



Democrats Who Win the Working Class

Profiles From the Seven Battleground States

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Democrats Who Win the Working Class

ROBIN JOHNSON

SEPTEMBER 2026

INTRODUCTION

Nick Miller is a Democrat who knows how to reach working-class voters. In 2022, he became the youngest candidate elected to Pennsylvania's Senate in over a century by winning an Allentown-based district where more than three-quarters of adults lack a bachelor's degree. This was no easy feat: Just two years later, the same district backed Donald Trump for president.¹

What was Miller's secret?

"I ran as a pragmatic, commonsense candidate focused on results rather than ideology," he says. "Independent voters play a critical role in our elections. And they consistently respond to leaders who are willing to work with anyone to get things done."

If Democrats want to become competitive again outside the blue islands of major metro areas and college towns, their single most important task will be winning back the Americans without college degrees who have abandoned the party in droves during recent decades. This report brings together interviews with dozens of politicians who've already shown they can do just that: 28 state legislators from seven battleground states who, like Miller, have managed to prevail in competitive, heavily working-class districts. We asked them about the issues they focused on, how their voters view the national party, and what on-the-ground tactics they relied on to win.

While these lawmakers represented disparate corners of America, they were remarkably consistent in their message. Their working-class constituents, they said, are intensely focused on basic pocketbook concerns like the cost of groceries and health care, and many believe

Democrats are too preoccupied by fights over cultural issues like LGBTQ rights and abortion — an assessment that dovetails with much of the polling that followed Kamala Harris's loss in the 2024 election. To overcome the national party's baggage, these lawmakers often campaign as practical problem solvers, rather than rigid partisans.

"Being a moderate formed the core of my strategy," says Wisconsin State Sen. Kristin Alfheim, whose district centers the Fox Cities region. "People would ask which party I was from and my response was, 'Should it matter?' Getting past that first initial knee-jerk response was critical to getting into what matters for voters — kitchen table issues."

The lawmakers who spoke with PPI could hardly be more different from the left-wing populists who've captivated the national media this summer. Insurgent candidates backed by the Democratic Socialists of America have won a handful of primaries in New York and Denver by knocking off more established opponents, while progressive favorite Graham Platner won Maine's primary vote before dropping out over allegations of sexual assault. In the Midwest, left-wing favorite Abdul El-Sayed won a narrow victory in the Michigan primary.

All of these candidates style themselves as champions for the working class and promise a lavish array of free public goods and services to lower the cost of living. Ironically, however, their left-wing insurgency thus far has mainly unseated liberal and even progressive Democrats. The democratic socialists aim their messages mainly at white college liberals and professionals instead of the non-college

voters Democrats need to win general elections against Republicans. In those races, they'll likely be dogged by past calls to abolish police and prisons and return to open borders.

In most cases, their performance with actual working-class voters has been middling to poor. DSA candidates in New York fared best in higher-income tracts of their districts, for instance.² El-Sayed ran up the score in college towns³ while losing less-educated parts of the state.⁴ Before he dropped out, polling by *The New York Times* showed Platner trailing incumbent Susan Collins by 20 points among Mainers without a college degree.⁵

In contrast, the state and local lawmakers featured in this report don't campaign as strident ideologues or radical insurgents. Most focus on working families' everyday struggles to make ends meet and avoid elite preoccupations like anti-fossil fuel crusades and trans rights. Fifteen described themselves as "moderate," while others identified as progressives or something else. None identified as democratic socialists. All won their seats by listening to working people and offering down-to-earth ways to help them solve their problems.

We chose to focus on state legislators for this report because their voices are often absent from the New York and Beltway-centric debates about how to win, despite their having a unique and important vantage point. Since their districts are smaller than Congress members' and they have less money to run expensive TV ads come election season, state lawmakers often spend more time in face-to-face interactions with their constituents, making them an important ear on the ground in places where the party's national brand can be a hindrance.

We selected politicians for interviews based on three criteria:

- They won their most recent race.
- Their district is competitive, defined as a margin of less than 10%.
- The share of voters without a college degree in their district is higher than the national average of 64.3%. There are a variety of definitions of “working class,” but this one is most common and easiest to quantify.

There are not many Democrats who check these boxes, partly due to gerrymandering, but also because of the party’s general weakness with working-class voters. Democrats who win these districts comprise just 10% of State Senators in the seven battleground states and 13% of House members. Wisconsin and Nevada have the highest shares. Some of the districts are heavy on white working-class voters, while some are dominated by Black or Hispanic voters. The lessons from all of them should be relevant to Democrats, given how the party lost ground with non-college voters of all races in 2024.

These districts were also competitive in more than state legislative races. Margins in the 2024 presidential race were also less than 10% in all but one of the districts. Harris won 20 of the districts, but 20 of the featured legislators ran ahead of her.

Most of the as-told-to essays in this report were written based on live interviews with the legislators. Three of the lawmakers wrote their own essays based on questionnaires. They all offered their own unique insights, and some diverged from one another on some issues.

However, five themes emerged most strongly.

01. POCKETBOOK ISSUES MATTER MOST

Over and over, legislators said that their working-class constituents cared most about economic matters. As Nevada assemblymember Max Carter put it: “It’s all about pocketbook, bread and butter issues; the wallet; how can I afford to take care of my family?” North Carolina’s Bryan Cohn, who beat a Republican incumbent to win his rural state house district, put it even more bluntly: “A solid economic platform will connect with them not just economically, but also emotionally. Everything else is vapor.”

While lawmakers agreed about the broad importance of kitchen table issues, they did not all emphasize the same policy solutions — which is perhaps unsurprising given the diversity among their districts.

Some stuck to traditional Democratic approaches like labor protections and expansions of the social safety net. Cohen, for instance, noted his effort to ban noncompete agreements for middle-class workers, increase the minimum wage, and create paid family leave. Carter pointed to legislation he spearheaded to crack down on wage theft, which was signed by the state’s Republican governor. The Wisconsin Democrats we interviewed all ran in 2024 on promises to adopt Obamacare’s Medicaid expansion, as highlighted on their campaign sites.

Other legislators emphasized targeted tax cuts. Georgia State Representative Tangie Herring pointed to her work in securing property tax relief for seniors; on their campaign sites, Michigan Democrats highlighted their successful efforts to repeal the state’s “retirement tax”⁶ on pensions. Local economic development initiatives of the

sort that often make up the bread and butter of state policymaking also came up.

Finally, some lawmakers leaned into more populist causes. “I voted to crack down on Wall Street buying up single-family homes, stood up to our state’s energy utility and forced them to return more than \$63 million to overcharged customers, and voted to cap insulin costs at \$35,” said Nevada representative Elaine Marzola. “These are real, tangible pocketbook issues that working-class voters need to see, feel, and touch to see that we are fighting for them.”

National Democrats have, of course, seized on the cost-of-living as a potent political issue in Trump’s second term. But state legislators warned that the party still had a weakness for talking about the economy in buzzwords and language normal voters couldn’t relate to.

“The term ‘affordability,’ for example. Who talks like that?” said Wisconsin State Assembly member Karen DeSanto. “My voters say that they can’t afford gas. That’s how I speak.”

02. CULTURAL ISSUES ARE THE PARTY’S BIGGEST HURDLE

The legislators generally agreed that, among Americans without a college degree, the national Democratic Party’s brand was “busted,” as Wisconsin State Sen. Jamie Wall put it. Cultural issues, they argued, were largely to blame.

While it’s well understood that many working-class voters simply disagree with the mainstream Democratic position on topics like abortion or trans rights, our interview subjects noted that even lawmakers who represent rural and culturally conservative districts face intense pressure not to deviate from the typical

party line. However, doing so can reap electoral rewards.

“My own party beat me down when I voted for a so-called bathroom bill and a bill to keep a newborn baby alive,” said North Carolina State Representative Garland Pierce. “This is the Bible Belt. Many church people view these issues differently.”

Many of these voters also believe that Democrats fundamentally care more about cultural issues or causes like environmentalism than the economy, the lawmakers said. In some ways, that may be more damaging to its image than the positions themselves.

“Democrats are perceived as the party of LGBTQ and green energy, and that’s not lowering their bills,” said Denise Mentzer, who represents part of Michigan’s Macomb County in the state’s House of Representatives. “We’re not seen as meeting their economic needs.”

Not every candidate felt it was necessary to moderate on cultural issues, and many ran explicitly on issues like protecting a woman’s right to an abortion. But lawmakers emphasized that it was important for Democrats to show there was room for multiple perspectives within the party, and not to get bogged down in culture war fights. Many said that in conversations with working-class voters, they would only discuss hot-button cultural issues if prompted, and make a point of showing a willingness to listen before turning back to economic issues.

“I don’t shy away from my positions. I openly support reproductive rights, stronger protections against gun violence, and treating all people with dignity and respect,” said Nevada State Rep.

Sandra Jauregui. “However, I believe Democrats cannot allow cultural debates to completely overshadow the economic realities facing working families.”

Most of the legislators we spoke with also feel that progressive groups, in general, demand total agreement with all their stances on issues to gain an endorsement. These types of litmus tests often put legislators in tough districts outside the mainstream of their districts' values and make them more vulnerable.

Jim Prokopiak, who represents Bucks County in Pennsylvania, said, “It also makes it harder when progressive groups demand total loyalty to their issues and don’t take into account the nuances of a district. It’s hard to be 100% with any group, but that’s what many demand.”

Adds Michigan State Rep. Angela Witwer, “We can’t be purists on every issue. We can’t get anything done if we don’t win enough seats to gain a majority. People have forgotten that.

03. DON'T BE AFRAID OF BUSINESS

Many Americans without college degrees run their own business, or aspire to. Others are simply looking for a good job and want public officials to bring more of them to their communities.

So it shouldn’t be surprising that some of the lawmakers we spoke with highlighted their relationships with the business community as an important part of their appeal to working-class voters. “I’ve been criticized by some on the left for attending Chamber of Commerce meetings. They call me a ‘Chamber Democrat.’ But I am business-friendly in trying to attract and retain jobs and backing incentives for growth,”

said Arizona State Senator Brian Fernandez.

Nevada Assemblyman Joe Dalia said he believed Democrats generally needed to be more comfortable talking about entrepreneurship, and likewise emphasized that they shouldn’t shy away from local chambers.

“There is daylight between being pro-big business and being anti-capitalism, and I think we need to be comfortable in that real estate,” he said. “In Nevada, running on diversifying our economy through homegrown business opportunities was wildly popular. And finding that zone enabled me to build a coalition not just built on traditional left-leaning labor, environmental, and pro-choice organizations, but also the Las Vegas and Henderson Chambers of Commerce. I took criticism for the latter, but I think that reflects the kind of coalition Democrats should want to build: workers, families, educators, entrepreneurs, and community leaders who all want Nevada to succeed.”

04. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE FROM CENTRAL CASTING

Before Platner’s campaign collapsed, his star political advisor, Morris Katz, reportedly told a dinner guest that he had “found a model here to win over working-class voters.”⁷ And what was it? Just pick a candidate who “looks like he’s a union working-class guy.”

A burly, tattooed combat veteran and oyster farmer with a baritone straight from a pickup truck ad, Platner certainly looked and sounded the part. In reality, his working-class bona fides were questionable: He was the grandson of a famous architect and son of a lawyer, graduated from a prep school, and sold oysters to his mother’s restaurant. In the end, the attempt

to turn blue-collar aesthetics into blue-collar support fell flat, if the polling was to be believed.

The candidates we spoke with came from a wide variety of backgrounds — both men and women of different races and occupations, including small business owners, lawyers, veterans, and ministers. Wisconsin's DeSanto was a nonprofit executive and former professional clown.⁸

Some of the candidates have real working-class backgrounds that helped them during their campaigns. Nevada legislator Max Carter is a former union electrician with a handlebar mustache who ran under the slogan: "Built to Work. Ready to Lead." Arizona State Rep. Lorena Austin grew up in Section 8 housing and has a sleeve of tattoos she says makes her look different from other politicians who come to voters' doors. Wisconsin State Rep. Lori Palmeri was raised in a trailer park. North Carolina's Cohn was the son of a union president, which "helped me understand the community and be situationally aware," he said. "No suit and tie for me at the doors — I wore a T-shirt and jeans."

Others, however, came from more upper-middle-class backgrounds. Take Pennsylvania's Miller: The son of a judge, he studied finance at Penn State and went on to a job in consulting for IBM. He later became a part-time realtor and school board member, traveling to 48 different countries along the way.

The key for all of the candidates is that they have a real connection to their community and neighbors, and know how to relate to their voters. They don't have to lean into macho working-class stereotypes in order to mime authenticity.

05. DOOR KNOCKING IS CRUCIAL

Asked to name the most effective way of reaching working-class voters, lawmakers virtually all agreed that door knocking was the most important tactic. "I still have a pair of bronze boots from my first race when I knocked on 6,000 doors and walked 600 miles," Carter, of Nevada, said.

In contrast to traditional door-knocking that emphasizes volume, many candidates said they will stay for longer interactions. Some said they will avoid leading with their own message, and instead ask voters what's on their mind.

"I spend however long it takes at the doors if people want to talk," said Arizona State Rep. Mariana Sandoval. "My approach is similar to deep canvassing where I engage in conversations that may take up to 15-30 minutes."

One reason door knocking can be useful for Democrats, lawmakers said, is that many working-class constituents feel alienated and neglected by traditional politicians. The act of listening alone can send a powerful signal and help build trust.

"I was particularly moved by a woman sitting on her porch who broke down in tears because nobody had ever asked for her opinion before," said Wisconsin Assembly member Joe Sheehan. "It taught me to stop focusing on getting my message to them as opposed to just listening to them get their message to me."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robin A. Johnson is a political/governmental relations consultant, part-time professor and radio show host. He teamed with his Member of Congress, Cheri Bustos (IL-17), to produce three reports on winning rural and working-class districts in the Midwest. He is a part-time lecturer in the Political Science Department at Monmouth College and also won election to a working-class city council district in a small Midwestern town.

Stuart Malec is a public affairs leader, political strategist, and communications specialist. He currently serves as Vice President of Public Affairs at the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), where he leads the organization's engagement with Congress and national policymakers. Previously, he served in Communications Director roles for Congresswoman Kathleen Rice (NY-04) and Congressman Jim Langevin (RI-02). At PPI, Stuart has written about American politics and how Democrats can reconnect with working-class voters.

Jolie Libert has built her career at the intersection of political strategy and execution. She currently serves as Political Director at the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI). Previously, she served as Trips Director for the Midwest Region on the 2024 Democratic presidential campaign, where she planned and executed more than 300 principal and surrogate trips across the battleground states of Michigan and Wisconsin. Prior to the campaign, she served as the Director of Operations for Representative Derek Kilmer (WA-06). While at PPI, Jolie has authored opinion pieces about the future of the Democratic Party.

