

Strategic Messaging

To Our Health

Protecting Medicaid and Children's Health



Research conducted for First Focus

Drew Westen, Ph.D.

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The challenge

To Our Health

- State budget deficits and a focus on budget-cutting rather than jobs at the federal level have led both parties to focus on Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program as potential targets for substantial budget cuts
- Medicaid and Children Health are both more readily targeted than other programs such as Medicare and Social Security because they have less powerful constituencies behind them
- Medicaid is readily attacked by opponents with coded racial messages

The goals

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- To develop effective **narratives** that can beat the toughest opposition messages
- To develop brief, evocative statements or “**talking points**” that speak to people in the political center
- To identify **words and phrases** to use or avoid

The take-home message

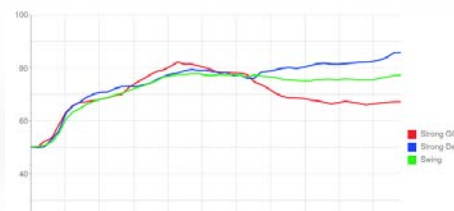
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- Attacks on Medicaid and Children's Health do not resonate with the public, who fiercely oppose them, particularly when hearing persuasive, values-focused messaging
- With effective messaging, budget-cutting arguments from the other side are easily beaten by over 40-point margins with 60-second narratives and by 50-75 points with single-sentence "talking points" designed to "stick"
- Calling attention to who actually receives Medicaid (children, seniors, and people with disabilities) is essential to protecting it
- Populist messages that focus on the people and institutions who caused so many people to lose their jobs and need help are highly effective
- Juxtaposing tax cuts for the rich and big corporations with cuts to children, seniors, and people with disabilities is highly effective
- Addressing racially coded messages directly is effective at defusing them
- Concrete, evocative language about real people is essential in drawing the contrast between an abstraction (the deficit) and real lives
- Voters are furious at politicians for what they see as cutting special deals for campaign contributors at the expense of poor, working, and middle class families

Methods

How did we find it?

- Online dial-test survey of 1068 registered voters
 - National sample of registered voters weighted to reflect the voting population
 - Conducted July 15, 2011 to July 18, 2011
- Tested all messages against strong opposition messages, based on the language of leading conservative politicians and pundits
- Tested brief statements or "talking points" against the best language from the other side



Want to fire people up on protecting Medicaid? Try this...

- If politicians want to cut somebody's health care, let them start with their own. (+76)
- If our leaders want to make sure Medicare and Medicaid are financially sound, there's one way to do it: put Americans back to work, so more people are paying their premiums again, and let millionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of taxes, so we stop bankrupting the middle class. (+71)
- Whether you're white, black, or brown, there's nothing more painful than having a sick child and not being able to take them to the doctor because you can't afford it. It's time we helped those parents get back to work, not take away health insurance for their kids. (+70)
- Medicaid covers long-term care for our aging parents and grandparents, and politicians have no right to shred the contract this country made with our seniors after a lifetime of work. (+69)
- If we're going to cut, we should start with programs that don't work, not the ones that protect ordinary Americans like Medicare and Medicaid. (+68)
- 15 million Americans are out of work right now, and they'd like nothing more than to be contributors to Medicaid again rather than recipients of it—and they could be, if politicians would start making jobs a priority instead of a talking point. (+67)
- We shouldn't be balancing the budget on the back of people who are poor, have lost their jobs, or need nursing home care. Congress should instead stand up to the special interests and let big corporations and the wealthy step up to the plate. (+67)

Want to fire people up on protecting Children's Health? Try this...

- People who work for a living ought to be able to take their kids to the doctor when they're sick. (+65)
- The health of our children should be more important than the bottom line of health insurance companies. (+60)
- With all the nation-building we've done abroad, it's time we did some nation building here at home, starting with protecting the health of our children. (+59)
- You don't gamble with our children's health. (+57)
- Investing in our children's health is investing in America. When we help children develop and thrive, we are paving the way for our country's next generation of workers and leaders. (+57)
- Children's health insurance couldn't be more important today with so many people unemployed, losing their health insurance, or working longer hours for less money. (+56)
- If we want the 21st century to be the next American century, we have to invest in it, starting with investing in our children's health. (+55)
- I believe in a family doctor for every family and a pediatrician for every child. (+54)
- If our kids aren't healthy, they aren't going to learn, and we aren't going to stay the world's leader in innovation. (+54)
- Health insurance for children of working parents needs to remain like it is now, a standalone program like Medicare, not something for politicians to put on the chopping block every time there's an economic downturn. (+53)

Sample

Demographics

■ Party Identification	Strong GOP	Strong Dem	Swing		
	19%	22%	59%		
■ Gender	Female	Male			
	56%	44%			
■ Education	HS or Less	Tech/2yr	Undergrad	Post Grad	
	19%	14%	25%	14%	
■ Ethnicity	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	
	75%	11%	9%	5%	
■ Party Affiliation (GOP, Ind, Dem)	Republican	Independent	Democrat		
	31%	36%	34%		
■ Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	Mountains	Pacific
	18%	24%	36%	7%	14%
■ Ever been or had a loved one on Medicaid	No	Yes			
	44%	56%			

Strategic Messaging

To Our Health

Messages that Move

Note: *Italicized* words and phrases are strong language that led the dials to shoot up, at least among persuadable and base voters. Underlined words and phrases led the dials to drop.

The structure of an effective message

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- **Connect**, using an aspirational, value-laden statement or an acknowledgement of voters' ambivalence.
- **Raise concerns**, describing the problem in a way that is concrete, visual, and evocative.
- **End with a hopeful solution**, a return to core values, or a resolution to voters' ambivalence.

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Protecting Medicaid

How did our messages fare?

1st tier messages

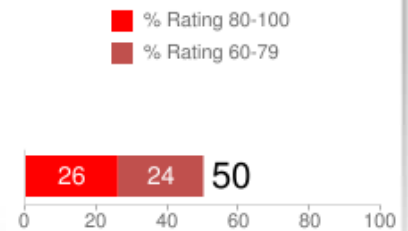
	Mean Rating	Percent preferring progressive	Percent preferring opposition	Margin
Opposition	52.4	-	-	-
Americans Support Medicaid	77.6	71	22	+49
Cut What Doesn't Work	78	69	24	+45
Problem Solving	76.8	69	24	+45
Last Place to Turn	74.9	69	24	+45
Insurance	77.8	67	23	+44
Americans Have Spoken	76	68	26	+42
They Are Us	75.6	67	25	+42
Drain on Our Resources	77.9	67	27	+40
Expand Medicaid	76.2	66	26	+40

The message from the other side

Opposition message

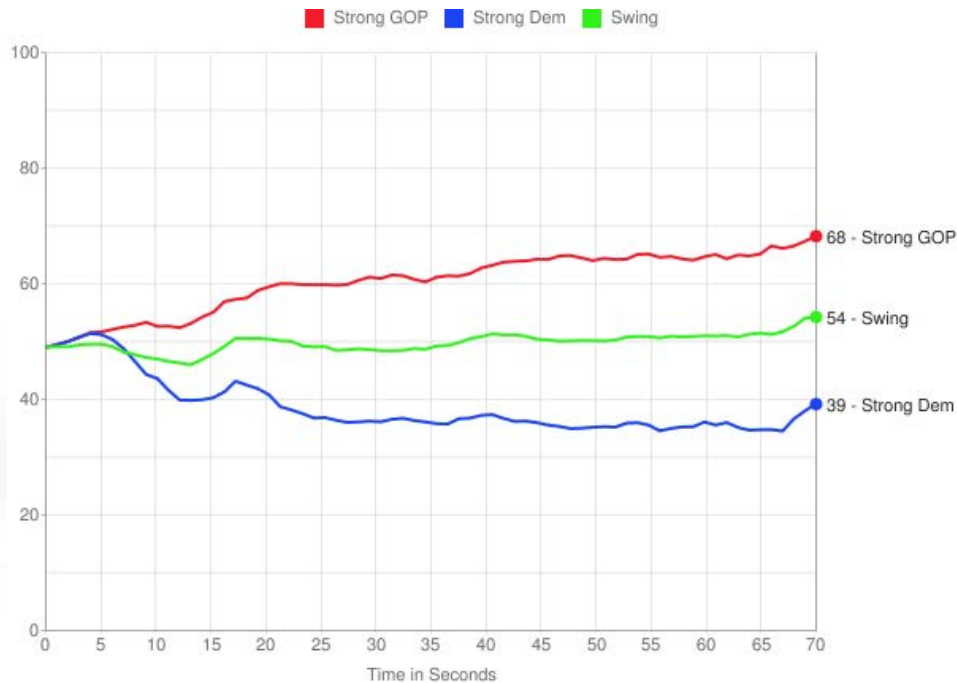
In the midst of a budget crisis, you don't expand programs like Medicaid, you cut them. Medicaid is nothing but a program for transferring income from people who work for a living to people who don't. We have millions of Americans who hard for their paycheck and can't afford to buy health insurance for their own family. Yet they're expected to foot the bill for people on welfare who are too lazy to work and too lazy to cook, eating so much fast food that the rest of us end up paying for treatment of their obesity-related disorders? Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour has described people who pull up at the pharmacy window in a BMW and say they can't afford their Medicaid co-payment. And there's an entire industry set up to coach seniors on how to transfer their assets to their relatives so they can qualify for Medicaid. Governors of both political parties were clear when Congress was debating the \$2.6 trillion health care law that they couldn't afford a massive expansion in Medicaid, which would divert funding from other necessary areas like education and law enforcement and handcuff governors to an inflexible program, but Washington didn't listen. Medicaid needs to cost less, not more.

Message Rating 0-100



Dial-test results

Opposition



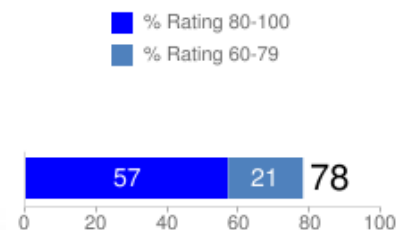
This message was highly polarizing by partisan affiliation, with self-identified strong Republicans finding it very compelling, strong Democrats strongly repellent, and swing voters in the center. Among its strongest components were its attack on "Obamacare" at the end and its coded racial language from Haley Barbour (the modern equivalent of "Cadillac-driving welfare loafers"). In general, however, respondents were resistant to this message despite its strong attempts at identifying targets for populist anger. Other than strong GOPs, only young people (age 18-24) found this message persuasive, rating it fully 10 points higher than people 55 and older, although by age 25, the message was not resonating with any age group, and even the younger voters found multiple progressive messages far more compelling.

Top tier messages

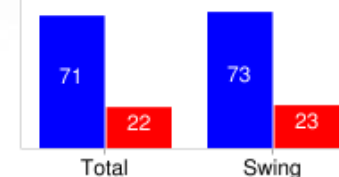
Americans Support Medicaid

As Americans, we support Medicaid for a lot of reasons. Half of us have a very personal reason to support it, having gotten coverage for our kids during tough times, received or had someone we care about receive long-term care for a disability, or seen Medicaid provide nursing home support for our ailing parents or grandparents. And a lot of us understand that we or our loved ones will someday need that kind of care. But a lot of us also see this as a moral issue, that you don't just throw children, seniors, or people with disabilities out on the street, and that people who've worked hard their whole lives and paid into the system shouldn't suddenly have to choose between food on the table and health care because some CEO outsourced their job or some Wall Street banker gambled it away. We talk about a "safety net" like it's an abstraction, but it's no abstraction to the 15 million Americans who are out of work right now, who'd like nothing more than to be contributors to Medicaid again rather than recipients of it—and who would be, if politicians would start making jobs a priority instead of a talking point.

Message Rating 0-100

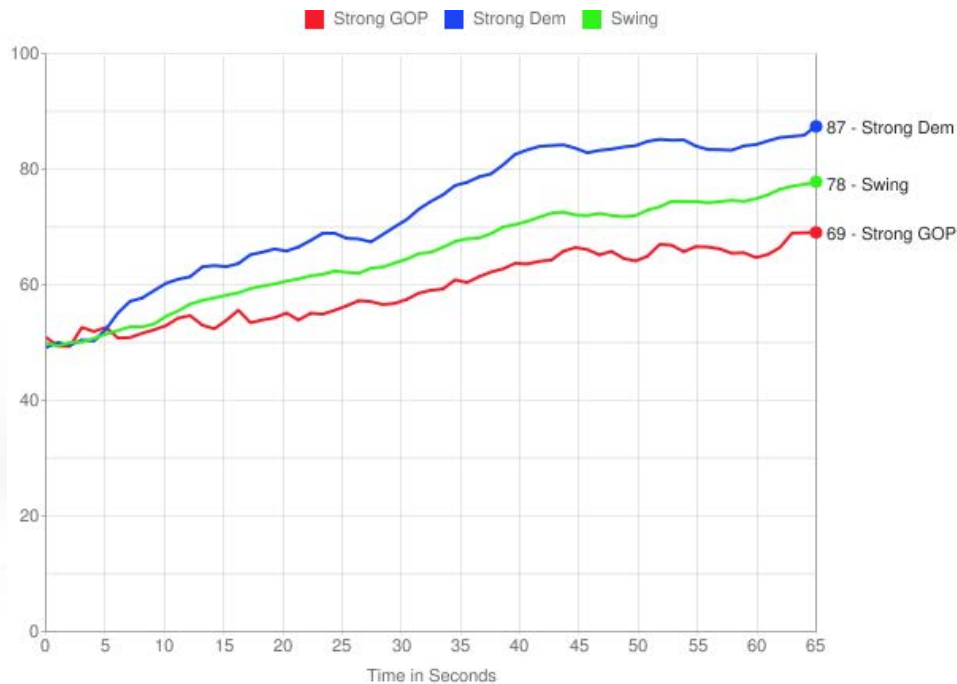


Preference



Dial-test results

Americans Support Medicaid



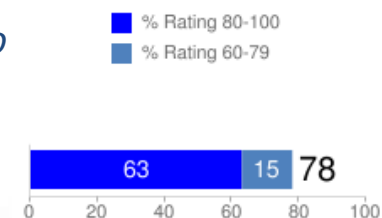
This was a "homerun" message from left to right, with swing voters moving the dials up from start to finish and ending with a 78 out of 100, and preferring this message to the opposition message by a 50-point margin. Even strong GOPs (the roughly 20% of the population on the far right) dialed up to near 70 on this message, and preferred it by over 20 points to the opposition message. For swing voters, virtually every word was resonant, beginning with the personal connections in the first part of the message; moving to the emphasis on morality and values in the second, and concluding with populist themes and job creation in the third.

