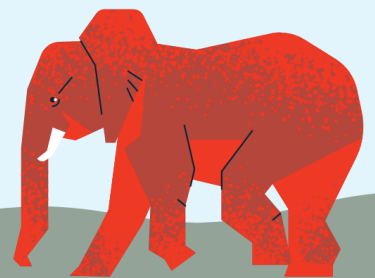
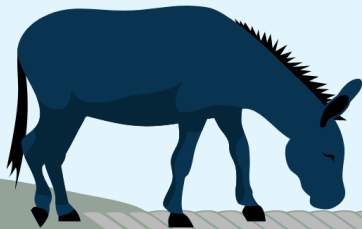




RURAL URBAN BRIDGE INITIATIVE

TALK LIKE A NEIGHBOR

Non-Polarizing Communication Tips for Rural Candidates



July 2024

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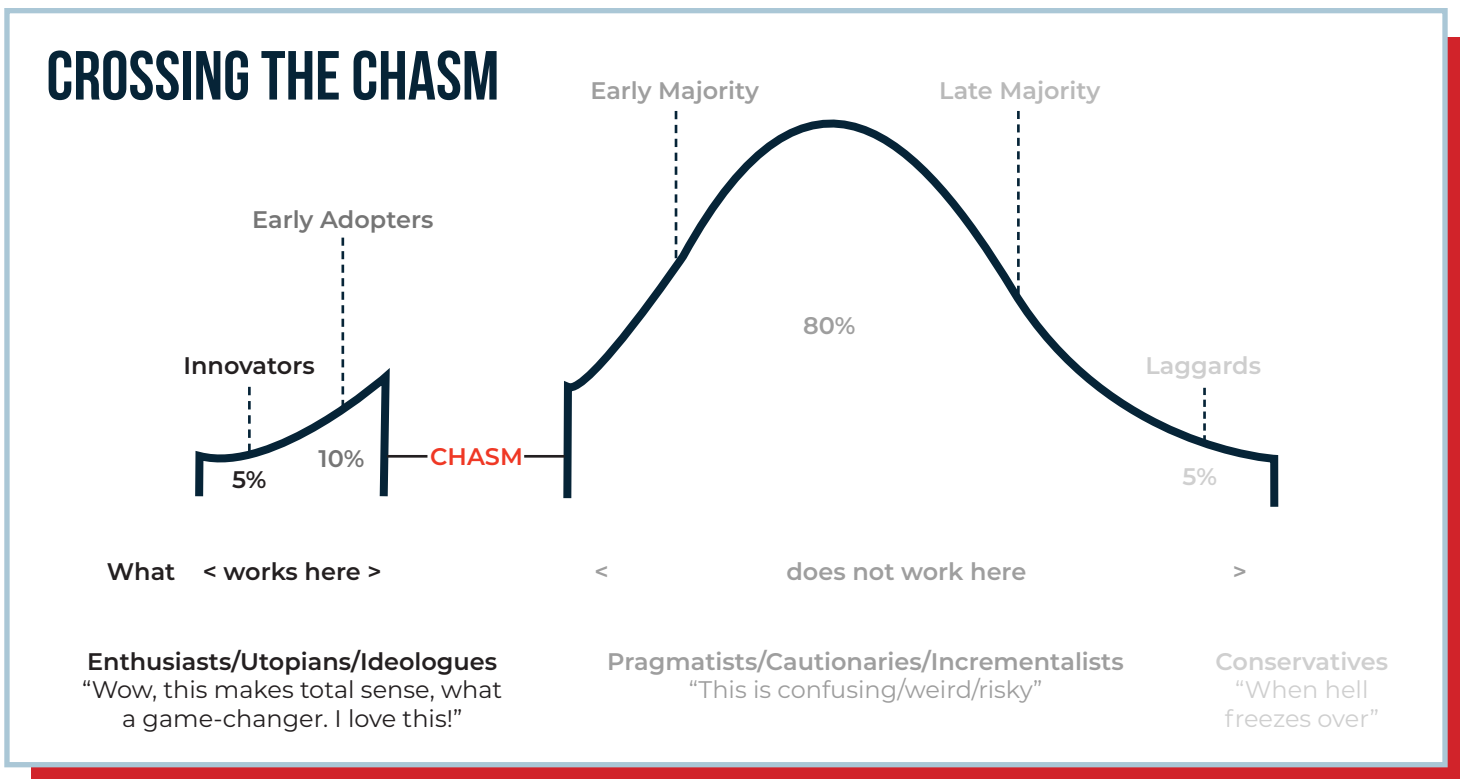
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Introduction

In [The Back Road to 2024](#), we suggested that candidates can defuse toxic polarization by speaking respectfully, acknowledging the validity of other viewpoints, and inviting opponents and fence-sitters into a collective search for truth and common ground. This communications guide provides guidance on how to go about that.

