HART RESEARCH

GROUNDWORK ACTION

TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Connecting Democrats' Oversight Agenda to Voters' Priorities

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Groundwork Action commissioned Hart Research to conduct research to identify voters' priorities for Congressional oversight and accountability investigations if Democrats were to retake one or both chambers of Congress. This two-phase research project includes a national survey of 2,029 voters that was conducted from September 3 to 8, 2026. This was preceded by four focus groups among key target audiences ("No Kings" voters, "Gettable Former Democrats", "Battleground state swing" voters, and "working-class" voters[1]).

In this memorandum, we outline key findings from the research and our strategic recommendations for an oversight and accountability agenda that a Democratic majority can use to drive a winning narrative for Democrats heading into 2028.

OVERVIEW

Our new polling indicates that an oversight agenda should prioritize investigating examples of corporate abuse and corruption that directly raise costs on Americans as opposed to other scandals or rule-of-law violations involving the Trump administration. Two in three voters (66%) think that investigations of corporate greed should be a high priority for Congress – more than any other area of potential oversight we tested.

Focusing on the economic impacts of corporate greed and corruption in the daily lives of everyday Americans is essential to demonstrate that Democrats' priorities are aligned with the most pressing concerns of voters. This focus is particularly essential to win back the target group of "Gettable Former Democrats" we surveyed. We cannot overstate how important it is to center corporate power and greed in the way congressional Democrats talk about why the economy is failing so many Americans. It should be at the heart of framing the actions Democrats take in the next Congress.

The Democratic base has a particularly strong appetite for investigations of Trump's personal corruption and violations of the rule of law, and Democrats in Congress obviously will use their oversight powers to address the legitimate concerns of the base in these regards. But reaching beyond the base requires shining the brightest spotlight on investigations that address corruption or abuse of powers that have pocketbook resonance and clear implications for the cost of living.

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[1] *No Kings Voters* are Democratic voters who either have attended or are likely to attend a No Kings protest; *Gettable Former Democrats* are voters who used to support Democrats but no longer do and are not strong Republicans/not very conservative; *Battleground State Swing Voters* are voters who are not strong partisans and reside in one of seven swing states; and *Working Class Voters* are low-to-moderate income, non-college voters.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Voters have soured on Trump's handling of the economy, but this has not translated into a durable confidence in Democrats. Any oversight agenda next year should be developed with the goal of consolidating what is currently only a tenuous advantage on the economy for Democrats.**

   - Trump's deterioration on the economy was a key factor in the results of the 2026 midterm elections. An issue that has historically been Trump's strength has turned into an albatross for Republicans during his second administration, with Trump's approval on the economy dropping nearly 20 points since the beginning of his second term.
   - However, our survey shows most voters do not have a high degree of trust in *either* Democrats (45% trust a lot or some, 55% trust just a little or not at all) or Republicans (39%, 61%) to act in the best interests of everyday Americans. Similarly, voters do not express high levels of confidence in either Democrats (44% a lot or some confidence) or Republicans (37%) in Congress to address the most important issues facing the country.
   - To be responsive to voters' priorities for the next Congress, Democrats must focus their oversight agenda on cost-of-living concerns. Among 10 issues that the next Congress could focus on, voters' number one priority is to lower the cost of groceries and gas (71% of top 4 most important); and it is the top priority across party (from liberal Democrats to MAGA Republicans) and nearly all demographic groups (with the exception of voters age 65+ who rank protecting Social Security and Medicare as their top priority).

   Strategic implication: The challenge for a potential Democratic majority is to turn voters' tenuous trust in Democrats to handle the economy into more durable credibility on what remains Americans' top issue. While Trump remains in the White House, an oversight agenda will be a meaningful and visible tool that a Democratic majority can use to drive a narrative and demonstrate an enthusiastic willingness to take on those who exploit a broken economy.

2. **In designing an oversight agenda, Democrats must account for three concerns voters consistently express: they think oversight is just a partisan exercise, they think both sides are equally guilty of corruption, and they think no consequences ever come from congressional probes.**

   - Voters recognize Congress' authority to conduct oversight and accountability investigations as important in theory, but they express skepticism about these investigations in practice.
     - Fully 83% of voters think that Congress' oversight role is a very (53%) or fairly (30%) important part of what Congress does.
     - Voters in the focus groups, however, express skepticism about the motivations and effectiveness of Congressional oversight investigations in practice.
   - First, they view investigations as the majority party's tool for political payback against the other side, and some assume a Democratic-led crackdown would target Trump and Republicans while giving Democratic officials and blue states a pass.

