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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and WWVAF

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## **Tipping the Senate battleground states in the final month**

Survey in Senate battleground and Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, and North Carolina

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For the first time in this election cycle, the WWVAF-Democracy Corps Senate battleground shows a consistent move toward the Democrats across a broad range of indicators that suggest the Democrats are more likely to hold control of the U.S. Senate than not. This election is still on a knife-edge; the overall vote remains unchanged and many states are within a couple of points. But the underlying dynamics and key metrics have all moved away from the Republicans. Some of these changes are dramatic, though the context remains a battleground that Romney won by 8 points. However, Democrats are poised to hold on.

This is a unique and large scale survey for Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund. It includes a core battleground survey of 1,000 interviews and an additional 1,200 interviews conducted in the battleground states of North Carolina, Iowa, Georgia and Colorado. These surveys were completed on October 1 and were incorporated into the battleground.<sup>1</sup>

The big story is that the Democratic campaigns have succeeded in making the candidates' positions on women's issues the second biggest reason voters are voting for the Democrat – after the economy, of course. At the same time, minority voters' support for the Affordable Care Act has risen dramatically – and for them, the health care law has become the second largest factor in their vote.

The result is that those voting Democratic are as consolidated and as intent on voting as those voting for Republicans. That Republican advantage is now gone in the battleground.

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<sup>1</sup> This presentation is based on this unique survey of 1,000 likely 2014 voters (unweighted 2200) in the most competitive Senate races across the country, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund. This survey was conducted from September 20-24, 2014 using a list of 2006 voters, 2010 voters, and new registrants. Unless otherwise noted, the margin of error for the full sample is = +/- 2.09% at 95% confidence. This also includes over-samples conducted for Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund in Georgia, Iowa, North Carolina, and Colorado, conducted September 25-October 1, 2014 and included in the full sample for this analysis.



A Democratic “in-your shoes” agenda for working women and men and strong populist message is beginning to become the dominant narrative, even in this very Republican battleground. But when Republicans are attacked on their opposition to equal pay and to women not being charged more for insurance, and when they are attacked on their use of unlimited secret money to keep taxes down for billionaires and CEOs, the race shifts from Republicans ahead by 2 points to Democrats ahead by 2. That gain is produced by even more gains among the Rising American Electorate, including unmarried women.

The reason why the battle has become less uphill is the improved position of the Democratic Party and Democratic incumbents, and the worsening standing of Republican candidates and Mitch McConnell. At the same time, the President’s approval rating has risen, and support for his handling of ISIS is strong. Support has risen for the Affordable Care Act. But perhaps as important, Republicans and conservative Republicans are not as strongly opposed to the President.

It all adds up to a final month where Democrats have the chance to take these gains a step further and hold on to their Senate majority.

Both the changing importance of “women’s issues” and the massive outside spending has created a powerful, populist opportunity to shift the vote. These battleground Senate races that start with Republicans ahead by 2 points end with Democrats ahead by 2. That could well be the difference for Senate control. The big impact comes from:

- Attacking Republican candidate on opposing equal pay for women and refusing to ensure women don’t pay more for health insurance; advocating specific policies in an agenda for working women and men: specifically, raising the minimum wage and making college affordable so they can get better paying jobs.
- Attacking Republicans for supporting a Supreme Court decision allowing unlimited secret money to buy elections and protect billionaires and CEOs from increased taxes; advocating for a constitutional amendment to bar secret money in elections.

### **The Narrative**

People are drowning because jobs don't pay enough to live on. We need leaders who can live a day of our lives and make change for us, not for the richest who show up with the big money. We must help people here with affordable college, job training, and childcare. We must raise the minimum wage and make sure women get equal pay so working women and families can keep up with the cost of living. We need an economy here that works for working people and the middle class again, not just those with the big money.



**Equal Pay & Health Insurance**

More and more women are breadwinners for their families, but women make just 77 cents for every dollar men make. (Republican incumbent/candidate) is opposed to requiring equal pay for women who do the same job as a man. And (he/she) would allow insurance companies to charge women higher premiums than men and force women to pay for preventive care like mammograms.

**Unlimited Secret Money to Protect Billionaires and CEOs**

(Republican incumbent/candidate) supports the Supreme Court's decision to allow wealthy special interests and big corporations spend unlimited amounts of secret money to buy elections, taking the power away from regular citizens and putting it in the hands of just a few billionaires. So, (Republican incumbent/candidate) made sure CEOs paid no higher taxes and that their loopholes are protected, while working men and women struggle.