Our purpose here is not to tell you what policies and positions to adopt but, rather, to provide insights into the perspectives of rural voters and to offer communication principles you can adapt to reflect your own views. We encourage candidates to center their campaign around issues that (a) local voters care a lot about; and (b) where the candidate's opinion on the issue aligns with public opinion. **Raise the salience of issues that make people want to vote for you, and reduce the salience of divisive issues that make people want to vote against you.**

At the same time, candidates can and should be willing to take unpopular positions on issues in accordance with their personal beliefs. In our [communications companion guide](#), we offer some ideas on how to move away from “Beltway-speak” and talk about issues in ways that “cross the chasm” between the small minority who already hold these views and the vast majority who do not.



Proponents of marriage equality had to cross the chasm when public support plateaued at 35%. In 2009, they [shifted their messaging](#) from “stop being a hateful bigot” to messages that emphasized the widely shared values of love and commitment. Within four years, 29 states had legalized same sex marriages; two years later, the Supreme Court did so.

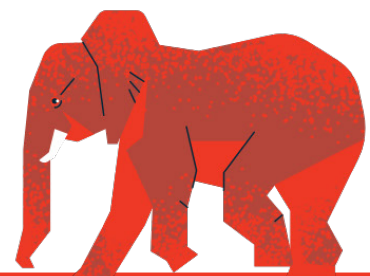
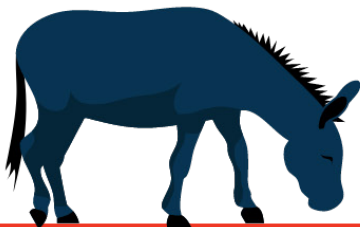


Love. Commitment. Family.
WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS



We've spent the last three years reading books, attending webinars, interviewing successful candidates, and combing through public opinion and message-testing polls and focus groups, particularly those that focus on rural voters. We commend, in particular, the ongoing work of [Winning Jobs Narrative](#) and [Galvanize Action](#), two outfits that pay special attention to rural voters. (We bring you some of their greatest hits in this report, but encourage you to check out their treasure troves for yourself).

Polling and message-testing aside, **we set our north star on rhetoric that depolarizes the red-blue divide.** We lay out below content that, in style and substance, appeals to the interests of the mainstream majority, across race, geography, and party.



5 Non-polarizing Communication Principles

1. STATE YOUR OPINIONS WITH HUMILITY, EMPATHY AND RESPECT

All the careful poll-tested phrasing in the world will land badly if the audience feels looked down on or gets the feeling that they are being coaxed into changing their minds about a candidate or issue. Most candidates know better than to go around belittling and name-calling their opponent or would-be constituents. Unfortunately, they are swimming upstream in waters that have already been poisoned by obnoxious, highly polarized discourse.

Candidates can't control what comes out of the mouths of media personalities, entertainers and activists. But what they can do is differentiate themselves by making it clear that they respect opposing viewpoints and value discourse as a collective search for truth; that they are willing and eager to engage a range of ideas, regardless of where they originate; and that their idea of a good leader is someone who can help the community find common ground and move the needle forward on areas of agreement.