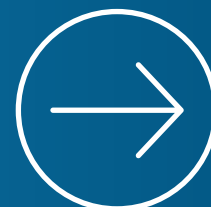
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Winning Voices: Candidate Profiles





STATE SENATOR

BRIAN FERNANDEZ

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE: SMALL BUSINESS OWNER; ENTREPRENEUR

Brian Fernandez won his sprawling southern Arizona senate district by nearly the same percentages in both of his races. He maintained the percentage in his second victory in 2024 despite redistricting, which made his district much more competitive.

ARIZONA SENATE DISTRICT 23



WORKING CLASS PERCENTAGE

**81.3%**

2024 WINNING MARGIN

**7.6%****DISTRICT**

My district includes a part of Tucson, a Phoenix suburb, Yuma, two reservations, and everything in between. It is a microcosm of the state, containing urban, suburban, and rural populations. I'm from Yuma, and we consider ourselves rural. The geographic diversity of the district helps me form alliances with other legislators from across the state who face similar issues. My district shares a border with both Mexico and California.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

The district has changed politically from being more strongly Democratic to toss-up. Some of that is due to redistricting, but I've found many historically Democratic voters switching to Republican in the Trump era. Over and over again, I'll knock their doors and find many with Trump signs in their yards. After talking with them, they'll often say "I'm surprised you're a Democrat" and express support. There are also a good number of working-class people who voted for the first time for Trump. I win because I am a moderate in a purple district, have a different image than the national party, and am called a "common sense Democrat" by many voters I meet.

My approach to reaching working-class voters centers on attending as many events as I can make. I find people where they're at and talk about issues that matter to them. I also do some door knocking across my district.

You can learn a lot about working-class voters by just listening to them. The national party seems more interested in talking than listening.

My voters are very concerned about the cost of living — rising prices for food, gas, and housing. I can relate to their concerns because I grew up in a household where we regularly practiced frugality. We would have \$25 for a meal to feed a family of five. So, I know what people are going through right now.

I've been criticized by some on the left for attending Chamber of Commerce meetings. They call me a "Chamber Democrat." But I am business-friendly in trying to attract and retain jobs and backing incentives for growth. It hasn't hurt my standing with unions nor my belief that companies like Walmart are hurting our country

State Senator Brian Fernandez | Arizona Senate District 23

by paying people as little as possible while reaping massive profits.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national Democratic Party, as a whole, doesn't seem as worried about these issues. They give them lip service, but most leaders have no idea what life is like in working-class communities like mine. People are really struggling; they don't know how they're going to pay for their next week's groceries. That's why the party brand is so toxic to some: they are struggling to make ends meet and see the party as focused on crazy or weirdo things.

By cutting federal programs and threatening others, Trump has put Democrats in the position of defending the status quo.

And most people, especially working-class voters, don't feel the status quo has been very beneficial to them over the past 30 years. Voters see Democrats as wanting to raise taxes for programs that they don't see as beneficial to them. They see Democrats as just keeping programs in business. The national party just doesn't seem to have a strong, proactive message to counter. We should be more open to reforming programs and explaining their benefits to people.

The party message is too often tailored to specific groups rather than people in general. We isolate ourselves through some policies that look out for a small group of people while neglecting the broader population. For example, a teacher might love a program to get rid of student debt. But if you're a mechanic, where's the benefit?



The good news is that there's an opportunity to win back working-class voters due to Trump's actions. Many voters I talk with say they don't have a political home right now.

Let's show them the value of programs and reform others to make them better. Let's show how these programs can do something positive for voters. Let's talk about issues that affect everyone, not narrow groups. People are worried about the price of groceries, whether their kids will get good educations, whether there will be jobs to support families through college or job training, and whether there will be good jobs for people to stay in their communities. And, will there be good jobs for my kids to stay? What's the hope for kids right now? If we can address these concerns and better explain what we stand for, then we'll get back working-class voters.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**LORENA
AUSTIN**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
NONPROFIT

In an ironic twist of fate, Lorena Austin represents part of the old district of Russell Pearce, who introduced the infamous “show me your papers” law that their family fought for years and was later overturned in the courts. Lorena finished first in multi-candidate fields in 2022 and 2024, winning 26.5% of the vote in both elections.

ARIZONA HOUSE DISTRICT 9

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**72.4%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**2.1%****DISTRICT**

My district in Mesa is suburban, older, and about 40% Latino with a diverse population, including a very well-known Asian district. We also have a large LDS population. My family goes back five generations and has lived for over 100 years in my community, which I believe has been an important factor in our success.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

In many ways, I'm the unlikely candidate for office you'll even come across.

I grew up poor and lived in Section 8 housing. I'm a five-time college dropout. And I don't look the part with my sleeve tattoos and getting my college degree 14 years after high school, but working-class values oozed throughout my family.

My background and deep roots in the community bring me credibility with people in my district, especially other working-class voters. My late father was the Arizona Assistant Attorney General and Civil Rights Director in

the 80's and early 90's. My grandparents on my mother's side were farmworkers. People want someone who understands their struggles, understands what it's like to stretch a dollar, and can understand what people are going through in tough economic times. I don't have to do focus groups or polls on working-class attitudes because that's where I came from.

That's an important factor when I knock doors: people know whether you're from the community or not. Mesa can still be like a small town in that respect. And you have to speak their language and know how to talk to them. I grew up in the same “hoods and barrios,” so it's natural for me.

Working-class people want to be listened to; they don't want to be told. They're working 2-3 jobs and don't have the time.

They also don't want to hear about five-point plans for the future. They want to know how you can help right now. Many don't have time to wait.

I differ from most candidates in that I don't immediately mention my party or anything

political at the doors. I'll ask how long people have lived in the district and then find things that connect us. It's relationship building prior to me asking them to vote for me. (I learned this lesson the hard way—the very first door I knocked, I mentioned my party upfront and had the door slammed in my face).

I'll also spend as much time as I need to at the doors. I try to build what I call the "chisme effect." Chisme is Spanish for gossip. People talk in these neighborhoods and look out for each other. If a conversation or two can start a buzz in the neighborhood, and especially if you can win the heart of a senora, you'll win that area.

Sometimes I have to explain the various levels of government at the doors. I've said, government isn't working for them because they don't know how government works. Meaning, we have a government that is inaccessible and confusing to some. Some think I'm a Member of Congress. It can take time to explain the role of state legislators versus their representatives in Washington and local government.

I am also visible in the community and attend all kinds of events. I'm active on Instagram and Facebook and post videos that get positive responses.

The door-to-door conversations and deep ties in the community help act as a shield to negative attacks from my opponents. I was hit by outlandish claims on crime issues, but most people knew they weren't true because they had met me at their doors or talked with me at community events and trusted me. There were some calls from people asking for clarification, but they were fine after my explanation.

State Senator Lorena Austin | Arizona House District 9



NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

In some ways, I don't get associated with the negative aspects of the Democratic brand because I'm not your typical Democrat. I never worked in campaigns prior to my first run for office. I don't run cookie-cutter campaigns and regularly ignore advice from campaign "experts" on issues, messaging, and strategy. Working-class people are tired of politics as usual and dislike the big money in campaigns. I value a \$5 donation from a struggling person working three jobs more than a \$500 donation from an out-of-state group trying to influence my vote.

What I find about the national party brand is that it is so disconnected from the people we serve. That's why it needs to find different types of candidates who are more rooted in their communities. It's all about grassroots mobilizing. Start by showing up more in these working-class communities. Go to where the people are. Backpack drives. After-school events. Those aren't traditional political gathering spots, but that's where people are. Meet them where they're at. Buy pizza and give it out for free on college campuses. That's what Charlie Kirk did with Turning Point. It almost seems the party thinks it's too simple and won't work. Try it.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

MARIANA SANDOVALEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
PARALEGAL

Mariana Sandoval won her first race for the Arizona House in 2022 and was reelected two years later. She has dedicated her career to public service, including working in the Arizona Attorney General's office and as an elected school board member. The working-class share of her district exceeds 80%.

ARIZONA HOUSE DISTRICT 23

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**81.3%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**1.4%****DISTRICT**

LD 23 is the size of a congressional district and covers parts of four counties in southern Arizona. It's a very diverse district that includes Goodyear, the fastest-growing city in the nation, as well as remote, rural areas. The district includes two ports of entry, three of the 22 recognized Native American tribes, and 230 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I come from working-class roots and am a first-generation college graduate. We are a union household — my husband is a UA469 union plumber and my entry into politics was organizing state employees for SEIU while working at the Attorney General's Office in 2007. My working-class background is why the policies I advocate are personal to me and why it's not hard for me to navigate both the rural and suburban parts of my district.

There isn't any secret sauce to my success. I show up. My authenticity is real. And I fight for people.

I can't promise everything since Democrats are

in the minority, but I can promise that I will fight for them and not trade my values for my votes.

There is no substitute for knocking doors to reach working-class voters. You can't just show up once before the election and ask for votes. Although I live in a suburb of Phoenix, people across the district know me. Some folks think I live in Yuma because I spend so much time knocking on doors there.

And I spend however long it takes at the doors if people want to talk. My approach is similar to deep canvassing, where I engage in conversations that may take up to 15-30 minutes. There should be no time limit on door-to-door conversations.

Democrats need to be flexible to reach working-class voters at home. When I was first elected to the school board, its meetings were set at 5 p.m. It would be difficult for me or parents who work to make those meetings. That lesson stayed with me — when we go canvassing, we plan our schedule to fit around working-class hours. This usually means going out on weekends, in the mornings, or after dinner.

State Representative Mariana Sandoval | Arizona House District 23

My campaigns are grassroots. I've never used television but relied on direct mail, radio and digital newspaper ads. Social media also plays an important role in my campaigns. We reach voters through YouTube, Instagram and Facebook.

Cultural issues are important, but I don't spend a lot of time on them unless someone asks. Here's my approach to several of these issues:

- **Guns:** Arizona is an open carry state. I remind folks who are concerned about Democrats taking their gun rights away that the party never tried it when it had a trifecta under Obama and Biden. What makes them think they will try it now?
- **Abortion:** I support a woman's right to choose and understand as a practicing Catholic how to walk a fine line on this issue. There are parts of my district that are rural, conservative, Catholic, and Christian where the issue is best avoided.
- **Transgender rights:** After a voter voiced concerns about trans rights and a woke agenda in schools, I explained as a former school board member that it was not happening in public schools.

Overall, I was disappointed in the last election that we spent a lot of time on rights issues and not enough time on kitchen table issues voters are really concerned about. Folks can't pay their bills with rights.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The toughest thing about the Democratic brand is meeting farmers, gun owners, and Trump voters who tend to clamp up when they hear my



party. Democrats are perceived as elitist and too dependent on data. It's made harder when the party really doesn't understand how to work in rural Latino districts. That's why I refused their help and ran my own effort with a foundation in grassroots organizing.

The party is also totally disconnected from everything outside of Washington, DC. They have no idea of the issues working-class people in my district face. In addition, the party doesn't hire locally, doesn't listen to people with boots on the ground, and instead takes the advice of DC consultants. The party would often do the opposite of what we advised them at the local level.

By showing up, listening, understanding, and delivering, we can win back working-class voters. It starts with year-round organizing. We need more educational efforts in Spanish especially in areas outside the metro Phoenix communities. I've been encouraging people to run for office in all parts of my district, including the red ones. Even if we don't win, we can build a local infrastructure. The party also needs to be better at phrasing things and speaking in ordinary language.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
**STEPHANIE
SIMACEK**
EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
EDUCATION

Stephanie Simacek won her first race for the legislature in 2024, leading the ticket in a multi-candidate field. She was a first-grade teacher and currently serves on a local school board. Simacek won both her school board and legislative races in a conservative working-class district.

ARIZONA HOUSE DISTRICT 2



WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE



68.1%

2024 WINNING
MARGIN



0.6%

DISTRICT

My district, LD 2, is located in the northern Phoenix region and is primarily suburban. It is split among Republicans (36%), Independents/Other (35%), and Democrats (28%) and reflects a diverse population that is majority White (61%), with Hispanics making up 23%, Asians 7%, African Americans 5%, and Native Americans 2% of the remaining population. The northern part of LD 2 is experiencing rapid growth, drawing many families to the newly developed areas, while the southern part consists of more established, longtime neighborhoods. Just across the district border to the north is the new TSMC semiconductor factory, which continues to bring significant growth in both population and employment as it expands.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Our campaign took a multi-faceted approach to voter outreach, meeting people where they are. Our team knocked on thousands of doors, targeting primarily Independent and Republican voters, while also reaching constituents through targeted mailers, community events, and an extensive phone banking effort.

Because fewer people answer their doors these days, I treat every interaction as an opportunity, giving each constituent as much time as they need to be heard.

I introduce myself, share my background, and then ask about their concerns. My background in public education resonates with a surprising number of people, whether they're teachers themselves or have educators in their families. Combined with my role as a mom, these are the passions that shape who I am and how I connect with constituents.

I am approachable because I'm not a typical politician. I'm someone who saw a need and stepped up. Voters relate to that.

I see myself as a voice for the people, someone grounded in real-life experience who isn't afraid to stand firm on the issues that matter most to my community. Some have suggested I watch my votes because I'm from a red district. I don't base my voting on holding this seat forever. I'm not a career politician and not afraid to speak

State Representative Stephanie Simacek | Arizona Senate District 2

up and admit when I'm wrong. In fact, I would rather speak out than sit and be quiet; if I lose, I lose. So far, that approach has served me well in public life.

While Republicans in the legislature tend to focus on cultural issues, that's not what I hear from people at the door. What voters are actually worried about is losing their health care, affording child care, and making ends meet for their families. These are people who wake up every day with a deep sense of responsibility to the people they love, and those are exactly the issues our caucus is focused on.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

I'm deeply passionate about my party, but it's not the first thing I lead with when meeting new people.

I'd rather start by sharing my background and then listening to what's on their mind. In a conservative district like mine, leaning too hard on the party label can do more harm than good.

People have a general sense that politicians on both sides are out of touch and more comfortable than the working-class people they represent. When I'm able to break through that and show someone that I'm one of them, those conversations become something special. I leave the door feeling energized, and honestly, those moments are what keep me going.

The national party needs to start focusing more on everyday issues and acknowledge the challenges people face on a daily basis. People aren't wanting these huge, comprehensive policies but just something that



directly addresses their needs. It's also about messaging: the party doesn't have a single message that people hear and say they can get on board with. The party tends to throw everything out there and see what sticks. We can see that it doesn't work from the results of recent elections.

