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Date: September 26, 2003

To: Friends of Democracy Corps

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RE: THE CORE MESSAGE

With Bush's fall, progressives and Democrats have an opportunity for a new clarity of message and strategy. These conclusions are based on the national polls conducted by Democracy Corps over the last two months that have addressed security issues and the economy. Those polls captured at an early point Bush's accelerating fall and the emergence of the new period in which we battle.

The core message is described below –

The Core Message

President Bush is overwhelmed by the problems facing the country – employment and the economy, Iraq, and the budget deficits. The problems grow out of control, yet he has no plan for expanding employment and no plan for post-war Iraq or the growing budget mess. Failing to win international support, he wants \$87 billion from US taxpayers for Iraq, but with exploding deficits, that means cuts in spending for education and health care and a lack of funds for Social Security.

The message makes no presumption about the vote on \$87 billion dollars, but instead, sets the context for either choice on the president's request. While a majority of voters is opposed to the \$87 billion, a majority also thinks it would be wrong to pull out of Iraq. Clearly, the Democrats in Congress will support the troops and provide them whatever they need; similarly, the Democrats will insist on accountability on the reconstruction aid.

The main emphasis should be on the mess that Bush has gotten the country into, the lack of a plan and the cuts in education, health care and Social Security. Had Bush won international support, the burden would not now fall on our troops and US taxpayers.

But Democrats should welcome a debate over how to pay for the rising spending for Iraq. Progressives say, not by cutting education and health care in America, not by bankrupting Social Security or the country; instead, repeal the tax cut for the top 1 percent to pay for Iraq. To protect the corporations and the wealthiest, Bush favors cuts in essential domestic spending and in increased debt. In this choice, voters side with the Democrats by more than 2 to 1.

In support of this core message, it is important to understand key aspects of the current period that are driving voters away from the president and the Republicans:

- The \$87 billion dollar request has become a powerful symbol of the president's failing policies. It took people by surprise, and they know that number. It represents the failed foreign policy, the open-ended war in Iraq, deficits, and a president who will not take care of America.
- The deficits too have become a powerful symbol of what is now wrong in the country and, as a result, voters are turning to the Democrats in remarkable numbers. There has been a collapse of confidence in the Republicans on handling the budget and deficits.
- The deficit is powerful because it means government will be unable to afford spending for education and health care and unable to fund Social Security. The former are most important for those under 40 years and the latter for those over 50 years. The main concern is not that debt will be passed to future generations or that it will produce higher interest rates and weaken the economy. The rising deficit is a central part of the narrative on Iraq spending undercutting needs at home.
- The main economic worries are job losses – the 3 million jobs lost over 3 years and the job losses in manufacturing in the face of rising Chinese imports. The job losses are powerful, but the sense of a problem unaddressed encompasses the failure of the Bush administration to address the China challenge.
- Rising health care costs are the other key element in the worsening economy. That prices are rising 13 percent a year is a powerful part of the Democratic message – George Bush overwhelmed as prices rise out of control.

- The case against Bush is also about priorities. He places the interests of big corporations and the wealthiest ahead of those of ordinary people. His go-it-alone policy, means the US is spending more on problems abroad, instead of taking care of our problems here at home.
- Support for Bush's tax cut plan dropped from 50 to 45 percent after the public received checks and after the announced \$87 billion. People are increasingly unsettled by the policy. Faced with budget trade-offs, they strongly favor repeal of the tax cut for the top 1 percent.
- Democrats must underscore their support for the military and the troops as they address the Iraq funding. The biggest doubt about Democrats is not their reluctance to use force; it is their lack of support for the military. In this battle, Democrats are the ones battling to make sure the military gets what it needs, including more allied support to share the burden.
- The drop in trust of the president is an important part of the Republicans' current problems. A large majority says they do not trust Bush on WMD, reversing a large majority that did in June. The biggest shift came after the president's speech, unprecedented in presidential speechmaking. Continuing declines in trust will buttress the dynamics now at work in this period.
- Remarkably, nearly a majority of the country believes George Bush is "in over his head." This is not about competence and smarts. This is about a Bush administration overwhelmed as problems spin out of control. That is a powerful theme for this period.
- The political energy in the country has shifted from the Republican to the Democratic world. There are now more enthusiastic Democratic voters than Republican; there are now more strong anti-Bush voters than anti-Democratic ones.

These are different times with obviously new opportunities for progressives. We hope these message notes will be helpful.