

To: Interested Parties

Subj: Most Effective Democratic (and Republican) Messaging on Tariffs

Prior to and following Donald Trump's "Liberation Day" announcement enacting tariffs on all other countries, we tested 43 individual messages on tariffs — including from elected Democrats, elected Republicans, and other stakeholders. These findings are based on surveys of more than 26,287 Americans over March 31 through today.

Learnings from the most effective Democratic messages:

- **Tariffs are a hidden tax for the middle class.** Be specific about what prices are about to be higher.
- **Tariffs are part of Trump's larger economic pattern: tax breaks for the rich, tax hikes for the rest.** Messages that performed well connected this tax *hike* for middle class families to Trump's tax *cuts* for working people.
- **Remind Americans about how tariffs are rising prices while their earned benefits (Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare) are on the chopping block.** The top-performing message of all ones we tested (which ranks in the 100th percentile — a whopper of a message!) combines tariffs with attacks on Trump's budget cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Learnings from less effective Democratic messaging:

- **Focus on costs over the stock market:** Though messages that include the volatility in the stock market are not ineffective, messages that focus on the stock market and the risk of a recession were less effective than those focused on consumer costs. While the stock market may be dominating the news, the supermarket continues to be what matters to voters.
- **Avoid overly abstract or policy heavy appeals:** Messages that are too removed from people's everyday experiences and emphasized trade wars, international relationships, or economic theory.
- **Avoid insulting or absurdity:** The worst-performing messages used mockery, sarcasm, or melodramatic language. We recommend avoiding messages that lean too far into disdain for Trump, which mirrors previous findings that Americans think Democrats are too focused on knee-jerk opposition to Trump, regardless of the content.

Percentile ranking is relative to 260 messages since Inauguration Day tested on a variety of topics, like inflation, abortion, the economy, and more. The higher the percentile, the more effective that talking point is at persuading a voter to vote for Democrats in 2026 compared to

other Democratic messages we've tested. **We recommend utilizing above-average talking points, i.e. those above the 50th percentile.**

Message Theme	Message Tested	Effectiveness Percentile*
Connection to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid + Tax Cuts for the Rich	Donald Trump's economic policies are making life worse for working families and seniors. Trump's tariffs will mean higher prices on basics like gas and groceries. And his budget cuts will take away earned benefits like Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare - benefits Trump calls "entitlements" - to pay for massive tax cuts for the wealthy and big corporations. It is a one-two punch that will make life worse for millions of Americans.	100%
Everyday Essentials List	Donald Trump's new tariffs will push prices higher on everyday goods. Middle and working-class Americans are already feeling the pinch – paying more for essentials like groceries, clothes, and electronics, just to support their families. This isn't a tax on other countries: it's a tax on the American people.	98%
Medicaid Cuts Connection	Donald Trump's tariffs will drive up the cost of everyday goods like groceries and gas. Trump said he would lower, not raise prices – but his tariffs and proposal to cut \$880 billion in Medicaid healthcare which families rely on will only pinch families' budgets further.	94%
Tax Breaks for the Rich	Donald Trump is handing out tax breaks to the wealthy while forcing working families to pay more through his new tariffs. These tariffs function like a national sales tax, hiking up the cost of groceries, gas, and other daily necessities. While the Trump Administration continues to prioritize the wealthy, middle class and working families will feel the pain of tariffs the most.	91%
Grocery Costs	Donald Trump's tariffs are driving up the cost of groceries by acting like a hidden national sales tax. With so many supermarket items sourced from other countries, families are now paying more at the checkout – and for middle and working-class Americans, that means added strain just to put food on the table.	89%
Housing and Groceries + GOP opposition	Donald Trump's tariff policies will drive up costs for groceries and housing at a time when they are already sky high. Trump was elected to lower costs, not raise them. Even many Republicans in Congress are opposed to his tariffs because they are likely to drive up prices on everything from fruit to building supplies.	88%
Looming Recession	Donald Trump's tariffs are destabilizing America's economy and bringing us to the brink of recession. Since Trump took office, millions have seen their retirement savings take a hit. Now, Trump is imposing even more tariffs, which leading economists suggest could continue to cause economic harm and even lead to a recession at a time when Americans are already struggling with	86%