The current president was effective at reaching working-class voters who felt long overlooked. The tragedy is that those voters are being let down by the very person they trusted. A solid economic message will play not just with working-class voters but with those voters with college degrees as well. They are hurting too. Many can't purchase a home, and some are moving back in with family or friends. And many are finding that a college degree doesn't necessarily come with a good-paying job. Our messaging must cut across class lines to put us on the path to a solid majority.



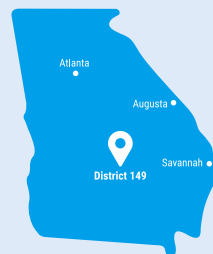
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

FLOYD GRIFFIN

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE: RETIRED US ARMY COLONEL; SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Rep. Floyd Griffin has lived an incredible life. The Tuskegee University graduate has been a cadet, Vietnam helicopter pilot, Army colonel, football coach, professor, businessman, state senator, mayor, state representative, and author. In 1994, Griffin made history by defeating an incumbent Georgia State Senator, becoming the first African American in modern times to be elected in a rural, majority-white district. In 2000, he broke barriers once again as the first African American mayor of Milledgeville. In 2025, Griffin continues to make history as the first African American to serve as the Georgia House Representative for District 149.

GEORGIA HOUSE DISTRICT 149



WORKING CLASS PERCENTAGE

**81.3%**

2024 WINNING MARGIN

**8.0%****DISTRICT**

My district is located in central Georgia and is mostly rural. It includes a significant educational component, including a four-year university, a military junior college, and a technical college. Milledgeville and Baldwin County are the linchpins of surrounding counties. The 149th district has a voting age population that is slightly majority minority. Our economic base is in education, manufacturing, and health care.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Getting through to working-class voters involves a combination of methods. I am very active in attending all kinds of events where people can see me, and I can listen to their concerns. Representing a rural district presents challenges in going door to door when homes can be quite a distance apart. That's why building relationships with local community leaders is so important.

My campaigns combine these things as well as being present on social media and using text messaging. People don't read as much as they used to, and community newspapers are going by the wayside. That's why it's important to reach out to folks in a variety of ways.

I take the time to explain to some of my constituents about the responsibilities of different levels of government. State government is sometimes the "forgotten middle" between the federal and local levels. We can't directly solve those issues, but I can work with other governments to address them. That's part of my job.

I am working right now to address three main concerns I hear from my district: 1) bringing good-paying jobs into the community; 2) ensuring accessible and affordable health care; and 3) affordable housing.

State Representative Floyd Griffin | Georgia House District 149

My military background is a definite asset in reaching out to working-class voters who are Independents or Republicans.

That figures prominently in my campaigns. Voters see certain qualities in people who served in our armed forces — leadership, planning and organizing, for example. They also know I'm going to be truthful and they can trust me.

During these times when people don't know what or who to believe, I feel voters have to be able to trust me as a candidate for public office. That trust comes from me telling them like it is — good, bad or indifferent — in a respectful way. I want them to know that “Floyd Griffin is not trying to snowball you.” Working-class voters especially can read through someone not being straight with them more than before.

There are times when I have to put the views of my constituents ahead of my party on certain issues. All politics is local.

Our caucus tries to stay united on key issues but understands when I have to vote for my district.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national party needs to work closer with state parties, and state parties need to work closer with local party organizations. We need more town hall meetings. All of this is designed to reach out and listen to local concerns. Communications are a big challenge. The party can address that by working more closely with other party organizations.

The party also needs to do a better job of messaging. Find a good message that people



can understand and don't make it too long. It should involve kitchen table issues — the type we used to talk about a long time ago.

After saying “kitchen table issues,” then define what they are and how we plan to address them. The party hasn't been doing a good job of that.

We also need to explain to working-class voters the importance of our democracy and why they need to vote. We have to give them reasons to vote. I recently wrote an article on the importance of African Americans voting in this election. I phrased it as “Come off the porch and vote: why democracy still requires courage.” That's my message to working-class voters as well: Come off the porch and vote. Be ready to run with the big dogs and fight for our democracy and future generations.

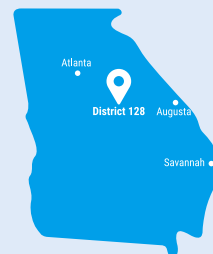


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

MACK JACKSONEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
RETIRED PROBATION OFFICER; MINISTER

Mack Jackson narrowly survived a strong challenge in his rural Georgia district in 2024 that was redrawn under a new map. His district has the highest share of residents without college degrees of any district in this report. After 18 years in office, Jackson plans to retire at the end of this term.

GEORGIA HOUSE DISTRICT 128

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**83.9%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**0.2%**

DISTRICT

The 128th district is predominantly rural and includes six counties in the central part of Georgia. It is majority minority, with 51% of residents being African American and 44% White. The economy in my district is anchored by mining, manufacturing, and the public sector. Schools are often the largest employers in many of my rural communities.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I don't think there's a single, best way to reach working-class voters anymore. It's a combination of a lot of things — door-to-door, newspapers, radio, social media, town halls and events — whenever there's an opportunity to go where people are.

You have to let people know who you are and that their voice will be known. Honesty and integrity are everything with rural and working-class people. Be a person that will do as you say you will. Part of my outreach is to bring people from my district to the capital and explain the process, especially to young people. Make them feel a part of the process, and they'll continue to vote for you. You might not solve all the

problems, but by listening to them, people will feel involved.

I've always made the time to listen to folks in my district. I remember when I first campaigned in 2008, I knocked on a door and was invited to sit down and share supper with a family. I did it and felt a part of that family. I also recall a lady at a Walmart telling me she voted for me because I asked for her vote. You gotta ask.

I classify myself as a moderate and like to stay in the center to reflect my district. In rural communities, people still go to church on Sunday mornings. They still believe the Bible.

As Tip O'Neill used to say, "All politics are local." When I sit in the Capitol, all my votes reflect back home. They elected me. That's why you have to be in tune with the people back home. I might get some pushback on certain issues with my caucus colleagues from metro areas. But I know who the people are who voted for me. And the leaders of my caucus give me the space to vote my district.

State Representative Mack Jackson | Georgia House District 128

In fact, there were homes in my district that had my yard signs right next to Trump signs. Some Republicans and Independents supported me based on my experience and my outreach to groups like civic organizations and businesses.

They knew me and could trust me. I represent everyone regardless of political party.

I've attracted support from people of both parties because I've been able to cross party lines and bring money back for my district. It's vital for rural areas to get state investments because we don't have the resources of metro areas. I've gotten state funding for water infrastructure for several of my smaller communities and investments in broadband and health care.

I'm very proud that the Republican speaker appointed me chair of the Rural Development Council. Our mission was to travel the state and define the needs of rural communities. The Rural Physician Tax Credit came out of this committee. It puts \$2 million in the budget annually to incentivize dentists and physicians to practice in rural communities by getting a break on their state income taxes. I would have never been named chair of this committee without keeping a steady mind, staying in the middle, and building relationships.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

People in my district know me as a Democrat, so there's no running away from my party. I don't see the brand as a hindrance because of the familiarity many voters have with me and my longevity in office.



Rural and working-class areas feel neglected and invisible to the national and state Democratic parties. I had a constituent ask me, "Who is the state party leader? Why don't they come visit us? They bypass us for some reason."

My advice to national and state Democratic leaders is to visit rural and working-class areas more often. Let people know who you are and what you stand for. Be accessible and listen.

Rural and working-class people want to be respected. They want to know that you know who they are and you don't look down on them. Show that you care and that they belong in the party — and the only way to do that is by showing up.

Rural people are saying, "We are here. We'd love for you to come see us and talk with us. Be a part of our communities. We'll show up. We want to have a voice too. Our issues might be different than in metro cities, but we have our common challenges as well."

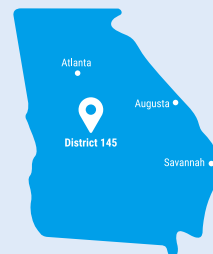


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**TANGIE
HERRING**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
EDUCATION; SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Tangie Herring won her first run for public office in 2024, defeating her opponent in a newly-drawn, heavily working-class district by one percentage point. Prior to running, she served nearly 30 years as a public school teacher and also owns a small business.

GEORGIA HOUSE DISTRICT 145

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**78.4%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**1.0%****DISTRICT**

Georgia House District 145 is a highly competitive, swing district that was redrawn in 2024 by federal order after U.S. District Judge Steve C. Jones found that Georgia's legislature had gerrymandered its districts to dilute Black voting power. The district bridges urban and rural Middle Georgia, spanning portions of Bibb and Monroe Counties, including the City of Forsyth.

While geographically divided, the electorate is highly concentrated, with 74% of the district's registered voters residing in Macon-Bibb County. Following the redistricting, it has become a narrow majority-minority district with a 50.3% Black voting-age population, making it one of the most hyper-competitive seats in the entire state.

The district's economic base is diverse, anchoring itself in heavy advanced manufacturing, aerospace, healthcare, logistics, and higher education.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Campaigning in a highly competitive swing district requires a hyper-localized, presence-

driven ground game rather than relying on top-of-the-ticket national momentum. My strategy focuses on direct, face-to-face voter outreach across both Macon-Bibb and Monroe Counties to build personal, trusted connections. By showing up consistently in neighborhoods that feel overlooked by traditional politics, I demonstrate that my priority is local accountability, not partisan posturing.

My messaging focuses primarily on pragmatic, everyday solutions that protect my constituents' pocketbooks and freedoms. By framing policy around universal, common-sense values like cutting bureaucratic red tape, lowering the tax burden, and supporting local families, my message resonates equally with Democrats, Independents, and moderate Republicans.

I focus heavily on bread-and-butter economic issues, such as expanding affordable housing options through deregulation and protecting individual property rights. Additionally, I emphasize concrete legislative wins that directly lower costs for families, such as sponsoring successful targeted property tax relief for our senior citizens.

State Representative Tangie Herring | Georgia House District 145

My relatability is rooted in 28 years of experience as a veteran educator in Georgia's public schools. Working closely with communities for over two decades has given me a deep, authentic understanding of the daily financial and social pressures my constituents face.

I don't just speak to working-class struggles; I lived them alongside my neighbors, which allows me to listen and collaborate with a genuine, grounded perspective.

The key to my success is an unwavering commitment to finding common ground and delivering tangible legislative results in a divided climate. By securing Republican co-sponsors and successfully passing three major pieces of legislation in a Republican-led General Assembly, I have proven my efficacy to voters. These include:

- Expanding property tax relief for Bibb County seniors;
- Allowing retired teachers to return to the classroom in critical needs areas like our rural communities
- Expanding housing options by removing unnecessary red tape

My approach treats public service as a mandate to collaborate and solve problems, which builds the broad, bipartisan coalition necessary to win. While national cultural debates certainly command media attention, the true battleground in HD 145 is won or lost on the economic realities facing our families.



When targeted by partisan attacks, my strategy is to cut through the noise by standing firm on my authentic background and my proven legislative record. Pivoting the conversation back to tangible economic delivery has been effective because it addresses what voters actually care about.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The toughest challenge is overcoming rigid national party stereotypes that don't align with the independent nature of Middle Georgia. Because HD 145 is a highly competitive swing district with a strong conservative presence, running under a national label requires constantly cutting through hyper-partisan noise to prove that my allegiance is to local families, not a national platform.

National groups often view races through a broad, top-of-the-ticket lens, which means the hyper-localized and data-driven field operation required to win this district must largely be built and funded independently from the ground up.

While the national Democratic brand can help maintain enthusiasm with base voters, victory in this district requires a focus on local kitchen-table issues. In a district where the margin of victory was just 273 votes, a rigid national party brand can become a hindrance when it alienates the Independent and moderate Republican voters needed for a winning coalition.

While my focus on building bipartisan coalitions and passing common-sense, market-driven legislation occasionally draws criticism from rigid partisan purists, it is not a defining feature of this race.

The vast majority of my constituents value effective governance over ideological purity.

National Democrats frequently misunderstand that working-class voters in Middle Georgia are fundamentally pragmatic and value individual economic freedoms and property rights. They

cannot be organized purely through a national lens or motivated by abstract ideological debates. They want to see local accountability, fiscal responsibility, and respect for their household budgets.

My 2024 victory in a highly competitive, formerly Republican-leaning district is living proof that we can win working-class voters back. They have not abandoned a party label so much as they have felt abandoned by political theater. When we show up, listen, and deliver real relief, we have the opportunity to regain their trust.

My advice to the national party is to focus on policies that directly lower the cost of living for working families and expand access to high-quality public education.

The national party must trust local leaders who understand the unique dynamics of their communities.

Ultimately, authenticity and concrete relief for families will always outperform national talking points.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**ANGELA
WITWER**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Angela Witwer is used to close elections. She defeated a Republican incumbent in 2018 by just under 700 votes. Three of her four general election victories have been under five points.

MICHIGAN HOUSE DISTRICT 76

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**68.7%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**4.2%****DISTRICT**

My district is about one-half suburban and the other half rural, with many small towns and villages. It also includes a small part of Lansing. The district is economically diverse, with the largest regional employers being Michigan State University and state government. We are also home to the biggest GM plant in the country, the biggest Meijer grocery warehouse in the U.S., and many small businesses and farms in the rural part of the district. It's a "culturally traditionalist" district and people.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I consider myself an "old school" politician, trying to be everywhere and meeting voters where they are. In my district, I meet voters based on how they consume information because people in the suburban and rural parts do so differently. For example, social media and e-newsletters are important for my suburban constituents, and rural residents additionally read one of four small town newspapers in my district. I host coffee hours every other week, host town hall meetings, read books regularly to school kids, and attend events like Boy Scout and Eagle Scout ceremonies.

I don't need coaching on how to talk to working-class voters. I'm from a small town and consider myself very "Midwesterner." I hug people and tell them I love them. I speak like the neighbor-next-door. Just being myself.

I have to win Independents and some Republicans in order to win. MAGA supporters show up regularly at my coffee hours. I know them and interact with them. I invest in the small town papers that cover rural parts of the district by placing ads featuring my calendar of events. The editors have written stories about my events. Farmers and small town residents read these papers, so it's an effective way to reach them.

In sum: Authenticity. Relatability. Honesty. Be everywhere.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The voters I speak to are concerned that we are focusing efforts on social issues versus economic issues like paying over four dollars for a gallon of gas and skyrocketing grocery bills.

State Representative Angela Witwer | Michigan House District 76



We need to stay focused on the issues of the people.

What would be considered super progressives attack me on social issues; they mostly live in urban areas and have difficulty understanding what it takes to win in a conservative district like mine.