Top tier messages

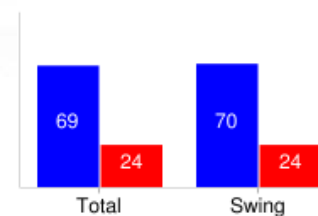
Cut What Doesn't Work

If we're going to cut, we should start with programs that don't work, not the ones that protect ordinary Americans like Medicare and Medicaid. Most seniors will tell you Medicare is a Godsend for people like them on a fixed income, and 85% of Americans who've turned to Medicaid at some point in their lives say good things about it, because it helped their families through a tough time, or provided 'round the clock nursing home to a parent or grandparent with Alzheimer's, or provided home health care to a friend or loved one who was disabled. The last thing we should be cutting is health care to our children, seniors, and people with disabilities—and prenatal care for 40% of American babies. You want to cut something? Start with tax breaks for oil companies, who are bankrupting the rest of us at the gas pump with their record profits. If that doesn't close the budget gap, try cutting tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, who don't need the \$120 billion handout Congress just gave them. And if that's not enough, try raising tax rates on hedge fund managers, who pay 15% a year on their billion-dollar incomes for producing nothing but economic insecurity for the rest of us. Start there, and let us know how that works out.

Message Rating 0-100

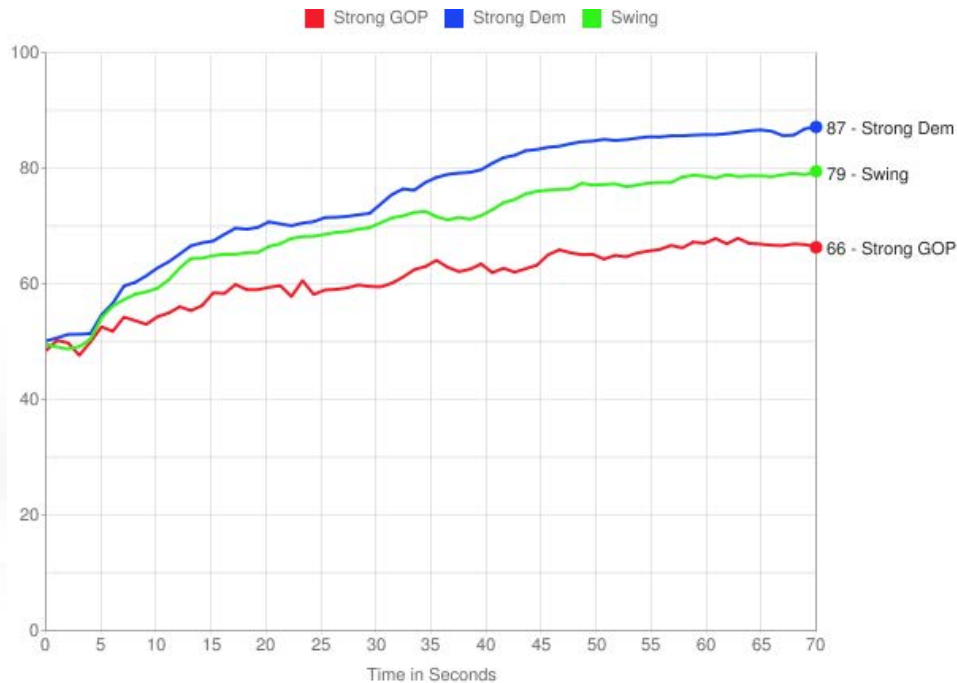


Preference



Dial-test results

Cut What Doesn't Work



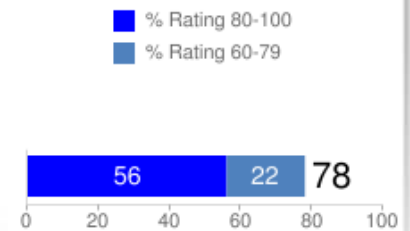
The dials shot up on the initial sentence, making clear not only that they want to preserve Medicare and Medicaid, but that they are open to a narrative about effective vs. ineffective government programs and initiatives if someone would just articulate one. Voters across the political spectrum found this message compelling, with swing voters ending the dial-testing near a rating of 80. Even the dial-ratings of strong GOPs steadily rose throughout the message.

Top tier messages

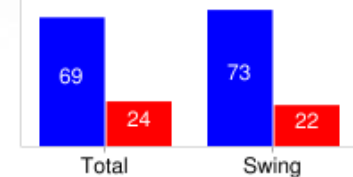
Problem Solving

Politicians need to stop pointing fingers and start solving our problems, beginning with putting Americans back to work. At a time of record unemployment, when people are falling out of the middle class in record numbers, you don't start cutting holes in the safety net our grandparents built. There's a reason Medicaid rolls are swelling: because most people get their insurance through their employers, and we've got over 15 million Americans out of work with no hope for the future. Are there people on Medicaid who should take better care of themselves? Sure. And there are a few of us who aren't on Medicaid who could shed a few pounds ourselves. But the main reason so many people are on Medicaid isn't because of their irresponsibility. It's because of the irresponsibility of the Wall Street bankers who gambled their jobs away and the politicians who let them do it. Whether you're white, black, or brown, there's nothing more painful than having a sick child and not being able to take them to the doctor because you can't afford it. It's time we helped those parents get back to work, not take away their health insurance.

Message Rating 0-100

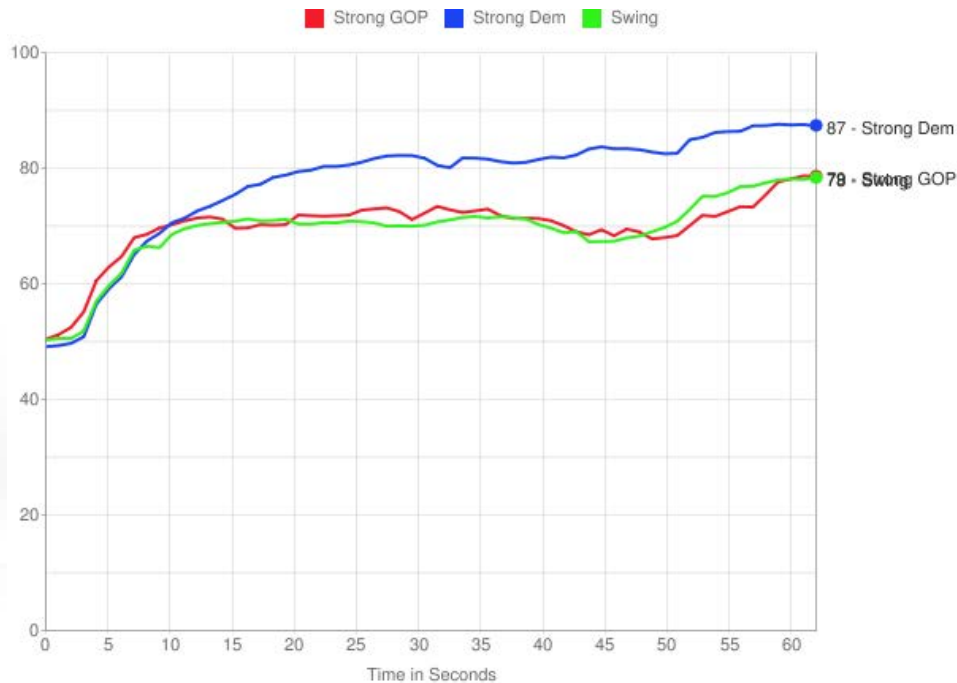


Preference



Dial-test results

Problem Solving



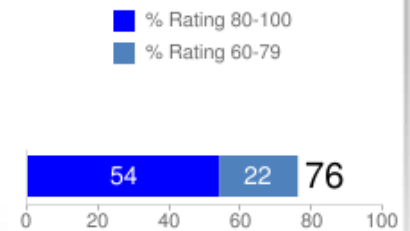
The dials shot up immediately across the political spectrum at the beginning of this message and stayed high throughout. The explicit reference to race at the end drove the dials up as well. This was one of the few messages which males rated as highly as females, likely because of the problem-solving theme. Remarkably, self-identified strong Republicans and swing voters converged in their responses to this message, sending the dials up quickly with the opening statement, staying high throughout, and closing even higher, near 80 on the dial-testing. This was the highest-rated message by strong GOPs, scoring fully 10 points higher than the opposition message. It was also one of the two highest-rated messages by Southerners, who responded to populist themes.

Top tier messages

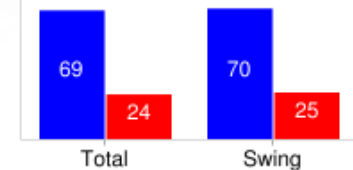
Last Place to Turn

Medicaid is the last resort for most Americans when they need health care, whether they're poor or middle class, old or young, white, black, or brown. It's the place millions of Americans with disabilities and children from low-income families turn for their care. It's the place millions of our seniors turn when they need long-term care that Medicare doesn't cover, and it takes care of two-thirds of all people in nursing homes in America. And it's the place where working and middle class Americans turn when they've lost their job or run through all their savings to pay for an illness. That's what happened to Jennifer, whose daughter was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor when she was 15 months old. Jennifer had to quit her job to take care of her baby through months of chemotherapy and hospitalizations. Her family could no longer afford health insurance, but we, as Americans, pitched in through Medicaid, and today she has a beautiful, healthy four year old girl. Jennifer's story makes me proud to be an American. Her daughter is alive because we were there.

Message Rating 0-100

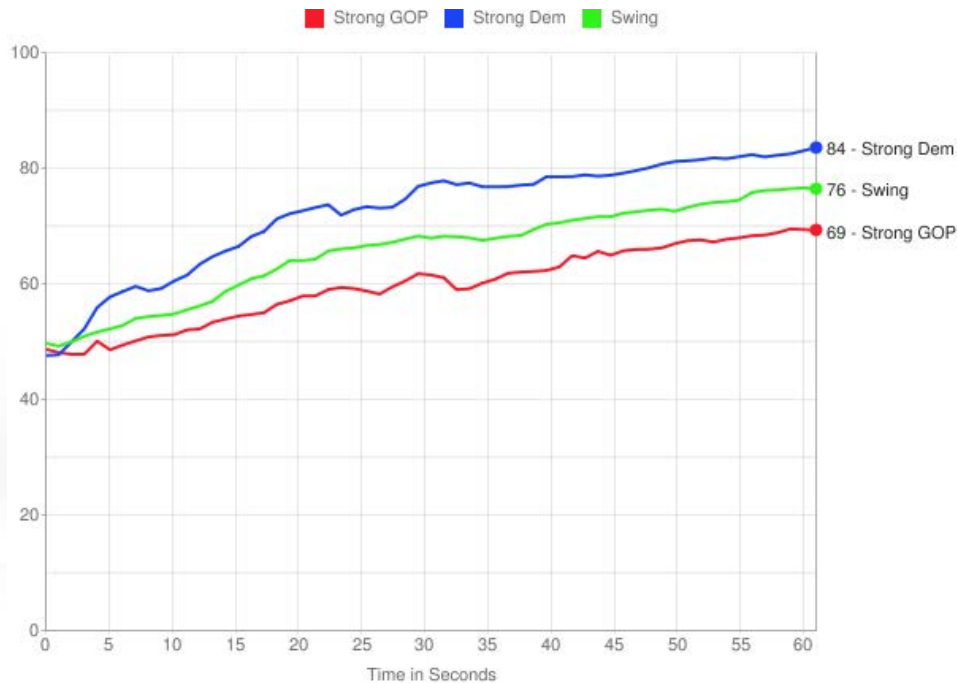


Preference



Dial-test results

Last Place to Turn



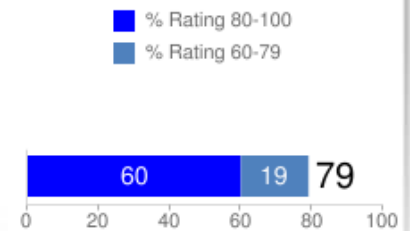
This message effectively linked the fate of middle class Americans with low-income and disadvantaged children and families, by making clear that Medicaid is the last resort not only for children who are chronically poor but also for people who lose their jobs or seniors whose Medicare doesn't cover nursing home and other long-term care. It also spoke joined the interests of people across colors. The message moved people of all political persuasions up in the dials from start to finish. The personal story was highly effective, and the message made the unusual turn of linking saving the life of a child through a government program with pride in country, patriotism, and the sense of what neighbors do for one another.

