



How to talk to voters about health care: progressive framing and messages

Presentation by Celinda Lake

January 8th, 2007

www.lake-research.com



The Context

- ✓ **Health care is clearly salient to voters. Rising costs are the top concern for voters**, the vast majority of whom are insured.
- ✓ Voters connect to health care as consumers. They feel they are getting less for more.
- ✓ Voters often support reform proposals in principle — but pull away from policy specifics fearing higher costs or lower quality *for them personally*.
- ✓ The concept of “quality affordable health care” is more appealing than “universal coverage.” It bridges uninsured and underinsured to insured who are worried about rising costs.

The Facts

- ✓ **The fact that 80% of the uninsured are in working families is still not widely understood.** This information is powerful in reframing the issue and helping voters identify with the uninsured.
- ✓ **Cost-shifting is not readily understood by voters.** Despite the seemingly strong argument linking cost-shifting to voters' intense concerns about their own rising health care costs, the connection remains difficult for voters to make.
- ✓ To broaden the dialogue, talk about using costs, not just access, and the underserved as well as the uninsured.

Core beliefs

- ✓ **Health care has become a core value** -- linked to the pursuit of the American Dream, our country's destiny, and each family's well-being and future.
- ✓ Voters talk about it in moral terms – no American should be denied access to health care.
- ✓ Yet, just calling this or that health care proposal a “moral issue” is insufficient to move voters.
- ✓ Voters see health care as a necessity. **They see a role for something beyond market forces to ensure affordable access.**
- ✓ Voters believe everyone should have access to quality, affordable health care — but they don't want to pay for those they perceive to be “undeserving”.
- 4 ✓ Voters want an “American” solution.

Barriers



- ✓ Cynicism about government
- ✓ Fear of higher costs, higher taxes, lower quality care.
- ✓ Opposition to helping those perceived as undeserving.
- ✓ The ability of powerful interests to block action.
- ✓ Blocked altruism – what do I lose?
- ✓ Who is going to pay for it?

Overcoming the Barriers

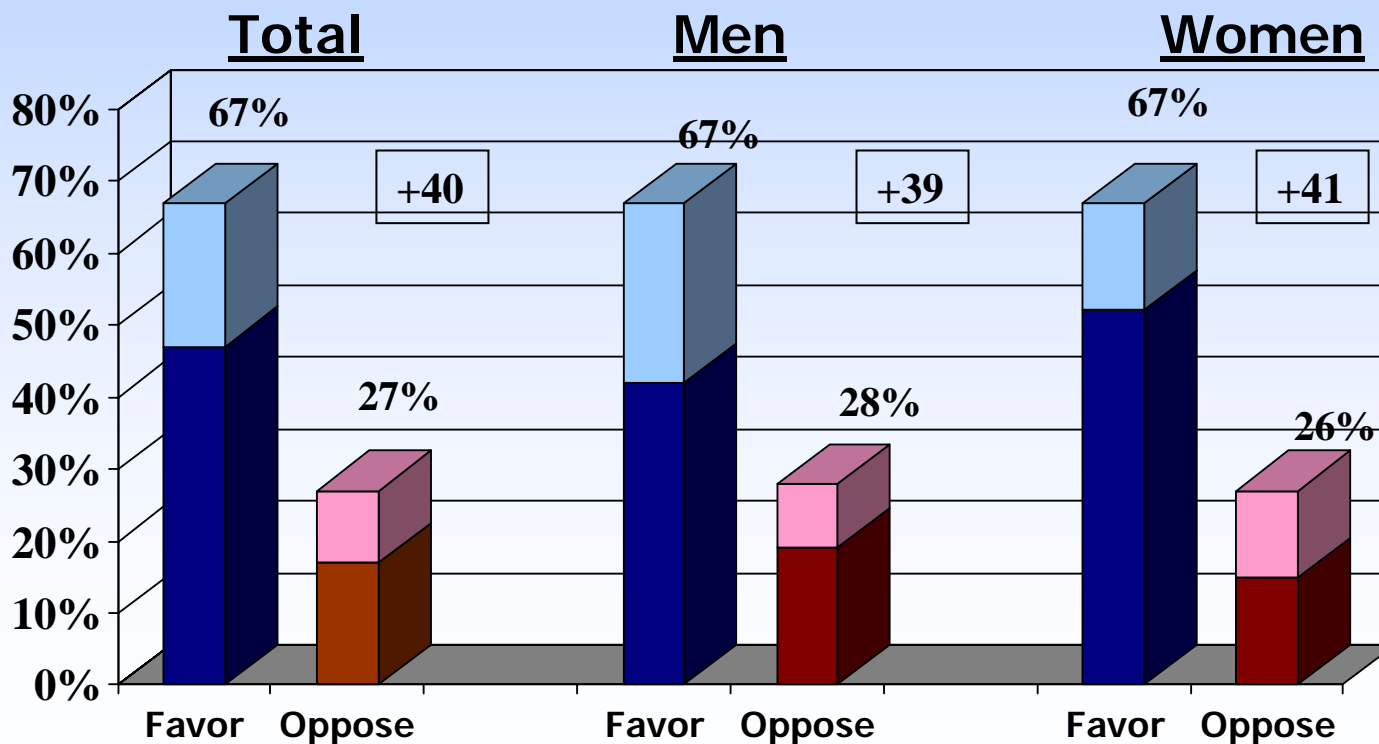
- ✓ Incorporate an Element of Personal Responsibility
- ✓ Include Options and Choices in Proposals
- ✓ Use Preventative Care as a Stepping Stone
- ✓ Find a Uniquely *American* solution
- ✓ Emphasize Security and Peace of Mind, Especially with Women
- ✓ Focus on Our Support for Small Business
- ✓ Propose Initiatives that Reflect Voter Values about Health Care
- ✓ Define a Role for Government as Watchdog and Rule Maker
- ✓ Animate Anger, not Fear