**The changing battleground and changing election stakes**

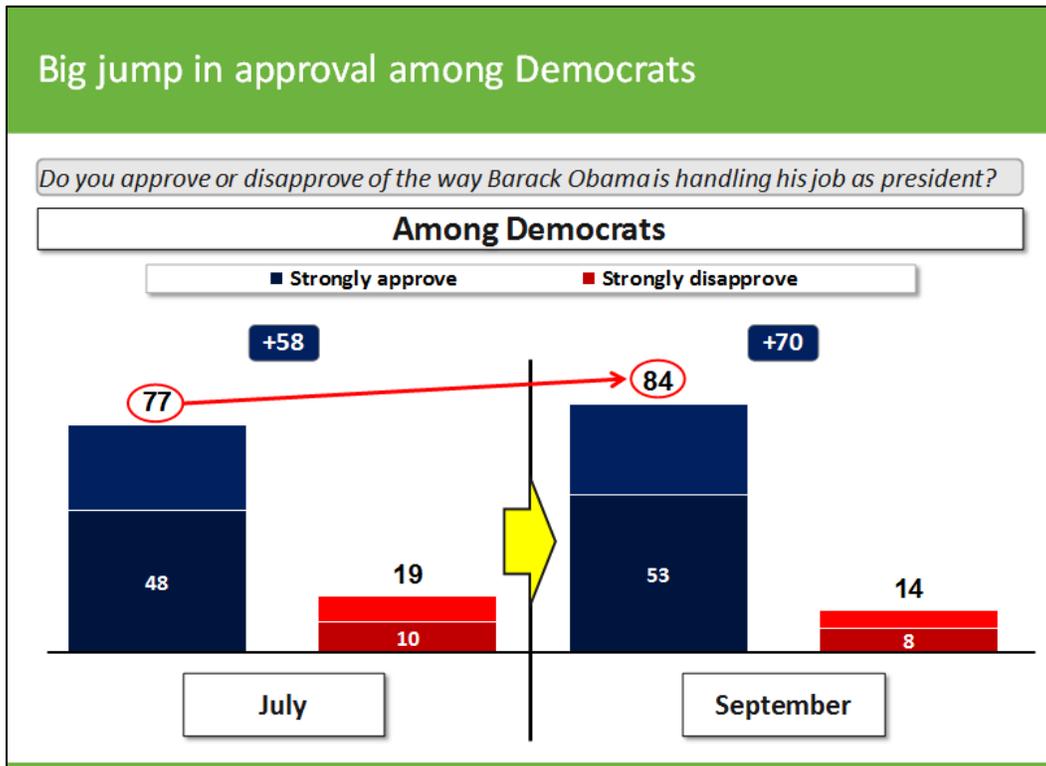
The race for the battleground remains on a knife-edge, with Republicans having a 2-point lead across these 12 states, even without Kansas where Republican Mitt Romney won 8 percent of the vote. Voters have not been enamored with the President; the Affordable Care Act was a cautionary tale for big government; and, like in 2010, Republicans had enthusiasm in their base, driven by hostility to Barack Obama's agenda. The dark mood in the country was supposed to be a killing field for Democratic incumbents, who are up for reelection in large numbers in 2014. But that is not what the Senate battleground looks like today. The dynamics have shifted. What is at stake in the election has shifted. Who is engaged in this election has changed. Who is up and who is down on America's scorecard has changed.

Some of these changes are small in scale, some are robust and others dramatic, but all are in the same direction and Democrats seem to be winning the argument. This large 2,200 interview survey in the battleground and oversample in four key states indicates that we will still see many very close elections on November 4th, with a few more won by Democrats, and that it should be enough for the Vice President to preside as Democrats continue their majority.

The President's approval had been stuck in all our polls at 37 and is now up to 41 percent in these battleground states and up to 46 percent on handling Isis in Iraq and Syria, including a quarter of Republicans. But there are bigger things are going on with approval ratings that suggest the battle is changing. The approval rating of self-identified Democrats has gone up 7 points and the strong approval has reached 53 percent. Democrats are growing proud to support the president and that seems that emerged in the last 2 weeks. But something else is happening. The strong disapproval of Obama's job performance has fallen 8 points among Republicans and 7



points among conservative Republicans. That is inconvenient for Republicans when the election strategy was premised on opposite trends.