Top tier messages

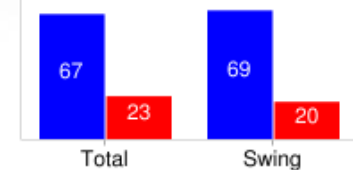
Insurance

As a taxpayer, it burns me up when politicians talk about Medicare and Medicaid like they're handouts. They're insurance programs we pay for with our taxes, and the reason you buy insurance is because someday you may need them. We've been paying those premiums for years, and now that millions of us are out of work or growing older, the same politicians who seem to have limitless money in tax breaks for their big campaign contributors want to tear up our claims. You don't cut funding to firefighters when brushfires are burning up millions of acres of land. You don't cut the Army Corps of Engineers when rivers are flooding a third of the country. You don't cut unemployment payments when millions of people are out of work. And you don't cut health insurance programs that cover a third of America's children and all of America's seniors when the economy is in its worst shape in 75 years. If our leaders want to make sure Medicare and Medicaid are financially sound, there's one way to do it: put Americans back to work, so more people are paying their premiums again, and let millionaires and big businesses pay their fair share of taxes, so we stop bankrupting the middle class.

Message Rating 0-100

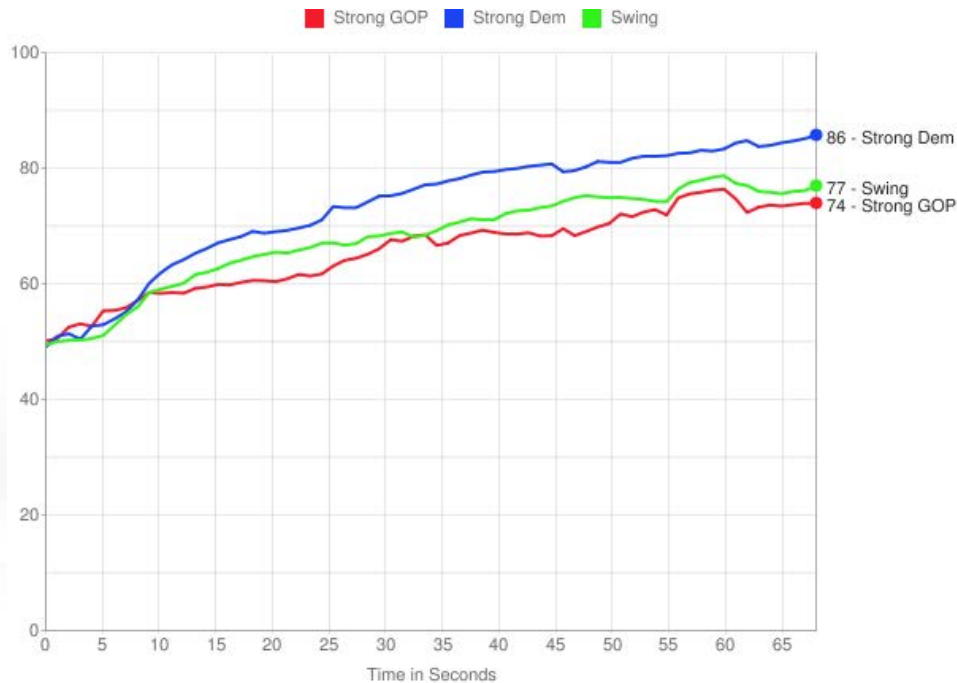


Preference



Dial-test results

Insurance



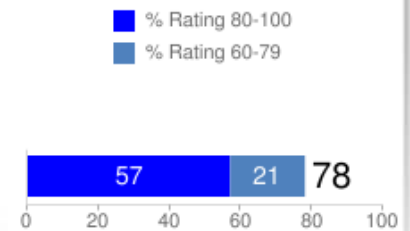
The idea that Medicare and Medicaid are insurance programs, not handouts, was highly resonant with voters, particularly swing voters, as was the attack on politicians who would cut funding just as it was needed. Interestingly, this was one of the strongest messages with self-identified strong Republicans, who dial-testing ratings and final ratings of the message were almost identical with swing voters. This was also one of the two strongest messages with Southerners.

Top tier messages

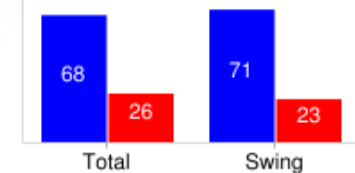
Americans Have Spoken

Americans have spoken clearly about Medicare and Medicaid: *About 80 percent of us are against cutting benefits to kids, seniors, and Americans with disabilities—or to the doctors, nurses, and hospitals who care for them. And that's across the political spectrum, from right to left. Why? Because cutting another half a trillion dollars from Medicare when the baby boomers are retiring, finally feeling secure that they won't go bankrupt from health care costs, and cutting \$750 billion from Medicaid at a time when record numbers of Americans are out of work, just isn't right, and it affects all of us, regardless of our politics. So why aren't politicians listening? Why are they cutting taxes to big corporations that outsource our jobs and to the richest Americans, who are cutting themselves larger and larger pieces of the American pie? Because too many politicians are owned and operated by special interests. It's time to tell Congress and the President that they need to answer to us, not their big campaign contributors, or we'll let them see firsthand what an unemployment line looks like.*

Message Rating 0-100

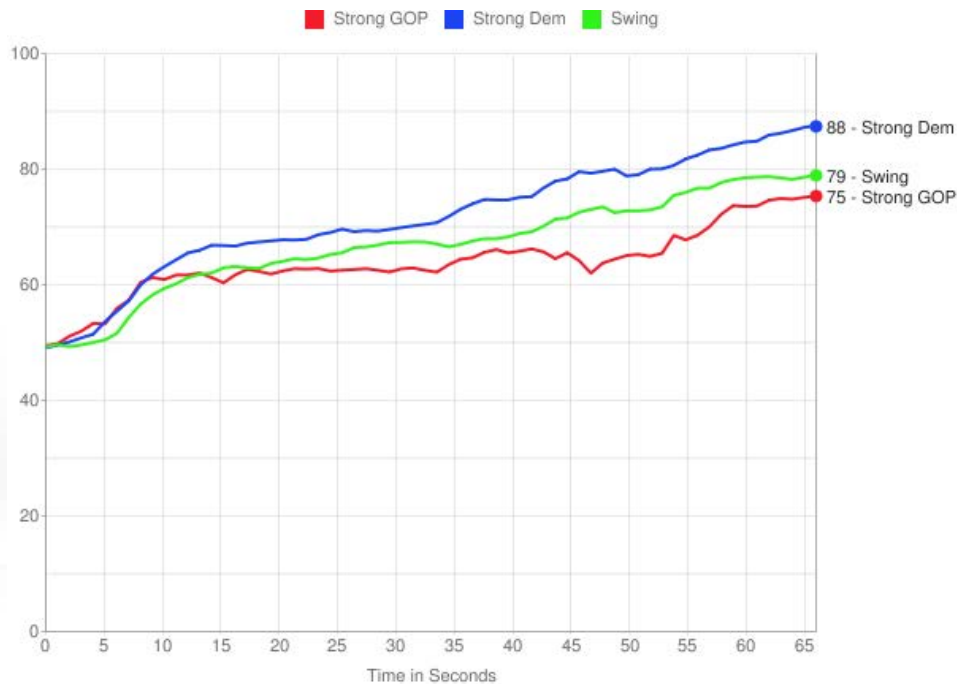


Preference



Dial-test results

Americans Have Spoken



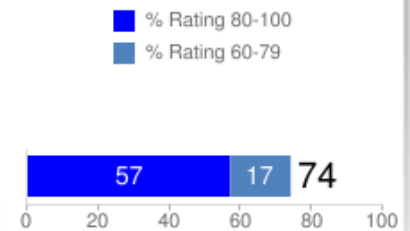
This was another strong message with even strong GOPs, which rose from start to finish, by enunciating clearly both that, and why, Americans are against cutting Medicare and Medicaid. The only thing that hurt this message was that it was slightly fact-heavy, which took away some of its immediate emotional appeal, although it received very high ratings and beat the opposition message by nearly 50 points with swing voters. Across the board, voters responded to the concluding statements about how politicians aren't listening to their constituents about Medicaid and Medicare because they are "owned and operated" by their campaign contributors.

Top tier messages

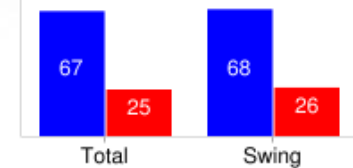
They Are Us

In this country, we don't kick people when they're down. The time to cut a program that provides basic health insurance to 60 million Americans—including millions of our kids—isn't after Wall Street bankers just threw eight million people out of work, costing them their health insurance along with their jobs. People who get their health care through Medicaid look a lot like America, because they are America. Over half are white, about one in four are either black or Latino, and about half suffer from illness like heart disease and high blood pressure that afflict many of us as we get older. But nearly half of all Medicaid dollars go to seniors—our parents and grandparents—who rely on it for nursing home care that Medicare doesn't cover. And of those who aren't children or seniors, most are disabled, and two-thirds of the rest are working one or more jobs. So if we're going to cut the deficit, I'd start by cutting tax breaks to the billionaire hedge fund managers who pay a lower rate than their secretaries, and the Wall Street speculators who put so many people on Medicaid who used to have private insurance until they lost their jobs.

Message Rating 0-100

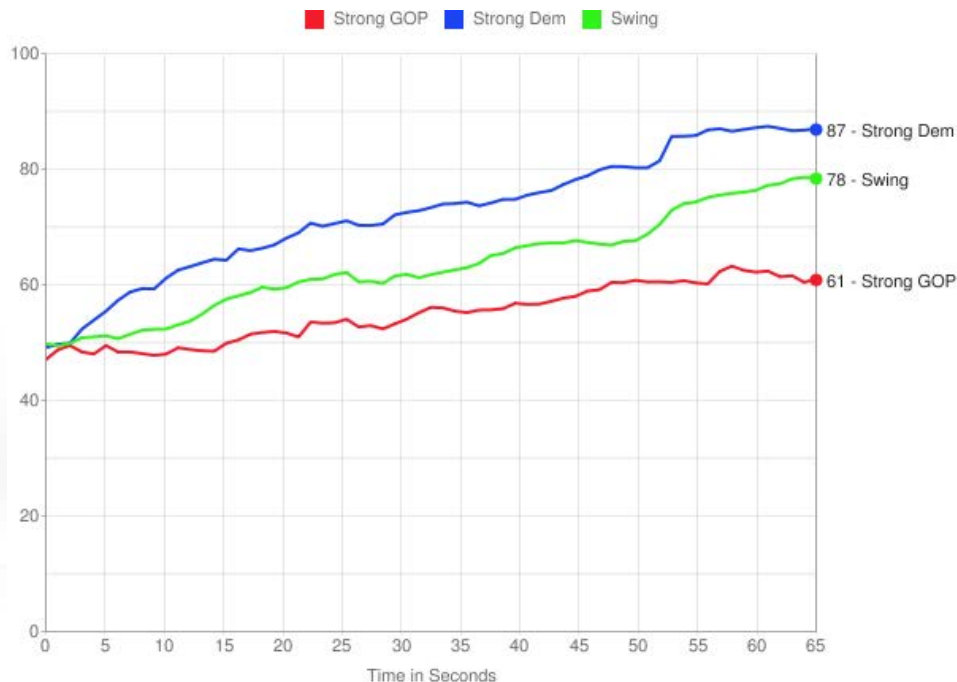


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Dial-test results

They Are Us



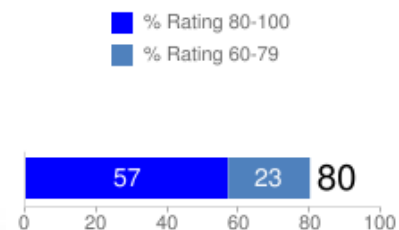
This message struck a strikingly resonant chord with voters with its explicitly race-conscious message, emphasizing that the face of Medicaid is the face of America. Its strongly populist themes and emphasis on turning anger where it belongs—on the Wall Street speculators who threw people out of work, not the people who consequently need to use Medicaid—was highly resonant with voters. Young people, for whom issues of race are much less salient, had a particularly positive reaction to this message, as did swing voters. Not surprisingly, strong GOPs resonated the least with it, although even their dials ended above 60 on a message that is quite explicit about race.

Top tier messages

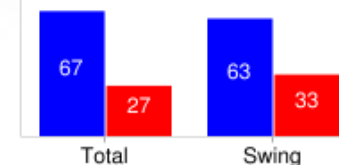
Drain on Our Resources

There's nothing more important than your health. Right now, tens of millions of Americans wake up each morning praying that their families won't get sick, because they don't have insurance. For millions more, Medicare and Medicaid are the only things that stand between them and losing their health and losing their home. With so many families stretched to the limit and so many people out of work, Medicaid now insures the health of 1/3 of our children – and provides prenatal care for their mothers, so those kids start out with a healthy brain, a healthy body, and a healthy chance at success. That's not just an investment in their future but in ours. But Medicaid doesn't just cover kids. It covers 8 million people with disabilities, and many of them are leading productive lives because of the services it provides. It covers nearly 10 million seniors who need long-term care, whether in nursing homes or in their own homes, where they can live out their lives in dignity. In this country, we don't push infants out of their cribs, disabled people out of their wheelchairs, or our aging parents or grandparents out of their homes because they're a "drain on our resources." If politicians want to cut somebody's health care, let them start with their own.

