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To: Interested Parties

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Re: Young Adults Could Hold Key to Keeping Democratic Majority

With control of Congress hanging in the balance this fall, new polling commissioned by Rock the Vote and conducted by Anzalone Liszt Research and the Tarrance Group shows that adults under 30 could hold the key to whether Democrats hang on to their majority this cycle. As the stagnant economy and dissatisfaction with Washington has caused Independents to move away from the Democratic Party, expanding the voting universe among young people could be critical to the Democrats' hopes.

A lot has changed since 2008, when Democrats benefited from a surge in support among young adults that helped them capture the Presidency and expand their advantage in the House. President Obama no longer enjoys the rock-star like status that he held with this group two years ago, but still earns strong ratings, with 56% viewing him favorably. This puts his support well above George W. Bush's (32% favorable) and at twice the level of Sarah Palin (28%).

Democrats are still preferred to Republicans among those under 30, but there is a strong sense of disenchantment, as 59% say that they have become more cynical about politics over the past two years. This rise in cynicism has taken a toll on the party in power, as Democrats' advantage on party ID has been cut in half (down from 18 points to 9 points) and a plurality of these young adults (36%) say that they do not care which party is in control of Congress. Democrats' declining advantage among young adults is not only evident nationally, but also in the key swing states of Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania that were polled separately.

To limit their losses this November, Democrats must re-energize these young adults. Currently, just 17% say they are paying "a lot of attention" to the upcoming elections, and engagement is higher among young Republicans, 60% of whom say that they are *very* likely to vote this November, compared to 51% of Democrats. The reservoir of support is still much larger on the Democratic side however, as they preferred Obama by a 21-point margin in 2008 (55% to 34%).

Motivating this age bloc to get to the polls will require a clear focus on economic issues, as much like the rest of the country, those under 30 overwhelmingly cite the economy as their top issue. Not surprisingly, they are most concerned about unemployment (74% very concerned), but their anxiety over the national debt is almost as high (66% very concerned). Though these two issues worry them the most, the cost of education, healthcare, the influence of corporations and America's dependence on foreign oil are also major sources of concern. These are not only the dominant issues nationally, but across key swing states as well.

Fortunately for Democrats, they are well-positioned to make the case to these young adults that they are the party that most closely aligns with their beliefs. Despite their growing cynicism

with politics, 18 to 29 year olds still strongly believe that they have the power to change things in the country (83%) and are very supportive of core Democratic priorities. Below are some recommendations for how Democratic candidates can effectively communicate to these young adults:

- **Creating green energy jobs.** Young adults are eager for new jobs and industries and see investments in renewable energy sources as an important step to achieving those goals. Of the sixteen policy proposals tested in the polling, none was more strongly supported than increasing investment in renewable energy sources, with 58% saying that they would be *much* more likely to support a Congressional candidate who took that position.
- **Draw contrast on college affordability.** In addition to the economy, college affordability is also a major priority with this group, particularly for those in their teens and early 20's. Increasing government grants to make college more affordable is enthusiastically supported by these young adults, and could be even more powerful when it is contrasted with Republican opposition to expanding Pell grants and the party's ties to the student loan industry.
- **Demonstrate a commitment to fiscal responsibility.** Although those under 30 strongly support increased investment in renewable energy and college aid, they are not looking for politicians to simply throw money at problems. The national debt is a grave concern for this age group (66% very concerned / 93% concerned overall) as they do not want to be forced to shoulder the burden of future tax increases. Given this, Democratic candidates must be sure to demonstrate a commitment to reining in wasteful spending and reducing the deficit, while framing investments in renewable energy and college aid as important for both short and long-term economic growth.
- **Oppose Bush tax cuts for the rich.** One way to demonstrate this commitment to fiscal responsibility is to take a stand against continuing the Bush tax cuts for those earning over two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year. Adults under 30 strongly support repealing these tax cuts as a way to reduce the deficit, as 65% say they are more likely to back a candidate who supports ending them.
- **Cast Democrats as the party willing to stand up to corporate special interests.** Over three quarters (76%) of adults under 30 believe that big corporations have too much power and cite the ability of corporate interests to prevent change as a prime reason for not voting. By contrasting Republican support for corporate interests with Democrats willingness to stand up to Wall Street, the student loan industry and big oil, Democrats can draw an important distinction between the two parties.

Democrats have lost ground with 18 to 29 year olds over the past two years, but the opportunity still exists for the party to re-energize this group. By making sharp contrasts with Republicans on issues such as green jobs, college affordability and tax cuts for the wealthy, Democrats can help increase their support among young voters and improve their chances of maintaining their majority post November.