There is no question in my mind that the Democratic Party can win back working-class voters. The party needs to invest more in candidates from outside urban areas. For example, make a small investment to help candidates with filing fees, voter lists, and signs. We invest in mostly urban areas, which then causes the center of gravity in the party to track to the left.

Let's get back to the days when we embraced everyone. That is what I have done. People over party. We represent everyone.

We're really making our party into a pup tent, not a big tent like we used to be.

The national parties tend to compartmentalize people — either for us or against us. There's no patience for bringing voters along who might be persuadable. We're better at pointing fingers rather than telling truths.

We can't be purists on every issue. We can't get anything done if we don't win enough seats to gain a majority. People have forgotten that.

My hope is that my comments are seen as my heartfelt desire to win back working-class voters and find a way to fight for all people. That way, we can become a true majority party and achieve the goals and values we, as Democrats, hold in common.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**DENISE
MENTZER**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Denise Mentzer's district is located in historic Macomb County, the home of Reagan Democrats. After voting Democratic in four of five presidential elections from 1996 to 2012, Macomb County shifted strongly to Trump in the last three elections. Mentzer first won by four points in 2022, but her margin was reduced by half in 2024 with Trump on the ballot.

MICHIGAN HOUSE DISTRICT 61

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**75.5%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**1.4%****DISTRICT**

The 61st House district serves Mount Clemens and parts of Sterling Heights and Clinton Township in Macomb County outside of Detroit. Our people have a tendency to be blunt and outspoken. We're hard-working, factory people for the most part, and many are union members. We take care of our homes and check in on our neighbors. And we don't get involved in a lot of extreme stuff.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

The best way to meet working-class voters is face-to-face. I do that through door-knocking and by being present at events. People see me out in the district all the time. I'm on social media but keep my messaging focused on state and local issues. I don't talk about national issues or Trump. I also prohibit my mailers from containing negative hits on my opponents. People are tired of that type of campaigning.

Some people appreciate seeing me at their doors while others consider it a solicitation and want nothing to do with me. (I've been kicked off

a few porches). If a sign says, "No Solicitation," I tell my team to just keep on walking. I take a lot longer at the doors than members of my team. One conversation took about 45 minutes. If someone recognizes me and wants to talk, I take the time to do so. Some people say nobody has ever knocked on their door before and just want to talk. We don't knock doors on Sundays or holidays; people want to rest and don't want someone bothering them.

I'll take longer too to address negative things said about me. One person listed several negative things about me that I was able to refute with facts. He was very appreciative and supportive afterward. I spoke to a gun owner once who asked me about a negative mailer that hit me on gun rights. I was able to explain that I'm a cop's kid and gun owner. After explaining my votes, he became more cordial. I've had other people say they would vote for me after extended conversations.

I need crossover votes to win, so these longer talks are effective for me.

State Representative Denise Mentzer | Michigan House District 61



Republicans who voted for me have known me for years and know I am blunt and outspoken and stand up for their interests.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

Macomb County continues to shift red. That's because Democrats are perceived as the party of LGBTQ and green energy, and that's not lowering their bills. We're not seen as meeting their economic needs.

If the party wants to succeed, it can't go left. We also need to bring in more younger voters through conversation and education.

There's a great opportunity to earn back the support of working-class voters.

The national party has no idea how loyal and faithful these voters would be if they just listened to them. They also don't realize just how hard-working many of these people are.

Very soon people are going to be a lot more aware of economic issues as more people lose their jobs due to tariffs, gas prices continue to climb, and health insurance is cut off or becomes more unaffordable. And our country has very serious mental health challenges that need to be addressed. These issues will supersede cultural matters. Party leaders need to get off their asses and do something.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
**JOHN
FITZGERALD**
EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

John Fitzgerald is serving his second term from a working-class district outside of Grand Rapids. Both elections were close, with him receiving about 53% of the vote each time. He serves as Minority Floor Leader for House Democrats in Michigan.

MICHIGAN HOUSE DISTRICT 83



WORKING CLASS PERCENTAGE



78.7%

2024 WINNING MARGIN



6.2%

DISTRICT

My district is centered in Wyoming, a first-ring suburb around Grand Rapids. It's a growing city roughly the size of Flint and a bedroom community where a good share of residents work elsewhere. Wyoming feels similar to other factory towns across the state because there are still strong neighborhood and school district identities. The district is also marked by increasing diversity with a growing Hispanic population from a variety of different countries. In fact, my district has the second highest percentage of Hispanic residents in the state. We're also part of the western Michigan Bible Belt where many residents' lives are rooted in faith. Our economy is diversified as well, with major employers from the food service, health care, and automotive industries. Our community is growing and becoming more attractive to young, college-educated families.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Door-to-door is still the best way to reach working-class voters — to get in front of them and develop a solid message. In a tight-knit district like mine, there's still a lot of contact between voters, and word travels fast between

neighbors and at community meetings. I use other campaign tools to reach out, but door-to-door provides the foundation. Social media, for example, does nothing if you haven't visited those neighborhoods and walked those streets. When voters see a Facebook ad about me, it isn't something new. They are familiar with me from being at the doors.

When I talk with voters at the doors, I ask them what their concerns are. I'm not there to be everything to all people; I need to have their experiences and input to fuel my views. My platform is based on what people are asking for; I stick to local issues, not social issues. For the most part, it's meat & potato economic issues and policies that respond to their day-to-day needs.

When cultural issues are raised, I hear them out and try to engage in discussion. So many of these viewpoints are manufactured by social media. I don't fault anyone for their beliefs. Working-class voters are used to being judged; in our society, we are expected to have an opinion on everything. I'll respond, "You know, I've never thought about it that way. I'll take

State Representative John Fitzgerald | Michigan House District 83

that into account to help inform my position. I hear your point; I think of it slightly differently." I'll see if we can find common ground and not admonish people. It's not pivoting from the issue; it's wading into it, inviting the dialogue and acknowledging that your experiences may be different.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The hardest part of running as a Democrat is that you're marred by national issues. When a different state party takes up an issue, we are lumped in with that. What's also changed is we have groups that believe if you're against them on a single issue, you're against them on all issues. If you're seen as not pushing the envelope to the furthest point, then you're not a quality Democrat. This attitude exists even in the local party—the mentality that we have to be together on everything or together on nothing.

The Democratic brand is no longer that we're the party of quality wages and civil rights; at times, it feels like we seek to have the most edgy take. We don't exchange and adopt ideas anymore; we exchange our viewpoints.

It's tricky to try and distance yourself from the party. If I don't include Democrat on a brochure, I can be called out on it for not being proud enough to include my party affiliation.

My advice to the national party is to instill a sense of pride back in the Democratic Party. We're proud to be Americans. We believe in striving towards excellence and providing the tools for everyone to achieve that. We need to talk about what it truly means to excel in our lives and push America back as a leader on the national stage. Spare no expense for the people



of our country; give them tools to raise their own standard of living, not just for the neediest.

Working-class voters feel left behind, disenfranchised, and misunderstood. They are exhausted by social issues that they don't experience day-to-day. They look at politics in terms of self-preservation — preserving and expanding upon what they currently have in their lives.

Democrats need to recognize that and offer them specific ideas on how to maximize what they can obtain as American citizens. For example, we want to increase take-home pay by 20% by 2030; we want to help you get a college degree or trade school training; we want to turn your \$80,000 income household into a \$100,000 income household. We want to reduce the tax burden because people work hard for their money.

We can, and we will, get working-class voters back. The last two years have pulled back the curtain, and they can see that Republican policies are not in their interests. Democrats have to put the people at the center of our policies. Everyone should have the opportunity to live fulfilling lives.

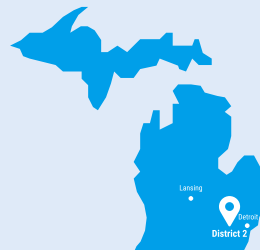


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**TULLIO
LIBERATI**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Tullio Liberati is the last remaining House Democrat in the blue-collar Downriver area south of Detroit. The region has been trending Red in top-of-the-ticket races and emerged as a key area in determining control of the Michigan General Assembly. He easily won his redrawn district in 2022 by 20 points, but the margin was reduced to under 10 in 2024 when a far-left progressive, third-party candidate siphoned votes away from him. Liberati is a true working-class Democrat representing a working-class district — he didn't complete college and instead went into the construction business.

MICHIGAN HOUSE DISTRICT 2

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**81.4%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**9.4%****DISTRICT**

My district includes all or parts of four suburbs in the Downriver region south of Detroit in Wayne County. The 2nd district is densely populated with many small row houses; in fact, I can knock it out with three people in one weekend.

The district is a solidly working-class, tight-knit community with lots of union members, Catholics, senior citizens, and small businesses. Family, job, and religion are the three most important things to people.

Many voters in my district feel forgotten. Many of the good-paying jobs have left. Our economic base used to be the steel industry, but it's gone; the economic anchor is now the auto industry, but it's shrinking too. Many residents work at auto plants or businesses that rely on auto plants. The Ford River Rouge plant that makes

the Ford 150 truck is located just outside my district.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I know my district. I'm a small business owner in the construction industry. I know what it's like to get dirty and be tired as hell after you get home from work. My focus is on reflecting their values on legislative issues and bringing dollars, jobs, and investment back to my community.

Door knocking is number one — especially by the candidate; volunteers can knock a second time. Listen when you go to the doors. I ask people the three issues that affect their lives. People respond to door knocking:

"I remember you; you came to my house." Also, negative ads don't work when you know people that well.

State Representative Tullio Liberati | Michigan House District 2

Working-class voters care about putting food on the table or getting a better job. Cultural issues are at the bottom. When people bring them up, I let them voice their opinions and move the chat back to economic issues.

We lost working-class voters because we took them for granted. We can get them back by showing up more and talking about issues they care about.

Don't say "you're crazy" when they voice contrary views. And educate them on how Republican votes are hurting them — like how tariffs are killing their jobs.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national party brand is a hindrance in my district. I won my hometown, Allen Park, by 1,300 votes and Trump won it by 600. Districtwide, I won by nearly 10 points, and Harris barely won.

We have a lot of crossover voters. Trump, for good or bad, talks to everyday people; national Democrats talk at people, not to them. I hear about it in my own family: my son says "your party talks down to me."

I have to differentiate myself from the national party by focusing on kitchen table issues and showing that I care. I emphasize my voting record and constituent services.

The national party just doesn't understand my district. They don't understand the changes occurring and have little presence here. They don't show up until late in the campaigns.



We're just not the party we used to be. We're not resonating with working-class voters like we used to. The far-left progressives ran a third-party candidate against me over the transgender issue. I voted to protect transgender civil rights, but that wasn't enough; I voted against them on the sports issue to reflect my district. We may not agree on everything, but how does electing a Republican help them? Let's not dwell on things we're not going to agree on. They think Ann Arbor is reality; it's not reality here at all.

I feel like I'm the old man saying "get off my lawn" regarding the party and the progressives. National Democrats say it's getting better with working-class voters; I think it's getting worse.

But I keep "fightin' the fight."

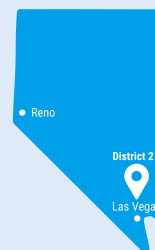


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**ELAINE
MARZOLA**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ATTORNEY

Elaine Marzola won her first election to an open seat in 2020 by four points. She has since won two more close elections and rose to become Speaker Pro Tempore of the Nevada General Assembly and Chair of the Assembly Democratic Caucus.

NEVADA HOUSE DISTRICT 21

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**65.7%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**1.4%****DISTRICT**

Assembly District 21 is located in Clark County and covers portions of Henderson and the southeast Las Vegas Valley, including Green Valley Ranch and parts of Silverado Ranch. The district is primarily residential, with established neighborhoods, schools, parks, and a growing diversity of families and backgrounds.

The economic base reflects the broader Southern Nevada economy, with residents working in healthcare, education, hospitality, retail, logistics, government, and professional services, alongside a strong small business community. Major employers in and around the district include St. Rose Dominican and Henderson Hospital, the City of Henderson, hospitality properties, retail centers, and logistics operations.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

My campaign's biggest adjustment in 2024 was shifting away from leading with social and cultural issues and instead focusing more directly on affordability and economic concerns. While I remain strongly supportive of issues like reproductive rights, LGBTQ protections, and

gun safety, I found those messages were not resonating with working-class voters as strongly as economic messaging.

As a single mother, I root much of my campaign in my own lived experiences. I talk openly about living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to cover bills, and raising my son while balancing work and financial stress.

Voters connect with authenticity and with candidates who can explain not just what policies they support, but why those policies matter personally.

My messaging focuses heavily on "kitchen table" concerns — housing costs, healthcare affordability, childcare, public schools, and rising everyday expenses. Democrats often overcomplicate economic issues with language voters do not relate to. Terms like economic justice or housing justice don't mean much to voters. People want to know if you're going to help lower their rent or make medication more affordable.

For example, I voted to crack down on Wall

State Representative Elaine Marzola | Nevada House District 21



Street buying up single-family homes, stood up to our state's energy utility and forced them to return more than \$63 million to overcharged customers, and voted to cap insulin costs at \$35. These are real, tangible pocketbook issues that working-class voters need to see, feel, and touch to see that we are fighting for them.

I emphasize empathy over ideology when speaking with voters. Working-class voters are tired of politicians talking at them rather than with them. Instead of presenting myself as having all the answers, I focus on listening and sharing experiences voters recognize in their own lives.

Every policy I introduce or support is one that would have directly helped my own family when we were struggling financially.

My campaign relies heavily on direct voter contact. Because AD-21 sits within the larger Las Vegas media market, broadcast television and radio advertising are less effective and inefficient. Instead, the campaign prioritizes direct mail, digital advertising, text messaging, peer-to-peer outreach, canvassing, and community events.

There is no universal formula for Democratic success with working-class voters. Candidates have to know their why. Voters can tell when someone is being authentic and when they're just repeating talking points.

Cultural issues played a much larger role in the 2022 election cycle than they did in 2024. Issues like abortion rights were highly motivating to Democratic base voters in 2022, but by 2024, voters across the political spectrum became more focused on affordability and the rising cost of living.

Republicans successfully tied cultural issues to broader economic frustrations, convincing many voters that Democrats cared more about ideological debates than helping families afford rent, groceries, or healthcare. In response, Democrats must stay grounded in economic messaging while still defending marginalized communities and core rights protections.

When Republicans attack on cultural issues, I focus on my legislative record and the policies I supported to help families in my district. Voters are often more receptive once conversations turn toward practical accomplishments and concrete benefits.

While I remain progressive on many social issues, voters across backgrounds increasingly want leaders focused on affordability, education, and public safety rather than endless culture war debates. People want solutions that improve their daily lives. That's where I keep my focus.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

One of the biggest challenges of running as a Democrat is overcoming frustration with the national party brand. Many voters feel disillusioned with Washington politics and often project those frustrations onto state and local candidates regardless of their actual records or priorities.