- ★ Say what you authentically believe. If your position is nuanced or uncertain, that's fine—in fact, most people have mixed feelings on many issues, so you'll be in good company, and your transparency will be refreshing. If your position is firm, that's fine too, so long as you avoid coming across as a know-it-all.
- ★ Allow that you could be wrong and are open to learning more. "I see you look a little skeptical...what do you think I'm getting wrong?"
- ★ State your opinion subjectively, not as a matter of indisputable truth or moral correctness. (If this is difficult, *The Righteous Mind*, by Jonathan Haidt, might give you newfound appreciation for the legitimacy (or, at least, the origins) of worldviews very different from your own). If your position is out of step with the majority of public opinion, subjectivity is even more crucial. If the majority is on your side, it's still important to acknowledge the validity of other viewpoints and welcome them to educate you more on their point of view.
- ★ Explain how you came to believe what you believe—was it a personal experience, your childhood or religious upbringing, a book you read? Tell it like a story. Thing A happened, then Thing B happened, then someone told me or I heard about Thing C and, after all that, my conclusion was X, and I understand how others could see it differently.
- ★ Avoid condemning values and beliefs others hold dear unless those beliefs are so profoundly abhorrent as to defy validity.
- ★ Don't refer to your party or opinions as being "on the side of progress", as this implies that others are Neanderthals.
- ★ If your facts are different from your opponent's facts, acknowledge that you have "different" information, not better or necessarily correct, just different...this will make voters curious about your information instead of defensive about their own.

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- ★ Map out common ground and points of departure. Commit to working together where there is common ground and keeping the conversation going regarding areas of conflict.
 - ★ Express empathy for people's hardships. (The importance of empathy is discussed in our **depolarization companion guide**). Where possible, put personal grievances in a collective context:

"When I see a boarded up factory like where you worked , I think, damn, remember how things used to be? Remember all those good union jobs that put steaks on the table and kept our kids in new sneakers? If it weren't for the politicians in Washington looking out for the corporations, instead of for working families, we'd still have those factories here. But the politicians in both parties let them move to Mexico and China, where they can pay them dirt. It's been huge profits for the companies but hard times for us here. They really screwed this community over."

All policies, even the best ones, entail tradeoffs. Conflicts arise where people balance those tradeoffs differently. Some people were willing to close the schools to protect elders from a potentially life-threatening virus; for others, the impact on children's learning and socio-emotional development was not a tradeoff they were willing to make.

Acknowledging the existence of tradeoffs can go a long way toward defusing arguments and can open each side to considering upsides and downsides they were otherwise ignoring. Simply asking the other person, "In your mind, are there any downsides/upsides to x?" can lead to a fruitful exchange in which you can explain how you weigh the upsides and downsides to reach your own conclusion.

There's a rhetorical concept called "steelmanning" where you express your opponent's point of view as strongly and accurately as you can. Doing so makes the other person feel heard and understood and, therefore, more willing and open to hearing an opposing point of view.

Where possible, steelman the other side before sharing your own opinion:

"I've heard a lot of good points made about why we should do X. In my mind, the strongest one is.... So on one level that makes sense to me; at the same time, I think that doesn't take account of....and so for those reasons my opinion on this is..."

Commonly used phrases that unintentionally trigger defensiveness and what you can say instead:

Instead of....	Try...
The fact is...	My understanding is...
Tell me more about...	Can you say a little more about ...?
I hear what you're saying <i>but</i> ...	I hear what you're saying, <i>and</i> ...
Help me understand...	The part of what you're saying that I don't understand is x...can you explain a little more where you're coming from on that?
Again/as I said before...	Leave this preface out
With all due respect...	Leave this preface out
We all want/we all know that...	What I want, and what I've heard a lot of other people say they want, is...

5 Non-polarizing Communication Principles

2. SPEAK TO SHARED VALUES AND SHARED FATE

When presenting voters with an idea or opinion that they are unfamiliar with or opposed to, candidates can appeal to mainstream moderates by showing how the idea aligns with the values they already hold. They can also talk about dimensions of the issue where there may be common ground –for example, a “pro-choice” candidate might agree with a “pro-life” voter that it would be good to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and engage in a conversation about the best ways of doing so. The candidate can then pledge to work together where there’s common ground and respectfully disagree on whether abortion should be legal.

A [2023 poll](#) of rural voters in 12 states found that Republicans, Independents and voters of color named family, faith, and freedom as their top values. Democrats named family, equality and kindness. In the *The Rural Voter*, the [authors emphasize](#) hard work, pride of place, local control, and the pervasive sense of linked fate among rural people across class and race. Rural folks want to solve their own problems and shape their own futures, not wait for the next top-down Beltway policy solution to be imposed on them.

Polls aside, you know the values of the people you grew up with.

