TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Emily Seidel, AFP President and CEO; AFP Action Senior Adviser
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RE: What Voters Told Us in 2026, and Where We Go from Here

Democrats won both the U.S. House and the Senate on Tuesday. Winning the Senate races AFP Action was engaged in was the top priority this cycle and these results are hard for the candidates it supported. We are grateful to the grassroots canvassers who knocked millions of doors this year, including in the races that didn't go our way.

When Republicans won in 2024 it was a mandate to address the concerns of the American people – cost of living first among them. Having failed to do that, voters have now sent the same message to a new majority. But a Democratic majority in Congress should not be mistaken as a mandate for socialism.

While the most extreme candidates who won last night capture headlines, the vast majority of voters didn't choose rent control, government-run health care, or punishing new taxes that would make their lives worse.

They rejected a party that didn't do enough to bring down the cost of living and, in some cases, drove costs even higher through damaging tariffs, a reckless war, and other policies that indulged the extremes and do not reflect American values. If Republicans want another chance in 2028, they'll do well to take that lesson to heart.

Below is what we saw, why it happened, and what Americans for Prosperity will be doing to work with members of both parties in the incoming Congress to help pass policies that address the American people's concerns.

What Happened and Why

A Cost-of-Living Election
Six months ago, AFP Action wrote that the Republican Senate majority was at risk and that its polling showed Democrats more trusted on the economy and inflation for the first time. The message to every candidate was the same: put a credible plan to lower costs at the center of your campaign, and give voters a clear choice between freedom and government control. The voters' top concern never moved. In October, 84% of voters called the cost of living one of the most important issues in the election (AP-NORC), and in AFP's own survey of nearly 43,000 voters across seven Senate battlegrounds, the economy and inflation outpaced every other issue by more than five to one.

The Working Families Tax Cut Was a Major Win. Voters Needed to See More.
The Working Families Tax Cut turned what would have been the largest tax increase in history into the largest tax cut for working families, and those families are better off because of it. Congress also repealed 22 Biden-era rules that were driving up costs. But decades of failed policies were never going to be undone with one bill. Many lawmakers pushed hard for a second round of reforms to lower energy, housing, and health care costs. Those bills stalled, and too much of the year went to fights that had nothing to do with a family's grocery or electric bill, while tariffs, a reckless war, and other policies drove costs even higher. By late September, 73% of Americans said the country was on the wrong track, including 47% of Republicans (AP-NORC).

Energy Costs Made a Hard Year Harder
The conflict in the Middle East kept gas at or above $4 a gallon for nearly 180 days this year, more than any year since AAA began tracking in 2000, including 2022 (CNN). Higher energy prices showed up in diesel,

fertilizer, and the grocery bill, and consumer prices were up 3.7% from a year earlier in September (Scripps News). About half of adults said they were extremely or very concerned about being able to afford to fill their tanks (AP-NORC). In an election decided by the cost of living, it was the last thing families needed.

What We Heard at the Door
Voters weren't asking for socialism. Free enterprise (77%) and small business (95%) remain far more popular than socialism (Gallup), and neither party was viewed favorably by a majority of Americans this fall (NBC News). What our canvassers heard was frustration from people who gave Republicans their trust and felt like they were not focusing on lowering prices.

That frustration was deepest among voters Republicans usually count on. This summer, AFP's analysis found that 1 in 5 reliable Republican base voters in key states were either unmotivated to vote or considering a Democrat.

Socialism Was the Opening
The rise of the democratic socialist left gave candidates the sharpest freedom-versus-control contrast in decades. Rent control that shrinks the housing supply, government-run health care and energy mandates that drive bills higher all make life less affordable by taking decisions away from families and handing them to unaccountable bureaucrats.

This was a chance for candidates to offer something different. What got the attention of the at-risk GOP base and key swing voters was the socialist agenda pulling the Democratic Party further left. When our canvassers broke those policies down piece by piece and paired that with a credible plan to lower costs, it worked. Voters moved to the candidates AFP Action supported, and we saw that at-risk group shrink by half. But ultimately, too few Republicans embraced this approach and it wasn't enough.

