

To: Protect Our Care
From: Geoff Garin
Date: January 24, 2025
Re: Democrats Have a Winning Hand to Play on Healthcare

This memorandum presents the key findings of our newly completed survey for Protect Our Care, conducted January 16 to 20 among a representative national cross section of 1,503 voters.

1. Healthcare is an issue that matters personally to voters, and congressional Democrats have an opportunity to build a strong and compelling contrast with Republicans on healthcare in a way that demonstrates Democrats are more in step with voters' views and priorities.

Healthcare is personal to voters, and few public policy issues hit home with voters as directly as healthcare does. Nearly all voters say healthcare is very (56%) or fairly (30%) important to them when they vote in elections for Congress. The importance of healthcare as a voting issue cuts across party lines, geography, and demographic groups. Majorities of Black voters, Hispanic voters, white women, and white working-class voters all say the issue is very important to them.

Democrats have a small partisan advantage today on the issue of healthcare, but the advantage has the potential to become massive when voters hear congressional Republicans agenda' and the fundamental differences between the two parties on the issue. At the start of the poll, voters say by just 44% to 40% that Democrats are more aligned with their views and priorities on healthcare than are Republicans (11% say neither are and 5% are not sure). After hearing about the GOP healthcare agenda and the key contrasts between the two parties, the Democratic advantage on the issue grows to 59% to 22%. Increases in support for Democrats are bigger than average among working-class and low-income white voters (+23), small town and rural white voters (+21), white women (+21), and AAPI voters (+21). Black and Hispanic voters start out considerably more supportive of Democrats than average, but Democrats make further progress with them over the course of survey.

2. Voters move on the issue of healthcare in large part because they soundly reject key parts of the Republican healthcare agenda when they hear about it. Even with partisan cues, large swaths of Trump voters disapprove of many Republican policies.

At least two-thirds of voters express disapproval of 10 different policy proposals that congressional Republicans have discussed in the past few months, including strong disapproval on many of them. On six, more than 60% of Trump voters disapprove—notwithstanding the fact that these are explicitly identified as proposals by Republicans in Congress.

	Strongly disapprove	Somewhat disapprove		Trump %
Ban drug price negotiations	66%	23%	89%	83
Cut health \$ to offset tax cuts	60%	22%	82%	74
High risk pools for pre-ex	56%	24%	80%	72
Raise Medicare eligibility age	51%	28%	79%	72
Major Medicaid cuts	50%	28%	78%	67
Raise ACA premiums	45%	27%	72%	61
Privatize Medicare	43%	26%	69%	55
Repeal \$2,000 cap	48%	20%	68%	57
Reduce Medicaid eligiility	38%	27%	65%	49
Repeal the ACA	42%	22%	64%	38

The following Republican policies are especially important to brightly spotlight:

- *“Ban Medicare from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices.”*
- *“Make large cuts in funding for healthcare programs in order to offset the cost of large new tax cuts for the wealthy and large corporations.”*
- *“Require people with pre-existing medical conditions to get coverage through separate high-risk insurance pools with much higher premiums, instead of regular health insurance.”*
- *“Raise the age when people can become eligible for Medicare.”*
- *“Make major cuts in funding for Medicaid.”*

Before going into more detail on several of these policies, a few points are worth highlighting.

First, on the issue of **drug price negotiations** there is a stronger negative response to saying that Republicans would “ban Medicare from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices” than to saying that Republicans would “repeal the law that gives Medicare the power to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices”—though large majorities oppose both ways. One reason why it is better to say that Republicans would ban Medicare from negotiating for lower prices is that not all voters are aware of the price negotiation provisions of the IRA, with 38% of voters saying they have heard very little about it or nothing at all. Awareness is particularly low among women under age of 50, Black voters, and white working-class or lower-income voters.

