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To: Interested Parties
From: Data for Progress
Date: Aug 4, 2022
Re: Message Testing on Social Security

From June 17 - June 19, July 1 - July 2, and July 26 - July 28, Data for Progress and Blue Rose conducted extensive research on public messages around Social Security. We tested over 100 unique public statements on Social Security from both Democrats and Republicans.

All three waves of message tests confirmed that Social Security is **one of the best-testing issues for Democrats**. 47 out of 55 unique Democratic messages about Social Security tested above the 80th percentile of all 2,500+ other messages we've tested over the past several months. More than half of those messages – 26 out of 47 – tested above the 95th percentile. Further analysis reveals that in general, Democratic messages about Social Security performed best among older voters.

Across the board, **Democratic messages on Social Security are extremely effective**. However, the best-testing Democratic statements on Social Security (which all test in the 98th-99th percentile of all messages we've tested across issue areas) had the following themes:

- **Inflation:** Messages that emphasize Democrats' commitment to expand Social Security in order to help Social Security beneficiaries meet rising costs tested extremely well across all three tests. Messages that reference adjusting COLA (the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment) also performed well.
- **Earned benefit:** Messages that framed Social Security as a benefit earned over a lifetime of hard work performed well with voters. These messages also perform well when contrasted with Republican messages that try to pass Social Security off as an entitlement program.
 - Messages that characterize Social Security as a historic and successful institution in the United States also performed well.
- **Seniors:** Messages that focused on protecting the dignity and stability of American seniors, particularly considering the lifetime of work they contributed to earn their Social Security benefits and the idea that their Social Security benefits can and should prevent seniors from slipping into poverty, all tested well.
- **50 years:** Messages that called attention to the fact that it's been over 50 years since serious legislative reforms were made to Social Security tested well. In particular, one message that harkened back to the time that Social Security was last reformed pointed



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out that a gallon of milk was 52 cents back then, which helped contextualize the idea that Social Security benefits have not been adjusted to meet rising costs.

- **Making millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share:** Messages that referenced proposals to increase payroll taxes on Americans making more than \$400,000 as a way to raise revenue for new, expanded Social Security benefits tested extremely well.

Additionally, we tested 46 unique Republican public statements on Social Security and found that the **most effective** Republican messages (**which decreased support for Democrats**) emphasized:

- **Bipartisanship:** Messages that accused Democrats of playing partisan games with Social Security and framed Social Security as a partisan issue were effective at *decreasing* support for Democrats.
- **Tax increases:** Statements that painted Democratic plans to expand Social Security as a broad tax hike tested well with voters.

Democratic messages we tested (in rank order of most effective to least effective at increasing voter support for the party):

Pct rank is relative to +2,500 previously tested messages.

Round 1 (June 17 - June 19)

Rising expenses: Democrats have a plan to ensure Social Security benefits keep up with Americans' rising expenses today, tomorrow, and forever. Republicans have a plan to end Social Security within five years. Seniors deserve better than this. They have worked hard all their lives and deserve to have benefits that take into account expenses.

99%

Inflation: Democrats will enhance Social Security in our country. Democrats will do so in order to ensure the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) keeps up with rising inflation being experienced by all Americans. Workers have received a cost of living increase, and seniors deserve that increase too.

99%

Democracy: Democrats have a plan to enhance Social Security in the United States, which is essential to protecting our country's democracy. Our seniors, who have worked hard for so long and contributed to Social Security their entire lives, deserve the Social Security benefits they have been promised by our federal government.

99%

COLA: Democrats have a plan to pass a Social Security bill in the country that will protect against rising inflation. Democrats also have a plan that will improve the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) formula to better reflect the costs incurred by seniors living in the United States.

99%

Sacred trust: Social Security is a sacred trust between the federal government and all working Americans. If you contribute to Social Security with each and every paycheck over many years of hard work, you will be able to retire with dignity. Democrats will protect this fundamental right.

