

TO: Interested parties
FROM: Franco Caliz-Aguilar, National Political Director
DATE: 09/22/26

A cycle with great possibility faces a significant money challenge

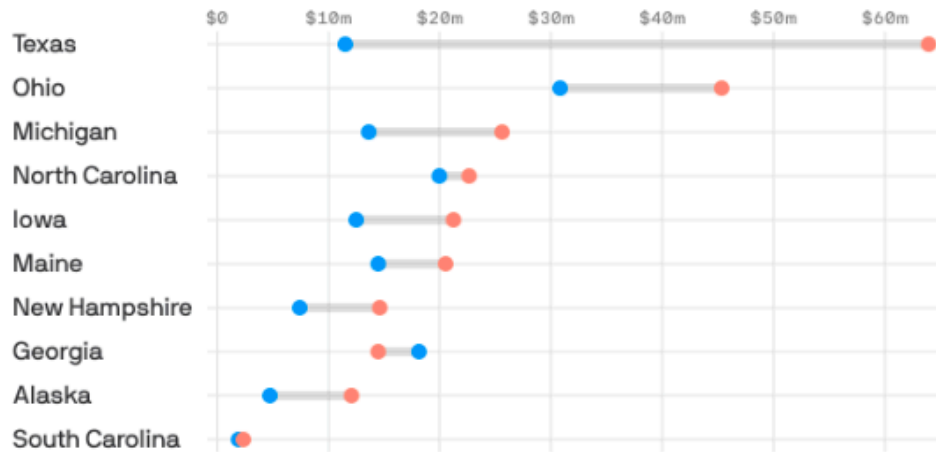
I am writing this as football season begins. I am a lifelong Miami Dolphins fan, and every few years I believe we'll have a good team that can win a playoff game—something we haven't accomplished since I was in the 5th grade, back in 2000! I've spent a lifetime watching incredible opportunities slip away as we find new ways to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

I bring this up not because I want empathy about being a Dolphins fan, but because watching Democrats this cycle has felt very familiar. There is an enormous lack of political dollars for organizations to put toward conversations with voters— even as we know it's one of our best tactics. As [The Atlantic](#) recently wrote, *“Listening to voters is a cheat code for understanding politics—democracy, after all, is the collective will of the voters—yet few people in politics do it.”*

Organizing and talking to voters is what we do. However, a vast majority of funds this cycle have gone directly to candidate campaigns, leaving the Independent Expenditure side – and the community power-building groups that surround it chronically unfunded. **In 2024, the Harris campaign raised \$1.1 billion dollars, yet voters—particularly Black, brown, immigrant, and low-income voters who understand the stakes but felt ill-equipped to navigate their choices—were left without the sustained clarity and investment they needed.** We can not replicate that model.

September Democratic and Republican ad spending in select Senate races

Top 10 races by total spend; includes video ad buys and reservations from Sept. 1-30, 2026 as of Sept. 11



Data: AdImpact. Chart: Stef Kight/Axios

The ask from us is clear: **2026 is a rare window to win seats in places we may not have a chance at in a long time. It's time for donors to open their pocketbooks if they want a Democratic House—and potentially a Senate—majority** that can check the Trump administration and deliver legislation that improves people's lives heading into 2028.

What voters are telling us

Over the past few weeks Community Change Action has called over 675,000 infrequent voters that are moderate-to-left leaning, making less than \$75,000, in key districts. This is this group that has moved most toward Trump and has been most harmed from his policies. On calls, voters describe the economic pain he's inflicted: rural healthcare access, new work requirements to access benefits, and cuts to safety net programs. The House battlegrounds could encompass more than 35 districts but with restricted resources; we're working in 20 of them.

Unsurprisingly, the top issues are economic. Most voters name inflation, including housing costs, groceries, and the general cost of living, as their top concern. In all but one district, that is followed by the need for jobs or job security, better wages, or equal pay, at around 20%. We also heard sustained concern about protecting Social Security benefits for older adults.

A few patterns stand out. Whiter districts show more concerns about protecting democracy— Maine is an outlier, with nearly 23% of voters naming it as their top

concern and the only district where democracy ranks second. Healthcare concerns are nearly double in places like Nebraska, Georgia and Michigan, but of significantly lower importance in Maine and North Carolina.