The Voters

- ✓ Core health care voters supporting progressive reforms **include Democrats, Democratic women, and African-Americans.**
- ✓ **Older women and seniors are the most attentive voters on this issue.** They need to be reassured that reforms will not adversely affect the quality of their health care.
- ✓ **Small business-owners are an important constituency on this issue.** A small business voice on our side is an important signal to persuadable voters. Women-owned small businesses have **health care insurance for their employees** as one of their top issues.
- ✓ **Swing constituencies are:**
 - Proper Patriots** (34% of population, 40% of electorate--focused on personal responsibility, everyday ethics and national pride)
 - Marginalized Middle Agers** (17% of population, 15% of electorate– looking for help and status)
 - Mobile Materialists** (13% of population, 12% of electorate – most extreme in rejecting initiatives)

Across the board, voters want action on this issue.

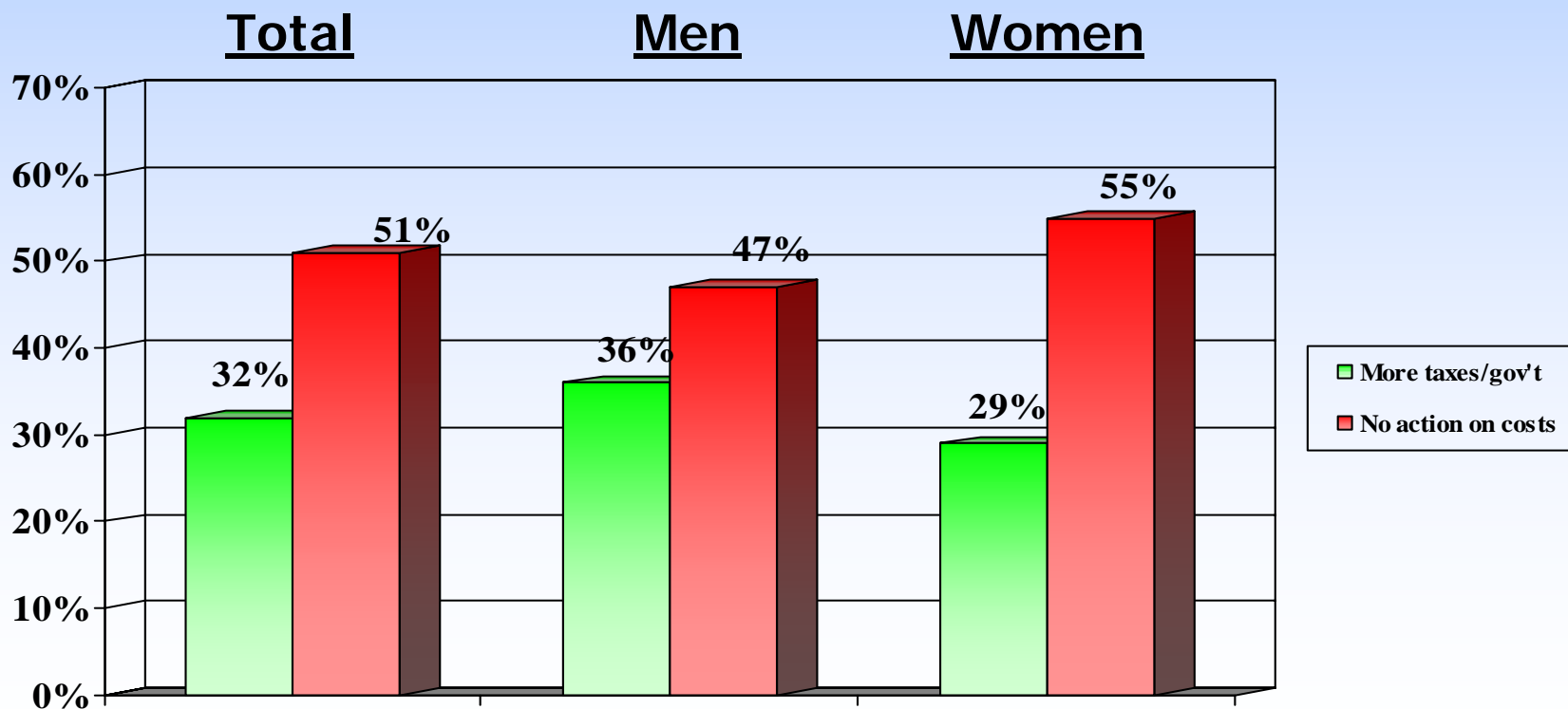
Do you favor or oppose expanding access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans even if it means raising taxes?