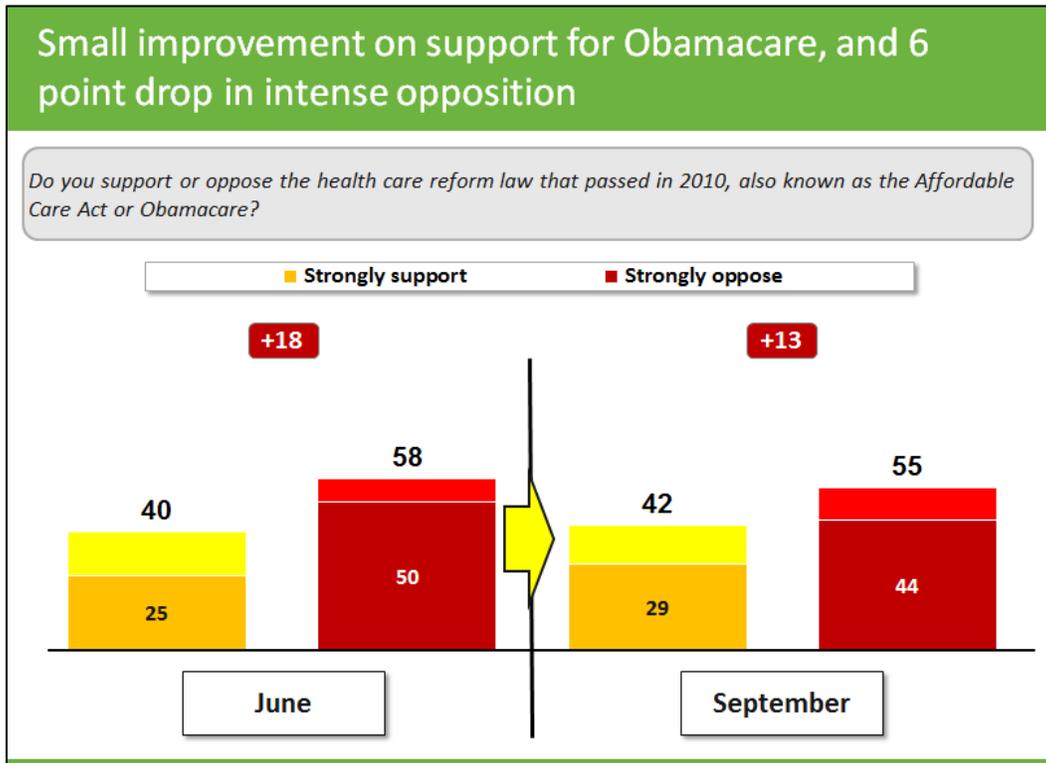
Public reaction to the Affordable Care Act is beginning to affect the race that is helping Democrats. We knew the Republican strategy was to get Democratic candidates to pay a price for being “the deciding vote on Obamacare,” and perhaps most importantly, to motivate their base. There is no evidence that it has hurt Democrats, because one in five Obamacare opponents say they are opposed because it is not a government-run single payer Canadian system. Only 42 percent are opposed because of big government, making it an issue limited to the Republican base. However, it does continue to be a base issue: 38 percent of Republican voters say that the health care law was the most important issue in their vote, behind the economy and foreign policy.

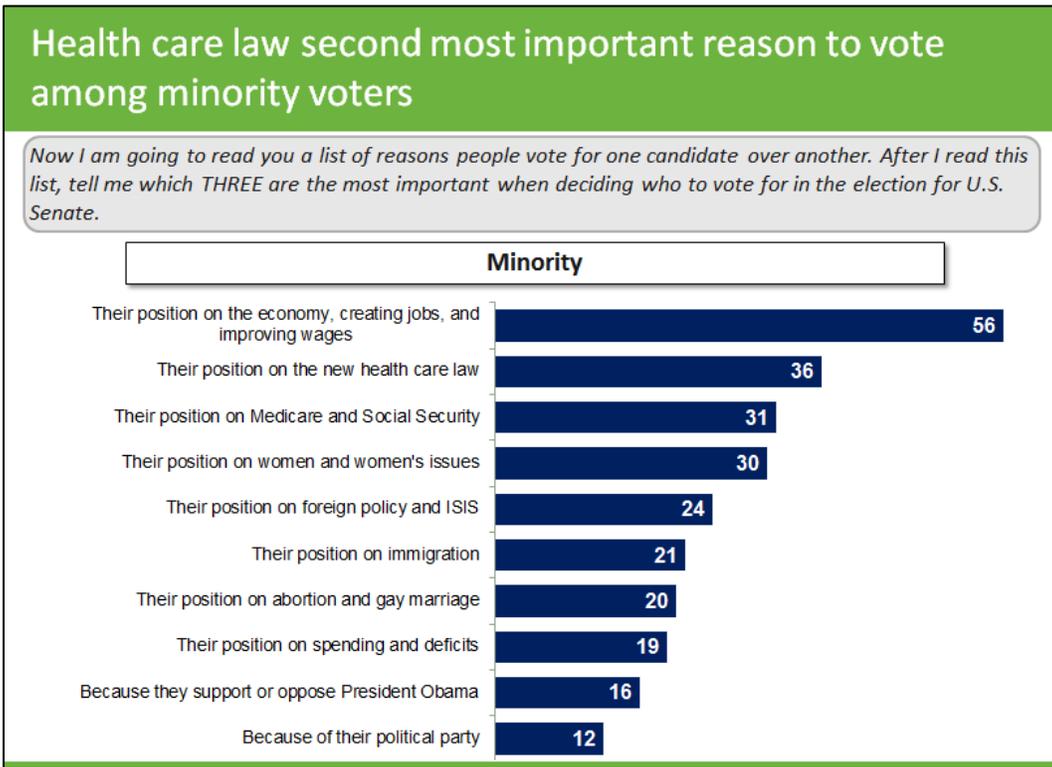
But this has not turned out as expected. In the battleground, the number of those who favor the Affordable Care Act is up 2 points to 42 percent and opposed down to 55 percent, but strong disapproval is down 6 points.

