

TALKING POINTS
Congressional Hearings Campaign
(For Spokesperson Training – 12/13/11)

I.

- I'm part of a national effort being led by independent voters to pressure Congress to hold hearings and examine the status of independent voters.
- The effort is being coordinated by IndependentVoting.org, a national association of independent voters.
- Polls show that 38% of Americans now consider themselves independent.
- But the political process hasn't adapted to this change.
- So independent voters face structural barriers that prevent us from fully participating.
- We're calling for Congressional hearings on the status of independent voters to shine a spotlight on the structural barriers that independents face.

II.

- It's clear that Americans don't like partisanship, and people are doing something about it -- they're leaving the Democratic and Republican parties and becoming independent.
- I'm doing something about it too. I'm participating in a national campaign to call for Congressional hearings on the second class status of independents and I want to invite you / your listeners to join me.
- The campaign is being coordinated by IndependentVoting.org, a national association of independent voters.

- The trend towards independence isn't new. It's been taking place over the last 30 years. It's reached a level where there are now more independents than Democrats or Republicans.
- Our political system hasn't kept pace with these changes. Quite the opposite. The political parties have resisted it. (It's not in their self interest to see their ranks diminished.) As a result, there are many ways that independents face structural barriers to voter participation.
- The purpose of the lobbying campaign is to educate Congress and the American people on how partisan control of elections is causing too many citizens to be shut out of the decision-making process and shine a spotlight on this issue as a way of laying the foundation for structural reforms.
- Closed primaries are one example of a structural barrier which many states have and which exclude independents from voting. Independents pay taxes for elections but don't get to vote in all of them.
- Independents want reforms that can prevent government from functioning exclusively on a partisan basis. Open primaries, nonpartisan elections, nonpartisan redistricting reform, putting independents on the Federal Election Commission, reducing the hegemony of the parties over the people.
- These reforms open up the process and empower the American people, allowing us to impact more on public policy whether it's education, healthcare or the economy.
- I want to invite your listeners who are fed up with partisanship to help by...

III.

- The political situation has become so strained, so gridlocked; it can't be ignored any longer. What's become clear is the political parties are more interested in gaining or maintaining their own power than in doing what's best for the country. That's why so many Americans are leaving the parties! They don't support that politic. Independents want what's best for the country, not what's best for a given political party.

- The self-interested / self-perpetuating quality that political parties have developed is dangerous. That's what we mean by partisanship. Not that they have different points of view. Partisanship means that the parties are fighting for their own self perpetuation, no matter the cost.
- Political gridlock has a very negative effect on economic growth. But also on human and societal growth. Independents are concerned about that all over the country. We're concerned about the corruption and decay of our democracy.
- Independents are doing something about it and leading a campaign to pressure Congress for hearings to examine the ways that our system is hardwired for partisanship.
- Congress has an all time low approval rating – 9% among independents. But we're not here to blame elected officials for the fact that Congress has the lowest approval rating in its history. We think the problem is structural, not how any given elected official is behaving.
- Independents are out at shopping malls and community centers collecting signatures on postcards which people can order on line by logging onto our website at IndependentVoting.org.
- Our campaign for hearings is gaining traction and we're going to keep building it. We've met with Congressional leaders from NY, KY, NV, MA and thousands of people have signed letters and postcards to their elected officials.
- Early this month, representatives of IV.org traveled to DC to meet with the staff of several key committee's that have jurisdiction over this issue – namely a class of voters, in this case independents, who are facing barriers to participation.
- Congressional leaders like Michael Grimm, a Republican from NYC, are starting to send letters to the chairs of those committee's urging they go ahead with the hearings. We need to shine a spotlight on this issue. We're not looking for a silver bullet solution and we're not proposing immediate legislation. Let's pause as a country and look at what we've become politically. And the answer is, we've become more

independent. Let's look at the implications of that. Let's look at the structural issues. That's what we need and I want to invite your listeners to help by...

Misc.

- There are two big issues facing the country that Americans are concerned with -- the economy and the problem of partisanship. The two issues are interconnected. We can't make progress on the jobs front, (or any front for that matter) if the political process is broken. That's why we're calling for hearings - - to look at how the system has broken down from the vantage point of the voter, specifically the independent voter, who is now about 40% of the electorate.
- To fix the economy, Americans want jobs and that's plain as can be. How to solve the problem of partisanship is less clear because the same people who are in a position to enact reform are the ones caught up in the partisan mess! So independents are getting organized in order to be heard. We're not building a third party, we're building a movement for structural political reform to get our system up-to-date with where *the people* are at. Lobbying Congress to hold hearings on how independents -- and by extension the American people -- are locked out of the process, is bringing us together to fight for a better future.
- Examples of Structural Barriers:
 - We need open primaries to allow independents to vote in the first round of voting. But voters want more than having to choose a straight party ballot to vote in. They want to vote for the best candidate regardless of party affiliation. In California and Washington the voters passed initiatives calling for top two elections. Any voter can go to the polls and vote for the candidate of their choice regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote getters go onto the general election. Independents in Arizona are putting a similar initiative on the ballot.
 - The Federal Election Commission (FEC) which oversees our national elections is run by 3 Democrats and 3 Republicans and

is chronically deadlocked. Obama could appoint one or more independents.

- State and local bodies that administer elections typically have no representation by independents either.
- Independents are often required to define ourselves in unfavorable terms at the point of registration (ie as "unaffiliated", "undeclared", "other", "decline to state", etc). .. In Florida independents must register as "NONE."
- IndependentVoting.org was founded in 1994 to support independent voters who--like so many Americans—feel dissatisfied with partisan politics and want to do something about it. IndependentVoting has taken the step of helping independents act on their dislike of partisanship, and to work to change the system so the parties don't exert so much control over politics.