** Darker colors show intensity*

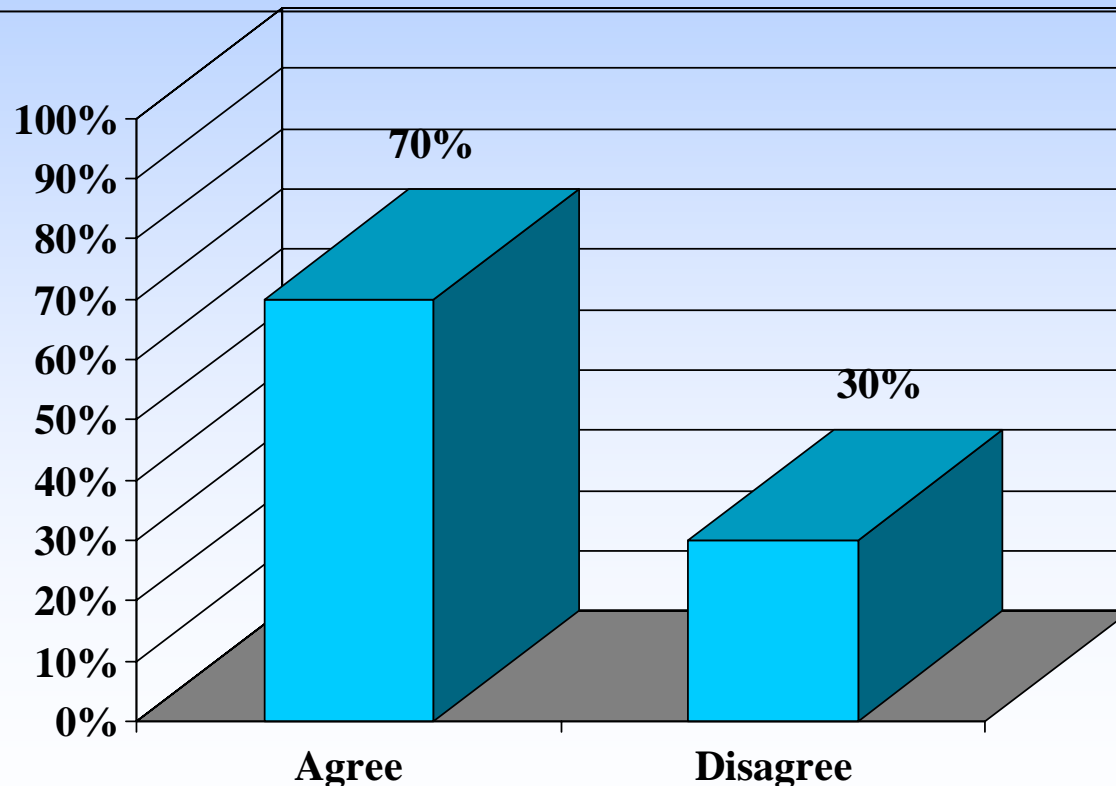
The desire for action on health care strongly outweighs concerns about government and taxes.

Overall, when you think about health care in America today, which are you more worried about, that health care reform will raise your taxes and create more government control OR that government will not take any action to rein in rising health care costs?



Covering uninsured children is popular.

Should providing affordable, quality health insurance to all children in the U.S. be one of the top priorities of Congress and the President?