Some voters shut down conversations immediately once they learn I am a Democrat because of their feelings toward national politics.

My strategy is to focus less on partisan labels and more on listening carefully to voters and showing them who I am personally.

Both national parties are struggling with voter trust because so many Americans feel life has become less affordable while politics has become increasingly polarized and disconnected from ordinary concerns.

To distinguish myself from national Democratic stereotypes, I focus on authenticity and listening. People want to vent. They want to be heard. I'm not here to tell them I have all the answers or that they're wrong. I'm here to work with them and find solutions.

Democrats need to fundamentally rethink how they communicate with working-class voters. Too many national consultants and party strategists have become disconnected from everyday Americans and overly reliant on elite political messaging and slogans.

We'll earn trust back when Democrats stop sounding like Ivy League consultants and start talking like regular people again. People want authenticity, not buzzwords.

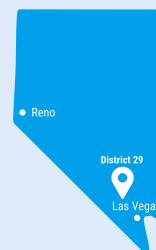


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**JOE
DALIA**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ATTORNEY

Joe Dalia took an unusual path to public service, first founding a startup company and later working in Silicon Valley before returning to his home in Henderson, where he grew up. He won an open toss-up seat in 2024. Dalia learned politics from one of the masters — Harry Reid. He interned for the late senator as an undergraduate.

NEVADA HOUSE DISTRICT 29

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**70.2%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**4.4%****DISTRICT**

My district is almost entirely inside the city of Henderson and is a microcosm of Nevada. It is a purple district with a wide range of families, neighborhoods, and life experiences. Some communities are working- and middle-class neighborhoods where families are stretching every dollar. Others are more affluent, including gated communities. The people I represent include casino workers, teachers, service workers, small business owners, blue-collar workers, and young families trying to build a future.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I connected with working-class voters because I didn't try to talk to them like an outsider. My life is rooted in this community. I grew up here, I remember what it felt like to be a kid here, and now, I am raising my daughters here. I communicated that to voters, and it mattered.

Voters can tell the difference between a message that is focus-grouped and a message that comes from lived experience.

The best way to understand voters is still the most basic one: knock on doors, listen, and let the conversation go where voters take it. I knocked on 5,000 doors during my campaign, and those conversations shaped the race. Again and again, voters raised the same concerns: Where are the good jobs? How do we fund our schools? Why do we feel less safe? Those became the core issues of the campaign: affordability and jobs, education, and public safety.

I did not try to tell voters that their priorities were wrong. I tried to meet them where they were. That meant talking about the issues they raised in the language they used, not forcing every conversation into a national political frame.

I also found that voters had a real appetite for specifics. They did not just want to hear, "I'll fight for stronger schools." They wanted to know what that meant. For me, that meant talking about broadening the tax base so Nevada could better fund K-12 education and pay educators. On jobs, it meant talking about economic diversification

and bringing more opportunity into the state. On public safety, it meant acknowledging what people were experiencing and making clear that safe communities are a basic part of a good life.

Here's one example: I sponsored the Homegrown Opportunity Act, a first-in-the-nation policy that invests in no-cost housing for American entrepreneurs and innovators. It's a unique and pragmatic federal-state collaboration rooted in entrepreneurship. The bill would provide entrepreneurs with two years of housing, food, and essential services in exchange for launching and maintaining businesses. It sets a target for Nevada to convert unused commercial real estate stock to launch 10,000 residential units, with at least 75% allocated to low-income Nevadans who just need an opportunity and a hand up. We don't typically think of entrepreneurs as working class, yet consider the retail worker in East Las Vegas with a dream for her own shop that she'll never realize because she has to fight daily to keep a roof over her head. The Homegrown Opportunity Act gives her, and others, back the heart of the American Dream: a chance at financial independence.

Voters can detect vague answers quickly, especially working-class voters who do not have the luxury of pretending policy is abstract.

Public safety was also more important to many Democratic households than national political conversations sometimes suggest. In lower-income parts of my district, my law enforcement endorsement often gave voters confidence that I took their concerns seriously.

That does not mean cultural issues are unimportant. It means voters were asking for

State Representative Joe Dalia | Nevada House District 29



the fundamentals first. The message I heard was, in effect: help us afford our lives, educate our kids, find good jobs, and feel safe in our neighborhoods. From there, voters were more open to a broader conversation about values and policy.

The key was staying focused on the issues that mattered most, while making clear why I was the right messenger. We did not try to sell voters a campaign they had not asked for. We listened to what they were asking for and built the campaign around that.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

Running as a Democrat in a competitive working-class district requires balance. I didn't make party affiliation the centerpiece of my campaign, but I didn't run away from it either. The voters I needed to win, especially nonpartisan voters, were less interested in hearing about party labels and more

interested in whether I understood their lives and had a plan to make things better.

I also believe Democrats should be comfortable speaking positively about entrepreneurship, small business, and the American Dream.

There is daylight between being pro-big business and being anti-capitalism, and I think we need to be comfortable in that real estate. In Nevada, running on diversifying our economy through homegrown business opportunities was wildly popular. And finding that zone enabled me to build a coalition not just built on traditional left-leaning labor, environmental, and pro-choice organizations, but also the Las Vegas and Henderson Chambers of Commerce. I took criticism for the latter, but I think that reflects the kind of coalition Democrats should want to build: workers, families, educators, entrepreneurs, and community leaders who all want Nevada to succeed.

I ran ahead of the top of the ticket in my district because voters had a different image of me than they did of national politics. They saw someone from the community, someone who went to local public schools, someone raising a family in the same place they were, and someone focused on the same kitchen-table concerns they were talking about at home.

Even when voters disagreed with me on a particular issue, many appreciated that I was offering them something concrete. People are tired of vague talking points. They want leaders who are rooted, specific, and honest about what they are trying to do.

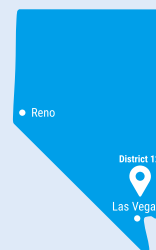


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**MAX
CARTER**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
UNION ELECTRICIAN

Max Carter's career in public service was forged in tragedy. His wife was fatally injured after falling off a horse in 2017. Friends urged him to seek a state assembly seat in 2021, and he won. He's a retired union electrician and true working-class legislator who is perceived as a "gun-totin', cowboy boot wearin' conservative" but describes himself as a "champion crier." Carter went from "just existing to wanting to live again" and calls public service "the best thing that ever happened to me since Karen died."

NEVADA HOUSE DISTRICT 12

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**76.3%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**0.8%****DISTRICT**

The 12th Assembly District is mostly comprised of eastern Las Vegas and northern Henderson. The eastern Las Vegas part is solidly working class, 50-60% Latino, and lower income. The Henderson part of the district is higher income, lower minority, and includes some gated communities where residents patrol the area in their golf carts with shotguns.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

The best way to reach working-class voters is door-to-door... period. I still have a pair of bronze boots from my first race when I knocked on 6,000 doors and walked 600 miles.

At the beginning, I was told not to spend more than a minute at each door and move on. I ignored that because I've found people often want to talk if you're willing to listen.

I've spent 15-20 minutes at some doors. I just try to be myself, learn about their concerns, and admit to not having all the answers. Listen more than talk. I think people appreciate the honesty. I'm a firm believer that people can sense if you're willing to listen and display some empathy.

Some of my colleagues brag about putting MAGA voters in their places at the doors. I'm dumbfounded by that approach. You don't tell someone they're wrong. If a MAGA person cusses me out, I'll at least listen and try to find some commonalities. Often, it's not an issue. It might be a motorcycle in their driveway or a horse in a field. I've flipped some MAGA voters with this approach, with several of them saying it's the first time in their lives they have voted for a Democrat.

I also use mail and digital in my campaigns. They work together — people will see me at the

State Representative Max Carter | Nevada House District 12

grocery store and say they saw me either in a mailer or on a streaming service. Digital is hard to quantify for success, but I find it helpful based on direct feedback from voters.

Cultural issues haven't played a big role in my races. At the doors, I hear mostly about cost of living issues like high gas prices or hyper-local concerns like street racing. People are hurting and concerned they won't be able to take vacations or road trips this summer. They don't know if they can continue to keep up financially. If somebody brings up cultural issues, I just roll with it. I do not tell them they're wrong. Cultural issues just distract us from what really matters to working-class voters, and that's pocketbook issues.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national party brand is definitely a hindrance, especially in working-class areas. If I can get 30 seconds with a voter at the door, we can make a connection. I do not say my party but will proudly give it if asked. My focus is on what's right for Nevadans and what's right for Nevada; national issues do not enter into my messaging. Democrats too often focus on issues national advocates care about but don't play a major role in the lives of average voters.

The toughest thing about running as a Democrat is how we're perceived — soft, wishy washy, too accommodating, and not willing to fight back. We need an image of "I'm not going to take any shit." We need to be genuinely tough and not bombastic like Trump. When someone kicks me in the shins, I'm going to at least punch you in the face.

When I get attacked by the Left in our party, my response is, "Who told you that you get to define



what a progressive is?" I've worked in the union movement for 30+ years, and we fought hard for a progressive agenda. And we continue to.

That's what the national party and national progressive groups don't get about working-class voters — that it's all about pocketbook, bread and butter issues; the wallet; how can I afford to take care of my family?

But we also have to produce results. I'm proud of my bill to enact labor standards revisions that crack down on wage theft by strengthening the Labor Commissioner's office. This bill had bipartisan support, was endorsed by business and labor, and signed by our Republican Governor.

If we focus on those issues and address them properly, we can win back working-class voters. Our language should be hard and blunt, not high-brow, which just reinforces perceptions of Democrats as out-of-touch elitists. Talk directly, not paternally. We need to stop telling voters we know better than they do about what they need. "Don't tell me what I need; listen and help me get what I need."

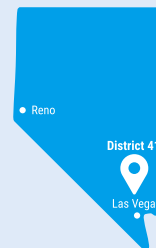


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**SANDRA
JAUREGUI**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
POLICY ADVOCATE

Sandra Jauregui was first elected in 2016, and all of her elections have been decided by less than 10 points. She has a compelling personal story as a survivor of the October 1, 2017, mass shooting in Las Vegas. Sandra recently won the Democratic primary for Lieutenant Governor.

NEVADA HOUSE DISTRICT 41

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**66.4%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**0.8%****DISTRICT**

Assembly District 41 is located in the southeast Las Vegas Valley and is a predominantly working and middle-class community. The district includes teachers, hospitality workers, construction workers, first responders, healthcare employees, union members, and small business owners living side by side in a diverse and rapidly growing area.

The district reflects the broader diversity of Southern Nevada, with strong Latino and Asian American communities, longtime Nevada families, and younger working parents all contributing to the area's identity. Like much of Nevada, many residents are feeling squeezed by rising housing costs, healthcare expenses, and the broader affordability crisis impacting working families.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

My success in the district comes from approaching working-class voters as neighbors rather than political targets. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, I frequently speak about the values of hard work and sacrifice instilled in my family growing up. Before serving in

legislative leadership, I worked for Harry Reid, where I learned how to advocate for working families and stand up to powerful interests.

Authenticity is critical when communicating with voters. People know when someone understands their struggles because they've lived them too.

My campaign strategy centers heavily on direct voter engagement. There is no substitute for knocking doors, listening to concerns, and maintaining a visible presence in the community. Voters are less interested in ideological debates and more focused on whether elected officials understand the realities they face every day.

The issues I hear most frequently from voters are affordability, healthcare costs, public safety, education, and economic opportunity. Families want practical answers about paying rent, affording groceries, finding stable jobs, and building security for their children.

As a result, I focus my messaging on concrete policies and tangible outcomes rather than broad political slogans. My campaign

State Representative Sandra Jauregui | Nevada House District 41

emphasizes lowering prescription drug costs, protecting union jobs, expanding workforce training and apprenticeship opportunities, investing in public education, and improving public safety.

Working-class voters are increasingly skeptical of vague political rhetoric and respond better to candidates who can explain how policies directly improve everyday life.

Cultural issues such as abortion, immigration, gun violence, and gender identity remain major components of modern campaigns, particularly as Republicans attempt to nationalize local races around those topics.

I don't shy away from my positions. I openly support reproductive rights, stronger protections against gun violence, and treating all people with dignity and respect. However, I believe Democrats cannot allow cultural debates to completely overshadow the economic realities facing working families.

Democrats have to be able to do multiple things. The economic realities families are facing deserve just as much attention as social rights issues.

Working-class voters remain primarily focused on affordability and opportunity, and campaigns must stay grounded in those concerns. Voters want leaders who can protect core rights while also addressing the rising cost of living and economic insecurity many families are experiencing.



NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

Running as a Democrat in Nevada can be difficult at times because many voters are frustrated with national politics and increasingly skeptical of both political parties.

Democrats are sometimes perceived as disconnected from working-class communities, and there are moments when that criticism is valid.

My strategy for overcoming those perceptions is to remain rooted in local concerns and direct voter conversations rather than engaging in national political theater. Voters can distinguish between leaders who are genuinely invested in their communities and politicians who shift positions based on changing political trends.

One mistake national Democrats sometimes make is underestimating how practical working-class voters are. People are not asking for perfection or ideological purity. They want leaders who respect them, listen to them, and offer a positive vision for how life can get better.

Democrats spend too much time attacking Republicans and not enough time explaining what they intend to do for working families. Rebuilding trust with working-class voters requires authenticity, consistency, and delivering measurable results on issues people experience in their daily lives.

Democrats can regain and strengthen support among working-class voters if the party remains focused on economic opportunity, affordable housing, quality schools, safe neighborhoods, and good-paying jobs.

When voters believe you genuinely understand their lives and are willing to fight for them, they will give you a chance.



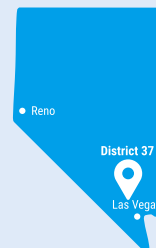


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**SHEA
BACKUS**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ATTORNEY

Shea Backus is no stranger to close election results in her working-class, Las Vegas district. She won her first race in a red district in 2018 by 135 votes before losing in 2020 by 657 votes. Since then, in a newly drawn swing district, she won by 806 votes in 2022 and 1,064 votes in 2024. Her largest percentage was 51.3% in 2024.

NEVADA HOUSE DISTRICT 37

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**66.0%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**2.6%****DISTRICT**

My district in northwestern Las Vegas is unique in its variety of different communities. You're as likely to find a master planned community as well as the Lone Mountain preservation area where people still have horses. We feature a large number of senior citizens who are mostly retired working-class residents. It's a swing district, and I have to get Independent and Republican votes to win.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

The biggest strength in my first campaign was knocking doors.