“We know how to solve our problems and take care of our people. Give us some of those tax dollars we’re paying, and we’ll use them to make sure our working families, small businesses, and family farmers have the opportunities and tools they need to build a good life.”

Values: Care, family, hard work, self-reliance

COMMON RURAL VALUES

Place	Purpose	Integrity	Control Over Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patriotism• Family• Belonging• Pride-of-Place• Tradition• Stewardship• Shared Fate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Duty• Self-Reliance• Hard Work• Tradition• Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Straight Talk• Duty• Loyalty• Tradition• Stewardship• Stoicism• Golden Rule• Faith• Common Sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom• Fairness (play by the rules)• Safety

5 Non-polarizing Communication Principles

3. MAKE CLEAR THAT WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

As discussed in the [Back Road to 2024 companion guide](#), we believe the political moment calls for left populism as an alternative to right-wing faux populism. By left populism, we mean policies and rhetoric that curb elite wealth and power and improve the economic well-being of *all* working and middle class Americans. We believe that an approach that brings together ordinary Americans of all races and genders under a populist banner is the most strategic and just path forward. As the powers that be seek to divide Americans along racial lines, a viable populist movement does the opposite, uniting *the people* against *the elites*. In other words, working and middle-class racial unity is intrinsic to left populism, just as scapegoating and “othering” are intrinsic to right-wing populism.

Inclusivity is a cherished value of the progressive left. Depending on how inclusivity is framed, it can come across as strangely fixated on race in ways that most people find off-putting. The vast majority of Americans were taught to aspire to colorblind anti-racism. The new turn toward heightened racial awareness might feel natural on campuses and in dismantling racism workshops, but is alien to mainstream Americans of all races.

People are more inclined to approve of a policy that benefits them than one that leaves them out. Martin Luther King, Jr. wisely and compellingly described his dream as “rooted in the American dream” and, today, [Rev. William Barber II](#) carries that torch with his efforts to unite the 87 million low-income white, black and brown Americans. If there’s a divide, it’s between the corporate political establishment

and the people, not between working and middle class people of different races and ethnicities.

[Out of 16 messages about curbing inflation](#), voters of all races reacted the most **negatively**, by a wide margin, to the following:

“President Biden says prices are going up because Black and Brown workers are being squeezed as corporations jack up profits. We need workers, regardless of race, treated well to control prices.”

In another poll, [Hispanic voters preferred](#),

“Joe Biden believes working people like us play a vital role in our economy”

over

“Joe Biden believes Latino working families play a vital role in our economy.”

An April 2024 Blueprint poll tested a bunch of Obama and Biden sound bites and, again, found a marked preference for universalist over racialized rhetoric (the percentages below reflect the percent of people who picked that statement as their favorite out of 16 statements they were shown):

[Obama - Workers] When faced with economic challenges, we must always bet on American workers. Time and time again, they have demonstrated their resilience, skills, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The strength of our nation lies in the hardworking people who drive innovation and growth every day.

65%

[Biden - Building American comeback] America's comeback is building a future of American possibilities; building an economy from the middle out and the bottom up, not the top town; investing in all of America, in all Americans to make every- — sure everyone has a fair shot and we leave no one — no one behind.

56%

[Biden - Small manufacturing jobs] A record of 16 million Americans are starting small businesses, and each one is a literal act of hope, with historic job growth and small-business growth for Black and Hispanics and Asian Americans. Eight hundred thousand new manufacturing jobs in America and counting. Where is it written we can't be the manufacturing capital of the world? We are and we will.

39%

In 2023, the [Center for Working-Class Politics](#) tested the comparative appeal of six soundbites.

#	Soundbite	Populism	Description and Elements
1	“The American people are being betrayed by unqualified political outsiders. Politicians need to listen more to experts. Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against political extremists.”	Not Populist	Anti-Populist Appeal to expertise and against extremism
2	“The American people are being betrayed. Politicians need to listen more to the people. Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all.”	Not Populist	People-Centered People-centrism
3	“Americans who work for a living are being betrayed. Politicians need to listen more to Americans who work for a living. Working-class Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all.”	Not Populist	Working-People-Centered People-centrism with working-class appeal
4	“The American people are being betrayed by out-of-touch political insiders. Politicians need to listen more to the people. Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against corrupt politicians.”	Populist	Political Populist People-centrism and anti-elitism with political focus
5	“Americans who work for a living are being betrayed by super-rich elites. Politicians need to listen more to working-class people. Working-class Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against corrupt millionaires.”	Populist	Economic Populist People-centrism and anti-elitism with working-class and economic focus
6	“White, brown, and black Americans who work for a living are being betrayed by super-rich elites. Politicians need to listen more to the working-class people. Working-class Americans of all races and backgrounds need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against corrupt millionaires.”	Populist	Racially Inclusive Economic Populist People-centrism and anti-elitism with working-class economic focus and appeal to racial solidarity