Second, when told about Medicare price negotiations, just 4% of voters say the law should be repealed, while 63% say the law should be expanded (for example by covering more drugs and people). Fifty-five percent (55%) of Republican voters want the price negotiations to be expanded. This is consistent with our previous polls for Protect Our Care that show overwhelming support for Democratic legislation to strengthen the drug pricing reforms in the IRA by increasing the number of drugs subject to negotiation and applying the reforms to private insurance plans as well as Medicare.

Third, while it is powerful to **connect GOP healthcare spending cuts to GOP tax cuts for the wealthy and large corporations**, it should be noted that voters do not want to reduce funding for healthcare regardless of whether the cuts are tied to tax cuts for those at the top. Indeed, only 9% of voters want to cut the amount the federal government spends on healthcare, while a 54% majority want to *increase* federal healthcare spending. Among Trump voters, 42% want to increase federal spending on healthcare and just 14% want to cut it.

Fourth, a key theme that emerges in the verbatim reactions to the Republican policy agenda is that **“Republicans focus on profits over people”**—a theme that should be echoed in our messaging. In this regard, we note that a large majority of voters are unfavorable toward “the pharmaceutical industry” (64%) as well as “the health insurance industry” (62%)—both major allies and funders of Republicans. While opinions of “drug companies” are just as negative (63% unfavorable), our split-sample experiment shows reactions to “health insurance companies” (53% unfavorable) to be less negative than for “the health insurance industry” (so in this case it is better to talk about the health insurance industry in messages about whom Republicans look out for).

- 3. Republicans have been clear about their intention to cut Medicaid to offset the cost of their tax cuts, and this is a fight that Democrats should lean into. Medicaid is a popular program, including among many Trump voters, and two-thirds of voters say that a GOP push for large Medicaid cuts would leave them feeling unfavorable toward congressional Republicans. In fighting Republican Medicaid cuts, it is important to stress that, “Millions of Americans would lose their healthcare coverage altogether and become uninsured, with the biggest impact on the most vulnerable Americans, including children, low-income seniors, veterans, and people with serious disabilities.”**

Seventy-six percent (76%) of voters have either a very favorable (35%) or somewhat favorable (41%) opinion of Medicaid, while only 14% have an unfavorable opinion. When asked which of two statements better describes Medicaid, only 18% choose “it is a costly welfare program that encourages people to be dependent on the government and is full of waste, fraud, and abuse.” A very large majority (82%) say instead that “Medicaid is an important source of health coverage for people who could not otherwise afford healthcare, including the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and workers who do not get insurance from their jobs,” including 55% who come down strongly on that side.

Medicaid has broad support because 63% of Americans say they personally know someone who benefits from it, including 37% who say that someone in their immediate family benefits from Medicaid. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Trump voters say that someone in their immediate family benefits from it.

Even before any message testing, 66% of voters say it will make them feel unfavorable toward Republicans in Congress if they push for large cuts to Medicaid this year. Notably, 43% of Trump voters say they would be unfavorable toward congressional Republicans if they push for large Medicaid cuts.

Majorities of voters place a high degree of importance on the role Medicaid plays in a large variety of respects. These items stand out as especially high priorities:

- ⇒ Medicaid provides essential care for over 10 million adults with disabilities, and Medicaid is the only source of health coverage for millions of children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities.
- ⇒ Medicaid provides healthcare to almost half of all children in America, helping over 30 million children get the healthcare they need.
- ⇒ Nearly a million non-elderly veterans--many of whom suffer with chronic conditions--rely on Medicaid for all or part of their healthcare.
- ⇒ Over eight million lower-income seniors rely on Medicaid for affordable and essential healthcare, from vision care to long-term care.
- ⇒ Medicaid helps pay the costs for almost two-thirds of all nursing home residents nationwide and plays a key role in helping families afford quality nursing home care for their elderly parents and family members with disabilities.
- ⇒ Medicaid provides essential home care services that allow elderly people and people with disabilities to stay in their homes and communities, while reducing burdens on families.