Face-to-face interaction is the best way to listen and understand what matters most to working-class voters. I start my door-to-door efforts early to better tailor my messaging for later months.

Based on my door-knocking experience, I have a strong sense at the doors whether someone watches MSNOW, CNN, or FOX. I can adapt my message better based on knowing their news-watching tendencies. And I stay away from hyper-polarized national issues.

While door-to-door is still an important element in my campaign strategy, I found that the growing popularity of Amazon delivery services was a definite hurdle. People assumed the doorbell or knock was a delivery person and didn't respond as often as before. Amazon and COVID resulted in a big shift in grassroots strategies, although senior citizens still tend to answer their doors more often than younger residents.

I found that social media and digital streaming ads are both effective in my campaigns. Digital streaming can fine-tune our targets based on geography or key demographics. We don't use TV ads because it wouldn't make sense in the Las Vegas market for a state legislative race.

The key to my success in this swing district is that I am viewed as a moderate Democrat because I'm a business owner.

I have an open-door policy on meeting and listening to everyone. That might be why I was not attacked from the left as often as some other candidates.

State Representative Shea Backus | Nevada House District 37



NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

It's been difficult to watch union members slowly vote Republican more often over the years. But many of these working-class voters who supported Trump are now frustrated at not getting what he promised to deliver.

This provides an opening for Democrats in 2026 and 2028 if the party can get its act together. While the Democratic Party is the working-class party, I understand that some constituents view the national party as elitist, which can be a hindrance to my campaign. In 2024, we saw that the national party did not brand well with younger working-class voters.

What the national party doesn't get about working-class voters revolves around the identity issue. Kamala lost the presidential race on cultural issues, especially relating to transgender identity.

We should uplift diversity, but remember to focus on the issues that matter most to constituents.

I am an enrolled member of a Native American tribe. Yet, I don't feature that in my campaigns, given recent attacks on identity politics. I am proud of the work that I have done in the legislature to strengthen tribal communities in my state. When I am speaking to working-class constituents in my district, I focus on the issues that matter most to them.

In the end, I truly believe people just want someone to reach out to them; someone to listen to them. Democrats can win back working-class voters by having conversations with them and using simple and direct language. The party should take a page out of Trump's playbook and use clear, concise language that everybody can understand.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**BRYAN
COHN**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
AGRICULTURE

Bryan Cohn did an extremely rare thing in today's politics: he defeated a Republican incumbent in a North Carolina rural district. He eked out a win by less than one percent that was critical in preventing Republicans from gaining super-majority status in the General Assembly.

NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE DISTRICT 32

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**78.5%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**0.5%**

DISTRICT

My rural district is located in central North Carolina just north of Raleigh-Durham along the Virginia border. Henderson is the largest municipality with a population of 15,000. Our economic base is primarily manufacturing and retail.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Door-to-door is the only way to connect with rural voters who feel overlooked and neglected.

If I had a choice between calling for dollars or door knocking, I'd choose the latter 100% of the time. This was part of a bottom-up, planned, intensive effort along with partners from outside and within the state. I simply couldn't have won without it. Our team knocked 30,000 doors, and I personally knocked more than 7,000.

I engaged in longer conversations and sat on a lot of porches for what some on my team felt was an "egregious" amount of time. But these listening sessions were extraordinarily helpful and resulted in people volunteering and

being more active in the campaign. Our goal was turnout — we targeted people with spotty histories of voting.

It's easy for me to be relatable because I grew up in a working-class family. My dad was a union president. That helped me understand the community and be situationally aware. No suits and ties for me at the doors — I wore a T-shirt and jeans. And I'd start the conversation by just asking how they were doing, not canned political messaging.

The ground game also included attending community and church groups — really everywhere we could meet voters where they're at. That's exactly what you have to do to win this type of district.

I found people very concerned about economic stability, access to health care, or having enough money to pay the rent or buy groceries. Some people are working two, three, or even four jobs and still in poverty. A solid economic platform will connect with them not just economically, but also emotionally. Everything else is vapor.

State Representative Bryan Cohn | North Carolina House District 32

To address working-class economic concerns, I sponsored several pieces of legislation. I introduced the Workforce Freedom and Protection Act to prohibit noncompete agreements for workers earning less than \$75,000 and give employees greater freedom to pursue better jobs and wages. I was also a primary sponsor of the Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would phase in an \$18 minimum wage, and the North Carolina Paid Family Leave Insurance Act, so that workers would not have to choose between a paycheck and caring for a newborn or sick family member. I also introduced legislation requiring the state to measure economic progress through wages, housing, childcare, healthcare costs, and job quality, rather than relying on traditional economic indicators alone.

Regarding cultural issues, some wanted to discuss access to abortion more in terms of access to overall health care access. When I was hit by Republicans on cultural issues, like immigration, abortion, or identity, I ignored it and didn't respond because they are secondary issues and not relevant based on what I heard at the doors. The people these issues resonate with won't vote for me anyway.

While I have strong support among Republicans and Independents, I own being a Democrat at the doors and wear the label proudly. You don't abandon your sports team when the going gets tough. It just energizes me to work that much harder to show that Democrats do stand up for working-class folks and do care about the issues working-class folks care about.



NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

While people are increasingly sick of the Republicans, they can't say much positive about the Democratic Party. There are plenty of reasons, but the one that sticks out to me is a lack of leadership at the top. We haven't had someone stand out and speak for the party like Obama and Clinton did.

The party is also tone deaf. There's a large disconnect between the party and regular working-class folks. People feel left behind, forgotten, and not seen by a party they see as elitist.

If Democrats want working-class voters to stop paying attention to cultural issues and pay attention to things that matter, then they need to start talking about things that matter.

In some areas, like bigger cities, cultural issues may matter more, but in rural and working-class areas like mine, you need to be focused on economic issues that affect people's wallets and pocketbooks.

The party can start rebuilding the bond with working-class voters by getting out of their bubble and meeting them where they're at.

The higher up in the party you go, the more people stop being people and are numbers on a spreadsheet or traded like commodities.

It's the quality of the contact, not the quantity. It's also not just about showing up, taking a survey, and relying solely on data points. Ask how they're doing and then shut up and listen. You'll start to see and hear things and patterns emerge. Building trust means looking people in the eye; that outshines anything they see that might influence their opinions, even if what they're talking about is outside our comfort zones.

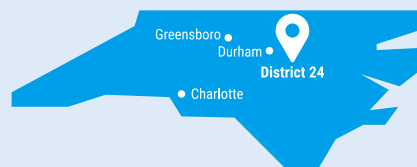


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**DANTE
PITTMAN**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
NONPROFIT

Dante Pittman flipped a Republican seat by less than 1,000 votes in 2024 that kept the Democrats from super-minority status in the North Carolina General Assembly. The rural, working-class district is historically Blue but has trended Red as rural, white working-class voters shift their loyalties.

NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE DISTRICT 24

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**79.2%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**2.2%****DISTRICT**

My district comprises all of Wilson County and one precinct in Nash County. Wilson is an aging, working-class, high-poverty county with a large number of SNAP and Medicaid recipients. Agriculture is a leading industry, and tobacco is still a major crop, especially for export. Wilson County has transformed its economy to include pharmaceuticals and advanced manufacturing.

REACHING WORKING CLASS VOTERS

I would not have flipped this seat without some Republican and Independent votes. Trump won my district by two points as I was winning by a similar margin. I attribute my victory to my deep roots in the community — my family has been here for five generations. A not insignificant number of people told me that I was the only Democrat they voted for.

I've learned from my years of living here that you navigate the culture in two parts. One involves the issues, and the second is how you talk to people. The Democratic Party does not sound like the Democratic Party of 20 years ago. Democrats tend to use academic language to tell people they disagree with that they don't know

what they're talking about. It may make party insiders feel smart, but it's at the expense of people that we need on our team. In the last 10 years, quite frankly, the Republicans have done a better job of listening and responding in a short, simple, and direct manner.

At the same time, I get very skeptical when I start hearing buzzwords. I just don't think that works. Now it's affordability. I say in every speech, "Prices are going up from gas to groceries." I have long thought that we have too many people who are more interested in winning academic arguments than elections.

My campaign was heavily focused on door-to-door and attending events. We did use radio, direct mail, and broadcast television, which helped build my name identification. It was an "all of the above" approach.

I show up and try to connect with people in one-on-one conversations. For example, my service in the North Carolina Army National Guard is a natural conversation starter with veterans. I'm proud of my service, and I love to engage with other service members and veterans. It's another

State Representative Dante Pittman | North Carolina House District 24

cultural connection that might get me another five seconds to talk. That's what candidates need — a little snapshot that extends the conversation a bit. You might pique their interest and get a gateway to them.

People differentiate me from the national party based on some of the events I attend. I've been at 4-H and volunteer fire department meetings where the political breakdown is either 90-10 or 80-20 Republican to Democrat. The party can't be frightened to show up at these types of events.

I spend a lot of time in churches, and some of the most socially conservative people I've met who vote Democratic up and down the ballot are in black churches. This is something the national party shies away from acknowledging because it's uncomfortable.

Sometimes, those who disagree with you will still vote for you if they trust that you have the best interests of the community in mind. In this age of social media and artificial intelligence, people don't know who to trust. That's why authenticity and staying true to yourself are so important. For example, I didn't talk about abortion as much as some experts recommended. While I'm firm in my position on the issue, it wasn't what I was hearing from my voters. The lesson for all of us is that we don't get to decide what's important to voters. They get to ask the questions.

It seems to be an urban versus rural cultural difference. Some of my urban peers expect everyone to vote in lockstep; that anyone with a 'D' behind their name will feel and vote the same. But the more rural a district is, the more that presents a challenge. We don't have the urban population to win elections on its own.



Why in the world would we ignore rural voters? There's got to be room in our party for these voters. We are better and stronger when we truly have a big tent.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

What the national party misunderstands the most is that the party that shows true progress on extending opportunity is the one that will win. In my district, people still need pathways to opportunity. That should be the Democratic Party's message.

The heyday of North Carolina Democrats was under former Governor James Hunt. There was a clear delineation between the national party and the state party. It was probably a mistake to get away from that, but elections are so nationalized now that I'm not sure there's any going back.

The most talented politician I've ever seen is Bill Clinton. He came from an area similar to my district and understood the culture. When he campaigned in my district in 2024, people flocked to him.

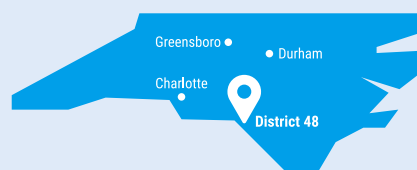


STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**GARLAND
PIERCE**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
MINISTER

Long-time incumbent Garland Pierce represents two counties undergoing political change. Hoke County has only voted for a Republican presidential candidate once in its history, but the Democratic margins are shrinking with every election. Scotland County had only voted Republican twice in its history prior to 2020, when Donald Trump won the next two races.

NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE DISTRICT 48

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**82.2%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**3.8%****DISTRICT**

My rural district includes two counties, one of which touches the South Carolina border. Hoke County is growing in population with many new families from the military community serving at nearby Fort Bragg. Agriculture still plays a big role in our economy. We've lost many of our factories, and those jobs have been replaced by the service industry.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I'm a first-generation college grad who grew up in a working-class family. In addition to being an ordained minister, I'm a retired Teamster who worked at UPS for 25 years. I can talk to people on that level because I'm working class myself.

My military background helps with working-class voters. I served in the U.S. Army and put my name on the dotted line to protect this country. That helps with military families moving into the area to serve at Fort Bragg.

In many ways, my name is synonymous with the district. I'm visible; whatever is happening, I

show up. I work hard to remain visible by sending letters to high school graduates, those with deaths in families, and newly registered voters — that all adds up. And I stay visible after the election. You can't just go home and go to bed after the election. If anybody calls my office, I get back with them — whether pro or con. That's helped me to be successful.

In my last campaign, I knocked a lot of doors and had my team knocking as well. My campaign did TV, radio and mailers too. Being visible and meeting people at their doors is the best way to reach working-class voters.

I was attacked by my opponent on cultural issues in the last election, which made it closer. They used those red meat issues to go after me. It was guns last time, and I expect it will be the trans issue this time. My own party beat me down when I voted for a so-called bathroom bill and a bill to keep a newborn baby alive. Abortion — they will eat you alive with that out here.

State Representative Garland Pierce | North Carolina House District 48

This is the Bible Belt. Many church people view these issues differently. In rural areas like mine, that dog won't hunt.

My votes on cultural issues helped me in my district. I get some moderate Republican votes because of those positions.

I faced pushback from progressives on some of my votes on these issues.

They always say the party is a big tent — let's live up to that.

When I first was elected, the Democratic Speaker would tell me not to vote for certain bills that would hurt me in my district. We don't have that awareness anymore.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national party brand can certainly hurt me in certain rural parts of my district. We've embraced a lot of social issues that people here just don't agree with. Even some Democrats don't support progressive positions on certain issues. Cultural issues are what have really hurt our party in rural areas. Moderate Democrats helped us gain and keep majorities. We need more moderate Democrats; otherwise, the party won't be successful.

The Democratic Party needs to have a better message that resonates with rural and working-class voters. By having a good message on economic issues, we can get some of these working-class voters back. A Goodyear plant nearby may close soon, costing the region some 1,700 jobs. People are wanting to know how they're going to feed their children, how they're going to pay the rent, how they can afford gas,



and, above all, how can they can make a good living, take care of their family, and live a good life. A lot of jobs don't have good retirement systems anymore and people are worried about retirement security. We should spend more time and energy talking about jobs instead of cultural issues.

**And just say it in plain language:
"Groceries are too high. Gas is too high."**



STATE SENATOR

**NICK
MILLER**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Nick Miller was elected to the Pennsylvania State Senate in 2022 at age 27, becoming the youngest person elected to that body in more than 135 years. He represents a working-class district in the Lehigh Valley located within Pennsylvania's 7th Congressional District, a key battleground region that often reflects broader political trends across the Commonwealth and the nation.

PENNSYLVANIA SENATE DISTRICT 14

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**75.3%**2022 WINNING
MARGIN**7.0%**

DISTRICT

My district is a microcosm of Pennsylvania. It includes the Commonwealth's third largest city, suburban neighborhoods, and productive farmland. The issues facing residents are diverse, but the priorities are often the same, including safe communities, good schools, reliable infrastructure, family-sustaining jobs, and a government that works.

One of the most rewarding parts of this job is hearing directly from people with different perspectives and experiences. Whether I am meeting with a farmer in Northampton County, a small business owner in Allentown, or a retiree at the Mack Truck union hall, I have learned that most people are looking for practical solutions, not political fights.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

The most effective way to connect with working-class voters is to show up, listen, and be present in the community.