Message Rating 0-100

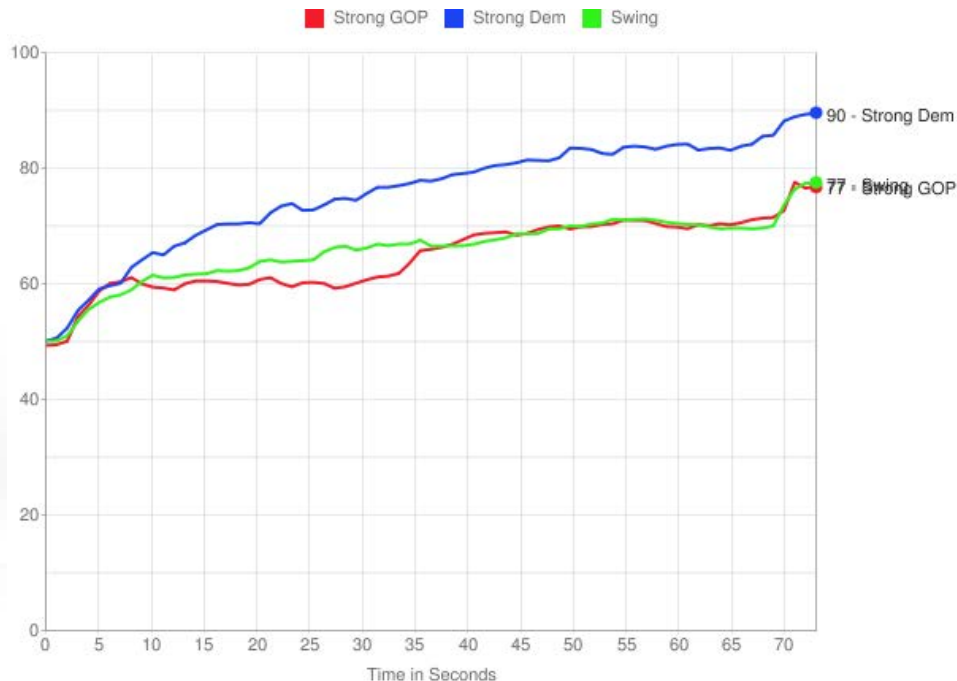


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Dial-test results

Drain on Our Resources



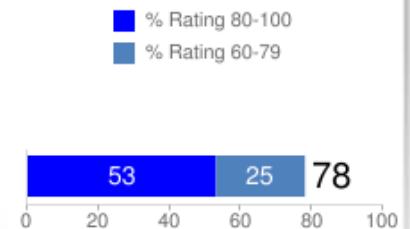
Although this message didn't capture the hearts and minds of swing voters as strongly as some of the others, the dials went up slowly but steadily for them, as for all other voters, from start to finish, beginning with the statement about the importance of our health, and shooting up with the statement that if politicians want to cut someone's health care, they should start with their own. This is the only messages men rated even higher than women, largely because of the populist themes, the emphasis on lost jobs (which older males are feeling acutely), and the strong language at the about politicians getting some "hands-on" empathy with loss of their health care. For many of the same reasons it appealed to strong GOPs, although this message also ended with a remarkable dial-rating of 90 for strong Democrats.

Top tier messages

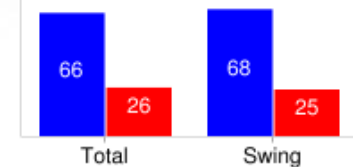
Expand Medicaid

In a country as wealthy as ours, with the best medical care in the world if you can afford it, we should be letting more people buy into Medicare and Medicaid if they don't have private insurance, not threatening the health care of our children, seniors, and people who are out of work. Medicaid provides long-term care to millions of seniors, helps Americans with disabilities live independently, and enables millions of children to see a doctor. People who rely on Medicaid for their health insurance have nowhere else to turn, whether because they lost their job in the recession, need special assistance or nursing home care, or come from parts of town where poverty steals the hope, health, and dreams of so many American children. And many middle class people get their insurance through Medicaid when they fall ill with diseases like breast cancer or heart disease because they lose their health insurance when they're too ill to work, or they run through whatever savings they have. So I have some advice for politicians who want to cut Medicare and Medicaid: give up your own government insurance coverage and let us know whether you still consider health insurance for seniors, children, and people with disabilities a luxury.

Message Rating 0-100

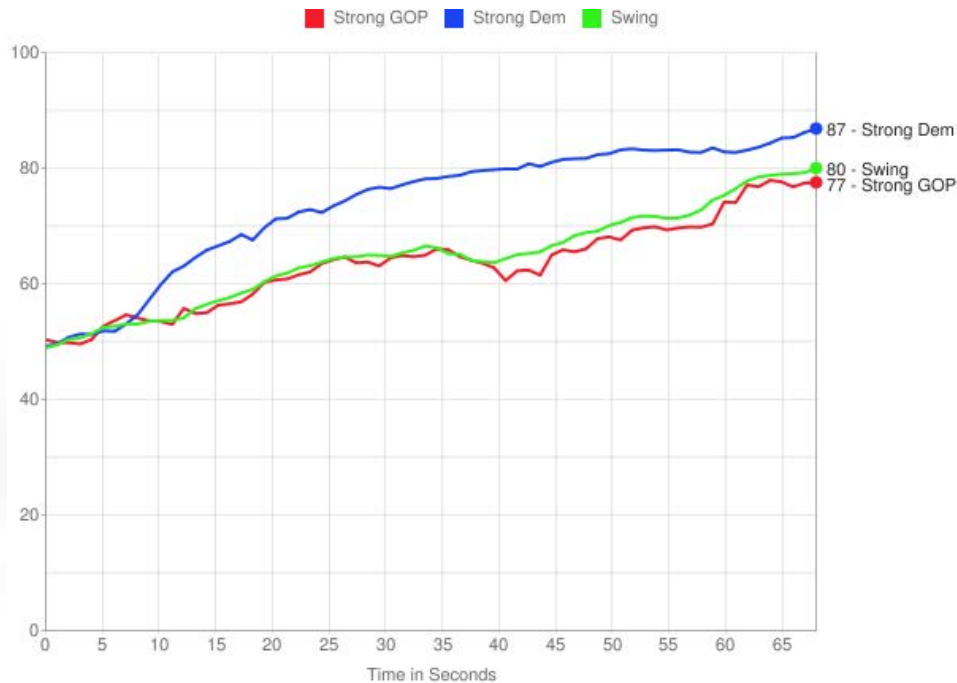


Preference



Dial-test results

Expand Medicaid



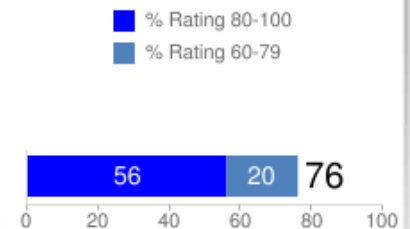
Voters across the political spectrum gave this message high marks from the start, with the idea that we should be expanding the number of people who can buy into Medicare and Medicaid, not throwing them off. It successfully wove together the stories, needs, and interests of people from all walks of life, suffering with diseases like cancer and heart disease, which often cause them to lose their health coverage. Like other messages, this one made clear that Americans strongly believe that if politicians want to cut someone's health care because it's too expensive, they need to start with their own.

Top tier messages

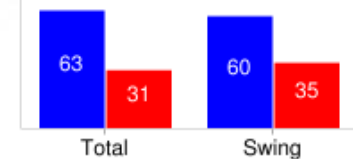
Generational Responsibility

In this country, we believe in responsibility across the generations: to our parents and grandparents, who raised us, and to our kids, who need our nurturance and protection. Right now, millions of Americans are taking care of both their aging parents and their young kids—like a woman named Sheila, whose mother spent her working years caring for others a nurse but is now the one who needs help, because she has MS. Her mother can no longer do the simplest things, like preparing her own food. As Sheila describes it, Medicaid has been a lifesaver for their family, allowing them to take care of her mother and her young daughter without quitting her job. Without Medicaid, the medication costs for her mother alone would have bankrupted them. The idea that we'd cut long-term care to our parents and grandparents and health care to our kids to make way for hundreds of billions in tax cuts to millionaires and Wall Street hedge fund managers is not only shameful but immoral. Medicaid isn't a handout. It's an insurance policy that we all take out and pay for, and Sheila's mother paid for it for years as a nurse. Now is not the time to turn our backs on our parents, our children, and our values.

Message Rating 0-100

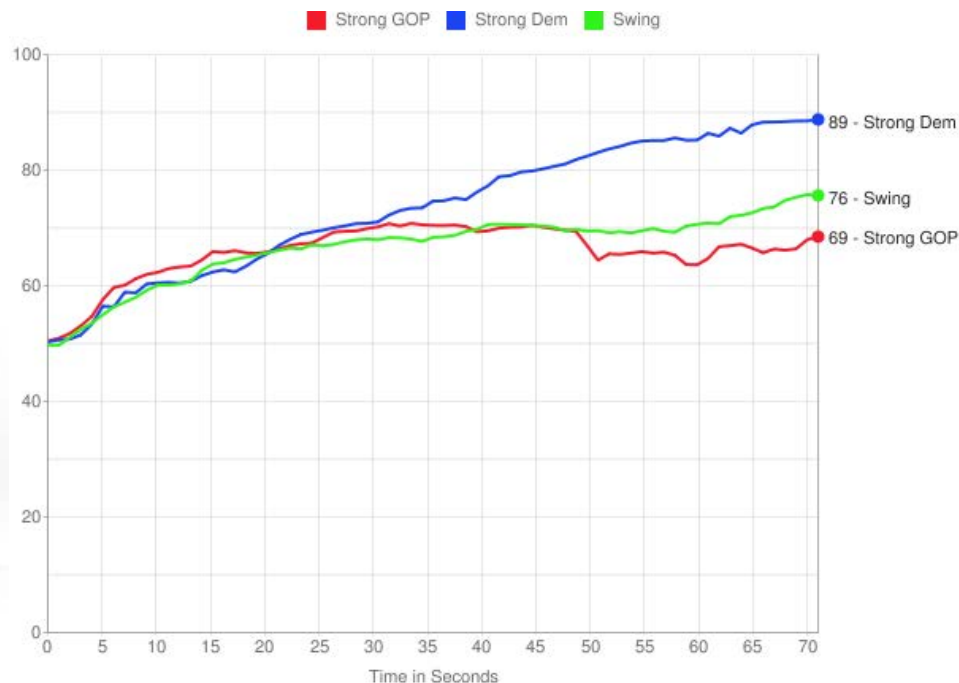


Preference



Dial-test results

Generational Responsibility



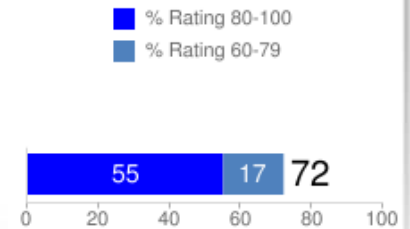
This was a strong message from start to finish, which “bookended” the story of Sheila—a classic story of what’s happening to the “sandwich generation,” caretaking for both a parent and children—with a strong values statement about our intergenerational legacy. Voters responded once again to the insurance theme and to the idea that we don’t turn our backs on people in tough times, particularly people who’ve paid their whole lives with the expectations that their “premiums” would not be taken away in tough times. For reasons that are unclear, however, it did not have quite as strong a margin of success over the opposition message as did several of the other messages, even though it won over voters from strong GOPs to strong Democrats.

Top tier messages

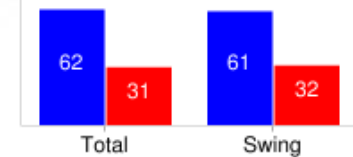
Gaming the System

I'm all for fiscal responsibility. But before we start cutting health care for children, seniors, and people with disabilities, let's cut that \$120 billion in tax giveaways Congress just handed millionaires and billionaires. The average senior is living on about \$18,000 a year. That's less than half the tax cut a person earning a million dollars this year got—and less than a thousandth of what the average billionaire got. In tough times, we should be devoting our resources to the needy, not the greedy. Politicians who want to cut our health care for our most vulnerable citizens make it sound like everyone who relies on Medicaid for their health care is just gaming the system—like kids with cancer are trying to steal an extra dose of chemo, or my mother or your grandmother is deliberately running out of money so she can live out the rest of her life in a nursing home. You want to know who's gaming the system? Corporate lobbyists and CEOs who've bought Congress and are lecturing us on how we need to tighten our belts while they loosen theirs, and trying to get us angry at everybody except the people who caused millions of Americans to be struggling right now.

