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To: Interested reporters

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Early breakthrough moment in off-year elections

Key findings from new focus groups with working women in Ohio & Virginia

On behalf of Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund (WVWVAF), Democracy Corps went to the battleground states of Virginia and Ohio to speak to African American, white millennial and younger unmarried women and white older unmarried and working class women – the working women who will play a critical role in determining whether Democrats make a comeback in the coming off-year elections.¹ Each of these groups disappointed Democrats to varying degrees in terms of vote and/or turnout in past off-years and in 2016, but our findings in these focus groups give us confidence that a dramatically better performance, even a wave, is possible.

- The Trump voters among these women are not yet regretting their vote, but the defeat of the Trump-Ryan health care replacement was demoralizing and opened their eyes. For the first time, Trump voters do not push back when presented with critical new information. They accept the CBO findings about the Trump-Ryan health care bill and are disturbed it would not lower costs as promised and would hurt seniors and the disabled. They accept an attack on Trump's budget because it mentions one of his signature priorities – the wall. They strongly oppose the wall, especially when paid for by cutting Meals on Wheels and after-school programs that make a difference in their communities.
- Exposure to information about the Trump-Ryan health care replacement and Trump's radical budget priorities lead the women in these groups – the Trump voters included – to express a potentially disruptive new doubt about Trump: that he is too rich and far removed from ordinary struggles to see the harm his policies would do. This is the context in which Trump's wealth and temperament matter to his voters.
- The women who oppose Trump in these groups are already leaning into the upcoming off-year elections and are energized by the resistance to the Trump presidency. Many of these focus group participants – especially the more Democratic-leaning African American and millennial women – would typically drop off in a midterm election. Their early

¹ On behalf of WVWVAF, Democracy Corps conducted six focus groups among working women March 23, 27-28 in Ohio and Virginia: white unmarried women over 45 and white non-college women in Akron, OH; white unmarried women under 45 and white millennial women in Cleveland, OH; African American women and white non-college women in Richmond, VA. Each group had a representative mix of Clinton (anti-Trump) and Trump voters.



engagement and intense opposition to Trump suggest a greater level of participation is possible in the upcoming off-year elections.

Trump voters: the AHCA failure and Trump’s budget priorities open the door for a disruptive new critique

Less than 100 days in, Trump voters in these groups are not second guessing their choice, especially because they believe his opponents are refusing to accept the election result. But the failure of the Trump-Ryan ACA replacement and the administration’s failure to get support for Trump’s first budget were demoralizing for his supporters and open the door for a disruptive new critique.

It is clear something seriously had changed because when presented with the Congressional Budget Office findings about the AHCA and a long list of facts about the administration, there was no push back on their accuracy from the Trump voters in these groups, as has been the case. The fact that Ryan and Trump were publicly humiliated by pulling the bill from the floor made the health care critiques credible. The information we presented about Trump’s budget priorities mentioned funding for his border wall which gave credence to other facts about the budget.

The Trump voters in these groups believed he promised to make health care more affordable for everyone. With the unaffordability of health care surging to the top of the concerns these working women want addressed, even some of the Clinton voters hoped Trump would get health care costs under control. As you can see by their initial reactions to the AHCA below, these women were horrified the replacement was so bad and ask, “Why would you do this to America?”

It’s terrible. (White non-college woman, Akron)	It’s scary and unsettling. (White non-college woman, Akron)
It doesn’t look very good at all. (White unmarried woman 45+, Akron)	I don’t even know what to think of it. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)
It’s not any better than what we had. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)	I think this raises a lot of questions. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)
It just sounds crazy. (White millennial woman, Cleveland)	This is scary. (White non-college woman, Richmond)
Obamacare is bad and this is bad. (White millennial woman, Cleveland)	It’s not accomplishing anything. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)
It’s not doing anybody any good. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)	That’s not a plan, that’s not anything better. (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)

They were most upset that the Trump-Ryan plan would hurt seniors and the disabled; they shook their heads when they learned this. They were also shocked that premiums would go up by 15 to 20 percent. One woman, nearly crying, said “If I have to pay another dollar to my premium, I might shoot someone.” Some of Trump’s voters began to worry that his lack of experience could mean he won’t be able to bring the promised change on health care.