10 *Source:* 800 likely voters on July 6-9, 2006. Conducted by Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of The Catholic Health Association of the United States

Yet, universal coverage for children is not a strong bridge.

Many believe that all children are covered now — they believe state children's health insurance program is working.

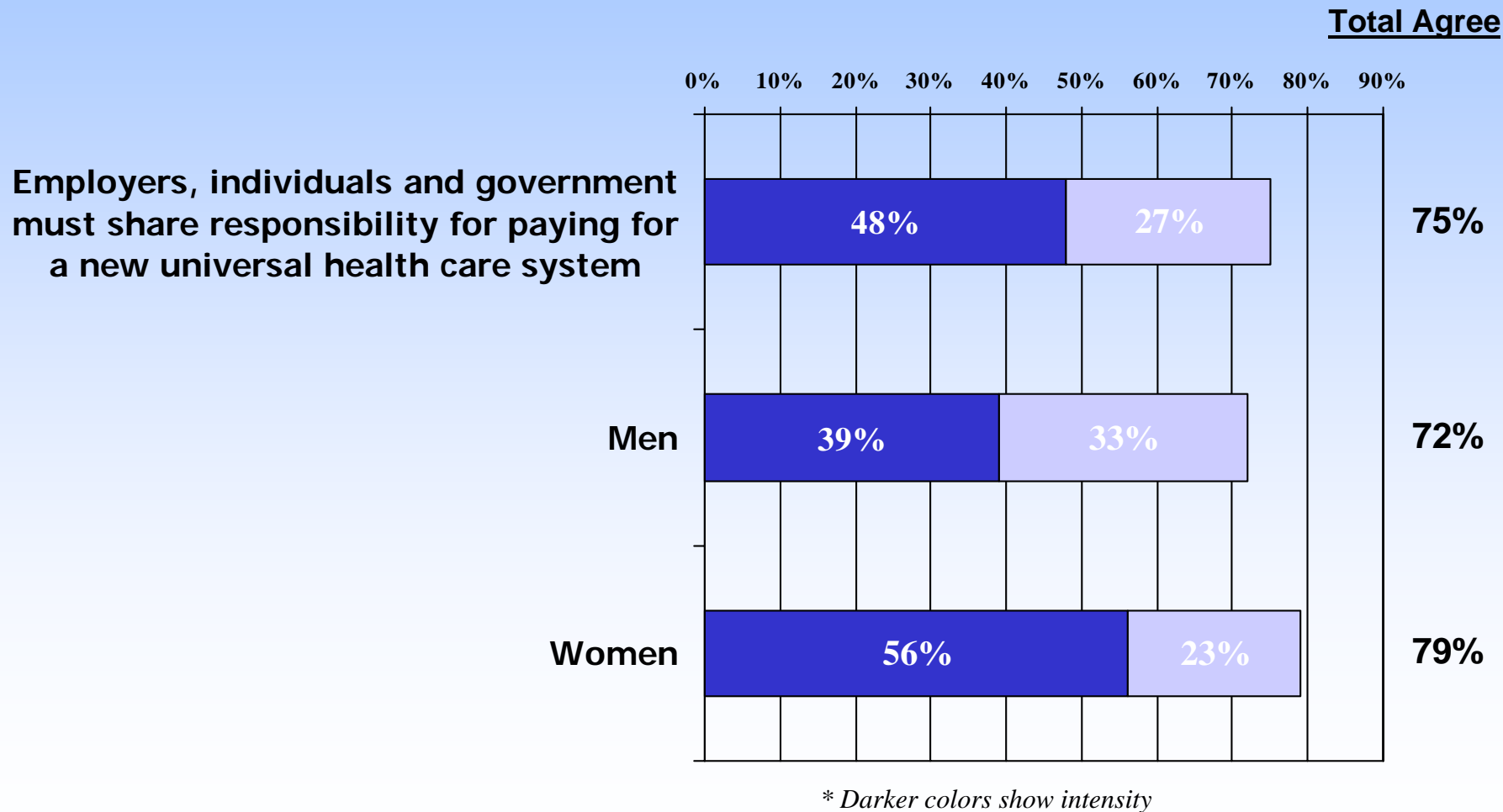


Universal child health coverage is hugely popular *but* is not a bridge to universal coverage for adults...

..it may even reinforce sense that universal coverage isn't for "the undeserving."



Voters don't believe that the market alone can solve this problem. They want shared responsibility.