Message Rating 0-100

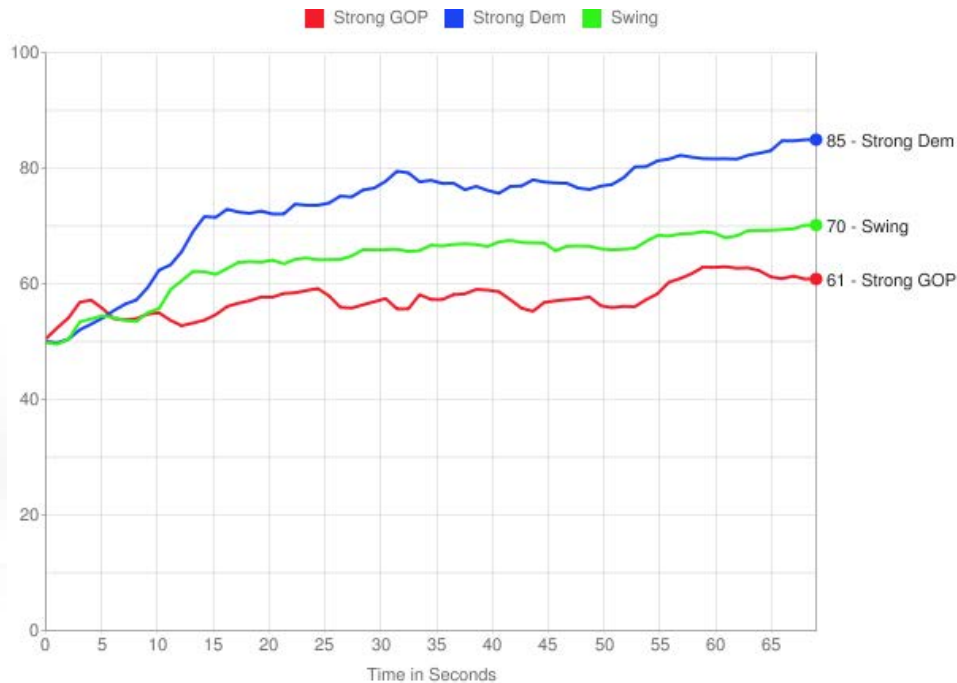


Preference



Dial-test results

Gaming the System



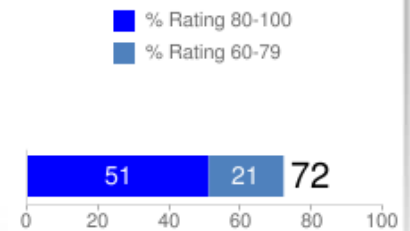
The introduction to this messages was extremely strong with swing voters and strong Democrats, with its juxtaposition of tax cuts for the rich with spending cuts for the rest of us. The remainder of the message was powerful but focused on the attacks of the other side, which is why it received somewhat lower positive ratings than some of the other messages. This is much stronger as a defensive message than as an offensive one, but should prove very useful in responding to charges about people gaming the system by shifting the onus of responsibility back on those who put so many people on Medicaid by killing their jobs.

Top tier messages

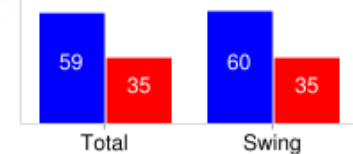
What Kind of Nation

A woman named Gail from Utah knew something was wrong—she could feel the lump—but she couldn't afford the mammogram, let alone get the treatment. She faced the all too familiar choice for working Americans between the cost of a doctor's visit and her house payment. When her husband heard on television about free cancer screenings, she went in, and sure enough, it was breast cancer, and it was invasive. But thanks to Medicaid, 9 years later, she's grateful to be alive—and equally grateful to her country for saving her life. Yet right now, politicians are trying to cut Medicaid, by transferring more and more of the costs to the states, while financially strapped states are cutting people like Gail from their Medicaid rolls. The question we face is what kind of nation we want to be. Does the richest nation on earth really let people die so oil companies can get their loopholes and the wealthiest among us can get their tax breaks? Our nation's founders told us we were all created, with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The question today is whether we still believe that. I do.

Message Rating 0-100

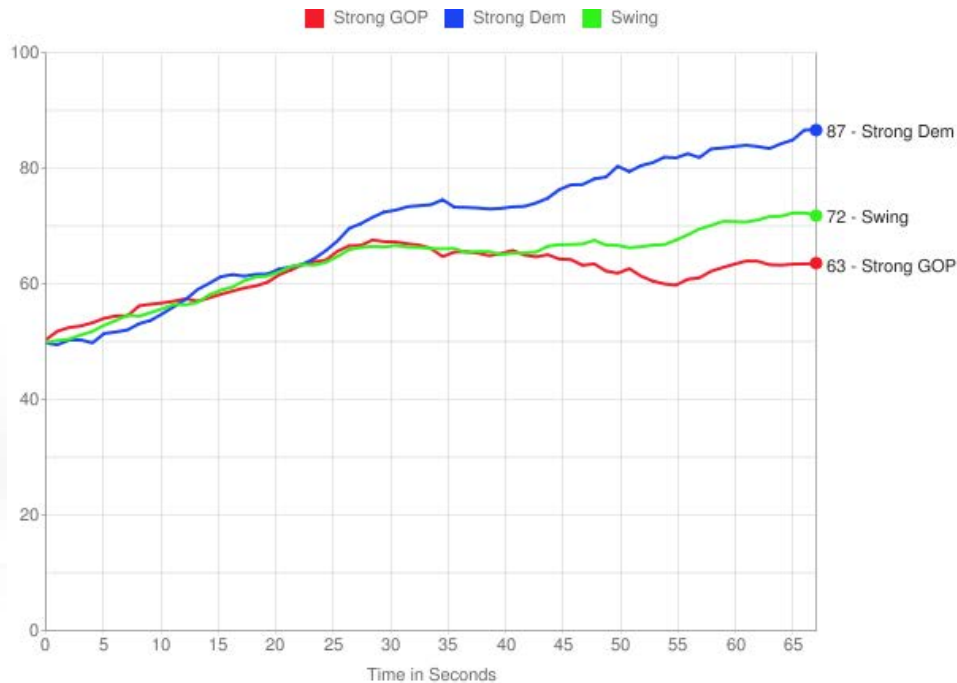


Preference



Dial-test results

What Kind of Nation



This message provided a powerful story that led the dials steadily up, leading to the conclusion at the end of the story that supporting Medicaid is a form of patriotism and national pride. The reference to the founders at the end also drew strong positive responses across the spectrum. Two factors depressed the ratings slightly on this message. The first was the overemphasis on *process* (*how* politicians want to cut Medicaid, as opposed to *that* they want to do it), which took away from the emotional power of the message and the focus on *outcomes*. The second was what some voters seem to have seen as “over the top,” the suggestion that some politicians were *intentionally* trading lives for special interest funding.

Talking Points

To Our Health

Talking Points
If you only have 6 seconds...

Talking Points

1st-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Medicaid is nothing but a program for transferring income from people who work to people who don't, and in the midst of a budget crisis, you don't expand it, you cut it.	33.3	10	--
If politicians want to cut somebody's health care, let them start with their own.	83.9	71	+76
If our leaders want to make sure Medicare and Medicaid are financially sound, there's one way to do it: put Americans back to work, so more people are paying their premiums again, and let millionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of taxes, so we stop bankrupting the middle class.	82.8	66	+71
Whether you're white, black, or brown, there's nothing more painful than having a sick child and not being able to take them to the doctor because you can't afford it. It's time we helped those parents get back to work, not take away health insurance for their kids.	81.5	65	+70
Medicaid covers long-term care for our aging parents and grandparents, and politicians have no right to shred the contract this country made with our seniors after a lifetime of work.	80.4	60	+69

Talking Points

1st-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Medicaid pays for immunizations for kids, cancer screening and treatment for adults, and special assistance for our seniors and people with handicaps. If that's what we want to cut, it's time we rethink our priorities.	78.8	60	+69
If we're going to cut, we should start with programs that don't work, not the ones that protect ordinary Americans like Medicare and Medicaid.	81	64	+68
Medicaid covers nearly 10 million seniors who need long-term care, whether in nursing homes or in their own homes, where they can live out their lives in dignity.	78.4	58	+68
I have some advice for politicians who want to cut Medicare and Medicaid: give up your own government insurance coverage and let us know whether you still consider health insurance for seniors, children, and people with disabilities a luxury.	82.4	67	+67
Medicaid provides long-term care to millions of seniors, covers important services that help Americans with disabilities live independently, and enables millions of children to see a doctor.	80.5	59	+67

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Fifteen million Americans are out of work right now, and they'd like nothing more than to be contributors to Medicaid again rather than recipients of it—and they could be, if politicians would start making jobs a priority instead of a talking point.	79.9	61	+67
We shouldn't be balancing the budget on the back of people who are poor, have lost their jobs, or need nursing home care. Congress should instead stand up to the special interests and let big corporations and the wealthy step up to the plate.	78.8	63	+67
Medicaid is the place millions of Americans with disabilities, children from low-income homes, seniors who need long-term care, turn for their care, and it's where working and middle class Americans turn when they've lost their job or run through all their savings to pay for an illness.	76.2	55	+67
The last thing we should be cutting is health care for our children, seniors, and people with disabilities.	79.8	63	+66
You don't just throw children, seniors, and people with disabilities out on the street. This is a moral issue, not a political one.	78.1	60	+65

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Medicaid is the place millions of Americans with disabilities, children from low-income homes, and seniors who need long-term care, turn for their care, and it's where working and middle class Americans turn when they've lost their job or run through all their savings to pay for an illness.	76.2	55	+67
The last thing we should be cutting is health care for our children, seniors, and people with disabilities.	79.8	63	+66
The majority of people on Medicaid are children, seniors, and people with disabilities, whose health care shouldn't be cut to make room for tax breaks for millionaires and big corporations.	79.1	63	+66
The majority of people on Medicaid are children, seniors, and people with disabilities, whose health care shouldn't be cut to make room for tax breaks for millionaires and big corporations.	78.9	60	+66
Kicking seniors out of their nursing homes, ending vaccinations to children, and ending cancer screenings for people who are poor or out of work is not the path to fiscal responsibility.	77.8	63	+66

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
People who've worked hard their whole lives and paid into the system shouldn't suddenly have to choose between food on the table and health care for their families because some CEO outsourced their job or some Wall Street banker gambled it away.	79.8	63	+64
As a taxpayer, it burns me up when politicians talk about Medicare and Medicaid like they're handouts. They're insurance programs we pay for with our taxes, and the reason you buy insurance is because someday you may need it.	77.1	60	+64
With so many families stretched to the limit and so many people out of work, Medicaid now insures a third of our children and provides prenatal care for their mothers, so those kids start out life with a healthy brain, a healthy body, and a healthy chance at success.	75.5	53	+64
You don't cut funding to firefighters when brushfires are burning up millions of acres of land, you don't cut unemployment payments when millions of people are out of work, and you don't cut health insurance programs like Medicare and Medicaid that cover a third of America's children and all of our seniors when the economy is in its worst shape in 75 years.	77.9	57	+63

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Before we start cutting health care for children, seniors, and people with disabilities, let's cut the \$120 billion in tax giveaways Congress just handed millionaires and billionaires.	81	67	+62
In tough times, we should be devoting our resources to the needy, not the greedy.	79.3	62	+62
Cutting another half a trillion dollars from Medicare when the baby boomers are retiring and three-quarters of a trillion from Medicaid at a time when record numbers of Americans are out of work is immoral. It's not a question of left and right, it's a question of right and wrong.	78.4	59	+62
All Americans—rich and poor, young and old, white and black—deserve the opportunity to live a happy, healthy life, and Medicaid catches people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of our health care system, whether they're children, seniors, or people who are disabled.	78.9	60	+61
There's a reason Medicaid rolls are swelling: because most people get their insurance through their employers, and we've got over 15 million Americans out of work with no hope for the future.	73.6	49	+61

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
The measure of a great nation isn't how well it treats those at the top but how it treats those whose fortunes are down. With record unemployment and a shrinking middle class, we should be catching people when they fall, not cutting holes in our safety net.	78	58	+61
In a country as wealthy as ours, with the best medical care in the world if you can afford it, we should be letting more people buy into Medicare and Medicaid if they don't have private insurance, not threatening the health care of our children, seniors, and people who are out of work.	75.8	52	+61
When our fellow citizens have been stricken with cancer or heart disease, we've pitched in through Medicaid, and we should be proud as Americans that today there are millions of beautiful children and productive adults who are alive because we worked together to protect them.	75.6	53	+61
Medicare and Medicaid are insurance programs we pay for with our taxes. We've been paying those premiums for years, and now that millions of us are out of work or growing older, politicians want to tear up our claims.	74.3	54	+61

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
We promised seniors years ago that the costs of health care and long-term care would not bankrupt them and their families, and we have an obligation to keep that promise, by protecting Medicare and Medicaid.	78.6	59	+60
Many middle class people get their insurance through Medicaid when they fall ill with diseases like cancer or heart disease because they lose their health insurance when they're too ill to work, or they run through whatever savings they have.	76.3	52	+60
For millions of Americans, Medicare and Medicaid are the only things that stand between them and losing their health and losing their home.	76.1	56	+60
Medicaid covers 8 million people with disabilities, and many of them are leading productive lives because of the services it provides.	74.8	54	+60
Politicians in Washington want to shift more of the costs of Medicaid to the states, but when states are all struggling with budget deficits, all that does is to cut health care to our children, our parents, and our grandparents, and force states choose between the health, education, and safety of their citizens.	72.8	49	+60