     "Nothing is going to be solved while they are too busy being Democrat and Republican and not Americans." – *Gettable Former Democrat*

- Second, they think both parties benefit from the current system and are equally complicit in the system's abuses.

  "We've heard about draining the swamp for years, and it seems like the swamp is still filled with all these just bad actors, as they say. Ultimately, it sounds really good to say that [Democrats will crack down on corruption], but they would have to look in their own house too. Right? [Look into] their own closets and clean the skeletons. And who's going to do that?" – No Kings voter

- Third, they do not expect Congressional investigations to accomplish much or affect their lives. They doubt either party will pursue real accountability and feel like accountability is rarely delivered even when promised.

  "When will we see the benefits from [investigations]? They can sit up there and discuss it…'til hell freezes over. But when will the American people see the benefits?" – *Working class voter*

Strategic implication: To mitigate the public's deep cynicism, leaders in the next Congress should prioritize investigations that focus on subjects with less partisan baggage and that are likely to deliver material outcomes.

3. Voters overall – as well as key target groups – respond more positively to Congress focusing its investigations on exposing corporate greed that raises prices for everyday Americans. Investigations focused on Trump personally test less well among groups outside the Democratic base.

- Of three potential areas of oversight we tested, the best-performing option was the following:

> ***[Corporate Greed] Exposing corporate greed, price gouging, and other illegal or unethical business practices that raise prices for everyday Americans.***
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> *In order to do this, Congress should investigate…*
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> - *Price gouging by corporations that raise their prices faster than costs are rising to boost their profits*
> - *Companies coordinating or colluding with each other to fix prices and limit competition*
> - *Corporations exploiting tax loopholes to avoid paying their fair share in taxes*
> - *Companies and/or their CEOs who have committed fraud, wage theft, and other crimes*

- Two in three voters (66%) overall think that investigations of corporate greed should be a high priority for Congress (rating of 8, 9, or 10 on a 0-10 scale) – more than think Congress should prioritize Trump's personal corruption (58%).
- And fully 70% say that they would feel more favorable toward their member of Congress if they pushed for investigations of corporate greed – more than ten points higher than the share who would feel more favorable if their member of Congress pushed for other types of investigations.
- Voters are also more likely to think that investigations of corporate greed (66%) will benefit people like them than to think investigations in other areas will.

- We should note that the Democratic base (e.g., liberal Democrats) places a slightly higher priority on Congress investigating corruption by Trump than on investigating corporate greed, but both approaches have significant appeal to the group. Importantly, however, the key target groups of Gettable Former Democrats and self-identified working-class voters do not find both options equally appealing, placing a higher priority on investigations of corporate greed.

Strategic implication: An oversight agenda that targets corporate greed gives Democrats in Congress an opportunity to speak to the broadest swath of Americans without alienating an enthusiastic and engaged base.

4. **When it comes to the particular industries and practices voters most wish to see investigated, price-gouging by drug, health care, and energy companies rank near the top.**

- A survey we conducted earlier this year found that both Democratic base voters and our target group of "Gettable Former Democrats" share a core belief: our economy is unfairly rigged in favor of the wealthy and corporations at the expense of everyone else. Fully 67% of voters overall, 87% of Democrats, and 75% of Gettable Former Democrats agree.
- When it comes to specific areas of corporate greed on which Congress could focus its oversight, voters overall and Gettable Former Democrats would most like Congress to investigate their price gouging and abuse of government influence:

  ✔ *Price gouging by corporations that sharply raise prices to unfair levels during an emergency or shortage* (Top 3 priority: 50% of all voters, 54% of Gettable Former Democrats); and

  ✔ *Billionaires and big corporations abusing their power and influence over government officials to get special favors in order to increase their profits* (Top 3 priority: 48% of all voters, 51% of Gettable Former Democrats)

  Note: Voters place a higher priority on Congress investigating these types of corporate wrongdoing than on investigating *Donald Trump, his family, and members of his administration using their positions and insider knowledge to enrich themselves*. (Top priority: 45% of all voters, 40% of Gettable Former Democrats).
- When it comes to investigations of corporations, voters' top priorities are for Congress to focus on health insurance companies (50% Top 3 most important), oil and gas companies (46%), big tech and AI companies (43%), and pharmaceutical companies (40%).
- We tested some specific areas of corporate greed that Congress could investigate, and two stand out clearly above the rest—both centered on corporate price gouging and strongest with Gettable Former Democrats:

  ✔ *Pharmaceutical companies are making huge profits by raising prices on many life-saving medications while not providing transparency about the supply chains, market concentration, and pricing strategies that would show if the increases were necessary or simply profit-driven.* (High priority for 69% of all voters, 79% of liberal Democrats, 69% of Gettable Former Democrats, and 72% of working-class voters)

✔ *Some oil and gas companies are price gouging, manipulating markets, and pursuing anti-competitive pricing practices to take advantage of the Iran war.* (High priority for 66% of all voters, 78% of liberal Democrats, 66% of Gettable Former Democrats, and 65% of working-class voters)

- Lastly, we tested two potential lines of inquiry for Congressional investigations of AI companies, and both resonate with voters:

  ✔ *AI companies have disclosed that some of their AI models are encouraging minors to harm themselves, creating deepfake content, and breaching cybersecurity networks, as the industry and technology continues to rapidly evolve without federal regulation.* (High priority for 64% of all voters, 78% of liberal Democrats, 59% of Gettable Former Democrats, and 63% of working-class voters)

  ✔ *AI companies are building data centers at a rapid pace that are expected to harm surrounding communities by driving up electricity costs, straining grid reliability, and negatively impacting air and water quality.* (High priority for 61% of all voters, 71% of liberal Democrats, 61% of Gettable Former Democrats, and 63% of working-class voters)

5. When it comes to investigating Trump-specific controversies, Democrats are best served to focus on those that involve a consumer or taxpayer harm as opposed to those that don't.

- We tested some potential investigations of Trump's corruption, including those related to insider trading, crypto investments, and acceptance of gifts from foreign leaders.
- Voters overall, Gettable Former Democrats, and working-class voters rate this category as less important than investigations of price gouging by drug companies and oil and gas companies, but it is top among liberal Democrats.
- Out of the examples of Trump corruption we tested, voters' top priority is to investigate Trump's insider trading. This option read as follows:

  Since taking office, President Trump has made over 17,000 stock trades worth over $1.5 billion. Several occurred just before major announcements by the Trump administration, most notably oil trades ahead of the Iran war, which has caused gas prices to rise to over $4 a gallon. (High priority for 59% of all voters, 85% of liberal Democrats, 55% of Gettable Former Democrats, and 61% of working-class voters)

- A key aspect at work here is the fact that it discussed not only an example of Trump administration wrongdoing, but also made a connection to a pain point directly felt by consumers. The implication is that Trump officials are profiting off the Iran war while regular Americans pay the price.
- This points to a larger takeaway: not all Trump controversies play equally well. We would divide the list of Trump scandals that could receive oversight attention into two categories:

  Category A – Trump enriching himself and insiders at the expense of everyday Americans. Examples include:

- Trump made millions from trading stocks in oil companies ahead of the Iran war, which has caused gas prices to rise to over $4 a gallon
- Trump issued pardons to nursing home executives who donated to his inauguration committee and those executives now no longer have to pay millions in restitution to consumers
- The Trump family has made over $1.4 billion from their cryptocurrency businesses and investments in President Trump's second term, all while pushing a bill in Congress that would benefit the crypto industry and remove protections for consumers and pardoning crypto officials who helped his own crypto business

Category B – Trump abusing power and violating democratic norms in ways that are less clearly linked to the high cost of living. Examples include:

- Trump's vanity projects, including demolition of the White House East Wing without Congressional consent in order to build a $600 million ballroom; taking control of the Kennedy Center, reshaping its offerings, and pushing for his name to be added to its façade; and pushing to build a Great Triumphal Arch near Arlington National Cemetery
- Accepting a $400 million luxury jumbo jet from the royal family of Qatar
- Directing the Justice Department to bring cases against his political enemies
- Pressuring law firms and media companies that he perceives to be unfriendly to his political agenda through investigations, lawsuits, fines, and other threats

CONCLUSION

A Democratic congressional oversight agenda that emphasizes investigations of corporate greed sends important signals to all voters – and importantly to the key group of Gettable Former Democrats – ahead of 2028:

- ✔ It is responsive to voters' top priority – the high cost of living – and so gives Democrats the chance to increase their advantage over Republicans on the issue of the economy.
- ✔ It provides evidence that Democrats are serious about confronting corporate power that is winning at the benefit of everyday Americans in our rigged system.
- ✔ It shows that Democrats are not just partisan actors whose primary focus is attacking Donald Trump and Republicans.
- ✔ It has the potential to produce criminal referrals or concrete reforms to abusive corporate practices – yielding the kind of tangible outcomes voters want these investigations to produce.

Congressional Democrats will obviously consider many factors when deciding which oversight investigations to pursue against Trump, but investigations of Trump's corruption and abuse of power have the greatest potential to reach beyond the Democratic base if they a) have pocketbook resonance and can clearly be linked to higher costs for everyday Americans, and b) link Trump's corruption to corporations and billionaires who are benefiting at the expense of everyday Americans.