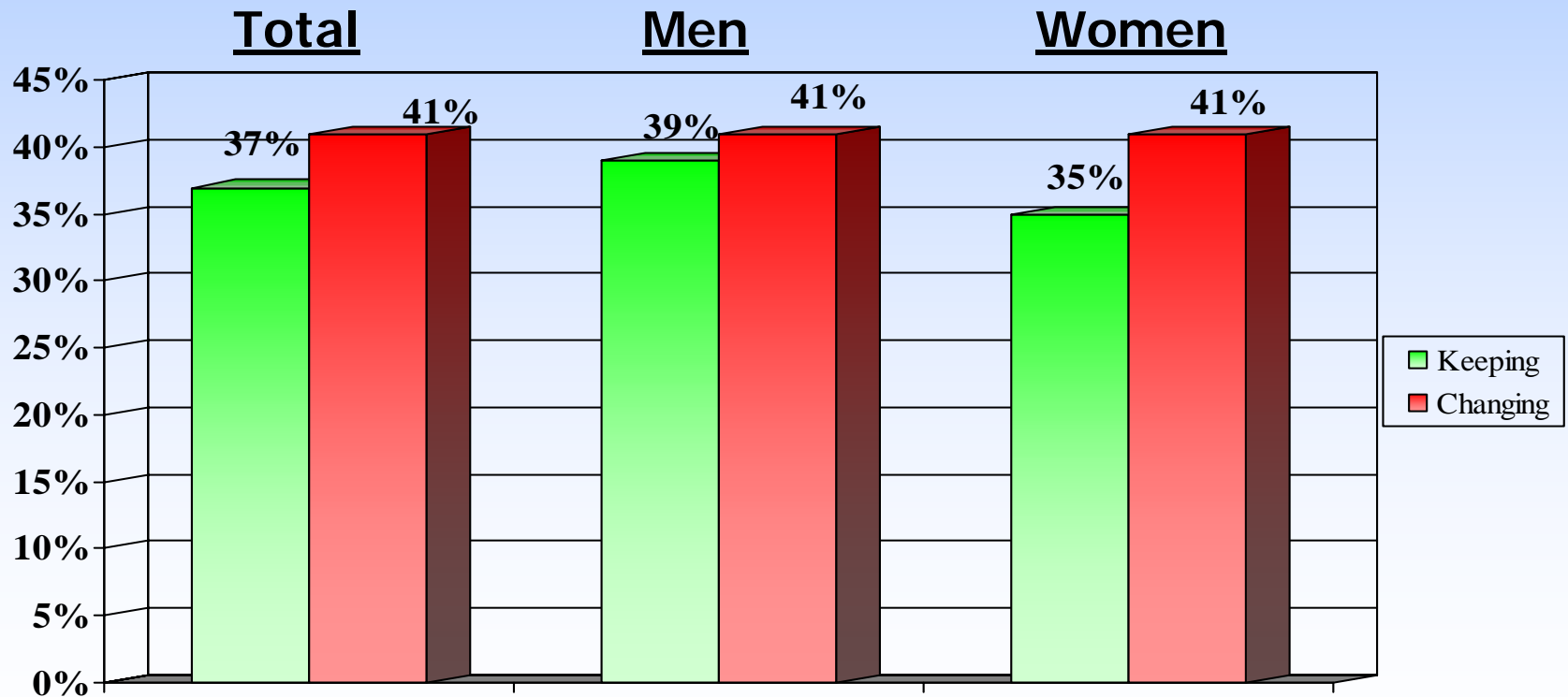


BARRIERS TO A SOLUTION:

Government, taxes, costs, and choice are vulnerabilities to health care reform.

While voters strongly support taking action, they also worry about changing things too much.

Overall, when you think about health care in America today, which are you more worried about, keeping things as they are or changing things too much?

