Slide 1: Messaging for Democrats

One of our jobs in any election is to turn out the people who, *when they vote,* we can *count on* to vote Democratic. But there aren't *enough* of those voters in Georgia, so we also have to reach out to people who can be *persuaded* to vote Democratic.

What we've learned — in part from watching Republican successes over decades — is that persuading people to change the way they vote is a long-term project, *much* longer than a single election cycle. We have to start telling them *who* Democrats are — what we stand for — maybe for years in advance of an election season.

"But," you may ask, "how can we persuade people *before* the election season if we don't know who our candidates will be?"

We do it by persuading them that *our* values, as Democrats, are consistent with *their* values. Our candidates, when they arrive, should be *advocates* for those values.

So…"**messaging**" for *us* is about getting *our* values and *our* positions on issues **firmly planted** in the heads of voters who don't already vote with us.

Slide 2: Messaging….

I'll show you a guide for **what** to say or write in your messages; then I'll show you **how** to say it. Not just *any* words will work.

We, together with our candidates, must create messages of all kinds:

- letters to the editor;
- guest op-eds in your local media;
- **press releases** (which are FREE publicity in your local media);
- flyers and brochures that you can hand out at events;
- newspaper or radio ads;
- talks to groups that you're invited to speak to — or that you *ask* to speak to;

- speeches for candidates who you volunteer to help;
- conversations with friends, co-workers, or neighbors; and
- social media — email, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, websites, and others.

Slide 3: Why? ValuesMessage.org

After the 2010 elections, I started looking closely at *why* **we Democrats have lost so badly in so many places**. I found that many people and organizations ask the same question and several are finding *answers* to that question and what we can do about it.

So I talked this over with some other Democrats and set up the website **ValuesMessage.org**. There, we have a *central* place to list the information that we find. On that website, I've been putting *links* to people and organizations as I learn about them.

I also have help with how-to-do-it material for that website, from a 9th District Messaging Committee that we formed over a year ago.

Slide 4: What to say….

Remember, we're reaching out to people who must be *persuaded* to vote Democratic.

What should we say to this audience? Because we're dedicated Democrats, the way we talk *among ourselves* about issues **will not** reach that audience.

Slide 5: Progressive Values ??

Values. What does that word mean? Drew Weston, a psychologist at Emory University, said that "…*values* [are our] emotion-laden beliefs about **how things *should* [be]**…."

There is a very long list of **issues** that we can *try* to get across to people, but their brains cannot take in many things at once. Three items is a rule-of-thumb maximum in politics. So rather than cut back on the number of *issues* we talk about, instead we can talk about a small number of *values,* because each value can influence many issues.

I've read a great deal about this over the last few years, and, in my opinion, there's a convincing argument for a *short* list of values that we can work from effectively.

Slide 6: Progressive Values - Freedom, Opportunity, Security

Freedom, Opportunity, Security.

These three words are a *foundation*, and we'll **build** our messages on them.

The Republicans are trying to *rip* some of these words out of *our* dictionary, so that we won't use them anymore. This tells us one thing: Republican think tanks found that these words are highly *positive* in the minds of Americans — so the Republicans are attempting not only to *own* these words but, more importantly, to *redefine* them. They work very hard to *twist* the definitions of these words in the public's minds to make them fit *their* ideology.

Here are the meanings of these words that *we* want voters to accept, and we'll do it by using the words this way in our messages. (I'll quote from this publication, "Voicing Our Values." You can download this document for **FREE** from the ValuesMessage.org website.)

> *[Freedom.]* Government *in the wrong hands* often tries to restrict our freedom. "Where government has **no proper role** — because public action would violate our individual rights — Democratic policy is based on **freedom**. Freedom means the absence of *legal* interference with our fundamental rights—freedom of speech, religion and association; the right to privacy; the rights of the accused; and the right of all citizens to vote. In other words, *we* use freedom as a defense of our basic constitutional rights and civil liberties.

> *[Opportunity.]* "Where government acts as a **referee** between private, unequal interests, Democratic policy is based on **opportunity**. Opportunity means a **level playing field** in social and economic affairs—**fair** dealings between the powerful and the less powerful, the elimination of discrimination, and a quality education for all….