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
At a time of record unemployment, when people are falling out of the middle class in record numbers, you don't start cutting holes in the safety net our grandparents built.	77.6	57	+59
We should be going forward, not backward, in the number of Americans who have health insurance. Cutting Medicaid would do nothing but create millions more uninsured Americans, putting the lives and health of children, seniors, and all of us at risk.	77.2	56	+59
If we're going to cut the deficit, I'd start by cutting tax breaks to the Wall Street speculators who put so many people on Medicaid who used to have private insurance but are now out of work.	76.5	58	+59
For those who want to cut Medicaid, remember the words, "There but for the grace of God go I." Medicaid is designed for people of modest means, but cutting Medicaid will significantly reduce the quality of nursing home care many of us end up relying on and will raise the cost of nursing home care for millions of working and middle class families.	74.3	50	+59

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
The idea that we'd cut long-term care to our parents and grandparents and health care to our kids to make way for hundreds of billions in tax cuts to millionaires and Wall Street hedge fund managers is not only shameful but immoral.	78	61	+58
What people who rely on Medicaid have in common is that they have nowhere else to turn, whether because they lost their job in the recession, need special assistance or nursing home care, or come from parts of town where poverty steals the hope and health of so many American children.	74	49	+58
In this country, we believe in responsibility across the generations—to our parents and grandparents, who raised us, and to our kids, who need our nurturance and protection—and that's just what Medicaid provides.	73.8	48	+58
People who get their health care through Medicaid look a lot like America, because they are America—white, black, brown, and everything in between.	73.7	50	+58

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
The idea that Medicaid is filled with freeloaders is a great talking point for politicians who themselves have government health care, but it isn't true. 90% goes to children, seniors, and people with disabilities, and most of the rest are either working or have lost their jobs or are gravely ill.	73.1	54	+58
In Arizona, the state stopped paying for transplants for poor people covered by its Medicaid program to save a million and a half dollars, and two people have already died as a result. That's not family values. That's not a culture of life.	73.1	51	+57
Medicaid is the last place most Americans can turn for help and hope when they need health care, whether they're poor or middle class, old or young, white, black, or brown.	72	52	+57
Medicaid isn't a handout. It's an insurance policy that we all take out and pay for, and you don't cut it in tough times when people who've paid in finally need it.	75.9	56	+55

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Half of us have a very personal reason to support Medicaid, having gotten coverage for our kids during tough times, received or had someone we care about receive long-term care for a disability, or seen Medicaid provide nursing home support for our ailing parents or grandparents.	75.6	52	+55
The time to cut a program that provides basic health insurance to 60 million Americans—including millions of our kids—isn't after Wall Street bankers just threw eight million people out of work, costing them their health insurance along with their jobs.	73.6	50	+53
The main reason so many people are on Medicaid isn't because of their irresponsibility. It's because of the irresponsibility of the Wall Street bankers who gambled their jobs away and the politicians who let them do it.	68.4	44	+50
Does the richest nation on earth really let people die so oil companies can get their loopholes and richest hedge fund managers can keep their 15% tax rates?	68.2	48	+50

Strategic Messaging

To Our Health

Protecting Children's Health

How did our messages fare?

1st tier messages

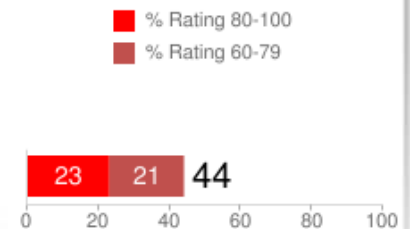
	Mean Rating	Percent preferring progressive	Percent preferring opposition	Margin
Opposition	49.7	-	-	-
You Don't Gamble	76.5	70	22	+48
Pediatrician for Every Child	74.3	68	24	+44
Work for a Living	75.8	67	25	+42
Bottom Line	74.3	67	26	+41

The message from the other side

Opposition message

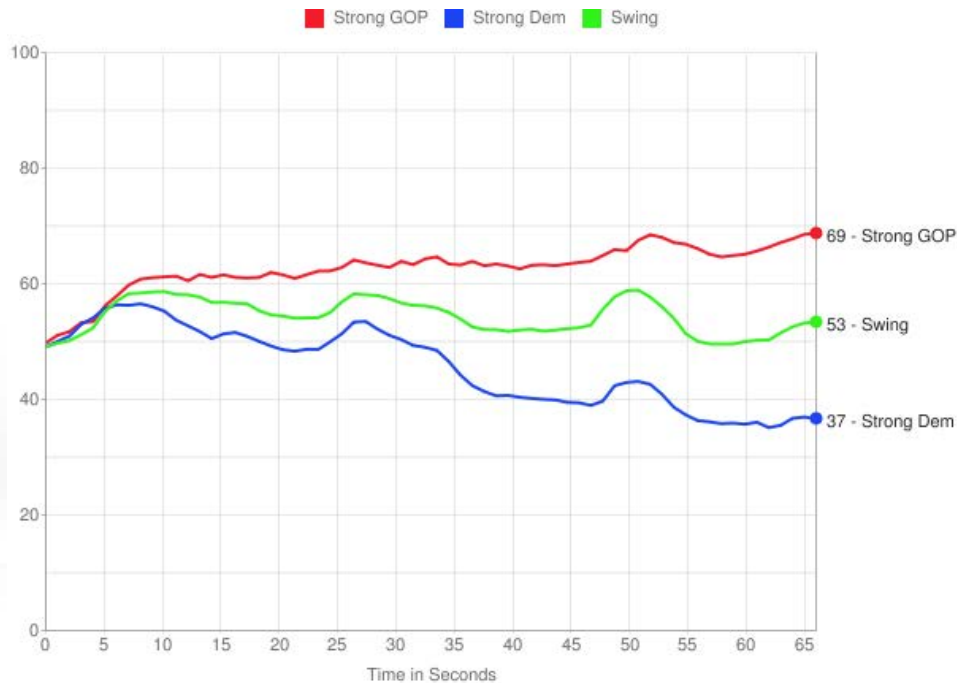
These are tough times, and they call for tough measures. Spending is out of control, and we have to rein it in. A government insurance program for children has already cost the taxpayers forty billion dollars and will cost another thirty billion more in the coming years. Expanding this program will increase taxes and create an unfunded federal mandate that our already strained state budgets just cannot afford. The needs of children are important, and this country has always taken care of those needs, but we have to make tough choices. All kinds of programs that benefit children are available, and we have charities for a reason, so the federal government doesn't have to pick up the tab every time someone identifies a problem. The main effect of government interventions is only to exacerbate the problems we face, because if there's one thing you can count on government for, it's to be wasteful and inefficient. And every program we create for children just gives parents the wrong message, that they can shirk their parental responsibility and somebody else will pick it up. Given the country's economic crisis and the growing federal budget deficit, American taxpayers simply can't afford any more.

Message Rating 0-100



Dial-test results

Opposition



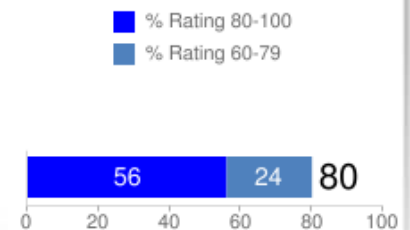
This message fared well with self-identified strong GOPs but poorly with all other voters. Swing voters dialed up every time they heard a well-branded negative statement about government but dialed down every time they heard the specifics, suggesting both that these platitudes are wearing thin and that, when applied to children, voters are spontaneously concerned about cuts.

Top tier messages

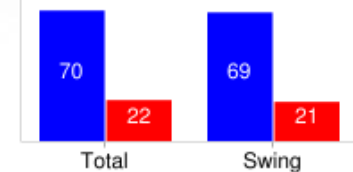
You Don't Gamble

You don't gamble with our children's health. After years of hard work, two years ago, in a rare moment of bipartisanship, Congress and the President agreed on a law guaranteeing millions of children of working parents the right to see a doctor. Everyone supported it—Democrats, Republicans, Independents—because no one believes that children should be sick, in pain, or without preventive care like vaccinations and annual check-ups just because their parents have lost their job or can't afford insurance. But now the same members of Congress who just cut the taxes of millionaires and billionaires want to cut the health care of kids with working parents. Nothing could be as short-sighted. If we want the 21st century to be the next American century, we have to invest in it, starting with investing in our children. If our kids aren't healthy, they aren't going to learn, and we aren't going to stay the world's leader in innovation. Children's health insurance couldn't be more important today with so many people unemployed, losing their health insurance, or working longer hours for less money. You don't roll the dice with our children's health.

Message Rating 0-100

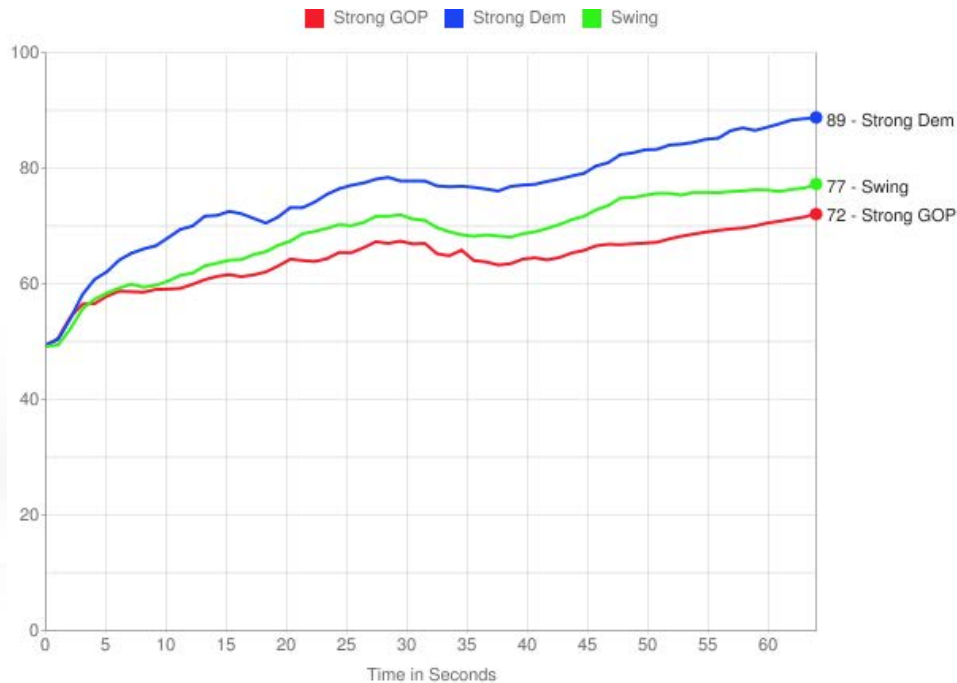


Preference



Dial-test results

You Don't Gamble



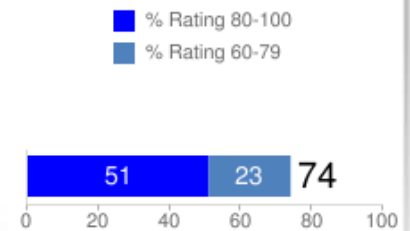
This message struck a responsive chord across the political spectrum and with virtually every demographic group, ending with dial-ratings in the 70s to high 80s from the far right to the furthest left. It “took off” from the start, with its first sentence, weaving together values with information about the program, but always staying at the level of the common vernacular. Themes of investment and American leadership were very powerful in driving people’s response to the second half of the message. Throughout, the metaphor of gambling or “rolling the dice” with our children’s health was strongly motivating.

Top tier messages

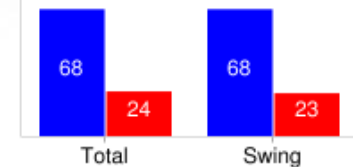
Pediatrician for Every Child

I believe in a family doctor for every family and a pediatrician for every child. We're still a long way from affordable health care for every adult, but we've made remarkable progress at insuring our nation's kids. Over the last decade, when the number of Americans without insurance has skyrocketed to more than 50 million, we've actually cut the rate of uninsured kids by half. How have we done it? By acting like Americans: setting our sights on something that seemed impossible, and making it happen. With bipartisan support, two years ago Congress passed a children's health insurance program that has done for kids what Medicare did for seniors, creating a program that works, designed for their unique developmental needs. In two short years, it's taken care of millions of children of working parents who can't afford insurance, giving them their vaccinations and setting their broken arms. But now politicians are trying to balance the budget on the backs of these kids. With all the nation building we've done abroad, it's time we did some nation building here at home, starting with protecting the health of our children.