Michigan

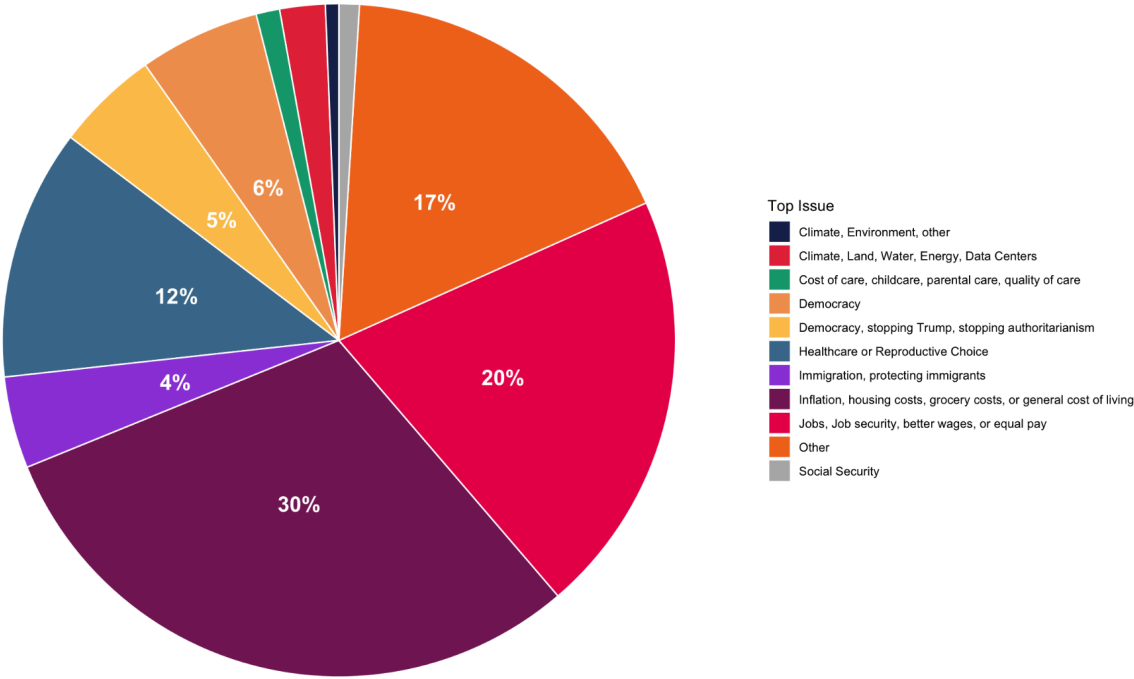
Democratic candidates are in a decent position, but we'd like support 5-8 points higher. We're reaching more undecided voters as Republican communications ramps up – a concerning trend that validates their spending.

Statewide candidates in Michigan are underperforming congressional district candidates. Of particular concern to us at Community Change Action, are Garlin Gilchrist (candidate for Secretary of State) running 3-9 points behind other candidates. Abdul El-Sayed (US Senate) is buoyed by voters ages 25-49, who make up the bulk of his support. In MI-03, data centers have emerged as a concern in a way we haven't seen elsewhere. Rising electricity costs worry voters with winter coming, even as rent in Grand Rapids remains a consistent theme. As one voter said: *"housing really because they're pushing rent to the maximum. I can pay my rent. But I'm thinking about the other people who are on a fixed income."*

In MI-04, voters tell us: *"living in America is like living in a third world country. Everything's expensive as hell. healthcare, everything. You got to choose between...healthcare and eating."* We often hear that policy doesn't drive voters, but one voter said: *"Well, healthcare specifically. The candidate I'm planning on voting for in November, Dr. Abdul El-Sayed mentioned Medicare for all and that seemed like a fairly reasonable opinion to stand behind."* One more example: *"I've been a healthcare provider and I don't get insurance. I went ahead and did Cobra, which is like \$700 a month. They kind of trap you."*

Michigan has been a significant focus of our work with over 300,000 calls into the state. We see an opportunity in the U.S. Senate race, statewide races, congressional districts, and down-ballot contests, with additional chances to capitalize on if resources become available.

Michigan: Top Issue Share



Candidate ID Results

State	District	Candidate	% Support
OH	OH-09	Kaptur	70.3%
OH	Senate	Brown	75.4%
MI	Senate	El-Sayed	77.5%
MI	MI-SOS	Gilchrist	70.2%
MI	MI-10	Hines	79.4%
MI	MI-04	McCann	74.3%
MI	MI-07	Lawrence	85.3%
MI	MI-03	Scholten	74.6%
ME	ME-02	Dunlap	74.6%
NC	Senate	Cooper	74.5%
NC	NC-01	Davis	75.6%
PA	PA-07	Brooks	72.0%

PA	PA-10	Stelson	74.3%
PA	PA-08	Cognetti	75.1%
GA	Senate	Ossoff	77.5%
GA	Governor	Bottoms	79.5%
NE	NE-02	Powell	75.7%
NV	NV-03	Lee	80.8%
NV	Governor	Ford	73.6%
WI	Governor	Crowley	73.8%
WI	WI-01	Berman	78.4%

Elsewhere

Outside of Michigan, the picture is steady: inflation and rising costs lead, with jobs second. Nevada voters are connecting the lack of conventions, tariffs and decreased tourism to economic pain—and they’re also smarting from housing costs. In Georgia, Keisha Lance-Bottoms (Governor) has been surprisingly strong with voters in the Black Belt, outperforming Senator Ossoff. Given her high name recognition in Atlanta but not across the rest of the state, that’s a surprising development.

One concern: a significant amount of undecided voters, many reporting hopelessness after Trump’s 2024 win. As one voter put it: *"I'm a hardcore Democrat, but after Americans were dumb enough to elect Trump for a second time, I really don't give a shit."* That dejection and sense of “if you voted for it you deserve it” is common. Some of our persuasion isn’t about policy—it’s about rebuilding trust that votes can make a difference in both electoral and real-life outcomes. We’re also hearing voters dismiss all politicians as working against their interest.

Of note, Rep. Kaptur in OH-09 has stalled in the mid 60% support range lately. We’ve heard pushback that she’s been in Congress too long, hasn’t done enough to improve people’s lives, and there’s a sense that she isn’t fighting hard enough against Trump. The same is true of Don Davis in NC-01, where protecting democracy from Trump is a major concern. Here’s what one voter said: *"I'm going to have to do a mail-in ballot. and I'm absolutely petrified that all of a sudden Republicans are going to start throwing them away. That's my biggest fear."* Concerns about votes not counting are limited at the moment. And in Nevada on Susie Lee – people are ticked off at the perceived lack of care she has for immigrants.

We are expanding calls this week into NC-11, TX-15 and NV-02 to increase visibility into statewide and congressional races—particularly Ford’s numbers in the Nevada gubernatorial race.

For questions about specific districts, please email fcaliz@communitychange.org. I’m happy to answer them.