[Security.] "Where government acts to **protect** those who cannot reasonably protect themselves, including <u>future generations</u>, Democratic policy is based on **security**. Security includes protecting Americans from domestic criminals and foreign terrorists, of course. But it also means *insuring* the sick and the vulnerable, safeguarding the food we eat and products we use, preserving our environment and, of course, there's Social Security."

A *Democratic* position on any issue will have at least one of these values *as its foundation* — freedom, opportunity, security. Every message should speak to one or more of these three values.

Slide 7: "similar values"

The publication "Voicing Our Values" also points out that we won't limit ourselves to using *only* these three words. There are *similar* words that we can use when writing or speaking about these values; and this list is in the book.

Slide 8: How to say it…

That's enough for now about "*What* to say"; that is, we'll base our messages on our values of Freedom, Opportunity, Security.

Let's talk about "*How* to say it."

Slide 9: book - *Language Intelligence*

We can use words in ways that affect people more *emotionally* and make the words more *memorable*.

This 200-page paperback has so much in it that I'll only skim through it. (This book is listed on the ValuesMessage.org website.)

Slide 10: Short words

Use **short words**, one or two syllables whenever you can.

A long word often describes a *complex* idea, made up from several *simpler* ideas. It squeezes all of those ideas into a single word. So *long* words often are a kind of *insider language*.

For example, the word **"environment"** has four syllables.

In politics, "environment" usually means the air, water, wildlife, forests, climate — things we want to protect. Using the long word saves us a little time in speaking — saves us having to use a few extra words — but it sacrifices the *emotional* connection that people have with the *simpler* words that it replaces.

For another example, the word **"regulations"** (four syllables) should be replaced with the word "rules."

Everyone understands "rules." Every game that we've played from childhood has them; and there were "rules" for behavior at home and at school.

"Regulations," on the other hand, is not an *everyday* word, so regulations can be criticized as something alien and complicated. Anti-government Republicans love to almost spit the word out, as something imposed on us by a tyrannical government.

"Inequality" is a very important concept about backward trends in the quality of our lives, but the five-syllable word has NO emotional content, because *it is not an everyday word.* It includes low pay, temporary jobs, poor education, limited opportunities. A person hearing it has to stop and think what the word might contain.

When you consider using a long word, what immediately pops into your head when you hear the word? Is there a *picture*? Too often, there's nothing, until your brain breaks down the long word into the simpler words that mean something to you. *The people we want to reach may lose interest before their brains go to that trouble.*

So…use *short* words, even if you have to use *more* words, simple words that everyone will understand.

Slide 11: Add "Repetition"

Use **repetition**. When speaking or writing, *repeat* your key ideas, words, and phrases. Repeat them not only in the *same* message but also in a *series* of messages, over a period of time, to **lock** them into people's brains.

There's a rule-of-thumb in political campaigns that we have to repeat our message *at least* five (5) times before the target of our message is *conscious* of it for the first time.

Slide 12: "Repetition" with image

Our muscles, when repeatedly exercised, become stronger. *Similarly*, cognitive science tells us that when neural pathways in the brain are exercised by repeatedly being exposed to the message that formed those pathways, the pathways are reinforced — made stronger. When something is reinforced in the brain, by repeated messages on the same thing, it has a stronger influence on what the person thinks.

When people hear something *repeatedly,* they may forget **who** said it, but they're more likely to remember what they've heard as being TRUE. If some fact or idea has been unconsciously stored in my brain…then, I can't help but think it's true. That's how we'll perceive it — even if, *factually,* it is NOT TRUE. *That's the power of repetition.*

There are some well-defined, formal kinds of repetition. Online, you can Google the word "repetition" as a *literary device* and see many examples.

Repetition is what makes money in politics so powerful. More money allows candidates to *repeat* their messages more times, in more kinds of media.

If our candidate has less money than the Republican, we can help personally by repeating *our candidate's* messages, spreading them to our own list of contacts, who will spread them to their lists of contacts, and so on.

Slide 13: Add "metaphors"

Use **metaphors**.

"The Republicans drove the car into the ditch. Now, after the Democrats pushed it out of the ditch, the Republicans want the keys back."