For rural voters, the non-racialized populist appeals (#4 and #5) and the people-centered appeal (#2) were the most broadly popular. The racially inclusive message (#6) **did not appeal to rural voters** of any race.

Although the Race Class Narrative (RCN) strives to strike a universalist tone, it seems that

the references to racial groups may, in some contexts, undermine that goal, at least with an audience of rural Americans.

The premise of RCN is that race must be explicitly addressed in order to neutralize the racist dog whistles voters are exposed to, but we’re not sure that such dog whistles

are in widespread operation outside of issues like immigration, crime, and welfare. We've observed RCN being deployed in support of a wide range of policies, including race-neutral policies, and have [questions about the necessity and efficacy](#) of doing so with respect to issues that don't typically trigger racialized thinking (eg. climate change). We are uncertain at this time as to which of the many iterations of RCN might resonate with rural voters and under what circumstances, and leave it to candidates to explore RCN and decide for themselves how and when to make use of it.

Some issues are obviously uniquely experienced by a specific group—eg. racially motivated violence. But what may on the surface look like a problem experienced only by people of color often turns out to be experienced *disproportionately* by people of color and *also* by low-income whites. For example, when polling places disappear in poor, rural, predominantly black counties, the powers that be may be trying to suppress the black vote, but all voters in that area, not just black voters, are negatively impacted. A campaign to restore polling locations should emphasize that *all* eligible voters deserve easy access to voting. Framing the issue in this universalist way will likely be more persuasive overall than a frame that paints the problem as only affecting one group.

For candidates who embrace left populism, we offer populist rhetoric we and others have created. The following populist messages hit the sweet spot:

- “President Biden believes no billionaire should pay a lower tax rate than a firefighter, a teacher, a sanitation worker, or a nurse. Everyone should pay their fair share, with the wealthiest Americans and big corporations finally contributing what they rightfully owe.” ([Blueprint](#))
- “Under President Biden’s tax plan, nobody earning less than \$400,000 will pay an

additional penny in federal taxes. Joe Biden is looking out for the middle class, not the millionaires and billionaires.” ([Blueprint](#))

- “To grow the American economy, we need a strong middle class. Because when the middle class does well, everyone does better. For too long, certain politicians have gutted programs we depend on while protecting corporations that rip off families. We need leaders who will grow the economy from the middle out by lowering costs through cracking down on corporate greed, protecting vital programs like Social Security and Medicare, and investing in the American people by bringing back manufacturing and good union jobs to the U.S.” ([American Family Voices](#))
- “This country belongs to all of us, not just the superrich. But for years, politicians in Washington have turned their backs on people who work for a living. We need tough leaders who won’t give in to the millionaires and the lobbyists, but will fight for good jobs, good wages, and guaranteed health care for every single American.” ([Center for Working-Class Politics](#))
- “Americans who work for a living are being betrayed by super-rich elites. Politicians need to listen more to working-class people. Working-class Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against corrupt millionaires.” ([Center for Working-Class Politics](#))
- “The American people are being betrayed by out-of-touch political insiders. Politicians need to listen more to the people. Americans need to come together and elect leaders who will fight for us all against corrupt politicians.” ([Center for Working-Class Politics](#))
- “We should invest in policies that lower costs and raise incomes for working people. Hardworking Americans are the engines of our economy—and when they can thrive, the economy grows, businesses prosper,

and America is more competitive.” ([Winning Jobs Narrative](#))

- “Democrats will hold corporations accountable for taking advantage of American workers and their families. Even as inflation has slowed, families are still paying higher prices because of corporate greed. Corporations are raising prices on American families and raking in record profits, using inflation as an excuse to raise prices. Democrats are focused on putting more money back into people’s pockets by raising incomes and lowering costs.” ([Winning Jobs Narrative](#))
- “Democrats say people are living paycheck to paycheck and working people haven’t seen a real pay increase in years. Those

in Washington don’t get it. The big corporations and billionaires and their lobbyists are calling the shots. Democrats gave tax relief to the poor, working families, and the middle class, and reduced health care, prescription drug, and energy costs. With inflation killing people, they are going after the price gouging. Republicans get their money from big oil and drug companies, and they oppose tax relief for working people and raising taxes on billionaires. Democrats believe your hard work should be rewarded, and we will grow the middle class again.” ([Greenberg Research](#)).

