

RUTLAND COUNTY DEMOCRATS MESSAGING June 1, 2019

Messaging refers to all of the ideas communicated to the world about Democrats and Democratic proposals.

You are the most important messenger!

- By fostering a positive view of Democrats in general, you help to elect Democrats.
- By encouraging friends and family to reach out to officials about proposed legislation, you influence votes.

Letters to the editor:

- Stick to a single topic; if you have more than one point, write more than one letter.
- Point out the local connections/history of an issue and put a new spin on a subject.
- Let us know that you've submitted the letter so that we can advertise your work. If your letter isn't printed, it still made an impact. When editors see a lot of letters on a topic, they're more likely to print at least one.

Social media:

- Don't just post articles – read them (beware clickbait) And comment on articles – the media listens!
- Report and block trolls (bullies) – blocking prevents them from using you to find your friends and family

Making conversation in-person or online (in-person is best):

- **Know yourself.**
 - Think about how the issues connect to your values so that you can spell this out for others. Voters don't vote in their own interests – they vote their values!
 - Know what will make you lose your cool and know how to exit a conversation cordially if need be. We want to be known for our civility!
- **Create empathy**
 - **Ask questions.** Don't go in expecting to dictate your opinion. Learn what people think and why.
 - **Agree with something they've said.** For instance, say "You're right, the economy is horrible." This will put the person to whom you're speaking in a more favorable mood. Use empathy as a bridge: "It sounds like you went through a real hardship. So you can identify with..."
 - **Tell a personal story** about yourself or someone you know to create an emotional connection. People are swayed more by personal stories than by facts and figures. Think about times you've been challenged and the lesson you've learned. Be willing to give something of yourself in order to get something in return. Remember that people vote against their own interests (regardless of facts and figures) because they vote their values! Encourage them to focus on their personal stake in the issues. Remember that we're doing this work because we believe that Democrats have the best solutions for the people we're talking to. Ask what they think: "Wouldn't it be better if..."
 - **Pay attention to your body language.** Be open and welcoming, not defensive and/or offensive.
 - **You do want to focus on values, but for some facts and figures,** you can see the *Latest News* at <http://rutland-democrats.org/>. Important legislation this session includes:
Investing in Childcare <http://rutland-democrats.org/h-531-invest-in-childcare/>
Expanding Broadband <http://rutland-democrats.org/h-513-broadband-expansion-bill/>
Protecting Women's Reproductive Rights <http://rutland-democrats.org/reproductive-rights-in-vt/>
24-hour wait on gun sales <http://rutland-democrats.org/s-169-24-hour-waiting-period-on-gun-sales/>
- **Correct falsehoods with the "the truth sandwich."** The first "take" on an idea is the one that often sticks. Start with your message, then state the falsehood while making sure to indicate that it's wrong, then repeat your message. Instead of saying that "The ACA doesn't force people to face death panels" say "The ACA makes healthcare more accessible. Without it, people are left to the mercy of profit-hungry insurance companies—the *real* death panels. The ACA saves lives."
- **Inoculate.** Neutralize the danger of Republican rhetoric ahead of time. For instance, even before the issue of immigration is brought up, you might say: "The bad economy isn't the fault of immigrants. The real problem is Wall Street profiting unfairly off of hardworking men and women."

- **Use *our* frames.** A frame is a way of interpreting the world. Republican frames are much more widespread than Democratic frames because corporate media—driven by a profit motive—are much more favorable towards Republicans, who put profits over people. We should avoid using Republican frames because they’re underpinned by a wealth of arguments that would take us forever to undermine. We’re much better off speaking in our own language. When someone asks you to reframe the conversation using their words, don’t go along with it. Stick to your frame. Use your own language in accordance with your own values. Don’t play their game. See the *Rutland County Democrats Frames* for more information.
- **Use your resources wisely.** It’s extremely unlikely that anyone will convince a radical Republican to change their mind. It’s a better use of our resources to focus on Independents and Democrats who aren’t as active as they could be. We outnumber Republicans. We just need to motivate all of our supporters.
- **Don’t embarrass the person to whom you’re speaking or make them feel defensive.**
 - If you don’t agree, thank them for their time and leave. Do your best to leave them with a good feeling!
 - Note: In the past, the Rutland County Democrats have found that negative campaigning (attacking a candidate) backfires. But going forward, when Republicans engage in negative campaigning, we will be criticizing them for this. We will be criticizing the negative campaigning, not the Republican candidate.
- **Avoid debates about individual politicians unless you’re actually campaigning for a candidate.** Keep the discussion on your values and the issues, not who someone voted for.
- **You may hear language that is sexist, racist, or otherwise offensive.** It’s important to state that we object to hateful language and ideas, but we also want to keep the conversation going. If this happens, consider:
 - Stating that you’re offended, but doing so in a tone of voice that indicates that you want to keep talking.
 - Being honest about how you are working to combat your own implicit sexism, racism, et cetera. For instance, “We are all racist because we live in a racist society.” And give a personal story about your struggle with your own racism that might encourage the other party to be vulnerable about themselves.
 - Noting the experience so that one of us can follow-up later. We have your back!
- **What if you don’t completely agree with a piece of legislation or something that has been done by the Democratic National Convention, the Vermont Democratic Party or a Democratic official?** It’s impossible for any one party to incorporate the ideas of every single member. We’re asking you to talk about your values, so we’re not going to ask you to compromise them. If asked about one of these issues, consider saying:
 - “I am working to make that change in the Democratic Party. *That’s* why I’m involved—to make a difference, because the Democrats reflect most of my values.”
 - “I believe in democracy. So I am committed to listening to others and working on the issues that are important to them for the greater good.”
 - “I believe that the people most affected by a policy should have the largest voice in deciding how it’s handled. So I am following their lead on this.”
- **Tips for ending a “long” conversation.** If the talk is going well, say “It sounds like you’re really interested in this. Why don’t you help us canvass/phone bank?” This is a shortcut for moving forward. You can also say, “I’m really enjoying this conversation, but I have X number of other houses to hit today. So unfortunately I have to go.” If the talk is going badly, thank them for their time and go.
- **There’s no one “right way” to do this.** Every conversation is different. Every “mistake” is a learning experience and you always have a chance to try again. You only fail if you stop trying!
- **For more resources see:**
 - *Rutland County Democrats Frames* and *Rutland County Democrats Organizing Strategy*
 - George Lakoff *Don’t Think of an Elephant*
 - *Voicing Our Values* http://www.progressivemajorityaction.org/message_guide
 - Indivisible <https://indivisible.org/resource/organizing-mainly-about-listening>