	high costs and low wages.	
Higher costs list (electronics, clothing, food)	Donald Trump's imposing tariffs on imported goods increasing costs for American consumers and raising inflation. Middle class and working Americans will face higher prices on everyday items like electronics, clothing, and food, making it harder to support their families when prices are already too high.	85%
Everyday costs list (electronics, clothing, food)	Donald Trump's new tariffs on imported goods amount to a national sales tax – one that will drive up costs for everyday Americans. These tariffs are raising prices on essentials like electronics, clothing, and food, making it harder for working and middle-class families to make ends meet and fueling inflation across the board.	81%
Everyday costs lists (groceries and gas)	Democrats oppose President Trump's tariffs because they know that tariffs raise costs on everyday needs like groceries and gas. Democrats know that there are times when tariffs make sense because they protect American jobs and businesses. But right now, everyone's priority should be on keeping costs low.	80%
Social Security Cuts	Donald Trump's tariffs will drive up the costs of everyday goods for seniors who are already feeling the strain of rising prices. Donald Trump said he would make life easier for seniors, but his Administration is raising prices through tariffs and targeting Social Security through Elon Musk's DOGE. That's unacceptable.	76%
Everyday costs (electronics, clothing, food)	Donald Trump is imposing tariffs on imported goods, which will effectively be a national sales tax, increasing costs for American consumers and raising inflation. Middle class and working Americans will face higher prices on everyday items like electronics, clothing, and food, making it harder to support their families.	73%
Accountable US	Trump and Musk's economic policies are already devastating families' pocketbooks. As Trump says he "couldn't care less" about driving up costs for families, his Administration is set to enact another round of industry-stunting tariffs this week – with regular Americans being forced to "absorb the cost of his tariffs in the form of higher prices and lower incomes."	72%
Everyday costs list (fruit, building materials)	Donald Trump's tariff policies will drive up costs for groceries and housing at a time when they are already sky high. Trump was elected to lower costs, not raise them. But even he acknowledges that tariffs are likely to drive up costs - on everything from fruit to building materials - which is exactly what Trump's tariffs will do.	72%
Risk of Trade Wars	Donald Trump's tariff policies risk igniting trade wars with key allies like Canada and Mexico, which could lead to retaliatory measures that could harm American industries and workers. We don't need a trade war that will lead to reduced consumer spending, slower economic growth, and American businesses closing.	55%

Rep. Krishnamoorthi	Trump's tariffs make no sense. Canada is our biggest trading partner. Small businesses are seeing their costs skyrocket. Businesses' costs are skyrocketing, and they're struggling to sell their products at expected prices. Meanwhile, our farmers are also raising serious concerns about retaliation in the form of counter-tariffs on their goods.	53%
Potential for Inflation	Donald Trump's tariffs will contribute to inflation, diminishing the purchasing power of American consumers and slowing economic growth. We need to fight inflation and lower prices, not continue driving them up.	52%
Retaliation on farmers	Donald Trump's tariffs will devastate farmers and ranchers who depend on selling their goods to foreign countries to sustain their livelihoods. When other countries retaliate with their own tariffs on American agricultural products, our farmers will lose important international customers. American rural communities will suffer as the agricultural economy falls apart under the weight of Trump's tariffs.	50%
Pro responsible tariffs	Democrats believe in responsible and strategic tariffs, not blanket policies like Trump's that harm working families. Tariffs are a necessary part of labor policy that can help support American manufacturing, but Trump's blanket tariffs on every single country will increase costs for Americans on everything from groceries to homes. Democrats will work on responsible policies that protect American industries without increasing costs for hardworking middle class families.	49%
Pro responsible tariffs	Democrats recognize that you can protect American industries without Trump's harmful trade war-inducing tariffs. Democrats aren't here to blanket oppose all tariffs - they know that responsible tariff policies help protect jobs for American workers. However, Trump's back-and-forth wavering on tariffs has left American small businesses confused and alienated key American allies. Democrats will focus on thoughtful trade policy that benefits American workers without causing an all-out trade war.	48%
Retaliation on farmers	Donald Trump's tariffs are already hitting American farmers hard. By sparking trade wars with key partners like Canada and China, Trump has caused these countries to slap retaliatory tariffs on U.S. agricultural products. This means our farmers are selling less abroad, leading to lower prices and tougher times.	46%
GOP Mayor Barnett (pro-Democratic message)	Even Republicans know that higher tariffs lead to higher costs. Higher costs lead to lower demand. Lower demand leads to lower production. And lower production and lower demand means job loss. We've gone through challenging times before, but the uncertainty of Trump's tariffs are making it impossible to prepare.	45%

