Democrats are seen to be more sensible and responsible. We should elevate this debate and put the Republicans on the defensive. While voters support targeted tax cuts, they think the country ought to choose this moment to protect Social Security and Medicare, invest in education, and reduce the national debt. It is the responsible thing to do.