During my first campaign, I knocked on thousands of doors, attended

community events across the district, and held town halls throughout the region. Those conversations taught me more than any poll or consultant ever could. People want elected officials who understand their challenges because they have taken the time to hear them firsthand.

My district requires building coalitions across political lines. I faced competitive opponents in both the primary and general election, but I ran as a pragmatic, commonsense candidate focused on results rather than ideology. Independent voters play a critical role in our elections, and they consistently respond to leaders who are willing to work with anyone to get things done.

That same approach guides me on difficult issues. Voters want to know where their elected officials stand, but they also want leaders who are thoughtful, respectful, and willing to listen. Even when people disagree, they appreciate honesty, consistency, and a willingness to engage.

State Senator Nick Miller | Pennsylvania Senate District 14



At the end of the day, however, most working-class voters are focused on the challenges they face in their daily lives. They are concerned about paying their bills, affording health care, finding good jobs, and creating opportunities for their families. Those concerns transcend partisan politics.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

There are parts of my district where running as a Democrat can be challenging. What I have found, however, is that once conversations move beyond party labels and toward issues, voters are often far more receptive than conventional wisdom suggests.

I did not run for office to represent a political party. I ran to be an effective leader and deliver results for the people I serve. Whether that means improving transportation infrastructure, supporting workforce development, strengthening public safety, or helping local businesses grow, my focus is on outcomes.

One lesson I believe the national Democratic Party should take seriously is the importance of direct engagement. Too often, political organizations communicate with working-class voters instead of talking with them.

People want to be heard. They want to know that someone understands their concerns and respects their perspective.

Rebuilding trust starts with showing up. It means knocking on doors, attending community meetings, and having conversations even when they are difficult. Working-class voters are looking for stability, opportunity, and effective leadership. If we consistently deliver on those priorities, we can strengthen those relationships and earn their support.

Politics is ultimately about people. The more time we spend listening to them, the better equipped we are to serve them.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JIM PROKOPIAKEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ATTORNEY

Jim Prokopiak represents a district in working-class Bucks County, which voted for Trump in 2024 after supporting Democrats in presidential races going back to Bill Clinton in 1992. The former school board and township official won a special election to fill an open seat in February 2024 and won reelection that November.

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DISTRICT 140

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**71.4%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**8.1%**

DISTRICT

The 140th district is located in lower Bucks County in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. It's always been a working-class and swing district. The 140th includes Levittown and Fairless Hills, two of the first suburbs in the U.S. that were created for people working at a nearby U.S. Steel plant. The plant is gone, but the working class remains. It's a place where people moved to get a good job, inexpensive housing, and raise a family near good schools. That vision of the American Dream has moved farther and farther away.

My working-class district is Democratic, but it's not progressive. The last 4-5 congressional candidates have lost my district and the race overall. The 140th is a key bellwether of candidate strength with working-class voters.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Nothing can replace door-to-door as the best way to talk with working-class voters, but it's getting harder to get people to answer. Some of the working-class folks in my district work two to three jobs. That's why an all-of-the-above approach on voter contact works best. I include

events, social media, mailers, digital — there's no one way to reach voters anymore. One-on-one is best, but you can't rely on it.

Thirty years ago, you could run a news release in a local newspaper and feel confident most voters would see it. Not anymore. It's harder to communicate these days.

My rule of thumb is that the time I spend at the doors is driven by the voters. Many don't want to talk. Some do. If they want to talk about something, we're going to talk about something. That might be their only opportunity to speak with me. I also get back to people who call or email my office — it may be my best shot to talk with them directly.

Some voters want to discuss cultural issues, and I don't shy away from it. I'll address it and then try to move on. There are voters who feel passionately about these issues whether they're with you or not. Cultural issues are important but not what I lead with. For some districts, they may be the most important issue, but not in a working-class district like mine.

State Representative Jim Prokopiak | Pennsylvania House District 140

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The national party brand can be a hindrance at times. When the first question they ask is my party, the response often elicits a “Goodbye.” You’re not going to reach these voters anyway. But most people will give you a shot. You’re there, at their door, after all. You’re more likely to break through if people know you and see you up close.

Many of the “Reagan Democrats” I know originally voted Democratic because we were focused on economic issues. As the party became more fixated on cultural issues, they saw Democrats as not having their backs. Every time the party focuses on a small group of people, the ones in the larger group feel we don’t care about them. It makes it harder to cut through when the national party is talking about issues that don’t affect working-class voters. They have their views on cultural issues, but their importance goes by the wayside when they are concerned about paying their bills or how they can afford to retire.

It also makes it harder when progressive groups demand total loyalty to their issues and don’t take into account the nuances of a district. It’s hard to be 100% with any group, but that’s what many demand.

The national party doesn’t understand working-class voters because it relies too much on polls, data, and analytics. Many of the political class recommend not deviating from what the poll says. But working-class voters aren’t cookie-cutter, and neither are these districts. I’ve found working-class voters aren’t as tied to the Democratic Party as other voters are. You can’t just look at some data and say that’s how they’re going to vote.



If the national party wants to win back working-class voters, it should focus on things they care about in their daily lives: a roof over their heads, food on the table; affordable health care; retirement security. Being able to chase the American Dream. People aren’t staying in one job for as long a time and need retraining. Make them know we have their backs regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, education, identity, or age.

The party also tends to get stuck arguing about grammar (homeless versus unhoused) rather than the underlying issue that causes the problem — housing supply and cost.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that many Democratic leaders live in districts where they lack a close connection to working-class voters. The party has become a bastion of college-educated voters whose concerns are more often cultural issues rather than economic concerns most on the mind of working-class voters that have been a part of the party brand since FDR.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SEAN DOUGHERTY
EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
ATTORNEY

Sean Dougherty won his first race in 2024 by the closest margin of any race in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania — 504 votes. He was the only Democrat on the ballot to carry his working-class legislative district based in Philadelphia.

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE DISTRICT 172



WORKING CLASS PERCENTAGE



67.3%

2024 WINNING MARGIN



1.9%

DISTRICT

My district lies within the City and County of Philadelphia. I would describe it as a combination of urban and suburban, but it is entirely within the city limits. It's a working-class district composed of police, firefighters, union members, teachers, nurses, first responders... everyday, hard-working people. It's also a very diverse district with a large number of immigrants from around the globe.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

It's the honor and privilege of my life to represent the district where I grew up and live. I never expected to hold public office, but when the opportunity came "knocking," I went out knocking on doors to ask my neighbors for their support. You can't spell the word "representative" without the word "present," and that shapes my approach to reaching voters, my neighbors. It's heavy on door knocking, attending meetings and events, and using social media. New obstacles to door knocking, like Ring cameras, make it vital to use other strategies to reach voters as well.

I was successful because people saw me as authentic and someone who truly cared about our community. When they would share some of

their chief concerns, I could relate them to other parts of the district, and they would reply, "You really are from the neighborhood."

People in my district don't vote the party; they vote the person. They know me as a neighborhood kid because we would share similarities about our grade schools, parishes, rec centers, and favorite cheesesteak spots.

Working-class voters can tell when you're a phony or a fake.

When neighbors wanted to engage in lengthier conversations at the door, we'd have a lot to discuss. First, the best way to hear true concerns is people's own words. With the nationally polarized environment and news media cutting and splicing comments or tidbits, the best is to have your words come across unfiltered and let the neighbors see and hear you in person. I also would use my time to address negative attacks against me, a.k.a, the lies. I had several instances where people would quote language from attack mailers and then rip them up after I had time to fully explain my position or reasoning. They'd respond, "I trust you."

State Representative Sean Dougherty | Pennsylvania House District 172

Voters also reacted well when I explained that I didn't care whether they were Democrat, Republican, or Independent — they're my neighbors, and I'm going to help them, no matter what. I'm not afraid to work across the aisle to get things done for my district.

It's about connecting with people on non-political topics. When knocking doors, I would comment about a decoration on a door, like a Shamrock, or the smell of food on the grill. It's about being genuine. People don't want the same old rhetoric — they want to see you be yourself and deliver for the neighborhood.

There's no secret recipe for success; just be yourself, put in the work, and be present.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

My first campaign in 2024 was a period of high tension due to the presidential race. The Democratic brand could be a negative for some people.

In a purple district like mine, I would explain to people that I'm a Democratic candidate, but I'm a Northeast Philly Democratic candidate. That means I'm going to do what's right for our neighborhoods. I'm not out there on the far left; I'm here in the middle and for our working-class neighborhoods.

The challenge for me is that some perceive the party as far left and woke. They forget that Democrats have always been for working people and those less fortunate. It's hard in these polarized times, but I try to bring people back to the center. I focus on people and not politics.



The national party needs to accept that working-class voters won't agree with the party on everything. But that doesn't mean we still can't get things done.

That's how I work with progressive and Republican groups — understand we have differences but see how we can make progress towards common goals.

The party also needs to get back to the basics. That means work the ground game. Hit the doors and have some dialogue with working-class voters. Listen. I was told growing up that we have two ears and one mouth for a reason. We may not agree on all things, but we can still find common ground. Teamwork makes the dream work.



STATE SENATOR

JAMIE WALLEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
BUSINESS CONSULTANT

Jamie Wall won a key competitive state senate district in 2024 that helps put Democrats in range of winning the chamber in 2026. A key to his success was winning working-class voters in Green Bay and positioning himself as an atypical Democratic candidate.

WISCONSIN SENATE DISTRICT 30

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**71.1%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**5.1%****DISTRICT**

My district includes part of Green Bay, some surrounding suburbs, and a small area that is more exurban than rural. About one-half of my voters are in Green Bay. The 30th District contains both “wine track” and “beer track” voters: Green Bay is more working class, while suburban voters are more likely to have college degrees. My district skews older but is growing both in terms of population and the economy. We have a diversified economy with jobs in manufacturing, paper mills, health care, insurance, and other services.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I use the word “work” an awful lot. I was raised on a small dairy farm and know the value of hard work. There are many positive stereotypes associated with being brought up on a farm. I talked about working with my hands and the dignity of work. Some voters may not see today’s Democratic Party in that way.

I also mention that I was first in my family to go to college, pursued a successful business career, and know the value of a dollar. That also provides a difference in how some Democrats

are stereotyped.

My approach to voters is the same wherever I go. What’s different is the concerns people have — working-class voters tend to raise economic issues more often, and wine track voters are more concerned about cultural issues.

The best way I found to reach working-class voters is at their doors. I knocked about 19,000 of them in my State Senate campaign. Wisconsin has been hotly contested for decades, but most voters are still impressed when an actual candidate takes the time to talk to them at their doors. They can’t see their president or U.S. Senator in person but can still see their State Senator at the door.

I listened and learned a lot at the doors and gained a better sense of what people are actually concerned about. I’d try to engage people who were skeptical by acknowledging that we might not agree 100% of the time or that I understand where they are coming from. It’s harder to hate people you meet face-to-face.

State Representative Jamie Wall | Wisconsin Senate District 30



I also attend as many community events as I can and volunteer at many of them. “Be present and be pleasant” is good political advice. I saw how the various campaign methods we used worked together: someone I met at a door might say they saw me on TV or at an event. Sometimes they say, “We see you everywhere.” Then, people begin to get an impression that I’m working hard and, hopefully, that I’m a decent person who is trying to do the right thing.

I focus on kitchen table issues and don’t spend a lot of my time shaking my fist at Republicans. Right now, people are looking at their checkbook balances at the end of the month and anxiously waiting for that next paycheck. They are stressed about their finances and want us to do something about it.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

Our brand as a party is busted, and I hope the national party realizes that. The party seems

more optimized for coalition management than winning elections. We have to be more willing to say no to groups on the far left. To counter negative perceptions about the party brand, my approach was to be friendly and normal to people, to be someone who cares about them and wants to make their lives at least a little better.

Trump’s performance is making working-class voters give us a second look. We’re in trouble if we can’t get some of them back.

We can’t be a majority party without the working class. And we can’t be afraid of our own voters.

It’s more important than ever that we win elections in the coming years. To do that, we have to point to tangible policy wins that are broadly popular and that people can feel. Good policy is good politics.



STATE SENATOR
**KRIS
ALFHEIM**

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

Kris Alfheim lost her initial 2022 run for the State Senate in a Republican district by eight points in spite of being outspent by a 3-1 margin. She won a redrawn district under a new map in 2024 by about seven points. The district includes Oshkosh and Appleton, where she previously served on the town council.

WISCONSIN SENATE DISTRICT 18



WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE



71.1%

2024 WINNING
MARGIN



6.6%

DISTRICT

My working-class district is a tight little band around Lake Winnebago and is considered urban. The economy is diverse with world-renowned organizations in health care, heavy manufacturing, and two universities. The district also includes more small businesses than any other State Senate district in Wisconsin.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

Prior to my career in politics, I worked in advocacy for two groups — one blue and one red. I'd been a split ticket voter my whole life and found it silly that they didn't come together on issues of common concern. In my world, you try to find commonalities to move forward. I was able to meet with each group and bring them together.

Moderates aren't milquetoast. They can share the same vision as progressives but are more pragmatic in moving the needle, proving it's the right move, then moving it again in order to hold control for the long-term fix.

Being a moderate formed the core of my strategy running for the State Senate. My door-to-door campaign targeted moderate households and

avoided those from the far left and right. People would ask which party I was from, and my response was, "Should it matter?" Getting past that first initial knee-jerk response was critical to getting into what matters for voters — kitchen table issues. And that got me to the point where voters felt comfortable crossing over to vote for me.

I'd spend as much time at the doors as needed, especially if we didn't agree on all issues. The party measures success too heavily by data and the number of doors candidates knock, rather than by how effective they are.

When I knocked doors in 2024, the main issue wasn't the economy. Most voters asked, "What the hell is wrong with all of you? Why can't we get back to when we moved forward?" People are so tired of partisanship. It's manufactured dysfunction.

I showed up in places where I'm not expected. For example, I attended ceremonies when our National Guard troops returned and for large manufacturers. Why don't more Democrats do that? Have the courage to show up.

State Senator Kris Alfheim | Wisconsin Senate District 18

Some cultural issues were brought up in my campaign. The transgender issue is a confusing one for many working-class voters. They don't understand, and they can be afraid of what they don't understand. My response is to put yourself in their shoes and give a little grace.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

We're an "all or nothing" party now, going from a party that looked out for everyone to one where groups formed into pods that own their 'iceberg' issues. The groups form together and decide who's not on the team. For example, people who may disagree on the transgender issue and agree with the party on everything else are pushed away. We have to learn to accept people and their imperfections to be a majority party. People won't come over to our side unless they're given the opportunity and not slapped in the head.