98%



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<p>50 years: Democrats have a plan to enhance Social Security, which hasn't been improved in over 50 years in the United States. Democrats will fight every day to improve benefits for all seniors whose Social Security benefits have not kept up with inflation in our country.</p>	97%
<p>Poverty: No one who paid into the Social Security system over a lifetime should retire into poverty in our country. The new minimum benefit will be set at 25 percent above the poverty line. This new benefit would be tied to wage levels in order to ensure that minimum benefit does not fall behind.</p>	96%
<p>Republicans end Social Security in five years: Democrats will expand Social Security benefits in the United States, while Republicans will end Social Security within five years. Democrats understand that all seniors who rely on Social Security benefits deserve to retire with dignity and peace since they worked hard for so long.</p>	96%
<p>Lift Americans out of poverty: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security and lift more Americans out of poverty, now rather than later. Republicans, on the other hand, have a plan to end Social Security within five years. Americans that have worked hard for all of their lives deserve much better. Democrats know this.</p>	95%
<p>Phase out: Democrats will expand Social Security benefits in the United States, while Republicans will phase out Social Security within five years' time. All Americans over 65 years of age deserve representatives that will fight for them for their basic rights, now and in the future.</p>	95%
<p>Billionaire pay-for: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security benefits in the United States, which will be fully paid for by making all of those millionaires and billionaires in our country pay their fair share of income taxes. They have avoided doing so for far too long.</p>	95%
<p>Responsibility: It is the United States Congress' responsibility to keep America's promise to all of its seniors and safeguard Social Security for all Americans. Democrats understand the importance of this responsibility and will keep this promise now and in the future of our country's history.</p>	94%
<p>Expand + Poverty: It has been 50 years since Congress has acted to enhance benefits in the United States. There are approximately 5 million seniors in poverty in our country. Americans need Social Security now more than ever. Democrats know this and are planning to act on this need.</p>	93%
<p>Seniors: Seniors can't survive on Social Security benefits right now. Seniors can't even afford the most basic of food items and staples, and Americans ages 75-80 are forced to go back to work despite having worked for decades with the expectation of retiring in dignity.</p>	92%
<p>Small business owners: Democrats have a bill to expand Social Security benefits in the country. Democrats are doing this in order to provide small business owners and their employees increased retirement, disability, and survivor benefits. All Americans that work hard throughout their life deserve that, at the very least.</p>	92%
<p>Pandemic: Seniors were most impacted by the pandemic and feel like they have been left behind by COVID relief in this country. It's important to expand Social Security benefits to fulfill the promise this country made to seniors and to ensure they can retire and live in dignity.</p>	89%
<p>Privatize: Republicans are trying to privatize social security in the United States, which will take benefits away from millions of hardworking Americans who have paid into the system their entire lives. Democrats know that privatization is not the answer and are aiming to ensure social security remains public for all retiring Americans</p>	89%



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Health care costs: Seniors are struggling to get by in the United States. Seniors are being squeezed by health care costs in the country. Democrats know that fewer and fewer retiring Americans have any resources beyond Social Security to depend on after all of their hard work.

88%

Defunding: Senate Republicans have a plan that calls for defunding Social Security and Medicare in 5 years. Democrats do not support this plan. Americans deserve leaders that will fight for them. Democrats have a plan to protect and expand Social Security in the United States.

87%

Ending Social Security: Democrats have a plan to enhance and expand Social Security benefits in our country. Senator Rick Scott, chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, has a plan to end Social Security for all Americans. Democrats will not allow that to happen now, or in the future.

83%

Plan to protect: Senate Republicans have a plan that calls for killing Social Security and Medicare in 5 years. Democrats do not support this plan. Americans deserve leaders that will fight for them. Democrats have a plan to protect and expand Social Security in the United States.

83%

Live on benefits: Democrats ask the same question that many Americans have: who can live on Social Security benefits right now? There was a promise made by the United States' federal government. If you pay into Social Security, you will retire with dignity and peace in return for a lifetime of hard work.