But critical things have happened in reaction. For unmarried women and the huge Rising American Electorate, it is the health care law that has become the second most important reason to vote for the Democrat, after the economy. For minority voters, the health care law has become the second most important reason to vote and an astonishing 74 percent support the current law. Un-



til recent months, the bulk of Republican advertising was on Obamacare, declining now to a still-conservative one-quarter of their overall messaging. But that effort by Republicans is backfiring, as it has made the ACA a motivating issue for those most affected.





The consequences of the Republican party-brand problem has become apparent in these states as the Republican candidates get attacked on all the issues that had played out more dramatically in Washington during the budget fights. But it is the advertising battle in the states that matter. Across this Republican-leaning battleground, we are watching in real time the modest rise in favorability of the Democratic Party, Barack Obama, and Harry Reid, while the Republican Party is stable but at a level of favorability below that for the Democrats. Mitch McConnell has become as well-known as Harry Reid and is most unpopular national leader in the battleground.

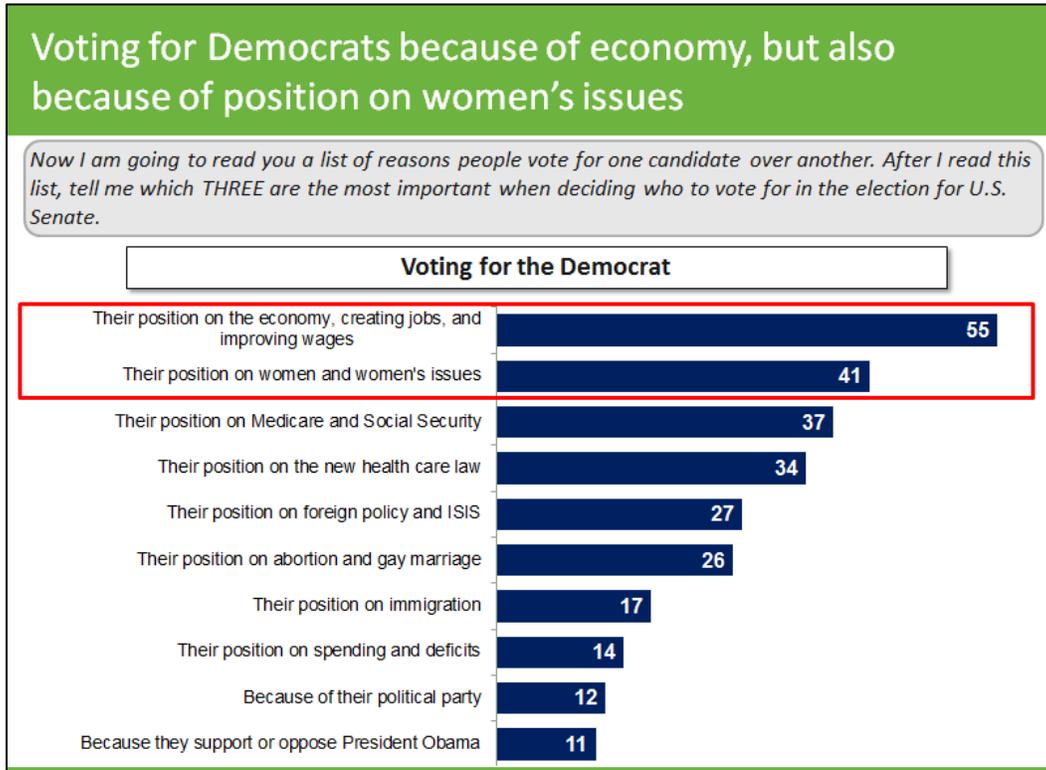
The seven Democratic incumbents have managed, in the face of incoming fire, to raise their approval rating in the last month by 2 points, and their approval is now 4 points higher than the President's. They have managed to battle back to where they are only 5 points underwater among independents. The incumbents in particular have managed to build up an image advantage over their Republican challengers: the proportion viewing them very favorably is 8 points stronger than for their Republican opponents.