Some of these activist groups have taken shots at me, and I'm all right with that. They hold out for perfection and want immediate action. They can't have everything they want when they want it. Folks on the far left get so mad at the Manchins, they forget the purples gave us the majority. Without them, we get nothing.

The biggest thing the national party doesn't get about working-class and rural voters is that they don't live in the same world and aren't aware of some of the bigger issues around them. They have never been exposed to some of the issues the national party is so fervent about. When you aren't impacted by the bigger world, you think your world is normal. It doesn't make them bad people; it makes them unaware people. Have some compassion and don't exclude them because they don't understand your world. They're not the enemy.



Democrats too often give the impression that they're opposed to success — that our focus is only on the downtrodden and we attack anyone making a decent living. The mentality is that you're either successful or a Democrat. We don't defend the middle class, and by that, I mean families that make \$150,000 to \$300,000 per year. What about the small business owner trying to pay a decent wage and provide good health care for employees? Our party's message to them seems to be, you're fine.

What's needed for working-class voters is a pulling style rather than pushing. These voters are disillusioned and change sides if they think someone is listening to them. We need to get the message out without insulting anyone in the first five seconds of conversation for a vote they've made in the past. I've found success by listening to them and earned the votes of some Republicans who never voted for a Democrat in their lives because they trust me to make pragmatic decisions for everyone.



STATE SENATOR

**SARAH
KEYESKI**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
HEALTH CARE

Sarah Keyeski flipped a Republican Senate district in 2024, winning by a margin of just 2.3%. Slightly more than one in four residents of this district hold a college degree. The combination of the district's rural and working-class character makes it a rarity among Democratic-held seats.

WISCONSIN SENATE DISTRICT 14

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**73.8%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**2.3%****DISTRICT**

Senate District 14 is located in the south-central part of Wisconsin. It is mostly rural and includes some suburbs north of Madison. My district is mainly composed of farms and small businesses, many of which are family-owned and operated. We have some manufacturing and tourism, including Wisconsin Dells. Some rural areas of my district are doing well, but others are impoverished and struggling.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I relate to people naturally because of my background. I was raised on a family farm among "salt of the earth" people where we were taught hard work, good ethics, and helping your neighbors and community. After completing my education, I returned to rural Wisconsin because that's where I wanted to raise my six kids.

I'm not wealthy and had no prior political experience when I first sought public office. My instincts were raw and unencumbered by preexisting political considerations. I felt this was a strength. Ignorance is bliss.

I'm a regular person who wants to be true to myself and simply wanted to salvage shrinking opportunities for middle- and working-class people in my district.

A robust ground game is essential to meeting working-class voters and played an integral role in my campaign. I knocked a lot of doors and had dedicated volunteers who also went door-to-door. Because it's impossible to hit every door in so vast a district, I also tried to be everywhere I could at events — to meet people where they are. Parades, listening sessions, breakfasts, co-op meetings — you name it, I was there. And I didn't just show up for a photo op and leave. I'd arrive early and leave late. At events involving meals, I'd volunteer and help. I'd listen to everyone, even people I disagree with. It's just the way I am, but I also need Independent and Republican votes to win this district. As State Senator, I reach out across the aisle for solutions and seek to resolve differences in a bipartisan way.

My campaign focused on issues that touch us all. I kept hearing how challenging life could be in rural areas. High prices. Lack of access to health care. Constantly going to referendum to

State Senator Sarah Keyeski | Wisconsin Senate District 14



adequately fund schools. Cultural issues, like abortion rights, were not voiced as often.

In addition to the ground game, the Senate campaign committee funded TV ads, including some during Packers games that were quite expensive. They also funded radio ads, which are very important in reaching rural voters.

Republicans are quite good at treating all issues as binary. Democrats do a disservice by falling into this trap. There are some issues where some nuance is required. For example, as a mental health professional, I see a lot of nuance in the issue of allowing biological men to participate in women's sports. But some progressive organizations adopt the same black-and-white approach to cultural issues as Republicans. Planned Parenthood refused to endorse me because of my nuanced approach to the trans sports issue. I am pro-trans people, but the sports issue isn't so simple.

At the end of the day, this job is not more important than my integrity. I did not get into

this job wanting to be a career politician. I'll be honest with voters and be myself. And then let the voters decide.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

Some in our national party tend to look down on rural people and question their intelligence by voting against their interests. I can tell you that you can't be a farmer and be successful these days without having the intelligence to understand tech, finances, and other modern tools in advanced agriculture

Our national party also needs to understand that we need candidates with nuanced or moderate views that reflect their districts in order to win.

We need a wider tent to be competitive in all races, not just in urban seats, and not be so puritanical about candidate viewpoints.

I'm proud to be a Democrat and proud of what we stand for. And I'm living proof that our party can win back working-class and rural voters.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

JOE SHEEHANEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
EDUCATION

Joe Sheehan won one of the most competitive State Assembly districts in 2024 by a narrow margin. He defeated an incumbent Republican who moved into the newly drawn district. He was helped by strong name identification from this long career working for Sheboygan schools and as head of the local economic development organization.

WISCONSIN HOUSE DISTRICT 26

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**75.5%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**2.9%****DISTRICT**

District 26 lies mostly within the City of Sheboygan and includes urban and suburban areas. The population is stable, but the demographics are changing; we're of German heritage, but the Hispanic and Hmong populations are increasing. Many factories are gone, but we still retain a manufacturing base to our economy along with health care and tech.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I served as Superintendent of Schools for 20 years and had an established identity in the community, which was of tremendous help to my campaign. Our schools have a good reputation and leadership that does what's best for students and the community.

There's no magic solution to winning working-class voters. The best way of reaching them is at their doors, and it's not even close.

And then you engage them in conversation and listen. I like to get people to talk and get them to open up because I can't help them if I don't know what concerns they might have. Better yet:

door knocking doesn't cost a thing, and you find themes and messages that resonate with other voters.

I was particularly moved by a woman sitting on her porch who broke down in tears because nobody had ever asked for her opinion before.

It taught me to stop focusing on getting my message to them as opposed to just listening to them get their message to me.

There were times when I would knock doors outside my assigned turf. I got lectured at by my staff, but the experiences of talking to Republicans and MAGA voters were worth it.

It may be a Wisconsin thing, but in Sheboygan, both sides of the political divide get along fairly well. I encourage that by telling voters that the other side wants the same things and we just differ on how to get there. We all want Wisconsin to be the best it can be.

State Representative Joe Sheehan | Wisconsin House District 26



When I first ran in 2024, the main feedback at the doors was that both parties needed to get along. Nothing can get done unless both sides cooperate more. But now, the main topic is the cost of living, like the rising costs of housing, health, and schools. Abortion came up more two years ago than it does now.

I was hit by negative ads, but they weren't effective because they knew me based on my years of service and from door knocking. Voters who heard these ridiculous claims knew they weren't true.

At the outset of my campaign, I made it clear that we would not do any negative ads. Some staff said I would lose. The results speak for themselves.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The voters the party needs to listen to the most are the voters the party listens to the least.

Democrats lost many working-class voters because we started preaching to them instead of listening. The party lectured to them and at them. We would tell them what they need instead of asking them what their needs are. Trump was very effective in leveraging the differences between elites and working-class voters. In the last election, he was able to persuade some of the younger Hispanic and African American working-class voters. We can't take these voters for granted and can win them back. I don't have the sense that we've been successful yet.

The party needs to step back and listen to them. Based on that, develop a list of things we feel are important and then go back and ask what they think. Engage in a real dialogue with the voters, not just stale talking points.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**KAREN
DESANTO**

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
NONPROFIT

Karen DeSanto has perhaps the most unique background of any elected official in the nation — she is a circus clown performer. She also served as CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of West Central Wisconsin. DeSanto used the skills learned in her career to win her largely rural and working-class district in 2024.

WISCONSIN HOUSE DISTRICT 40



WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE



75.7%

2024 WINNING
MARGIN



8.2%

DISTRICT

The 40th General Assembly district is located in the south-central part of Wisconsin. It is a swing district and very rural, with Baraboo as the largest population center at 12,000 residents. Our economic base is in agriculture. I court Republican voters and have some actively working on my campaign. They were involved because they know me and what I stand for.

REACHING WORKING CLASS VOTERS

Knocking on doors is the most effective way to reach working-class voters.

I usually start conversations by asking simple questions in simple language. “How are your kids doing?” for example.

I’m willing to listen as long as people don’t do or say anything to harm others. When I first started my campaign, I was advised to bring up abortion rights at the doors. That would not have worked with voters in my district.

I’m very open, fun-loving, and transparent, and I feel that resonates with people. I am working class — I went to college, but it didn’t work for

me. Working class represents my whole value system as a human being. And it represents how I speak. Democrats often use language that is out of touch with working-class people. The term “affordability,” for example. Who talks like that? That word is not in the vernacular of working-class people. My voters say that they can’t afford gas. That’s how I speak.

I often negotiate with my staff about language. It’s not dumbing down; it’s talking the way real people talk. Now, more than ever, people want to relate to the person wanting to represent them, and language is a key way to do so.

Being a circus performer actually helps open up a conversation. Most everybody loves the circus regardless of party. I spoke recently to a Republican women’s group, and all they asked about was my career in the circus.

When people bring up hot-button cultural issues, I try to bring the topic back to a personal level and ask if they might feel different if it involved them. I learned this as a circus performer — to try to bridge the gaps that divide us and bring everyone to the middle. Find something

State Representative Karen DeSanto | Wisconsin House District 40

that correlates to their lives and share my experiences. For example, it's not just trans rights — it's rights for all.

Storytelling is an effective messaging tool—people relate to stories.

If we still disagree, then I'll say that the issue is only one element of our world. Working-class voters aren't stupid, but they can be stubborn; however, I've found there is movement among some of these conservative voters to a more moderate point of view using the approach I learned in the circus.

Some people will say, "You should go back to the circus, Karen." I respond that I wish I could. The circus is everything we want — inclusive, family-oriented, and when you leave, you feel a little bit happier than when you arrive. My hope is to have state government and the Democratic Party more like the circus in those ways..

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

The party brand can be a hindrance mainly with Republican voters. But, by showing up, engaging with them, and being me, I take it as a win that they are not quite as vitriolic as when I first meet them.

The national party brand is still seen in rural and working-class areas as free spending, free-wheeling, burning your bras, etc. But the party playbook is still stuck in the 2000s. We need to change like Republicans have. Play more aggressively; more on offense; more proactive.

My advice to the party is to attract more working-class people and candidates like me. People who will challenge the existing norms in the party. Don't fight dirty; fight smart.



Show the working class we will fight for them and go to the mat for them. Regain patriotism as a party value. Fight to restore the American Dream.

Nothing is more central to the American Dream than home ownership. That's why I sponsored several bills to address that, including:

- A bill prohibiting hedge funds from acquiring single-family homes in the state
- A bill providing for a refundable senior citizen property tax credit for senior citizens
- A bill indexing the Homestead Tax Credit to inflation

It's not about progressives versus moderates. It's about proactive versus reactive strategy and messaging.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

LORI PALMERIEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:
FORMER OSHKOSH MAYOR; CONSULTANT

Lori Palmeri is a former Common Council member and Mayor of Oshkosh. She was first elected to the Wisconsin General Assembly in 2022 and was reelected in a newly drawn district in 2024. Both victories were close, with her percentages at 54% and 53% — "winning with small margins," as she says.

WISCONSIN HOUSE DISTRICT 54

WORKING CLASS
PERCENTAGE**74.0%**2024 WINNING
MARGIN**5.3%****DISTRICT**

My district takes in about two-thirds of Oshkosh and two rural townships — bedroom communities that comprise about 10% of the total vote. Our economic base is in tourism, manufacturing, and services.

REACHING WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

I honed my campaigning skills during my races for city office. It's all about showing up, listening and following up. Showing up involves meeting voters where they are. That means canvassing at the doors and also attending as many local events and meetings as possible. Listening means letting people express what's on their minds and their key concerns. And following up is returning every call, responding to complaints, and sending letters of recognition.

I am from the working class, so I can empathize with the challenges facing voters.

I have trailer park roots and was raised in foster care. There were times in my life when I didn't have an address. When I first campaigned for the Common Council, I was caring for my grandkids

and taking care of my mother at the same time. I've dealt with a lot of hardships that people can relate to.

I use social media some, mostly Facebook and Instagram. Paying for legacy media like newspaper ads and TV was quite a change from my city races that didn't cost much money.

I refer to our weekly newspaper, the Oshkosh Herald, as my go-to for local issues. I put our office hours in the paper and look for people in the news to follow up with recognition letters.

I developed some new skills when campaigning in the newer, rural part of my district. I learned how to have meaningful conversations with them on topics that differed from those of urban Oshkosh residents. I didn't win the rural wards but cut the margins enough to win a close election.

What I hear most often from voters are kitchen table issues — elderly people raising their grandkids, being able to go to the doctor, how they're getting their medicines, and whether they can afford their property taxes.

State Representative Lori Palmeri | Wisconsin House District 54

I don't poke the bear on culture war issues unless someone brings them up. These issues can get in the way of economic messaging.

NATIONAL PARTY BRAND

It's a delicate dance for me being from a purple district. Unlike our nonpartisan city elections, state elections are hyperpartisan. The Democratic brand brings challenges that seem more generational with younger voters who are less partisan than older voters. Among many working-class voters, the party is seen as being more focused on identity politics as opposed to core kitchen table issues. But I do believe we can win back most working-class voters. Here's how.

My message to the national party is that we can't give up on any voter, even those who express views that might sound uninformed or intolerant.

When confronted with intolerance, we preach way too much. Instead, we must make recovering Republicans more comfortable to come out and have a conversation.

True, we're not going to move people on certain issues. But if we allow people to have the grace to see things a different way, they will be more willing to see that we are the party that truly has their backs.

I've faced this in my caucus as well when I've voted against the Democratic Party majority on the state budget. During my time with the city, I learned that budgets are incremental documents as much as we would like them to do big and bold things. Independent and moderate-to-left voters in my district appreciate this; voters from



the far left do not. I've been hit from the far left more than from the far right. If you're not out there waving all the flags, then you're not an ally. As cliché as it might sound, we need to find a way to disagree without demonizing others in order to move forward.

There is also an urban-rural division where some in our party don't truly understand areas outside of Milwaukee and Madison. Some think that rural folks are only concerned with agricultural policy and guns, when, in fact, they worry about the same kitchen table issues as everyone else. We tend to assume that all voters subscribe to the New York Times when many just want to sit down after a long shift and tune in to Netflix. That's true for urban and rural folks.

Party messaging should be connected to real-life concerns of people. Slick media consulting plans are seen as a way to make money off of other people's pain.

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