Message Rating 0-100

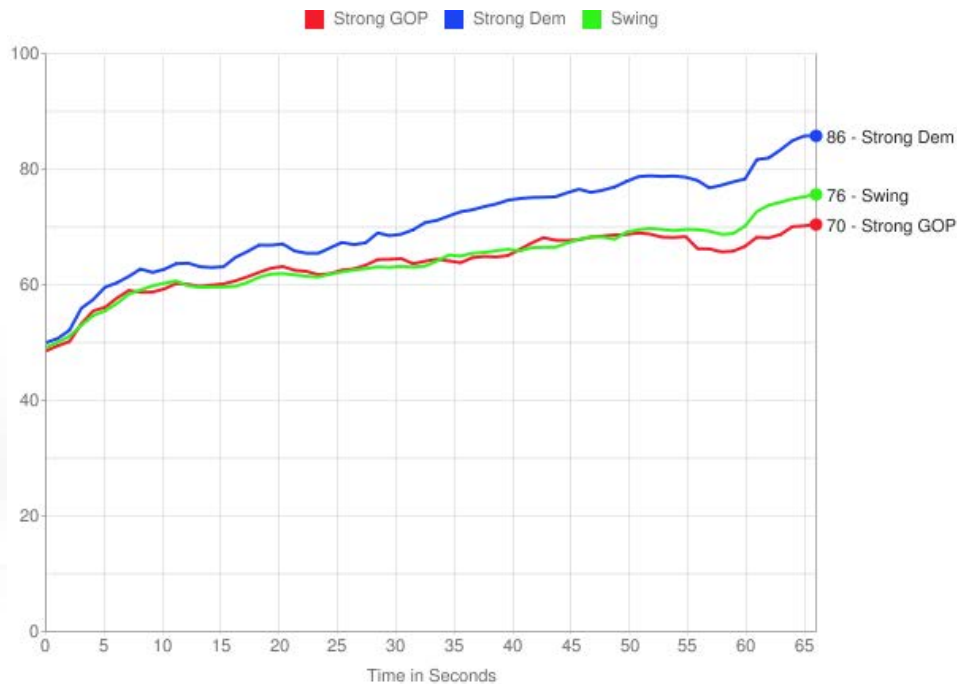


Preference



Dial-test results

Pediatrician for Every Child



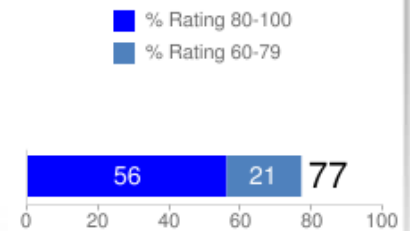
This message did well with partisans of all stripes, starting with its opening statement, which shot the dials up across partisan lines. The same was true of its final line about nation-building, which led to a sharp upward spike in the dials. In the interim was a slow rise, as even strong GOPs ended at a dial-rating of 70. As can be seen from the graph, differences based on partisanship were minimal. The only thing that drove this message down was some apparent ambivalence about the fact that children had insurance at long last but their parents and other adults do not.

Top tier messages

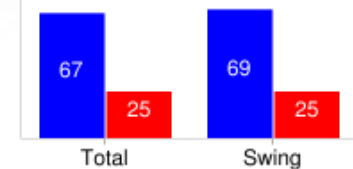
Work for a Living

People who work for a living ought to be able to take their kids to the doctor when they're sick. After years of trying, a bipartisan majority in Congress finally agreed with that basic value, creating a program that's been as effective for kids of working parents as Medicare is for seniors—and at substantially lower cost than private insurance. The children's health insurance program takes care of kids whose parents can't afford health insurance despite working full time, often at two or three jobs. And just like Medicare was designed to meet the needs of seniors, this law was designed with kids in mind. There's a reason we have pediatricians, because kids aren't just little adults. They have distinct needs, which require care from professionals who understand the needs of growing children. That's why health insurance for children of working parents needs to remain like it is now, a standalone program like Medicare for seniors, not something for politicians to put on the chopping block every time there's an economic downturn. It's time we made kids a national priority the same way good parents make them a family priority.

Message Rating 0-100

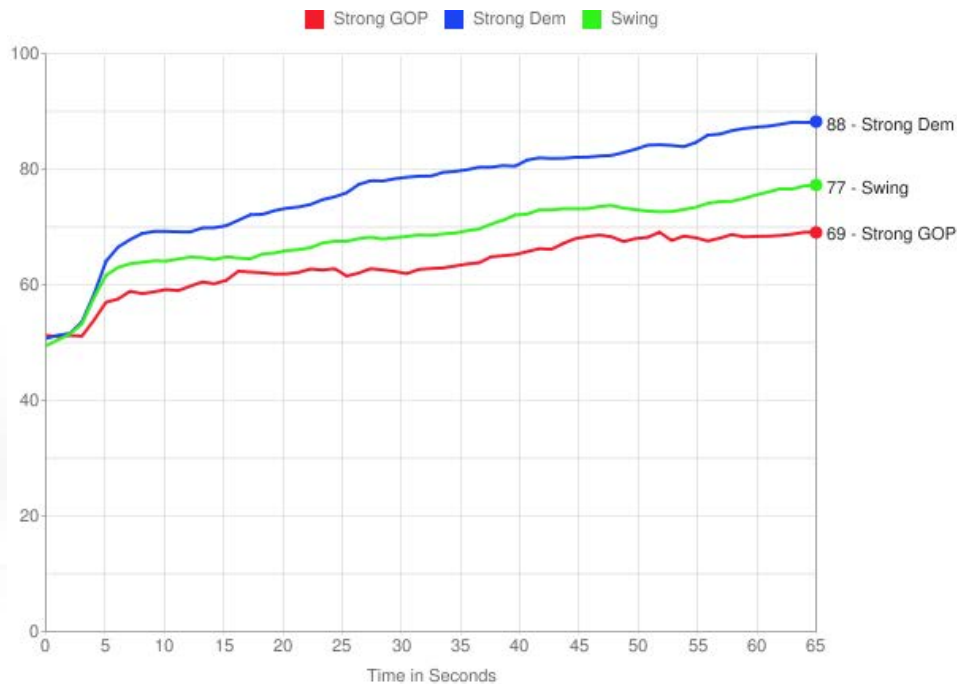


Preference



Dial-test results

Work for a Living



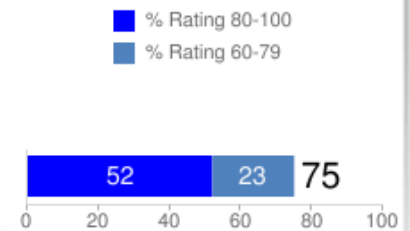
This message, with its theme of hard work and earning benefits, was the strongest message with Latino-Americans. It showed greater variation by partisanship, with strong Democrats and strong Republicans (the 20% on the left and right) 20 points apart in their final dial ratings, although even the strong GOPs ended up near an extraordinarily high rating near 70. The dials shot up with the initial values statement and then steadily rose throughout for all groups. The dials took a spike upward at the mention of cost-efficiency of the program relative to private insurance, suggesting again that voters are discriminating efficient, cost-effective programs from those they consider wasteful. The values statement at the end also strongly resonated with voters.

Top tier messages

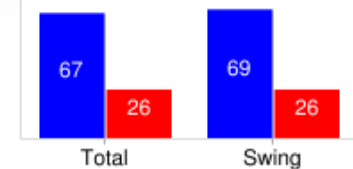
Bottom Line

The health of our children is more important than the bottom line of health insurance companies. A little more than two years ago, before the debate over health care reform, Congress passed and the President signed a law supported by majorities of both parties guaranteeing health care to millions of American children. The law had the support of 85% of Americans, although it wasn't so popular with health insurance companies, who saw it as threatening their profits. But today that law is providing insurance to kids of working parents who earn less than about \$45,000 a year and can't afford \$10,000 premiums, let alone all the co-pays and deductibles. And it's been one of the most successful and innovative programs for moving people from welfare to work, because it allows parents to work without losing Medicaid coverage for their kids. But now Members of Congress are threatening major cuts to the program and to the care of 7 million children, saying we can't afford it—while taking large campaign contributions from health insurance companies. It's time we put the needs of America's families above the needs of politicians and special interests.

Message Rating 0-100

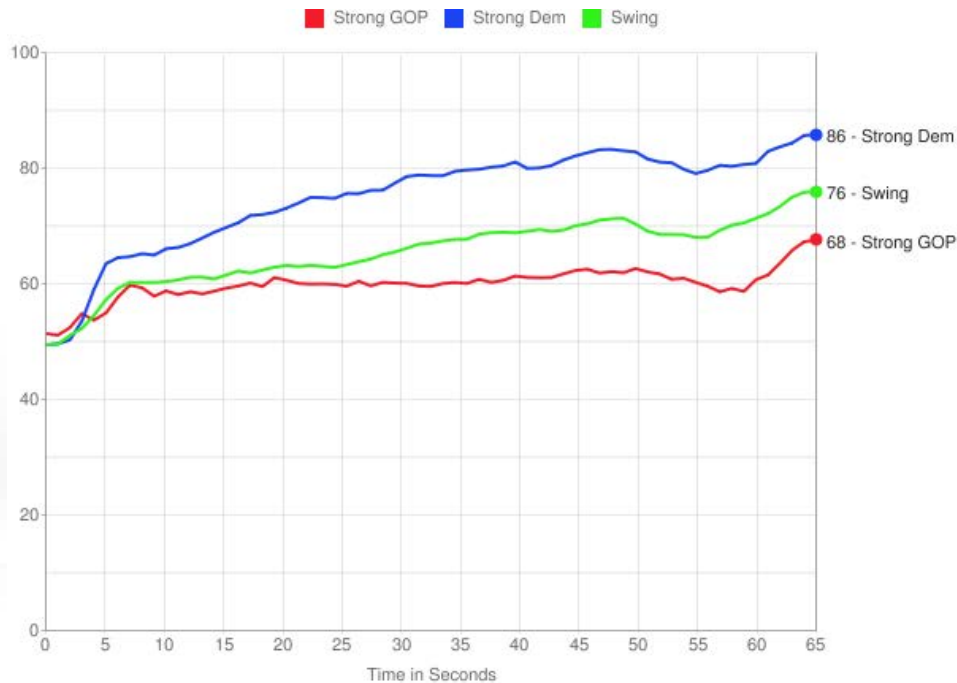


Preference



Dial-test results

Bottom Line



This message, with its strong populist themes, strongly resonated with voters across the spectrum, including strong GOPs, although it was more polarizing than the other children's health messages. Voters responded to both its strong values statements and its references to corporate profits and how they should be subordinated to the good of working families and children.

Strategic Messaging

Talking points

Talking points

If you only have 6 seconds...

Talking Points

1st-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Spending is out of control, and we have to rein it in, and that means making tough choices, whether it's Social Security or children's health insurance.	40.4	15	--
People who work for a living ought to be able to take their kids to the doctor when they're sick.	83.5	66	+65
The health of our children should be more important than the bottom line of health insurance companies.	83.1	66	+60
With all the nation-building we've done abroad, it's time we did some nation building here at home, starting with protecting the health of our children.	80.8	63	+59
It's time we put the needs of America's families above the needs of politicians and special interests, by protecting health insurance for children of working parents.	79.9	60	+59
You don't gamble with our children's health.	81.9	64	+57

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Investing in our children's health is investing in America. When we help children develop and thrive, we are paving the way for our country's next generation of workers and leaders.	79.1	59	+57
Children's health insurance couldn't be more important today with so many people unemployed, losing their health insurance, or working longer hours for less money.	77.8	57	+56
If we want the 21st century to be the next American century, we have to invest in it, starting with investing in our children's health.	77.4	56	+55
I believe in a family doctor for every family and a pediatrician for every child.	78.1	55	+54
If our kids aren't healthy, they aren't going to learn, and we aren't going to stay the world's leader in innovation.	77.8	55	+54
Health insurance for children of working parents needs to remain like it is now, a standalone program like Medicare, not something for politicians to put on the chopping block every time there's an economic downturn.	76.6	56	+53

Talking Points

Next-tier language

	Mean	%80-100	Margin
Over the last decade, when the number of Americans without insurance has skyrocketed to more than 50 million, we've cut the rate of uninsured kids by half, by acting like Americans: setting our sites on something that seemed impossible, and making it happen.	72.3	47	+52
It's time we made kids a national priority the same way good parents make them a family priority. And there's no more important priority for kids than their health.	78.2	56	+51
With bipartisan support, two years ago Congress passed a children's health insurance program that has done for kids what Medicare did for seniors, creating a program that works, designed for their unique developmental needs.	74.5	50	+50

Conclusions

Conclusions

To Our Health

- Americans strongly oppose cuts to Medicaid, and they strongly oppose cuts to Children's Health Insurance
- The more they hear about what these programs do, and the stronger the references to their values, the greater their opposition to cuts
- Linking Medicaid to Medicare is effective in strengthening the connection to a highly popular program, particularly with both providing care to seniors, although Medicaid is highly popular on its own
- The focus of both political parties on deficit cutting rather than job creation, and on cutting programs that help people who are poor, "down on their luck" (a concept many working and middle class people understand all too well), or getting on in their years is grossly out of sync with public sentiments
- Narratives on preserving Medicaid beat opposition messages by 30-50 points, and multiple "talking points" on preserving Medicaid win by up to 76 points over opposition talking points
- Narratives on Children's Health win by upwards of 40 points, and talking points, by 50-65 points.
- Americans are not uniformly anti-government. They oppose programs they believe are wasteful or misplaced, not those that fit their values, interests, or both.

Conclusions

Segmentation by demographics

- Partisan differences:
 - Strong GOPs differed from others in their positive response to the opposition message, but they preferred multiple progressive messages to it by over 20 points
 - Swing voters mirrored the general electorate in their attitudes
 - Strong Democrats rated all messages in the 80s
- Personal experience with Medicaid was associated with higher ratings on about half of the messages and less resonance with the opposition message on both issues, whereas children in the home was unrelated to message ratings.
- Differences by gender, region and age:
 - In general, women tended to rate progressive messages about 5 points higher than men, although that is relatively small and common across issues
 - Most age groups responded similarly to most messages, although some messages resonated much less strongly with the youngest voters (but still much more positively than to the opposition messages)
 - Latino voters tended to look like swing voters in their attitudes, whereas African-American voters tend to have the strongest positive reactions to the progressive messages
 - Southerners responded strongly to populist messages

Strategic Messaging

Best practice messages

Best practice messages, reflecting dial-tests

Note: These messages have been revised based on careful viewing of moment-to-moment reactions to words, phrases, sentences, and concepts using dial-tests. They have not been tested in this form, although they are highly likely to outperform the messages as tested because revisions eliminated or altered language that brought the dials down, particularly for swing voters.

