

The Biden Message Hangover: What It Means For The Tax Bill

During the Biden administration, Democrats could not break through with selling the president's economic agenda. As inflation persisted, President Biden's statements touting economic progress were not believable to voters, leading to enormous frustration for Democrats. Although voters rejected Biden's economic arguments, this does not mean voters will believe what Republicans say about their economic agenda. As we have found, voters tend to be skeptical of statements that could be seen as partisan hyperbole. With independents on the rise as a percentage of the electorate, authenticity is more important than ever, as this group is particularly resistant to partisan talking points. The economic spin from the Biden White House has created a hangover effect in the communications environment, with the bar now higher for what people find to be believable.

As Republicans sell their economic agenda, here are three important criteria for messaging:

1) **Making believable statements.** One of Biden's most famous communications blunders was the claim that the Build Back Better plan cost zero dollars. Only 21% of the electorate believed this statement, with 62% that did not (21-62 believe-do not believe). It is likely that this statement was tested in terms of more/less favorable or more/less likely to vote for a candidate making this statement, but not evaluating whether it was believable.

Another example was from his 2023 State of the Union speech: *under President Biden's economic plan, the deficit has come down by a record \$1.7 trillion.* By 2:1, voters did not believe this (25-51 believe-do not believe). Independents were even more skeptical, as only 19% believed this (19-50, 31% don't know). As his campaign stalled, Biden advisors urged him to show more empathy in his messaging. But [as shown in our video analysis](#) of their campaign ad "For You," the problem with their message was more than empathy. Believability was the source of the message disconnect. In this environment of communications noise, a statement that isn't believable will not break through.

2) **Selling economic progress while remaining in touch with voter concerns.** As the re-election campaign got underway, President Biden wanted to claim credit for the economy, but Democratic strategist [David Axelrod admitted](#) there was a disconnect: *"This has been a constant, constant problem. His desire to claim credit is a huge obstacle to connecting with voters on this issue."* Voters could not see beyond record inflation and the high prices they were paying. By not speaking from the perspective of voter priorities, White House messaging was out of touch. Republicans will want to show progress from the tax bill, but they need to be careful that it speaks to voter concerns and addresses inflation that people continue to see as a problem.

3) **Operating with true situation awareness.** A December [Wall Street Journal](#) report indicated that during his campaign, President Biden was disconnected from political reality as his advisers only showed him positive polling numbers: *Democratic insiders became alarmed by the way Biden described his own polling, publicly characterizing the race as a tossup when polls released in the weeks after the disastrous June debate consistently showed Trump ahead. They worried he wasn't getting an unvarnished look at his standing in the race.* In campaigns and the private sector, we see organizations that do not want to take an "unvarnished look" at the competitive environment and evaluate the strength of opponents' statements, as their focus is generating the most favorable polling numbers. Choosing not to understand competing arguments is like practicing plays without an opponent on the field. Having a thorough understanding of challenges will strengthen and refine communications.

For more thoughts on the tax bill, see David's new column: [Straight talk about the "big beautiful bill."](#)

Have a good weekend.

David & Myra