But nothing mattered as much for these women as Trump's proposed spending to build his wall, paid for by cutting funds for Meals on Wheels, after-school programs and cancer research.

He proposed to cut spending on programs like Meals on Wheels, after-school programs for children, and research on climate change and cancer. At the same time, he is proposing a \$54 billion increase in defense spending, including billions to build a border wall.

We have rarely seen an attack breakthrough like this. Over two-thirds of every group marked his budget priorities as a top concern and overall half of the participants said it was the most concerning doubt of all, meaning Trump and Clinton voters were finally on the same page. Their attention went to the impact this would have on their community. These cuts hit close to home.

“These programs are community-based. And I think taking something like that away—you want to keep the communities together. And they say, usually, the people that bring you your Meals on Wheels are one of your neighbors. And after school programs are run by retired people who live in the community. And I think that's important.” (White unmarried woman 45+, Akron)

“Those are things that everybody is concerned about. Parents work full time, they need that after-school care. What do you do if you don't have that? I baby sit sometimes for families and they need me, so I can relate. And people that can't afford food... (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)

Some wonder if after-school program cuts will exacerbate problems with crime and drugs facing kids with working parents. Cutting cancer research funding was another head-scratcher: “Cancer is one of the things in there. So that kills people right?” That Trump chose to cut programs that need more resources to build his wall made many of them livid and said a lot about his priorities:

“It just seems like he – his priorities are in the wrong place, to spend that much money on putting up a wall when it could be helping save lives or feeding hungry people or taking care of our own country.” (White unmarried woman <45, Cleveland)

“So he's taking money from things that are actually happening every day, and putting more money towards hypothetical situations, which I think makes him very out of touch with the reality of life for many, many people.” (White millennial woman, Cleveland)

After being exposed to information about the “scary” consequences of the AHCA and his radical budget priorities, the Trump supporting women in these groups said his plans just show “he's never been poor” and “never been hungry,” and “he needs to be more in touch with what people need.” They began asking whether he is so pampered he's unable to see how much his policies will hurt ordinary people. In private post-cards to President Trump at the end of the night, a significant number of Trump voters begged him to live a day in their shoes and show compassion for the middle class, seniors and kids. This concern is fundamental and emotive. It is a critical opening that could unravel support for Trump and the congressional Republicans.

President Trump,
Please try to work on one or two things at a time so you can finish them. Also, take care of the poor or lower class, feed the children, take care of the elderly. Do not lose sight of people who are not as fortunate as you. I voted for you! Don't make me look like a fool!!

Dear Mr. President,
For us to move ahead and truly live the American Dream, how can you help us be a better America? Have you been in our shoes and how would your perspective change if you were. Please know we are being patient but can't take much more negativity, politically. Thank you!



Anti-Trump voters: already engaged and intensely opposed to Trump

Trump's opponents in these groups already appear to be engaged and paying attention to politics, which is much earlier than we have seen in previous cycles. There is real intensity behind their doubts about Trump and they use words like “flabbergasted,” “devastated” and “terrified” to describe how they feel about the country. But there is a consciousness people are out there resisting and that gives them hope:

“There are people organizing and finally getting their heads out of the sand and paying attention to what’s going on in politics.” (White non-college woman, Akron)

“I think it’s good that people are coming together. The Women’s March sticks out in my mind. That, whether or not it’s for a good cause that you agree with or not, people are still kind of coming together I think is an important thing.” (White millennial woman, Cleveland)

Perhaps because they do not feel alone, the Clinton voters actually push back against Trump voters in conversation, even when outnumbered in the room. This turned out to be an unintended test of the strength of their views and resolve to resist. This sort of intensity suggests some of the women – particularly the African American and young women – that would typically drop off in midterms are more likely to engage in the upcoming off-year elections.

The challenge for Democrats right now is that their brand and agenda is so undefined. The party is almost exclusively associated with social justice, and they do not associate the party with an economic agenda. For Democrats to make gains, they must fill in the picture about what the party values and can offer working women to improve their lives and struggles with the cost of living. That will establish the powerful contrast and choice needed for a shattering off-year election.