80%

Retirement crisis: The United States currently faces a retirement crisis that needs practical and timely solutions. Democrats know that a moderate boost in Social Security benefits strengthens the one leg of a retirement system that is universal and the most reliable, and has been for quite some time now.

79%

Seniors hardest hit: 740,000 seniors have died from COVID-19 in our country. Democrats also know that seniors in the United States are hit hardest by rising inflation. We owe it to our seniors to protect and expand their Social Security benefits for all of the hard work that they have put into our country.

75%

Leaders that fight: Senate Republicans have a plan that calls for phasing out Social Security and Medicare in 5 years. Democrats do not have the same plan. Americans deserve leaders that will fight for them. Democrats have a plan to protect and expand Social Security in the United States.

72%

Millennials: American millennials are going to need a strong and expanded Social Security framework more than anyone in the country's history. Social Security benefits all generations, young and old. It has done so for quite some time and will continue to do so in the US.

67%

Payroll taxes: Payroll taxes are not collected on wages of Americans making over \$147,000 of reported gross income. Democrats are proposing legislation that would apply the payroll tax to wages of Americans making above \$400,000. This provision would only affect the top 0.4% of earners.

59%

Caregiver credits: Democrats will provide caregiver credits to ensure that caregivers are not penalized in retirement for taking time out of the workforce to care for children or other dependents. Democrats understand that we all have families to take care of, and should not affect retirement benefits for caregivers.

34%

Test 2 (July 1 - 2)

Lifetime investments: Social Security benefits are not entitlements, but rather they are benefits that people have paid for out of their pockets their whole lives. Seniors who worked hard for a lifetime deserve that sacred trust that Social Security represents. Hard working Americans have invested their whole life and deserve to see the benefits.

100%



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Cost of living + inflation: Democrats will enhance Social Security and ensure that the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) keeps up with rising inflation, which is hurting all Americans right now. Workers have received a cost of living increase, and seniors deserve that increase too. Democrats will make this possible.

99%

Taxes - high earners: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security benefits by raising payroll taxes on those making over \$400,000 in income within the United States. This plan would ensure that the top earners in our society pay their fair share of income in taxes, just like the rest of us do.

96%

Retire with dignity + Republicans: Democrats will expand Social Security benefits in the United States, while Republicans will end Social Security within five years. Democrats understand that all seniors who rely on Social Security benefits deserve to retire with dignity and peace since they worked hard for so long.

96%

Taxes - high earners only: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security without raising taxes on anyone in the United States earning less than \$400,000 in income per year. Republicans oppose this, but the ultra-wealthy must contribute just like everyone else. Democrats will ensure that, for the rest of us, taxes will not increase.

95%

Fight for access + Republicans: Democrats will fight to make sure every American will have access to Social Security benefits when they retire. These are benefits that will allow them to retire in comfort and with dignity. Republicans, on the other hand, will end Social Security in the next five years.

95%

Protecting democracy: Democrats have a plan to enhance Social Security in the United States, which is essential to protecting our country's democracy. Our seniors, who have worked hard for so long and contributed to Social Security their entire lives, deserve the Social Security benefits they have been promised by our federal government.

94%

Fight for seniors + Republicans: Democrats will expand Social Security benefits in the United States, while Republicans will phase out Social Security within five years. All Americans over 65 years of age deserve representatives that will fight for them for their basic rights, now and in the future.

94%

Poverty: No one who paid into the Social Security system over a lifetime should retire into poverty in our country. The new minimum benefit will be set at 25 percent above the poverty line. This new benefit would be tied to wage levels in order to ensure that the minimum benefit does not fall behind.

94%

National debt: Democrats believe that protecting and expanding Social Security benefits does not increase the national debt, which many Americans understandably do not want to see a rise in the coming years. Social Security funding does not come out of the federal budget and millions deserve to see their hard work be rewarded in retirement.

93%

Millennials: Democrats have a plan to enhance Social Security, meaning young people will still have access to benefits later in their lives. Social Security is a promise our government made to Americans, and millennials and young people also deserve access to Social Security benefits in this country.