Senator Sherrod Brown’s Greatest Populist Hits:

“PLENTY OF SENATORS WORK FOR CORPORATIONS. I WORK FOR OHIO.”

Whether you punch a clock or swipe a badge, earn a salary or make tips, are raising children or caring for an aging parent, *Sherrod is fighting for you.*

“I’ll never stop fighting to crack down on corporate greed.”

PUTTING OHIO FIRST

Sherrod works with anybody to put Ohioans first and stands up to anyone who gets in the way.

WHEN YOU LOVE YOUR COUNTRY, YOU FIGHT FOR THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT WORK.

We came up with a few more (untested) populist zingers you can sprinkle into your speeches and social media posts:

- Jeff Bezos, who owns Amazon, makes almost [eight million dollars an hour](#). His warehouse workers make \$18 an hour. Are his contributions truly worth 438,000 times more than his workers? Not in my book.
- If worker pay had kept up with CEO pay since 1978, the average worker today would be earning **\$381 an hour**. I want to crack down on that pay gap so you've got more money in your pocket.
- I take responsibility for cleaning up my messes, and I expect corporations to do the same.
- When I see so many people struggling, it makes me think we've got a system problem, not a people problem.
- I appreciate a strong work ethic. What I don't like is when people preach it but aren't willing to pay a fair wage for that hard work.
- The GOP tax cuts promised we'd all get a 7-course dinner, well yeah, but yours and mine turned out to be a possum and sixpack (Hat tip: Jim Hightower)
- What if we brought back the 50% corporate tax of 1950—the economy was booming back then and working families could buy homes and send their kids to college.
- Fed up with taxes? If the rich pay more, the rest of us can pay less.
- [Duke Energy paid no taxes for the past five years](#). Free-riders should be made to pay their share, just like the rest of us do.

- Top corporate CEOs make millions but don't pay any payroll taxes after the first \$168,600 of their earnings. If they had to pay based on every dollar they earn, just like the rest of us, the Social Security fund would be in great shape.
- After years of hard work, people should be able to retire without worry.

For messaging guidance on specific issues, check out the [communications companion guide](#).

5 Non-polarizing Communication Principles

4. KEEP IT POSITIVE. COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Our [Back Road to 2024 companion guide](#) discusses at length the downsides of attacking political opponents and proposes, instead, sticking with positive and contrast statements and ads:

- What are *you* going to do to help make people's lives better?
- What specific policy does your opponent endorse that will make people's lives worse?

The purpose of drawing a contrast between candidates is *not* to attack the opposition's character flaws nor to signal a candidate's moral or intellectual superiority. The purpose is simply to provide voters with information on which to base their decision. Here's an example of a contrast statement on Social Security, "As it stands, you can start collecting Social Security when you're 67. My opponent wants you to wait and keep working until you're 70. I'll vote to keep it at 67."

Winning Jobs Narrative has found the following contrast messages to be highly effective.

- Republicans voted to cut resources working families need to live and work, like funding for Medicaid, food, energy, and housing. Democrats are focused on growing our economy by lowering costs and ensuring hardworking people have opportunities and tools to build a good life. America's current recovery is the world's strongest, building a foundation for long-term growth with good-paying jobs that don't require a college degree.
- Republicans voted for a plan to gut Medicaid, threatening healthcare access for 21 million Americans- including in rural America, where hundreds of hospitals have closed, forcing people to drive hours to get healthcare. Democrats are focused on providing tools and opportunities so more people can live healthier lives, by expanding coverage, lowering drug costs, and increasing preventative care to treat illnesses before they become expensive emergencies.
- President Biden just capped insulin prices at \$35 a month for seniors on Medicare. Democrats tried to make insulin \$35 a month for everyone, not just seniors but Republicans blocked it. With your vote this year, we're going to make it happen for everybody in America.

