



REASONS TO MAKE TAX FAIRNESS A LEADING ISSUE IN THE 2014 ELECTIONS

Every investment we want for our communities and our country – from education to healthcare to equal opportunity for all – depends on having adequate tax revenue. Increasingly, the tax system has been skewed to benefit the rich and corporations at the expense of the rest of us. When they avoid paying their share of taxes we pay more – or get fewer services. Increasing tax fairness is essential to solving our most intractable problems – creating jobs, protecting and expanding public services and addressing inequality.

This analysis is based in part on extensive polling by Hart Research Associates for Americans for Tax Fairness and on recent polling by Hart Research for the Center for American Progress.

- **Tax fairness is a winning message with base voters and with swing voters.** Progressives need both types of voters to win. The “tax fairness frame” and specific measures to raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy have strong support among these voters, and even among many Republican voters. Moreover, in 2012 Obama and many Democrats used “making the rich pay their fair share” as a leading message to win elections.
- **Conservatives will attack progressives on tax issues regardless of what we do in 2014.** That is because attacking those who support “big government” and “higher taxes” has been one of their core messages for decades. However, polling shows that the winds have changed, and that our tax fairness message trumps conservative calls for lower taxes as the solution to every problem. Moreover, conservatives are likely to run on a “pro-growth lower taxes” message because that is always how they talk about creating jobs, and many governors and state legislatures have a recent record of cutting taxes. The best defense is a good offense: promoting tax fairness allows progressives to change the conversation to “closing tax loopholes to make the rich and corporations pay their fair share of taxes,” which polling shows is the best tax message of all by far.
- **Tax fairness sets up a very strong contrast between progressives and conservatives.** Elections need sharp contrasts to help voters decide who is on their side. Conservatives are already trying to co-opt the income inequality issue. That is much harder for them to do with taxes because reducing taxes for the rich and corporations is their bedrock principle.
- **Tax fairness taps deeply into the anger the public feels about the unfairness of the economic system.** Banks, bailouts, and bonuses generate a visceral hatred. Tax fairness issues are also extremely potent – the public hates hiding profits offshore, tax breaks for CEO bonuses, the fact that some large corporations pay less in taxes than they do, etc. Together, these issues create a consistent storyline about economic fairness and inequality.

- **Tax fairness (and related tax tradeoff messages) provides a way to talk about the revenues needed to make investments without proposing to increase government spending, which is unpopular with voters.** Polling shows that most voters are not ready to accept a pro-spending message given their lack of confidence in the government's ability to spend wisely. However, they are overwhelmingly in favor of tax fairness, which would result in increased revenues and would stop the rich and corporations from gaming the system through special loopholes.
- **Tax fairness provides a way to talk about jobs and offers a real solution.** Ending tax loopholes that allow companies to ship jobs and profits overseas is a very potent message. It is also a powerful way to talk about saving/creating jobs without calling for more government spending, and is a way to make a strong appeal to swing blue-collar voters.
- **Making tax fairness a major issue in 2014 will help set a reform agenda for the future.** If elections can be fought and won on the tax fairness issue, it will embolden progressives and strengthen moderates to carry out the fight for progressive tax reform. Success on this issue will make it possible to have revenue that is critical to achieving many things we care about and to realizing a deeply-held value that we all care about – fairness.
- **Tax fairness is the leading edge of a top voter issue – disgust with Washington.** Polling shows that voters see politicians in Washington as doing the bidding of special interests like the wealthy and big corporations who have used their lobbyists and campaign contributions to “stack the deck” against the middle class. Tax fairness is a populist, pro-government reform message that responds to the public's anger.
- **Tax fairness ties multiple progressive issues together.** Government needs adequate revenue so we can have better schools and educational opportunities, more jobs through rebuilding infrastructure, food aid and income supports to the poor, good low-income housing, public safety protections, increased aid to state and local governments, a cleaner environment and secure retirement programs (Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid). The abuse of tax loopholes drains needed resources away from these priorities. We need a fairer tax system in order to provide adequate funding for the things Americans expect from government.
- **Taxes are a major issue at all three levels of work – federal, state and local issues.** There are common frames and messages that operate at all of these levels. Working on them at one level helps the work at the other levels.
- **Tax fairness is a pro-small business message.** Large corporations that ship profits and jobs overseas have an advantage over small businesses that play by the rules. Talking about tax fairness blunts efforts by conservatives to claim they are champions of small business. This could be especially important in 2014 as progressives will be accused of being anti-small business by promoting increases in the minimum wage.