93%

Billionaires: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security benefits in the United States, which will be fully paid for by making all of those millionaires and billionaires in our country pay their fair share of income taxes. They have avoided doing so for far too long.

93%

Poverty + Republicans: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security and lift more Americans out of poverty, now rather than later. Republicans, on the other hand, have a plan to end Social Security

88%



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within five years. Americans that have worked hard for all of their lives deserve much better. Democrats know this.

Enhancing benefits: Democrats stand for enhancing benefits and improving the quality of life for all of our American seniors. Republicans, on the other hand, stand only for cutting their benefits and ending Social Security in the next five years. Democrats will not let that happen.

70%

Test 3 (July 26 - July 28)

52 cents: It's been more than 50 years since Congress enhanced Social Security benefits. A gallon of milk was 52 cents back then. We're long overdue to expand Social Security benefits and protect them against rising costs, especially at a time when seniors are most vulnerable to the impacts of both coronavirus and inflation.

99%

Fixed income: Millions of American seniors living on fixed incomes through Social Security are struggling to meet rising costs and are slipping into poverty. We owe it to our seniors to take care of them, and they should be able to retire in dignity thanks to benefits they've earned over a lifetime.

99%

Life-saving income: Democrats have a plan to protect and expand Social Security benefits. Social Security provides the majority of income for half of its senior beneficiaries. Social Security payments put food on the table, keep the roof over millions of Americans' heads, and help Americans afford life-saving medication.

99%

Fully funded: Democrats have a plan to ensure Social Security will be fully funded for future generations. Every American deserves to retire in dignity, and Democrats have a bill now that would make sure Social Security doesn't run out of funding in the next few decades.

98%

Payroll taxes: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security benefits to help beneficiaries meet the rising cost of living. This plan would impose a payroll tax on incomes over \$400,000 to pay for new, expanded benefits, ensure Social Security is fully funded for future generations, and make millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share.

96%

Retire with dignity: Democrats are fighting to expand Social Security and extend its solvency so that everyone in America can retire with dignity. Americans pay into Social Security throughout their lives, and all deserve access to the benefits that they have earned over a lifetime of hard work.

97%

SS2100: Democrats are trying to pass a bill that would expand Social Security benefits to protect low income workers by increasing the minimum monthly benefit, raise the cost-of-living adjustment to protect against inflation, and make millionaires and billionaires pay the same payroll tax rate as everyone else.

97%

Hard-earned benefits: Democrats know Social Security is a benefit earned over a lifetime of work, not an entitlement. Republicans are eager to cut Social Security and strip hard-earned benefits from beneficiaries who've paid into the system their entire lives. Democrats are fighting to protect and expand Social Security for all beneficiaries.

96%

Fully paid for: Democrats have a plan to expand Social Security benefits in the United States, which will be fully paid for by making millionaires and billionaires in our country pay their fair share of income taxes. The ultra-wealthy have avoided doing so for far too long.

97%

Triumph: Democrats are fighting to protect and expand Social Security, which has been a triumph of the

87%



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American government for nearly 100 years and keeps seniors out of poverty. Social Security is something Americans should be proud of, and Democrats will always fight to protect it at a moment when it is under threat.

80 years: Democrats have a plan to protect and expand Social Security benefits for all beneficiaries. Social Security is one of the most popular and successful government programs in American history. For more than 80 years, Social Security has paid out every benefit owed to every eligible American on time and without delay.

Kicking the issue down the line: Democrats are fighting to expand Social Security benefits and deliver relief to millions of Americans who are struggling to meet rising costs while living on fixed incomes. Republicans, on the other hand, are trying to kick this issue down the line, leaving millions of Americans ages 62+ continuously vulnerable to inflation.

Perfect Solution: We should be doing anything within our power to improve Social Security. We don't have time to wait around for a perfect solution; we should pass a bill now that we know will expand benefits and protect beneficiaries from rising costs of living. Democrats are fighting to improve benefits now.

88%

88%

72%