Tariffs – Impact on Small Businesses	Small businesses relying on imported goods will face higher costs due to tariffs, forcing them to raise prices or reduce their workforce to stay competitive. Trump's tariffs will lead to business closures, decreased entrepreneurship, and job losses across the country.	43%
Impact on farmers	Even Republicans are worried about how Trump's tariffs will affect farmers. Multiple Republican Congressmen have voiced concerns about Trump's tariff policies, worried that American farmers will suffer as they lose out on international customers. Farmers already have such a tough job, having to deal with weather, low margins, and more - why is Trump so intent on making their lives harder?	40%
Free Trade	Donald Trump's tariff policies contradict the principles of free trade Republicans have been supporting for decades. Free trade policies with other countries help promote job creation and opportunities for Americans and help keep costs low. Instead, Trump's tariffs threaten U.S. economic progress. When Democrats AND Republicans agree on something, you know Trump is in the wrong.	39%
Pro responsible tariffs	Democrats recognize that some tariffs are necessary in order to protect domestic industries. Democrats will work on implementing tariffs as part of a comprehensive economic strategy, rather than Trump's chaotic tariffs on every country that pisses him off. Democrats will balance protection for domestic industries, while making sure that American families don't face higher costs at the grocery store and farmers don't get blocked from selling to international customers.	39%
Increased Energy Costs	Tariffs on imported energy resources are already leading to higher utility bills for American households. We need to lower, not raise the price of energy, and we shouldn't start a trade war with close allies like Canada that help to fuel our homes.	39%
Whip Clark	The Trump Administration is out of control. Prices are going up. Consumer confidence is plummeting. Classified info is being leaked. Social Security is being dismantled. Residents are being arrested for their political views.	39%
Jason Furman Op-ed	Trump's tariffs will hurt Americans. Their effect will be lower economic growth, higher inflation, higher unemployment, the destruction of wealth and a tax increase on American families. It will deal a blow to the rules underlying the global trading system and further empower China.	38%
Strain on International Alliances	Imposing tariffs on close allies undermines international relationships and weakens cooperative efforts on global challenges. Damaging these alliances can lead to decreased diplomatic influence and hinder collaborative efforts in areas such as security, environmental initiatives, and global trade agreements.	37%

Job Losses in Manufacturing	Donald Trump's tariffs on imported materials like steel and aluminum increase production costs for U.S. manufacturers, potentially leading to job losses and factory closures. Higher costs make American products less competitive globally, reducing exports and further endangering jobs in the manufacturing sector.	35%
Rep. Del Bene	Trump and Republicans promised to lower prices but they're making cars and many other goods more expensive with their tariffs. They don't care about higher prices because they won't feel the pain, but middle-class families will.	33%
Sen. Patty Murray	For reasons no one can understand, Trump is starting trade wars with our allies and the rest of the world. Just remember: It'll be the biggest peacetime tax increase ever, and he's demanding tax giveaways for billionaires while he forces prices up for YOU.	31%
Legal and Constitutional Concerns	Donald Trump's unilateral imposition of tariffs without congressional approval raises concerns about the overextension of executive power and the circumvention of established legislative processes. Trump's unilateral tariffs are undermining our system of checks and balances on the presidency.	29%
Rep. Gwen Moore	Trump sold his economic plan to the American people as one that would lower costs and inflation. Instead, his hairbrained flip-flopping economic policies are doing the exact opposite. He is breaking his campaign promises and leaving working Americans to pay the price.	25%
Rep. Dwight Evans	Trump promised to lower prices on day 1. Then he told you to "shut up about egg prices." Now it's day 71 and Trump just said he "couldn't care less" if auto prices spike because of his constantly changing tariffs- and hard-working Americans foot the bill!	24%
Disruption of Supply Chains	Donald Trump's tariffs disrupt established international supply chains, causing uncertainty and inefficiency for American companies dependent on global trade. This doesn't just hurt the stock market – it raises prices, too.	20%
Rep. Debbie Dingell	We must bring supply chains back to the U.S. and ensure that we are on a level playing field with our trade partners. Tariffs are a tool to work toward this, but they must be used strategically to protect our workers and businesses without increasing costs for consumers.	17%
Accountable US	Consumer confidence is at its lowest point in over a decade and the stock market is in chaos, as Americans brace for economic uncertainty and the increased risk of recession thanks to Trump's damaging economic policies.	12%
Yashar Ali	In an interview with NBC News, President Trump said repeatedly that he "couldn't care less," if auto manufacturers raise prices due to his tariffs. He also said that he hopes they raise prices. The	5%

	president says he believes that will just lead consumers to buy American made cars.	
Pro strategic tariffs	Democrats oppose tariff policies that don't work. Tariffs can be an effective tool for protecting American workers, but President Trump is using them to start petty fights, and the American people are paying the price.	4%
David Frum	Trump has ample warning from financial markets of how harmful his tariffs will be. He is proceeding anyway, because the only way he can feel alive and fulfilled is by intentionally hurting people.	1%
Mark Cuban	60% of U.S. Christmas presents are manufactured in China. If all of a sudden Trump's tariffs cause those prices to go up by 25%, that's less things being purchased for Christmas, kids being upset, families being upset they can't buy as much, people will lose their jobs making things even tighter. It turns the Trump Administration into the grinch.	0%