Democrats have successfully impacted the agenda of this election and what issues are important, starting with candidates' positions on women and women's issues. That has become one the biggest reason to vote against the Republican and to vote at all. In many races, Democratic candidates are advocating for equal pay for women, and attacking Republicans for opposing it and



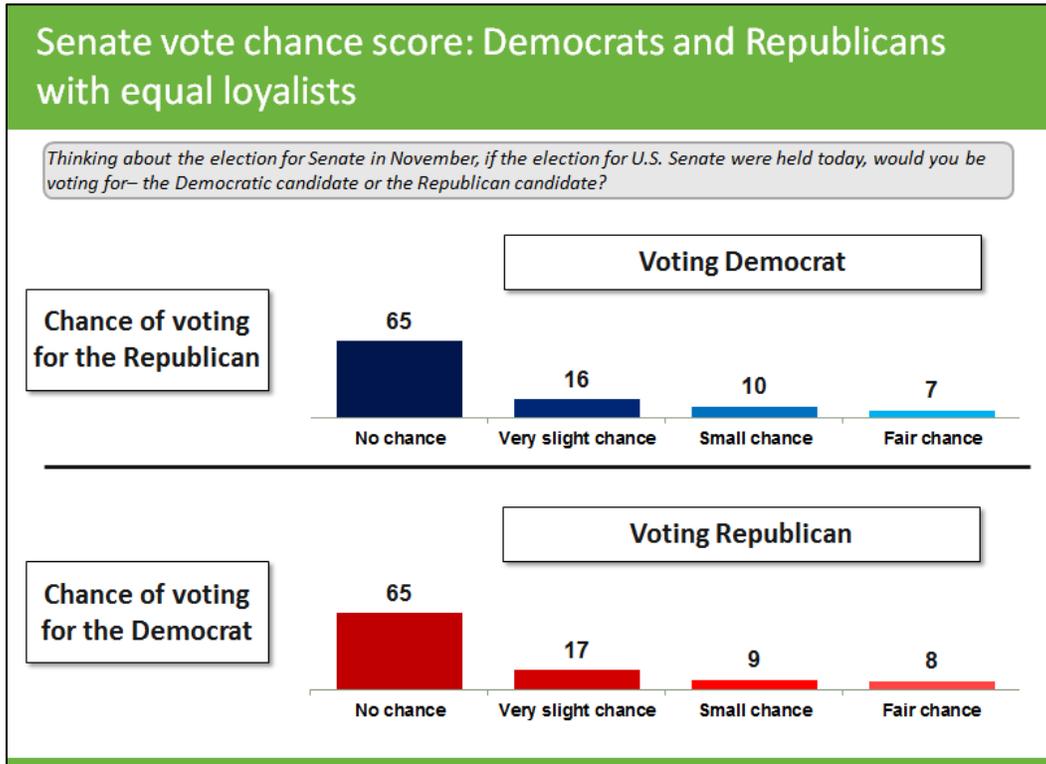
wanting to go back to letting insurance companies drop coverage for pre-existing conditions and charging women more; these Republicans are also being attacked on contraception and abortion.

Stunningly, those voting Democratic now cite the candidate's position "on women and women's issues" as the second most important factor in their vote, behind the economy.



That has changed both who is supporting the Democrat and, perhaps as important, who is intent on voting. It has produced a huge shift in the proportion of white unmarried women (a 14-point rise in the vote margin) supporting the Democratic Senate candidate. With unmarried women overall giving Democrats 58 percent of their votes, their support could approach presidential level.

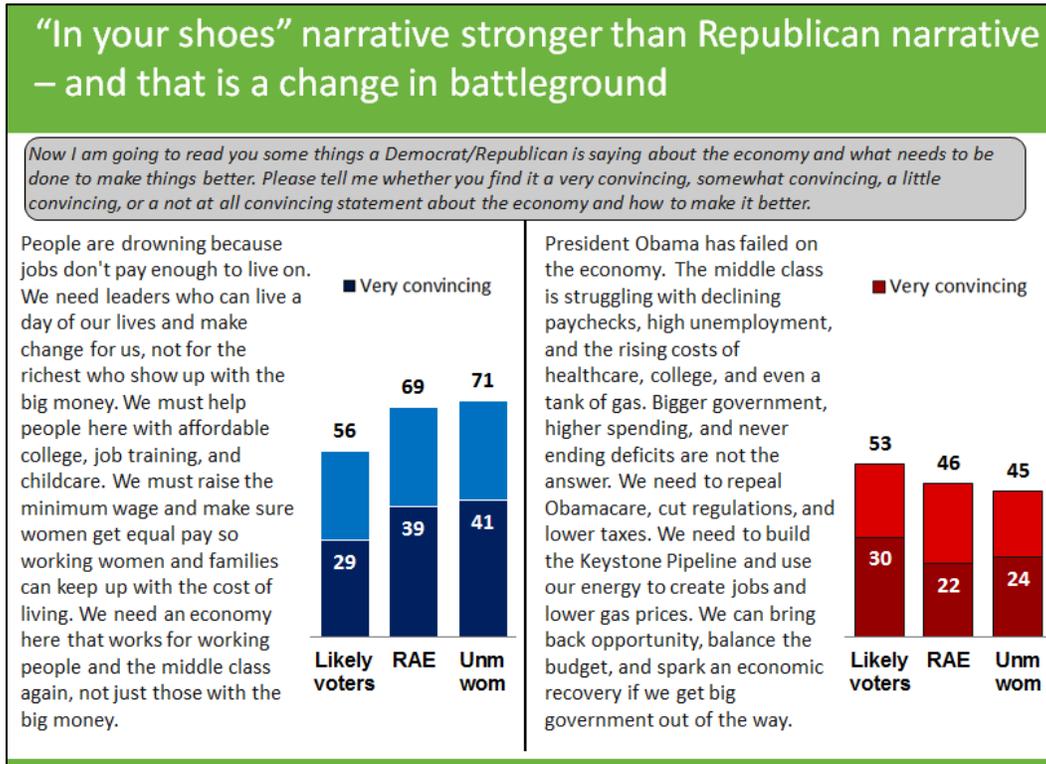
The result is that Democrats have become more consolidated behind the Democratic candidate (84 percent of Democrats supporting the Democrat and the same proportion of Republicans for their candidate) and as firm in their vote choice as the Republican: two-thirds of each say they are absolutely committed to their vote. This survey is with off-year voters, but there is no longer a gap in intention to vote: 91 percent of those voting Democratic and 94 percent of those voting Republican are “almost certain to vote.” And on the voter file, those voting Democratic score slightly higher on vote propensity measure.



Democrats are also starting to win the message debate in the battleground. That is new and indicative of shifting battleground and important to the final month.

In the NPR battleground survey that is part of this expanded-state battleground survey, the Democratic message defeated the Republican message crafted by Resurgent Republic’s Whit Ayres and partner Karl Rove in the effort to win the Senate. We urge you to look at that, because just three months ago, the Democratic message lost by 10 points. It was not an identical message as tested previously, but it advances a Democratic message centered on the middle class, populist, protecting American jobs and raising the minimum wage and equal pay for women.

But this survey released today tests the same in-your shoes message that we tested in July. Now, Democrats have emerged with a 3-point advantage on their core narrative – after being at parity in previous polls. More importantly, the regression model shows this Democratic message has a bigger impact on the re-vote at the end of the survey than does the Republican message – the opposite of what was true in our previous poll in the Senate battleground. In two of the four states where we conducted the oversample, the in-your-shoes message was more powerful than the Republican.



This battle of narratives, combined with the competing economic agendas and attacks, brings the race to even in Georgia, puts Braley ahead in Iowa, and Kay Hagan further ahead in North Carolina. It leaves Colorado tied.

This is an unfinished story, of course, but the battleground is less tilted than it was before and many of these changes give Democrats an opportunity to finish stronger.

**The road to further Democratic gains: women and secret money**

This poll provides a very clear set of weapons to take advantage of what the campaigns have already produced and hit hard: the role of big money at a point when these states are saturated by outside campaign advertising. Democratic Senate campaigns make further gains when they hit the Republicans first on equal pay and equal health insurance, re-enforced with key parts of economic agenda for working women and men; and second, when they hit the Republicans hard on the flood of unlimited, secret money that means the Republican protects the interests of billionaires and CEOs, rather than the middle class.



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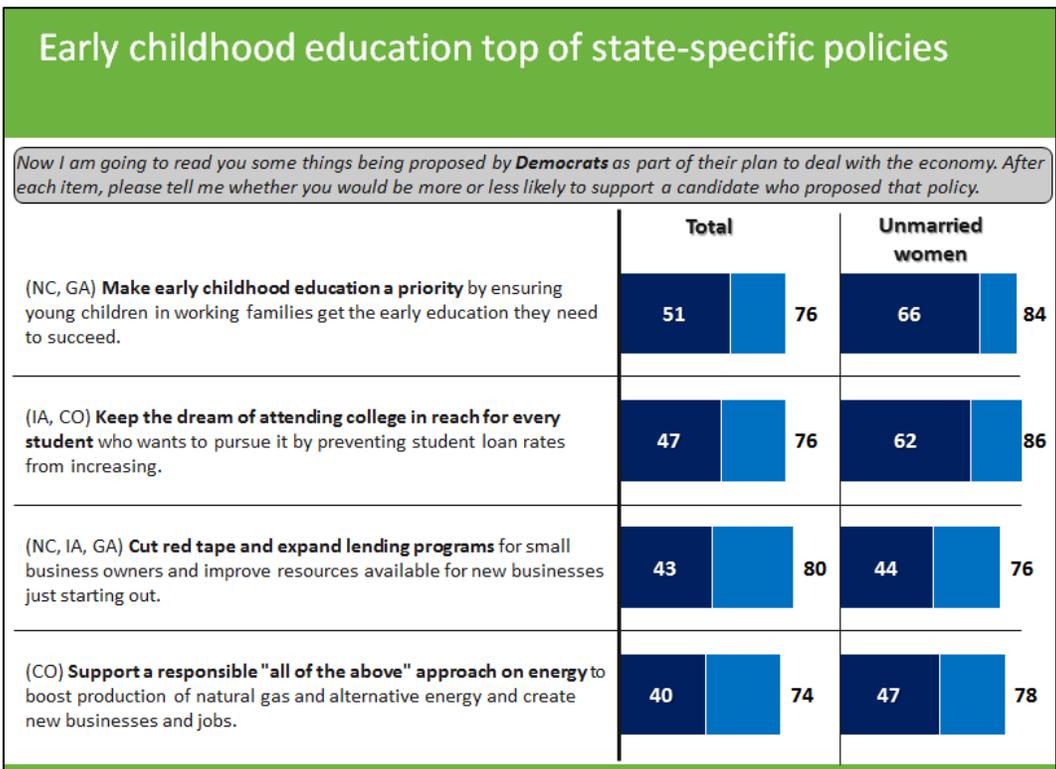
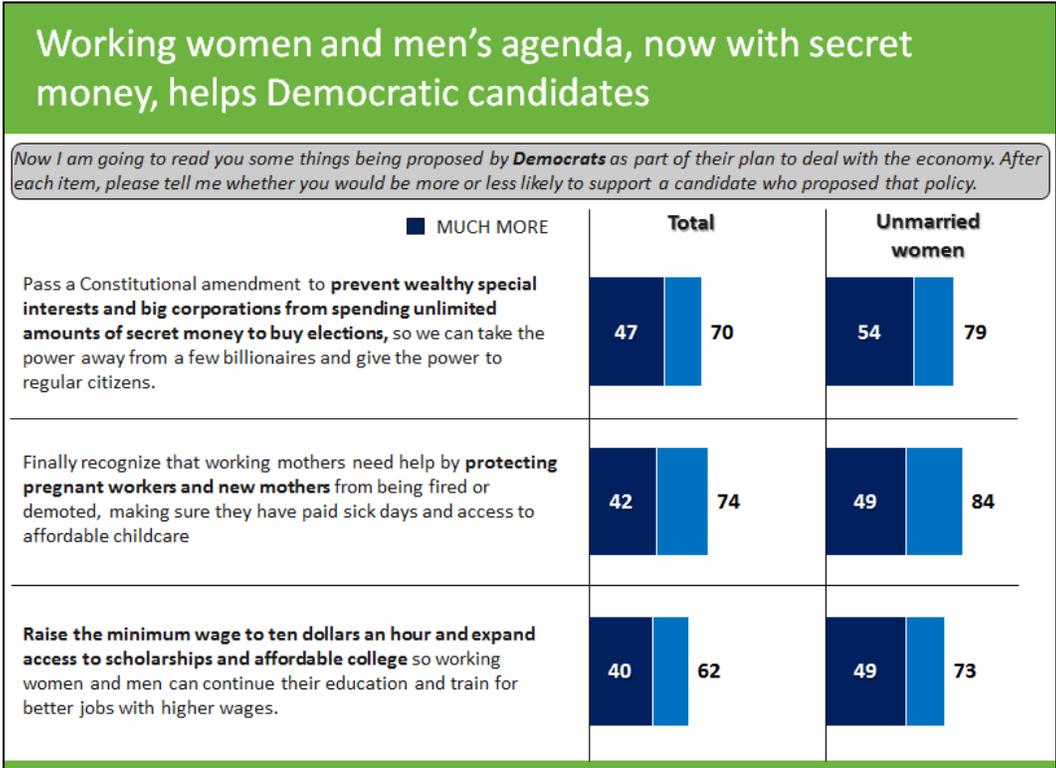
Both the changing importance of “women’s issues” and the massive outside spending has created a powerful, populist opportunity to shift the vote. These battleground Senate races that start with Republicans ahead by 2 points end with Democrats ahead by 2. That could well be the difference for Senate control. The big impact comes from:

- The attack on equal pay and policies that help working women (raising minimum wage and making college affordable so they can get better paying jobs);
- Advocating for a constitutional amendment to bar secret money and the attack on unlimited money to keep billionaires and CEOs from increased taxes.

### **Bring women home**

Campaigns of all political stripes that wish to continue to move the electorate should give new emphasis to the parts of the economic agenda for working women and men – both the policies that we tested from WWVAF’s national plan but also the specifics that have been advanced effectively in these states – as confirmed by this poll.

The graph below shows the power with all voters and unmarried women – and it is important to emphasize that the ones that had the strongest impact on the revote. Across state, the most impactful part of this agenda was raising the minimum wage but also “expanding access to scholarships and affordable college so working women and men can continue their education and train for better jobs with higher wages.” In the states where we tested relief from the interest rate burden on college loans, they did very well. Policies that recognize the need of working mothers were also impactful.





We cannot understate how strong the attack on these candidates on equal pay and women’s access to health care is. In terms of the regression, this is the strongest driver of the vote: “More and more women are breadwinners for their families, but women make just 77 cents for every dollar men make. Cory Gardner is opposed to requiring equal pay for women who do the same job as a man. And he would allow insurance companies to charge women higher premiums than men and force women to pay for preventive care like mammograms.”

The states we oversampled underline the importance of this attack. Even where there are stronger messages, the equal pay attack solicits strong doubts on the Republican candidate. And this attack is the strongest driver of the vote in three of the four states. In Iowa it is the strongest attack on Jodi Ernst, with nearly two-thirds of voters concerned about her after the attack, 38 percent very strongly. In North Carolina it produces 37 percent very serious doubts for Thom Tillis, and 35 percent very serious doubts about Cory Gardner in Colorado. And in Georgia, even though it is not the strongest attack, it still rates over half (56 percent) serious doubts.

### **Follow the money**

It is hard to understate the intensity of the response to the role of big money, but discussed in ways that seem very relevant to the flood of campaign advertising impacting these states. We saw that above in the response to a positive proposal to pass a Constitutional amendment to limit secret and corporate money. But the attack that was presented here was constructed to relate to the way people feel about the economy and the role of government advantaging the special interests and CEOs at the expense of ordinary workers and citizens.

(Republican incumbent/candidate) supports the Supreme Court's decision to allow wealthy special interests and big corporations spend unlimited amounts of secret money to buy elections, taking the power away from regular citizens and putting it in the hands of just a few billionaires. So, (Republican incumbent/candidate) made sure CEOs paid no higher taxes and that their loopholes are protected, while working men and women struggle.

This attack is extremely significant in our four targeted states. It is the first or second strongest message in all four states. It is far and away the strongest attack in Georgia, and one of strongest on Tillis in North Carolina and on Ernst in Iowa. In Colorado, even as abortion is the strongest attack on Gardner, prioritizing the wants of special interests over the needs of his constituency is the second strongest attack, with over a third (37 percent) very serious doubts and 62 percent total doubts.



**The close**

Every element of this message – the in-your shoes narrative, the focus on women and big money – have a strong populist, outsider tone that is proving very effective in this year when voters are angry with what is happening with the economy and what is happening in Washington, where dysfunction, special interests, and partisan gridlock leave people pessimistic to say the least.

But Democrats do have closing messages that break through.

The focus on these issues in the context of the in-your shoes economic message produces a 4-point shift in the race – led by the Rising American Electorate and even more gains among unmarried women. Importantly, those voters not part of the Rising American Electorate improve marginally for the Democrats – suggesting that this Democratic close is not polarizing and does not produce offsetting ripples. These are major shifts that can tip a lot of races that are on the edge.



**Appendix A: Battleground State List and Definitions**

**Battleground States**

<b>States</b>	<b>Incumbent</b>	<b>2012 Presidential margin</b>
Alaska	Mark Begich	Romney +14.0
Arkansas	Mark Pryor	Romney +23.6
Colorado	Mark Udall	Obama +4.7
Georgia	OPEN (Chambliss)	Romney +8.0
Iowa	OPEN (Harkin)	Obama +5.6
Kentucky	Mitch McConnell	Romney +22.7
Louisiana	Mary Landrieu	Romney +17.2
Michigan	OPEN (Levin)	Obama +9.5
Montana	John Walsh	Romney +13.5
New Hampshire	Jeanne Shaheen	Obama +5.8
North Carolina	Kay Hagan	Romney +2.2
West Virginia	OPEN (Rockefeller)	Romney +26.8

<b>Regional</b>	<b>2012 Presidential Result</b>	<b>Competitive Tier</b>
<b>Midwest and East</b>	<b>Won by Romney</b>	<b>Tier 1 (Most Dem)</b>
Iowa	Alaska	Colorado
Michigan	Arkansas	Michigan
New Hampshire	Georgia	New Hampshire
West Virginia	Kentucky	North Carolina
<b>West</b>	Louisiana	<b>Tier 2</b>
Alaska	Montana	Alaska
Colorado	North Carolina	Arkansas
Montana	West Virginia	Iowa
<b>South</b>	<b>Won by Obama</b>	Louisiana
Arkansas	Colorado	<b>Tier 3 (Most Rep)</b>
Georgia	Iowa	Georgia
Kentucky	Michigan	Montana
Louisiana	New Hampshire	Kentucky
North Carolina		West Virginia