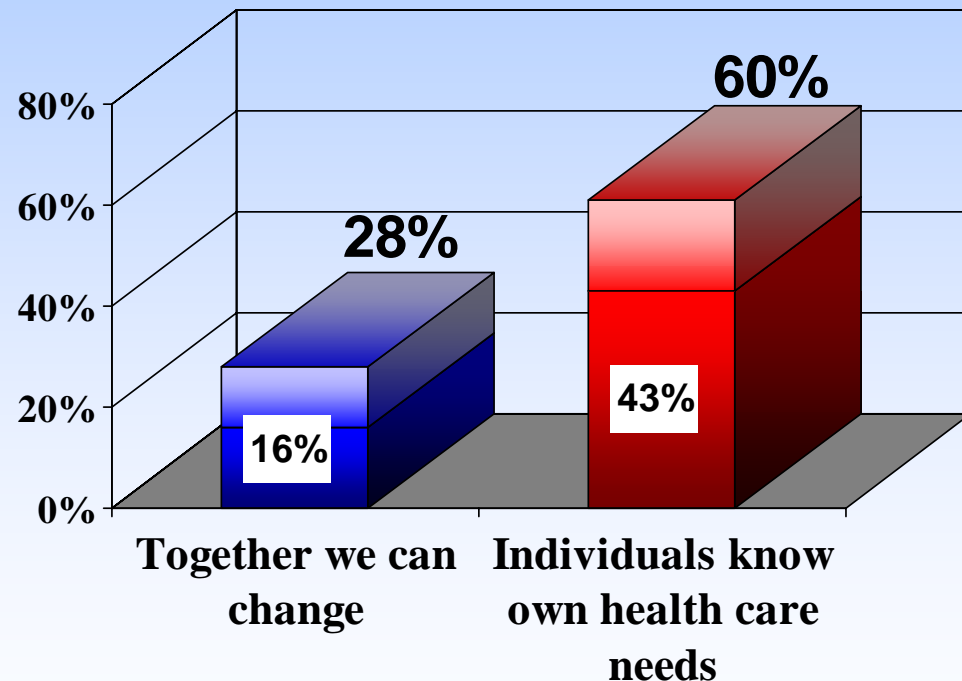


Cynicism about government and blocked altruism are barriers to change.

- ✓ Insured voters fear losing what they have
- ✓ Voters are highly doubtful about the abilities of government
- ✓ Across the board voters are feeling tax sensitive

Reform is vulnerable to arguments focused on freedom of choice and individual control.

- **Together We Can Change:** Each of us alone cannot bring down skyrocketing health care costs or make sure more hard-working families have basic health coverage. But together we can do that. If we pool our resources and use government's purchasing power to buy our health insurance coverage from one insurer, we can use our power in numbers to rein in the cost of health care, demand the highest quality and accountability, and cover more families.
- **Individuals know own health care needs:** Instead of creating new government programs and raising taxes, we need to give consumers more freedom of choice and let them keep more of their own money so they can buy the health care that is best for them and their families. Individuals understand their own health care needs far better than a government bureaucrat.



The Republicans' market-based approach has some appeal for voters. Security and risk are powerful opposing themes.

- ✓ Initial support for HSAs is based on the appeal of cost-savings and analogy of a 401(k).
- ✓ The Republican approach is framed in financial terms, while voters see the issue in terms of care, often the difference between life and death, and as a value. They want peace of mind.
- ✓ The strongest themes that raise doubts are:
 - Security and risk
 - Many need services not covered
 - You may not have enough money when you need care



Overcoming barriers:

*Talking to the anxious insured
about health care reform*

My Family and Me First

People will look for themselves in any proposal.

People want to know what proposal will do *for me* and *to me* as a taxpayer and as someone with coverage provided by an employer or the government.

Change must keep good aspects of the current system.



Consumer Orientation

The role of government is not an alternative to the consumer frame. Rather, it is a way of ensuring individual choices are available, responsible behavior rewarded, and greed punished.

Government should work as *watchdog* and *enforcer* of rules — not as the mass provider of health care.

People of color and base voters are the only groups comfortable with government's role defined as providing benefits.



"I like [Guaranteed Choice]. That way everybody has some kind of insurance. I'm just a little worried about my employer. Are they really going to give me a choice or are they going to say let's push everybody over to this one?"
(Columbus, non-college, female)

Avoid Triggering Fears of Change

Our proposals are in trouble if they make people worry that they will lose what they currently have.

When people are fearful, they tend to become less open and less generous.

When fearful, they blame others: freeloaders, illegal immigrants, bad parents, welfare cheats, etc.



"I would worry they [my employer] would cut back if this [Health Security Card] was in effect. They're already trying to cut back now and we work for it." (Atlanta, marginalized middle aged, female)

Channel Anti-Greed Anger Rather Than Fear

People blame insurance, drug companies that exhibit greed, which they perceive as costing us and undermining affordable quality health care.

Anger must be channeled. Generalized anger without a clear proposal for change can result in cynicism that nothing can be done.



"The pharmaceutical companies... they spend money like it's going out of style. They don't care about the consumer. They don't care about what it costs." (Atlanta, proper patriot male)

Individualism Trumps Collectivism

America remains a very individualistic culture. Even collective concepts that worked well (e.g., responsibility, obligation, family) had individualistic aspects to them (e.g., parental responsibility).

People like the idea that “responsibility is a two way street,” and “everyone pays something” (e.g., “sliding scale”).



We must co-opt personal responsibility and individualism — not fight it.