This is a metaphor. A car in the ditch is a *physical object*, so it evokes a *picture* in our heads. President Obama used this metaphor to describe what happened, following the Great Recession, with the politics of the *economy*. The "economy in recession" — [quote] the "economy in recession" [unquote] — is an *abstract* idea. It isn't a physical thing, so no picture pops into our heads. So President Obama used the metaphor to create a memorable picture.

Because of the double memory hook — *pictures* in addition to words — metaphors are easier to remember than literal statements that mean the same thing.

For example, after World War II, Winston Churchill coined the metaphor "an iron curtain" to describe the Soviet Union taking over the governments of Eastern Europe. The vivid picture evoked in people's minds, of a curtain made of iron, was much easier to understand than descriptions of an abstract political system.

Slide 14: "Language Intelligence"

There's much more of value for you in this small book. I'll leave the rest for you to read about in the book, but there's one item that's particularly important:

Slide 15: Negation - "We are NOT…."

Using the word "NOT" — trying to negate a Republican statement — should be avoided.

For example, if Republicans call us "tax & spend Democrats," we must *avoid* responding, "We do *not* tax & spend."

What happens in people's minds is that the negation, the "NOT," fades in memory;

Slide 16: Negation - "We are NOT…." (faded)

and what's remembered are the **key words** — the Republicans' words. By *repeating* "tax-and-spend," even by negating it, we've ***reinforced*** the Republican message, that Democrats just "tax-and-spend."

Instead of being *defensive,* trying to *negate* an attack, respond with something **positive**, such as "Democrats are building for this generation and the next!" Use *our* words and phrases instead of the ones the Republicans try to force on us.

Slide 17: Framing Public Issues - cover

FINALLY, material on the very important idea of "framing" is in this document, "Framing Public Issues." It's FREE. It may be downloaded as a PDF document on the **ValuesMessage.org** website. Look on the "Links/Tools" page.

Imagine looking at your surroundings *through* a picture frame. Look only at what's inside the frame. Framing a message does the same thing.

Instead of trying to cover *all* the possible material about an issue, you ***frame*** a political issue by choosing to show people *that part* of the material that *you* consider *most* important, that is, you choose how *you* want to "frame" the issue.

Slide 18: Framing; CoMMeNT-V

We're getting deeper into the machinery of messaging. We've talked about using short words, using repetition, and other methods to find *the most effective words and phrases.* Here's how to build the final message, brick by brick.

In creating a message, **these are the six (6) elements that you should take into account.** You don't have to *use* all six in a message, but if you do use them, there are guidelines that you should follow.

These elements are described in detail in "Framing Public Issues," and you should read it to make effective use of this. I don't have time to go through them today.

I've made up a mnemonic, a memory aid to help you remember these elements. It's made up of the initial letters of these items. **It's the word "comment" with a "V" tacked on to the end.**

In putting your message together by using these framing elements, **remember** to base the message on one or more of the *values* that we've talked about: Freedom, Opportunity, Security. You will set the *standard* against which anyone else's arguments will be measured.

Slide 19: Messaging…ValuesMessage.org

What I've shown you are the basics:

- We've talked about *what* to say: that is, our messages should be based on the Democratic values of Freedom, Opportunity, Security.

- We've talked about *how* to say it — guidelines for the effective use of language, such as using short words, repetition, and metaphors; and how to carefully *frame* our messages.

Go to the website, ValuesMessage.org; and *especially* go to the link outlined in red dashes. There you'll see *this* material and more that the 9th District Messaging Committee is working on.

Republicans have their think tanks that are paid to do nothing but figure out the most effective messaging, then tell *their* politicians what to say and how to say it. And they go out and say it.

We Democrats don't have that. We DO have the scattered **sources** that I've talked about here, more that are listed on the ValuesMessage.org website, and others that we're still discovering. All of those sources are doing important work…separately.

We have to learn to do messaging *ourselves, **at the grass roots***.

Learning to do messaging is like learning to ride a bicycle: We're a little wobbly at first, but we get better with practice. And if we follow the guidelines I've talked about, we'll help our future candidates win.

Thank you.

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