Sources: Winning Jobs Narrative [Good Economic News & Policy Progress](#) (April 2024); [Imperatives for 2024](#) (Feb 2024)

Take a look at some of the effective ads we compiled in Appendix B.

5 Non-polarizing Communication Principles

5. TALK LIKE A NEIGHBOR

Elitists are widely resented and distrusted. Remember Dr. Oz with his “crudité” platter compared to John Fetterman in his basketball shorts letting the public use the swimming pool at the Lt. Governor’s mansion?



In our [2022 analysis](#) of successful rural candidates, we noticed that top-performing candidates were typically humble, open-minded, down-to-earth, non-dogmatic problem-solvers. They spoke to the issues their voters cared most about, and they did so in a neighborly, plain-spoken manner without recourse to long-winded political theories or policy platforms.

In the contemporary political arena, where attention spans are short and resentment of “elitists” runs high, brevity and plainspokenness are virtues. What do we mean by plainspoken?...

- **Use concrete, everyday language, not academic or activist jargon or acronyms**

Progressive Left discourse uses a lot of novel, abstract terms that leave people

feeling confused and alienated. Made-up words like “BIPOC” and “Latinx” are so alien as to have an ironically “othering” effect on the very people the terms seek to include. What’s more, there is a sense that such words are being handed down from on high, and that the rabble are expected to get on board.

[Hispanic Americans prefer](#) to be called Hispanic, and only 4% want to be called “Latinx.” According to novelist [Sherman Alexie](#), who grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation, most Indians call themselves “Indians” and see the word “indigenous” as condescending.



Words like “frontline communities” and “lived experience” make those uttering them sound like they’re part of an insular group of elitists showing off their big words instead of clearly stating their values and beliefs.

Instead of...	Try...
lived experience	experience
center frontline communities	make sure those most affected have a say
unhoused	homeless
BIPOC	Black, Indian, Asian-American or Hispanic
Latinx	Hispanic
cis-gender	born male/female
gender-affirming care	medical treatment for people questioning what gender they are; sex change, hormones and surgeries
LGBTQIA+++	gay and lesbian people; transgender people
marginalized communities	people suffering the most because of x
systemic racism, white supremacy	racism
equity	equality
neurodivergent, developmentally disabled	autistic, special needs
exploited us	did wrong by us
intersectionality	having to deal with sexism/homophobia and racism at the same time
fascist, racist, transphobe, xenophobe, sexist, misogynist, anti-semite	describe the impact of the behavior or belief instead of labeling the person — e.g. “When he voted down the Paycheck Fairness Act that would have made sure women earn as much as men, I saw that as very unfair to women.”
reproductive justice	freedom to decide when and if to have a kid
abortion care	abortion
contraceptives	birth control, family planning

- **Don't lecture, rant or act superior**

Snarky, condescending, or know-it-all rhetoric turns off persuadable voters who are exhausted by political blood feuds. And it fires up Republicans who maybe were going to sit this election out but now are duty-bound to own the libs right back.

State your opinion succinctly and subjectively, as your opinion, not dogma. If people want more, they'll ask questions; otherwise, less is more. (Brief rants against nefarious rich and powerful entities are effective so long as they're not the main course and not wildly overheated).

- **Avoid formulaic politi-speak**

Politicians overuse certain catchphrases to the point where they sound canned and inauthentic. This includes classics like "the American people," "the American dream," and "hard working Americans" (try "hard working Georgians" to mix things up)", as well as new ones like "hold corporations accountable", "no matter what we look like or where we come from...", and "democracy is on the ballot." With some exceptions, if you wouldn't say it to your neighbor, try to keep it out of your speech.

- **Stay out of the policy weeds**

Most people have little interest in getting into the policy weeds. What inspires them is hearing how a given policy will change their lives for the better. Paint that picture for them.

Communications consultant Anat Shenker-Osorio encourages advocates to "sell the brownie, not the recipe." Instead of giving a detailed explanation of why a new policy or program is needed and how it will operate, simply show people how their lives will be better once it's enacted. Her favorite example is, "Paid family leave means you'll be there when your baby smiles for the first time." Nice!