Mixed Signals Blurred the Choice
Instead of a clear alternative from Republicans, voters too often heard proposals that looked a lot like the extreme left's: $5,000 government checks, federal stakes in private companies, and new tariffs that raise prices in a cost-of-living election. Voters weren't persuaded. Sixty-one percent of likely voters said the checks would never arrive (Economist/YouGov), and 64% said new tariffs had gone too far (AP-NORC). A 21-point Republican advantage on the economy three years ago became a one-point Democratic lead by September (NBC News).

Big government means higher prices and less prosperity no matter which party proposes it. And when Republicans tried to mimic the policies supported by the extreme left, they lost. Voting with Democrats to extend Obamacare's COVID-era subsidies or to expand Big Labor's reach didn't guarantee re-election. Voters looking for a Democrat voted for one, and voters looking for a real choice too often didn't find one from Republican candidates.

What Comes Next
With Democrats in control of both chambers, they will need to decide whether to cater to their extremes or address the concerns of the American people. Pushing for government-run health care, socialist-style price controls, punishing taxes or power grabs like the elimination of the filibuster or changes to the Supreme Court will not only threaten the future of the country, it will make the Americans' problems worse.

The new majority ran on lowering costs and addressing the concerns of the American people and Americans for Prosperity will hold it to that promise. A small number of votes will decide each of these fights, and AFP's grassroots network will be in those members' states and districts supporting good policies and opposing policies that raise costs and shrink opportunity. The stakes are high: Social Security and Medicare are on the cusp of insolvency, the debt keeps climbing, and new spending and new taxes will only make things worse for the American people.

An Affordability Agenda That Works
Voters told us all year what they wanted: lower prices and more opportunity to get ahead. Price controls, new subsidies, and government checks might sound like relief, but they only put those goals further out of reach. The way to bring prices down and keep them down is more innovation, more competition, and more choice. That's the agenda AFP will keep pushing, working with lawmakers in either party who want to deliver it:

- **Lowering the Cost of Energy:** Finish permitting reform, building on the SPEED and PERMIT Acts the House already passed, so energy and infrastructure projects get approved faster and at lower cost.

- **Making Housing More Affordable:** Clear the federal red tape that keeps new homes from getting built.

- **Quality, Affordable Health Care:** Defend the reforms in the Working Families Tax Cut and fund patients, not the special interests who benefit from the current system, with a personal option that puts families in charge of their coverage.

- **Eliminating Regulatory Red Tape:** Build on the 22 rules already repealed with a federal REINS Act.

- **Addressing the Biggest Drivers of the Debt:** Fix Social Security and Medicare through policy reform that ensures those who need it, get it.

Building a Constituency for Freedom and Opportunity
Elections are one piece of a larger effort. Americans for Prosperity's grassroots network is permanent and year-round, and AFP Action draws on that presence to inform its strategy. This cycle, AFP Action's activists and targeted advertising reached more than 30 million voters across 8 Senate battlegrounds and 11 House races, and the millions of one-on-one conversations at the doors are how we know what moves them.

That reach comes from a layered approach. AFP Action evaluates its program like a business, studying cycle over cycle which combination of mail, digital, and one-on-one conversations most effectively persuades voters, so every dollar goes where it has the most impact. Voters don't see AFP Action's message once, in a single ad, mailer, or door knock. They see it reinforced across every channel, and that's what makes it stick. By the time a canvasser reaches the door, the conversation builds on something the voter has already seen and trusts.

Over the next two years, AFP will take that work into the policy fight, connecting the debates in Washington to the price at the pump, the rent check, and the doctor's bill, and holding lawmakers in both parties accountable for delivering. Good policy is good politics when voters can see the connection.

Heading into 2028 and with it, the threat of one party extreme progressive rule — Democrats would do well to not cater to their extremes. And Republicans have a choice to make: keep offering watered down versions of the socialism you claim to oppose or offer Americans a real alternative grounded in freedom and opportunity, with results to back it up.

AFP will champion lawmakers in either party who vote for lower costs and more freedom, and when the next cycle arrives, AFP Action will be ready to back the candidates in competitive races who deliver real results and give voters a clear choice to vote for freedom and opportunity.