

# Words That Win on Middle Class Tax Cuts

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Congress is deciding whether to extend tax cuts to the vast majority of Americans and let extra breaks for the rich expire. The opposition threatens to oppose this proposal, unless it comes with extra tax giveaways for the rich -- even if that means middle class Americans don't get a tax cut.

We tested language and narratives about extending tax cuts to the middle class against the opposition's rhetoric. **Values-driven language that speaks to Americans' legitimate anger and economic anxieties and that fights for the middle class over special breaks for millionaires won by 18- 34 points with the general electorate and by 26- 42 points with swing voters<sup>1</sup>**, including moderate Republicans. The following language is most persuasive (the number of points by which swing voters preferred each statement to the opposition's is in parentheses):

## **Act Now for the People We Agree on - The Middle Class**

- It's not fair to hold tax cuts to hard working, middle class Americans hostage to special tax breaks for the rich. (+35)
- Everyone agrees we need to extend tax cuts to working and middle class families, who are struggling just to get by. So let's get that done now and stop playing partisan politics. (+33)

## **Millionaires Don't Need Tax Breaks - Especially When Our Kids Would Pay for Them**

- Our kids and grandkids shouldn't be saddled with three quarters of a trillion dollars in debt to the Chinese so millionaires can get even more tax breaks and loopholes on borrowed money. (+37)
- Millionaires and billionaires should be giving to charity, not getting it. (+39)
- There's no excuse for continuing to give the average millionaire a check for \$100,000 we don't have so they can just forward it on to their hedge fund manager. (+28)
- Politicians who think the rich just aren't rich enough have obviously been spending too much time with lobbyists, bankers, and CEOs--or getting too much campaign money from them. (+28)

## **We Need Jobs - Not Tax Breaks for Millionaires**

- Rather than spending \$700 billion for tax cuts to people who don't need them, we should be creating jobs, protecting Social Security and Medicare, and beginning to pay down the deficit. (+42)
- America needs jobs, tax cuts for working people, and help for small businesses, not another handout for the rich. (+38)
- If we're going to borrow \$700 billion, it should be to put Americans back to work and get the engine of our economy running again, not to increase the stock portfolios of millionaires or add to the bonuses of the CEOs and Wall Street bankers who threw so many Americans out of work. (+34)
- Let's put money into the hands of the real job creators in this country--working and middle class Americans--and stop giving special tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires who don't need it and don't spend it. (+26)

<sup>1</sup> Swing voters are defined as those who described themselves as anywhere from weak/moderate Republicans through Independents to weak/moderate Democrats.

## KEYS TO CONNECTING

The language above soundly beat the opposition's refrain ("We shouldn't be raising taxes on any American during this recession, especially not job creators, which is why we should extend the tax cuts for all Americans") because it:

1. Urges action now on what both parties agree on: tax cuts for the middle class.
2. Focuses on fairness and responsibility, rather than programs and policies -- fairness (tax cuts for middle class Americans who need them rather than "special tax breaks" for millionaires who don't), responsibility (making a down payment on our debt rather than taxing our children), and work (creating jobs) -- and on populist anger over a deck that is stacked against the middle class.
3. Refers to those whose tax breaks should expire as "the rich," "millionaires," "millionaires and billionaires," "lobbyists," "CEOs and their bonuses," or "Wall Street bankers"; and what they already get or what the opposition proposes to extend as "special tax breaks," "handouts," and "loopholes."

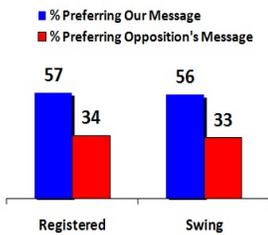
## NARRATIVES THAT BEAT THE OPPOSITION

We also tested longer narratives against the following opposition message, which is based on language drawn directly from conservative leaders:

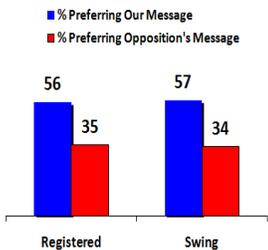
### THE MESSAGE WE'RE UP AGAINST

We should not be raising taxes on any American during this recession, especially not job creators. To get us out of this recession we need more Americans working and more certainty in the marketplace so small businesses start hiring, not the largest tax hike in history. President Obama and Speaker Pelosi say we can't afford to extend all of the tax cuts, but the reason we face a trillion dollar deficit for the third year in a row isn't because we are taxing too little, it's because we're spending too much. Liberals in Congress spent billions on a stimulus package that hasn't done anything to help the economy, and now they want to raise taxes again. The money earned by hardworking Americans doesn't belong to the government and it shouldn't be taken away to finance the liberals' big-government agenda.

**Our top two messages beat it by over 20 points with both the general electorate and swing voters.** To the left of each is a graph<sup>2</sup> showing the percent of voters who found it more compelling than the opposition message:



**"Spending every dollar"** The majority of Americans are spending every dollar they earn right now just to pay their rent or mortgage at the end of the month, pay down their credit cards, or put food on the table, and one in ten can't find a job at all. We need to cut taxes for working people, make it easier for small businesses to hire new workers, and put Americans back to work, because we have plenty of roads to repair, bridges to fix, and wind turbines to build. But we can't get our national debt under control if we give three quarters of a trillion dollars in special tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires, who only spend a fraction of the money they earn because they can't spend it as fast as they earn it. They already get tax loopholes and giveaways the rest of us don't. If our choice is between getting the deficit under control and giving millionaires nearly 700 billion more to deposit in their hedge funds, I vote for fiscal responsibility.



**"The real job creators"** In the last decade, we've seen a massive transfer of wealth from the middle class to the rich, and it's time to put a stop to it. The Bush tax cuts gave the average middle class family less than a thousand dollars a year, and gave the average millionaire over \$100,000. That isn't fair, and it's isn't good economics: extending giveaways to the rich does nothing to get the economy moving or create jobs, because when you hand millionaires a check for \$100,000, they just hand it to their hedge fund manager. But every dollar we spend on tax cuts to working people goes into the economy and creates jobs, because they're spending it, which means someone else is getting hired to make what they're buying. So let's put money into the hands of the real job creators in this country—working and middle class Americans—and stop giving special tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires who don't need it and don't spend it.

<sup>2</sup> We surveyed a national sample of 1,011 adults matching the demographics of registered voters from September 20-21, 2010, dial-testing their responses as they listened to the messages to understand what they found compelling, and analyzing their overall ratings of each message. The numbers reported here are likely underestimates of the strength of these messages. The statistics here refer to the original messages tested prior to revising them based on analysis of online dial tests.