The billboard below, which was displayed in rural Minnesota, is missing the brownie.



"Carbon" is an abstraction to most folks. The year 2030 is a long way off. And "IRA" is a head-scratcher unless you have time to read the small print as you drive by. What is an ordinary voter going to take away from this?

Here's another way to go:



- **Listen**

When we say "talk like a neighbor," we don't mean that neighbor who goes on and on and never lets you get a word in edgewise. Talk less and listen more sounds like a cliché, but it's one that is seldom heeded.

Whenever possible, test drive new content with a diverse audience that includes Republicans and independents. If Democratic base voters love it, remember...they're the early adopters. How will you cross the chasm to the mainstream majority?

Appendix A: Multipurpose Bridging Statements

- We don't agree on everything so my proposal is that we work together on the things we agree on and keep talking about the things where we don't see eye-to-eye.
- I've heard arguments on both sides, and haven't made up my mind yet but plan to study up on it more.
- I wholeheartedly believe that....but I could be wrong.
- I don't have all the answers, so I'm here to listen.
- It seems like the loudest voices are awfully sure of themselves, but I usually find that things are more complicated than they seem at first glance.
- I can't promise to always be right, but I do promise to always listen to different viewpoints.
- This is an issue that understandably gets a lot of folks on both sides pretty riled up. When there's such strong feelings, what I think makes sense is try to sit down and talk it through. Who would like to be part of a sit-down conversation about this?
- In my experience, experts aren't always right, they're human and can make mistakes just like all of us. When there's something I don't know much about or don't know how to do, that's when I'll bring in experts—when my car's not running, I'll take it to a mechanic; when my body's breaking down, I'll go to the doctor, and when we've got economic or political problems that need solving, I'll at least listen to what the experts have to say about it.

Appendix B: Good Ads

1. Jon Tester (MT)

- Plainspoken and casual, authentic clothes
- Longterm Montana roots
- Montana imagery
- Freedom from government control
- Montana pride
- Acknowledges grievances
- Calls out veterans, hospital and schools as priorities

2. Sherrod Brown (OH)

- Hard hat workers tell the whole story
- Diversity
- “American made” steel
- Bipartisanship
- Job creation
- “Fighting for Ohio workers”
- Ohio imagery

3. Sharice Davids (KS)

- Workers at work
- Job creation
- Bipartisanship

4. Hillary Scholten (MI)

- Western Michigan pride
- Hard work
- Diverse working class supporters

5. Catherine Cortez Masto (NV)

- Small business owner spokeswoman
- Hard work
- Job creation

6. Brad Pfaff (WI)

- Local roots
- Western WI images
- Calls out divisiveness
- Values: Unity, hard work, decency, cooperation

7. JD Scholten (IA)

- Trust-inspiring local messenger says it all
- Draws contrast with opponent without attacking
- Focus on Social Security and Medicare

8. John Fetterman (PA)

- Casual dress
- Spotlight on ordinary Pennsylvanians in their work and home environments
- Acknowledgement of hard times in “forgotten places”
- “These places matter, the people that live there matter”
- Patriotism (America as “industrial powerhouse”)

9. Tim Ryan (OH)

- Draws contrast with opponent but not over-the-top
- Criticizes fighting culture war instead of putting Ohioans back to work
- “Fighting over bathrooms won’t sound this steam whistle”
- Inspirational celebration of manufacturing work

10. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (WA)

- Auto repair shop owner
- “I’m not your typical candidate”
- Not taking corporate PAC money
- “I’ll fight for working Washingtonians just like me”

11. Mary Peltola (AK)

- Dressed for Alaska weather
- Imagery of Alaska scenery and ordinary Alaskans
- Place-based nostalgia
- Denounces “lower 48 partisanship”
- “To hell with politics”
- Jobs, fisheries, cost-of-living

12. Steven Horsford (NV)

- Relatable personal story
- Imagery of ordinary Nevadans
- Focus on bread and butter issues (cost of living, jobs, small businesses)
- Willingness to crack down on corporate speculators

13. Joe Biden (ad created by Galvanize Action)

- Ordinary, sympathetic protagonists (triggers compassion)
- Relatable problem (diabetes) – triggers in-group care ethic
- Simple policy intervention (\$35 insulin cap)
- Restores trust that Biden and federal government have their back