Strategic initiatives that connect to these values



- As an outgrowth of these values, the Herndon Alliance developed and did voter survey testing of four strategic initiatives--Cancer Screening, Healthy Generation, Bill of Rights, and a Guaranteed Affordable Plan—all of which tested well with roughly 80% favorability.
- More details about the contents of these initiatives, voter reactions to them, and what we learned from the research on them will be shared later.



**Key values in this debate:
family values, responsibility as a
two-way street, America, control
and peace of mind.**

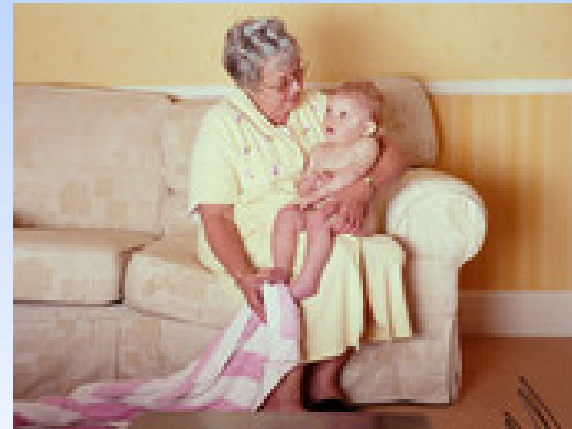


Quality, Affordable Health Care is a Value

Voters agree with the central principle that there should be access to quality affordable health care.

Health Care has become a core value, not just a commodity. It is linked to the American Dream, our families' and country's well being

It is a moral obligation when focused on deserving recipients such as children and seniors.

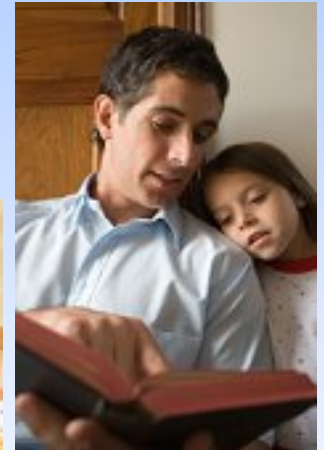


*"Because we're a compassionate nation. We can't let people be dying in the streets. It's not Calcutta. That's not what America's principles or values are."
(Columbus, Proper Patriot, female)*

Personal Responsibility

If voters don't clearly hear a central place for "personal responsibility" in proposals, they are turned off.

Once their need for others to demonstrate personal responsibility is met, people become more generous.



"I thought [Healthy Generation] was a good idea but I think that parents need to take more responsibility over what their kids do and what they watch on TV and what they eat." (Atlanta, Latina)

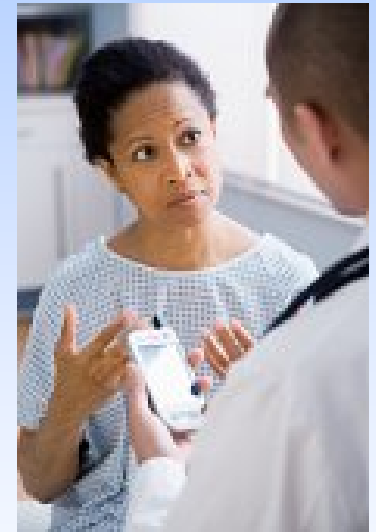
Choice, Control, Competition

People want to make their own choices of doctors, tests, specialists, drugs, and second opinions. They believe choices are being reduced by employers, HMOs, insurance companies.

Women are less responsive to competition than men, but still want choices.

Our opponents often define our proposals as a “one size fits all” government system that will reduce choices — and quality.

Our proposals must include options and choices. They must give control over this increasingly arbitrary system driven by greed.



Concept of “competition” not as good as “choice.” Many women said they feared competition.

Preventive Care as Stepping Stone

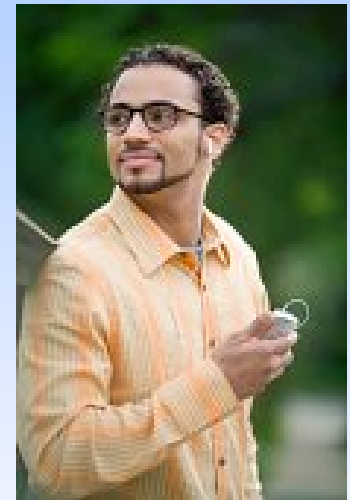
Seen as “common sense” investment. Saving money long-term. “Pay now or pay later.”

Prevention seen as encouraging *personal responsibility*.

Guaranteeing access to preventive care is a clear role for rules and government.

Preventive care is potential escalator. When included, people often move to the idea of treatment.

Wellness does not test well.