To Our Health

Protecting Medicaid

Narratives to use

Americans Support Medicaid

As Americans, we support Medicaid for a lot of reasons. Half of us have a very personal reason to support it, having gotten coverage for our kids during tough times, received or had someone we care about receive long-term care for a disability, or seen Medicaid provide nursing home support for our ailing parents or grandparents. And many of us understand that we or our loved ones will someday need that kind of care. But a lot of us also see this as a moral issue, that you don't just throw children, seniors, or people with disabilities out on the street. And people who've worked hard their whole lives and paid into the system shouldn't suddenly have to choose between food on the table and health care because some CEO outsourced their job or some Wall Street banker gambled it away. We talk about a "safety net" like it's an abstraction, but it's no abstraction to the 15 million Americans who are out of work right now, who'd like nothing more than to be contributors to Medicaid again rather than recipients of it—and who would be, if politicians would start making jobs a priority instead of a talking point.

Narratives to use

Cut What Doesn't Work

If we're going to cut, we should start with programs that don't work, not the ones that protect ordinary Americans like Medicare and Medicaid. Most seniors will tell you Medicare is a Godsend for people like them on a fixed income, and 85% of Americans who've turned to Medicaid at some point in their lives have good things to say about it, because it helped their families through a tough time, or provided 'round the clock nursing home to a parent or grandparent with Alzheimer's, or provided home health care to a friend or loved one who was disabled. The last thing we should be cutting is health care to our children, seniors, and people with disabilities. You want to cut something? Start with tax breaks for oil companies, who are bankrupting the rest of us at the gas pump with their record profits. If that doesn't close the budget gap, try cutting tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, who don't need the \$120 billion handout Congress just gave them. Start there, and let us know how that works out.

Narratives to use

Problem Solving

Politicians need to stop pointing fingers and start solving our problems, beginning with putting Americans back to work. At a time of record unemployment, when people are falling out of the middle class in record numbers, you don't start cutting holes in the safety net our grandparents built. There's a reason Medicaid rolls are swelling: because over 15 million Americans are out of work, and most people get their insurance through their employers. Are there people on Medicaid who should take better care of themselves? Sure. And there are a few of us who aren't on Medicaid who could shed a few pounds ourselves. But let's lay the blame where it belongs: on the irresponsibility of the Wall Street bankers who gambled our jobs away and the politicians who let them do it. Whether you're white, black, or brown, there's nothing more painful than having a sick child and not being able to take them to the doctor because you can't afford it. It's time we helped those parents get back to work, not take away their health insurance.

Narratives to use

Last Place to Turn

Medicaid is the last resort for most Americans when they need health care, whether they're poor or middle class, old or young, white, black, or brown. It's the place millions of Americans with disabilities and children from low-income families turn for their care. It's the place millions of our seniors turn when they need long-term care that Medicare doesn't cover, and it takes care of two-thirds of all people in nursing homes in America. And it's the place where working and middle class Americans turn when they've lost their job or run through all their savings to pay for an illness. That's what happened to Jennifer, whose daughter was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor when she was 15 months old. Jennifer had to quit her job to take care of her baby through months of chemotherapy and hospitalizations. Her family could no longer afford health insurance, but we, as Americans, pitched in through Medicaid, and today she has a beautiful, healthy four year old girl. Jennifer's story makes me proud to be an American. Her daughter is alive because we were there.

Narratives to use

Insurance

As a taxpayer, it burns me up when politicians talk about Medicare and Medicaid like they're handouts. They're insurance programs we pay for with our taxes, and the reason you buy insurance is because someday you may need it. We've been paying those premiums for years, and now that millions of us are out of work or growing older, politicians want to tear up our claims. You don't cut funding to firefighters when brushfires are burning up millions of acres of land. You don't cut the Army Corps of Engineers when rivers are flooding a third of the country. You don't cut unemployment payments when millions of people are out of work. And you don't cut health insurance programs that cover a third of America's children and all of America's seniors when the economy is in its worst shape in 75 years. If our leaders want to make sure Medicare and Medicaid are financially sound, there's one way to do it: put Americans back to work, so more people are paying their premiums again, and let millionaires and big businesses pay their fair share of taxes, so we stop bankrupting the middle class.

Narratives to use

Americans Have Spoken

Americans have spoken clearly about Medicare and Medicaid: About 80 percent of us are against cutting benefits to kids, seniors, and Americans with disabilities—or to the doctors, nurses, and hospitals who care for them. And that's across party lines. Why? Because cutting another half a trillion dollars from Medicare when the baby boomers are retiring, and cutting three-quarters of a trillion from Medicaid when record numbers of Americans are out of work, just isn't right, and it affects all of us, regardless of our politics. So why aren't politicians listening? Why are they cutting taxes to big corporations that outsource American jobs and to the richest Americans, who are cutting themselves larger and larger pieces of the American pie? Because too many politicians are paying too much attention to their campaign contributors and not enough to either their conscience or their constituents. It's time to tell our elected officials that they need to answer to *us*, or we'll let them see firsthand what an unemployment line looks like.

Narratives to use

They Are Us

In this country, we don't kick people when they're down. The time to cut a program that provides basic health insurance to 60 million Americans—including millions of our kids—isn't after Wall Street bankers just threw eight million people out of work, costing them their health insurance along with their jobs. People who get their health care through Medicaid look a lot like America, because they are America. Over half are white, and about one in four are either black or Latino. Most have the kind of health problems we all get as we get older—like high blood pressure and heart disease. And millions more are seniors—our parents and grandparents—who rely on it for nursing home care that Medicare doesn't cover. So if we're going to cut the deficit, I'd start by cutting tax breaks to oil companies, millionaires who pay lower tax rates than their secretaries, and the Wall Street speculators who put so many people on Medicaid by costing them their jobs and their private health insurance.

Narratives to use

Drain on Our Resources

There's nothing more important than your health. Right now, tens of millions of Americans wake up each morning praying that their families won't get sick, because they don't have insurance. For millions more, Medicare and Medicaid are the only things that stand between them and losing their health and losing their home. With so many families stretched to the limit and so many people out of work, Medicaid now insures the health of 1/3 of our children – and provides prenatal care for their mothers, like check-ups and vitamins, so those kids start out with a healthy body and a healthy chance at success. That's not just an investment in their future but in ours. But Medicaid doesn't just cover kids. It covers 8 million people with disabilities, and many of them are leading productive lives because of the services it provides. It covers nearly 10 million seniors who need long-term care, whether in nursing homes or in their own homes, where they can live out their lives in dignity. In this country, we don't children, disabled people, or our aging parents or grandparents a "drain on our resources." If politicians want to cut somebody's health care, let them start with their own.

Narratives to use

Expand Medicaid

In a country as wealthy as ours, with the best medical care in the world if you can afford it, we should be letting more people buy into Medicare and Medicaid if they don't have private insurance, not threatening the health care of our children, seniors, and people who are out of work. Medicaid provides long-term care to millions of seniors, helps Americans with disabilities live independently, and enables millions of children to see a doctor. People who rely on Medicaid for their health insurance have nowhere else to turn, whether because they lost their job in the recession, need nursing home care, or come from parts of town where poverty steals the hope, health, and dreams of so many American children. And many middle class people get their insurance through Medicaid when they fall ill with diseases like breast cancer or heart disease because they lose their health insurance or run through whatever savings they have. So I have some advice for politicians who want to cut Medicare and Medicaid: give up your own government insurance coverage and let us know whether you still consider health insurance for seniors, children, and people with disabilities a luxury.

Narratives to consider

Generational Responsibility

In this country, we believe in responsibility across the generations: to our parents and grandparents, who raised us, and to our kids, who need our nurturance and protection. Millions of Americans are taking care of both their aging parents and their young kids—like a woman named Sheila, whose mother spent her working years caring for others as a nurse but is now the one who needs help. Her mother can no longer do the simplest things, like preparing her own food, but Sheila also has a young daughter. Medicaid has been a lifesaver for their family. Without it, the medication costs for her mother alone would have bankrupted them. The idea that we'd cut long-term care to our parents and grandparents and health care to our kids, when we've just given \$120 billion in tax cuts to millionaires, is not only shameful but immoral. Medicaid isn't a handout. It's an insurance policy that we all take out and pay for, and Sheila's mother paid for it for years as a nurse. Now is not the time to turn our backs on our parents, our children, and our values.

Top tier messages

Gaming the System

I'm all for fiscal responsibility. But before we start cutting health care for children, seniors, and people with disabilities, let's cut that \$120 billion in tax giveaways Congress just handed millionaires and billionaires. The average senior is living on about \$18,000 a year. In tough times, we should be devoting our resources to the needy, not the greedy. Politicians make it sound like everyone who relies on Medicaid for their health care is just gaming the system—like kids with cancer are trying to steal an extra dose of chemo, or my mother or your grandmother is deliberately running out of money so she can live out the rest of her life in a nursing home. You want to know who's gaming the system? Corporate lobbyists and CEOs who've bought Congress and are lecturing us on how we need to tighten our belts while they loosen theirs. We don't need lectures from them. We need them to pay their fair share for what this country gives them.

Top tier messages

What Kind of Nation

A woman named Gail from Utah knew something was wrong—she could feel the lump—but she couldn't afford the mammogram, let alone get the treatment. She faced the all too familiar choice for working Americans between the cost of a doctor's visit and her house payment. When her husband heard on television about free cancer screenings, she went in, and sure enough, it was breast cancer, and it was invasive. But thanks to Medicaid, 9 years later, she's grateful to be alive—and equally grateful to her country for saving her life. Yet right now, politicians are trying to cut Medicaid, and cut people like Gail from their Medicaid rolls. The question we face is what kind of nation we want to be. Does the richest nation on earth really let people die because they can't afford private insurance, or they run through their savings after becoming ill? Our nation's founders told us we were all created, with the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The question today is whether we still believe that.

Protecting Children's Health

Narratives to use

You Don't Gamble

You don't gamble with our children's health. After years of hard work, two years ago, in a rare moment of bipartisanship, Congress and the President agreed on a law guaranteeing millions of children of working parents the right to see a doctor. Everyone supported it—Democrats, Republicans, Independents—because no one believes that kids should be sick, in pain, or without preventive care like vaccinations and annual check-ups just because their parents have lost their job or can't afford insurance. But now the same members of Congress who just cut the taxes of millionaires and billionaires want to cut the health care of children of working parents. Nothing could be as short-sighted. If we want the 21st century to be the next American century, we have to invest in it, starting with investing in our children. If our kids aren't healthy, they aren't going to learn, and we aren't going to stay the world's leader in innovation. Children's health insurance couldn't be more important today with so many struggling just to get by or working longer hours for less. You don't roll the dice with our children's health.

Narratives to use

Pediatrician for Every Child

I believe in a family doctor for every family and a pediatrician for every child. We've made remarkable progress at insuring our nation's children. Over the last decade, even as the number of Americans without insurance has skyrocketed to more than 50 million, we've actually cut the rate of uninsured kids by half. How have we done it? By acting like Americans: setting our sights on something that seemed impossible, and making it happen. With bipartisan support, two years ago Congress passed a children's health insurance program that has done for kids what Medicare did for seniors, creating a program that works, designed for developing minds and growing bodies. In two short years, it's taken care of millions of children of working parents who can't afford insurance, giving them their vaccinations and setting their broken arms. But now politicians are trying to balance the budget on the backs of these kids. With all the nation building we've done abroad, it's time we did some nation building here at home, starting with protecting the health of our children.

Narratives to use

Work for a Living

People who work for a living ought to be able to take their kids to the doctor when they're sick. After years of trying, a bipartisan majority in Congress finally put that value into law, creating an insurance plan that's been as effective for kids of working parents as Medicare is for seniors—and at substantially lower cost than private insurance. The children's health insurance program takes care of kids whose parents can't afford health insurance despite working full time, often at two or three jobs. And just like Medicare was designed to meet the needs of seniors, this law was designed with kids in mind. There's a reason we have pediatricians, because kids aren't just little adults. They have distinct needs, which require care from professionals who understand the needs of growing children. That's why we need an insurance program just for kids, not something for politicians to put on the chopping block every time there's an economic downturn. It's time we made kids a national priority the same way good parents make them a family priority.

Narratives to use

Bottom Line

The health of our children is more important than the bottom line of health insurance companies. A little more than two years ago, before the debate over health care reform, Congress passed a law, supported by majorities of both parties, guaranteeing health care to millions of American children. It had the support of 85% of Americans, although it wasn't so popular with health insurance companies, who saw it as threatening their profits. Today that law is providing insurance to kids of working parents who earn less than about \$45,000 a year and can't afford \$10,000 premiums, let alone all the co-pays and deductibles. And it's been one of the most successful and innovative programs for moving people from welfare to work, because it allows parents to work without losing Medicaid for their kids. But now Members of Congress are threatening the care of 7 million children, saying we can't afford it—while taking large campaign contributions from health insurance companies. It's time we put the needs of America's families above the needs of politicians and special interests.

Strategic Messaging

Contact:

dwesten@westenstrategies.com

To Our Health

Protecting Medicaid and Children's Health



Research conducted for First Focus

Drew Westen, Ph.D.

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Westen
Strategies, LLC


FIRST FOCUS
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN