

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin
DATE: March 18, 2020
**RE: Key Findings from New National Polling on the
Coronavirus Pandemic**

This memorandum presents the key findings of a survey conducted March 13 to 15, among a representative national cross section of 1,015 voters. The survey was conducted on behalf of the CAP Action Fund and Protect Our Care.

Any assessment of public opinion about the novel coronavirus must begin with this simple fact: the coronavirus has become a defining and consuming issue for a clear majority of American voters. Nearly two-thirds of voters say they have been following news about the coronavirus very closely, and 65% say either that the coronavirus is already a very serious problem in the United States (49%) or that it will become a very serious problem (16%). Seven in 10 voters say they are very or fairly worried about the impact it will have on the U.S. economy, and 64% say they are very or fairly worried about the impact it will have on the U.S. healthcare system.

Moreover, concern about the coronavirus is personal for many Americans. Forty-six percent say they are very worried that they or someone in their immediate family will be infected with the coronavirus (another 25% are somewhat worried), and 50% say they are very or fairly worried about the impact that the coronavirus will have on their own financial situation (24% somewhat worried).

Attitudes about the coronavirus are closely connected to partisanship, and voters who closely follow the news about coronavirus are far more likely than others to be strongly concerned about its impacts.

	<u>Democrats</u> %	<u>Inde- pendents</u> %	<u>Repub- licans</u> %	<u>Follow News Very Closely</u> %	<u>Do Not Follow News Very Closely</u> %
Already a very serious problem	63	43	37	62	27
Very/fairly worried about impact on U.S. economy	79	67	59	79	52
Very/fairly worried about impact on U.S. health system	78	61	51	75	45
Very/fairly worried about personal health impact	57	47	35	56	29
Very/fairly worried about personal financial impact	62	49	38	59	35
Believe coronavirus is more dangerous than seasonal flu	73	63	49	69	50

Voters' attitudes about the way Donald Trump is dealing with the coronavirus are highly correlated with how they see the severity of the problem. Voters who say the coronavirus is already a very serious problem disapprove of Trump's performance on the issue by 64% to 36%. Voters who expect that it will become a very serious problem are divided evenly on Trump's performance—53% approve, 47% disapprove. Voters who do not expect the coronavirus to become a very serious problem approve of the job Trump is doing on it by 69% to 31%.

These results raise the question of what will happen when Trump's base comes to realize that the impacts of the coronavirus are far worse than what they currently expect. It is reasonable to anticipate that Trump's ratings will deteriorate as the crisis continues to grow, its consequences become increasingly apparent, and voters hear more of the basic facts about Trump's failures to prepare for the pandemic.

President Trump has significant vulnerabilities as a result of his handling of the coronavirus, and not just among voters who already are opposed to him. Our polling identifies a large segment of the electorate, representing 37% of all voters, who are highly persuadable on the issue and prone to turn against Trump as his failings in combating the pandemic come more sharply into

focus. While these persuadable voters are spread across the electorate, they are more likely to be women than men and more likely to be under age 50 than older. They are less likely than average to be following coronavirus news very closely, and more likely than average to think the coronavirus is not yet a very serious problem but might become one. They also are the most unsettled in the preference between Biden and Trump in the presidential election—because they are either undecided or uncommitted to the candidate they currently are supporting.

Perswadable voters are defined by their nuanced view of Trump's performance on the coronavirus—agreeing with some aspects of his performance, while disagreeing with other aspects. This is a malleable group of voters. Early in the survey, they are divided evenly in rating Trump's handling of the coronavirus—48% approve, 52% disapprove. But later in the survey, after learning more about what Trump has done and failed to do with regard to the coronavirus, their rating of him shifts dramatically, to 32% approve and 68% disapprove.

Even before being exposed to any messaging, Trump has two significant weaknesses with this critical group of swing voters.

- First, they believe that Trump *"did not do enough to make sure that the United States was prepared to deal with the spread of the coronavirus,"* and they put a great deal of weight on this fact.
- Trump's second major weakness among these swing voters is their recognition that he *"failed to tell the truth and has not stuck to the facts in his public statements about the coronavirus."*

Sixty-eight percent of persuadable voters feel that Trump did not do enough to prepare the country for the spread of coronavirus, and 66% feel that he has not stuck to the facts in talking about the pandemic.

Informing and reminding voters about specific actions that President Trump has taken (or has failed to take) further deepens their concerns about his

handling of the coronavirus. In this regard, three facts are worthy of special and repetitive emphasis:

- In 2018, Donald Trump fired and never replaced the entire pandemic response team on the National Security Council, including the Homeland Security advisor whose job was to coordinate responses to global outbreaks of disease.
- When the coronavirus emerged in China, Donald Trump resisted recommendations to plan and prepare for the virus coming to the United States. He failed to secure enough testing to head off a coronavirus outbreak or enough masks and protective clothing in hospitals to deal with an outbreak.
- Donald Trump has repeatedly made false and misleading statements about the coronavirus, including that a vaccine would be available within a few months when public health officials say it wouldn't be ready for at least a year or a year and a half. He also said that anyone can get a test at a time when hardly anyone could get one.

Among the entire electorate, as well as among persuadable voters, for each of these statements more than 60% say the information gives them major concerns about Trump and his handling of the coronavirus.

What are the big, important takeaways for persuadable voters from these facts? Two key points emerge from our test.

- ✓ Donald Trump doesn't tell the truth and is causing confusion when people need accurate information.
- ✓ Donald Trump is ignoring reality and unwilling to listen to experts or science.

Special note should be taken that these statements are framed in the present tense—not just the past—and there is an important point here in communicating with voters about the crisis. Americans are deeply concerned about the health and financial impacts they may suffer, and they will become more so over time. This means the debate over Trump's performance must

go beyond a litigation of his years and months of dereliction and focus as well on what is happening in real time—asking voters whether Trump has learned his lesson from his past errors and using his current actions to show them that he has not.

Sadly, there are many current examples in which Trump's failure to admit his mistakes, let alone learn from them, have resulted in new failures that put the country behind the curve in protecting Americans and combating the pandemic.

- The absence of strong action to increase the supply of ventilators that will be badly needed to save the lives of infected patients.
- The absence of strong action to increase the availability of hospital beds and treatment facilities, including a failure to adequately engage the military in this effort.
- The absence of strong action to ensure that frontline medical personnel and other first responders have the protective equipment they need to keep them safe so they can stay on the job, keeping Americans safe.
- Trump's continuing efforts to overturn the Affordable Care Act in the Supreme Court—an effort that, if successful, would make it harder for millions of Americans to get healthcare if they get sick from the coronavirus.

Another important way that Democrats and progressives can proactively engage the debate in a forward-looking way is by advancing an ambitious policy agenda that speaks to voters' most important concerns and priorities on both their economic security and their health security.

In addition to calling on President Trump and Republicans in Congress to abandon their effort in the Supreme Court to overturn the protections and coverage of the Affordable Care Act, Democrats can advocate for a number of policies that are strongly supported by large majorities of voters:

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- ✓ Make sure all healthcare workers are given the appropriate safety protections and training for when they come into contact with potential coronavirus patients;
- ✓ Require that new vaccines and treatments are affordable, and prevent pharmaceutical companies from profiteering on a vaccine when it is developed;
- ✓ Pass anti-price-gouging laws to protect Americans from excessive price increases for medical and non-medical essentials;
- ✓ Require that hospitals charge only in-network insurance rates for treatment of the coronavirus, with no surprise billing of patients for out-of-network services;
- ✓ Require that health insurance companies stop selling junk plans that don't cover preexisting conditions or basic medical needs like vaccines and treatments; and
- ✓ Require that health insurance plans fully cover the cost of medical care for people who get the coronavirus, with no co-pays.

And given the vacuum of leadership from the White House, Democrats should be in the forefront of calling for far more dramatic and aggressive action to ensure that the United States has the medical capacity it will need to treat coronavirus patients and save their lives.