“We’ll be more than happy to pay that, because we know that’s a savings for us in the future if we’re healthy.” (Atlanta, mobile materialist, male)

An American solution

Voters are feeling that the needs of Americans are being neglected. They are eager for a uniquely American solution.

They believe American ingenuity would produce the best solution to the health care problem.

Voters want concrete solutions to problems, and doable steps to move us forward.



"I think we have to look at where we're going as a society. If that means encompassing people who don't have health care so that their problems can be brought under control now and not progress further, which is more cost-effective, then that's what we need to do." (Atlanta, Marginalized Middle Ager, female)

Peace of Mind

People, especially women, want security and peace of mind for themselves and their families. They want affordable health care they can count on. They want affordable health care that mirrors life's transitions: job changes, kids turning 18 or 21, part-time and full-time work, having a major disease, retiring before Medicare kicks in, etc.

And they want affordable health care that mirrors transitions in the economy – outsourcing, mergers, buyouts, reduced hours, profit cycles, etc.



*“I’m going to be in your situation very soon because, being divorced, I was under my husband’s insurance and that’s going to run out the first of the year. As an independent contractor, I’m going to have to find insurance.”
(Atlanta, marginalized middle ager, female)*

On the side of small business

- Noting that Wal-Mart and other hugely profitable corporations do not provide coverage and even direct their uninsured employees to government programs as well as noting how small businesses struggle to compete against giants like Wal-Mart adds considerable weight to our arguments.
- This framing serves to put us on the side of small business and can deflect some anti-government sentiment instead placing it toward Wal-Mart for sticking taxpayers and government with the costs of insuring their workers.



Summary:

Rules of engagement and terms
that work



Need New Concepts, Not Magic Words

Calling health care a “moral issue” and recruiting moral spokespersons (e.g., religious leaders) is not enough.

We must invent new policy initiatives that speak to values behind the words.

e.g., We must get out of the framework of “who’s deserving” of health care and who isn’t. We must speak to desire for new rules.

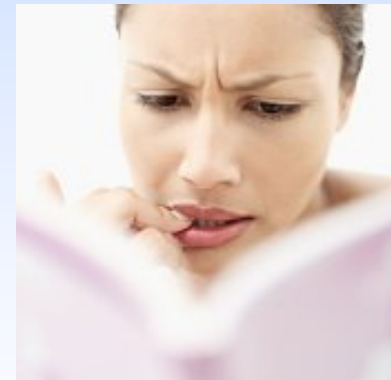


Grapple with Consumer Orientation

People relate to health care as consumers — not as altruistic policy experts or philanthropists.



People want affordable comprehensive care for selves and family. People want to know, “Who will pay?”



Avoid fear, channel anger. Our proposals must include options and choices. They must give people feeling of greater control.

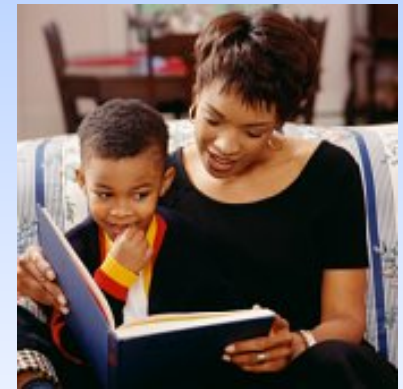
Embrace Personal Responsibility and Prevention

Voters want people (corporations, parents, individuals) to take responsibility. Sliding scale works because people believe it's fair that "they should pay something."

Prevention seen as encouraging personal responsibility.

Guaranteeing access to preventive care is a clear role for government.

Preventive care is potential policy escalator. When included, most people embrace offering treatment.



Personal responsibility and prevention are often linked in minds of voters.

Define Government as Rule Enforcer

People blame insurance, drug companies that exhibit greed, which they perceive as costing us and undermining affordable quality health care.



Anti-government cynicism is high — including around Medicare — but voters want “somebody” (i.e. government) to hold insurance and drug companies accountable.

**THE BUCK
STOPS HERE**



Voters want standardized rules that people can depend on.

Words that Work

Words to Use	Words to Avoid
Quality affordable health care	Universal coverage
American health care	Medicare for All; A system like Social Security; Canadian Style Health Care
Sliding scale	Free
Prevention	Wellness
Smart investments; investing in the future	Inexpensive
Choice	Competition
Rules	Regulations

Words that Work

Words to Use	Words to Avoid
Guaranteed	Required
Giving people control; peace of mind	Government health care for all
Standard package; affordable health plans	Basic health care
Public/private partnership	Public health care
Government enforcement/watchdog	Government health care; public health care