The two most worrisome consequences of Republican Medicaid cuts are that “millions of Americans would lose their healthcare coverage altogether and become uninsured” and “the cuts would have the biggest impact on underserved communities and the most-vulnerable Americans, including children, low-income seniors, veterans with chronic conditions, workers who cannot get coverage from their jobs, people in rural America, and people with disabilities.” When asked which specific groups they are most concerned about being hurt by Medicaid cuts, voters put low-income seniors at the top of the list, and Republican voters say the impact on veterans is a top-tier concern. Black voters respond very strongly to the impact that GOP Medicaid cuts would have on people of color.

While voters start out evenly divided on Republican proposals for Medicaid work requirements, they quickly turn against work requirements when they consider that many people who are in poor health, who have a disability, or who take care of children and parents could lose their healthcare. In opposing Republican proposals on this front, it is essential to stress that the true goal of Republicans is not to encourage work, but to generate savings to pay for their tax cuts by kicking enough people off their healthcare. Organizations like the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are valuable validators in raising the stakes on the significant negative health impacts of taking Medicaid away from individuals who cannot meet a work requirement.

4. Democrats will also have the high side of the debate in opposing Republican efforts to repeal or weaken the Affordable Care Act, including Republicans' willingness to raise premiums for people who get coverage through the ACA by refusing to extend expiring tax credits.

Three in five voters (61%) now have a favorable opinion of the Affordable Care Act (28% unfavorable). Support for the law goes down but is still above a majority when it is described as "Obamacare" (56% favorable, 36% unfavorable). Democrats respond equally favorably to both names, and both Black and Latino voters are more favorable toward "Obamacare" than "the Affordable Care Act." For both independent voters and Republicans, referring to the law as "the Affordable Care Act" evokes a more favorable reaction than does "Obamacare" (at 66%, independents are 24 points more favorable toward the ACA; and at 39%, Republicans are 14 points more favorable toward it.)

In the survey, we explained to respondents that in 2022 Congress expanded the tax credits that help lower premium costs for many people who get coverage through the ACA, and if the expanded tax credits are allowed to expire, insurance premiums will rise for as many as 20 million Americans. With this information in hand, 78% of voters say it is very (51%) or fairly (27%) important for Congress to take action to continue these expanded tax credits. Seventy-one percent (71%) of voters say they would disapprove if Republicans refuse to renew the current tax credits and increase premiums for 20 million Americans. *Of course, the simplest version of the point we want to make is that Republicans are raising healthcare costs for millions of Americans.*

5. At the end of the survey, we tested a variety of ways of summing up the contrast between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of healthcare. All of them yield strong preferences for Democrats, and in many cases for swing voters and soft Trump supporters as well. While there is a strong pro-Democratic response on several contrasts framed around specific issues (e.g., pre-existing conditions, Medicare retirement age), these are the two most important overarching contrasts that our messaging should ladder up to:

- **Republicans'** priority on healthcare is to cut government spending to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and large corporations. **Democrats'** priority on healthcare is to lower costs and ensure access to affordable coverage.
- **Republican** policies would raise the cost of healthcare for many Americans. **Democratic** policies are focused on lowering the cost of healthcare for working families and seniors.

On the first of these, Democrats have a 35-point advantage among center-right voters (independents and soft Republicans), and a 53-point advantage among soft Trump voters (who supported President Trump with reservations in the last election). On the second one, Democrats have a 32-point advantage among center-right voters and a 48-point advantage among soft Trump voters.

We also asked respondents to rank order their biggest concerns about Republicans based on this list. Among the movers with whom Democrats gain an advantage over the course of the survey, the highest-ranking concerns are:

- ⇒ Republicans would end protections for people with pre-existing conditions and force them into plans with much more expensive premiums and less coverage.
- ⇒ Republicans' priority on healthcare is to cut government spending to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and large corporations.
- ⇒ Republican policies would raise the cost of healthcare for many Americans.
- ⇒ Republican policies would take coverage away from millions of Americans and increase the number of uninsured people.