

# MESSAGING

the **Progressive Wins**  
of the Washington State Legislature

2023



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Washingtonians across race and place have come together to demand better conditions for our lives today and to reimagine our vision for the future. The last few years have opened our eyes to what's been in front of us all along - we live inside a system designed and maintained by the wealthy, white, and powerful few. While we fight to stay in our homes, feed our families, and protect our kids, they work to protect the growth of their wealth and power while avoiding contributing to the communities we all share.

We came together to demand something different from our government. By turning out in record numbers, we elected leaders who would protect our freedoms and share our values. We started telling our stories, shining light on racist laws from decision makers of the past, and are now holding lawmakers accountable for our vision of the future.

Democrats are using their expanded majorities to make Washington a place where we all live in a home we can afford, we are safe and healthy in our communities, and our families can access the care they need to get and stay well, no exceptions.

**THIS  
IS THE  
STORY.**

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The narratives in this guide can be used in many ways: in conversations with stakeholders and advocates, as letter-to-the-editor or op-ed templates, in public statements and interviews, on messaging materials, websites, social media, and much more. These statements can be memorized like a script or copied and pasted into materials. They can also be adapted to fit your particular needs and circumstances.

The Core Narrative tells the story of progress from recent legislative sessions and is followed by seven issue-specific narratives. The basic structure of these narratives should remain intact, but you are encouraged to adapt the specifics - like your heroes, villains, or call to action - to fit your audience or asset. The bullet points in each section are selected policy wins and you should pick and choose which ones you and your org want to elevate. To make these narratives c3 friendly, simply replace "Democrats" with "progressive lawmakers".

The more specific you can be about who (active agent/villain) is getting in the way of progress on an issue, how they are doing it, and the impact on your heroes' life when progress has been made, the more persuasive and powerful your narrative will be.

**WHEN OUR  
WORDS SPREAD,  
THEY WORK.  
WHEN OUR  
MOVEMENT  
TELLS ONE  
UNIFIED STORY,  
WE WIN.**

# CORE NARRATIVE

**No matter what we look like or where we live in Washington, most of us want similar things. A stable place to live, a nurturing community for our kids, and to see a doctor for any kind of health care we need.**

Most of us have noticed just how many Washingtonians are barely getting by while the wealthiest and most powerful hoard more wealth and power. We got here because lawmakers in our past, who were mostly white and wealthy, created laws to benefit people like themselves. Instead of adequately funding the schools where our kids learn, creating homes we can all afford, or ensuring our air and water is clean enough to breathe and drink, they have been lining their pockets with the wealth our work creates. Wealthy corporations refuse to pay us a fair return on our work and avoid paying what they truly owe in taxes.

We know it doesn't have to be this way. That's why we came together across our differences of race, income, and zip code, and demanded that our lawmakers take bold action to give us the tools to rebuild our communities. And it was Democrats who listened to us, learned from us, and are using their majority power in Washington to ensure we have what we need to live healthy, vibrant lives.

Democrats are making sure we're paid the true value of our work so we can meet our basic needs, take care of our loved ones, and stay in our homes. They are putting money back in our pockets so we can afford to shop at our local businesses. They are taking steps to ensure that we feel safe and welcome in our neighborhoods, regardless of the color of our skin. They are making sure we have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, and that health care is available and affordable no matter our gender or stage in life. And, they are making sure the wealthy few finally pay what they truly owe to our communities in taxes.

When we demand change, our lawmakers listen and take action. Together, we are building a more just, equitable, and prosperous future for everyone in Washington.



# CORE NARRATIVE

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
<p>Whatever your...(race, income, zip code, etc)</p> <p>No matter...(how much money is in our wallets, where in Washington we live, the color of our skin, etc)</p> <p>Black, brown, or white</p> <p>Whether you were born here or just arrived here</p>	<p>Everyone, all people</p>	<p>Race-, gender-, and class-blind language speaks largely to cis, white, male audiences. We are telling stories about policy work that includes all of us, and we must name who we are and demonstrate that even though we have differences, we are working together toward a future we can all share.</p>
<p>Protect our freedom to vote</p> <p>Ensure the will of the people prevails</p>	<p>Defend our democracy</p> <p>Protect our democracy</p>	<p>Democracy is an abstraction. Freedom is a deeply held shared value that we should weave through as many of our issues as possible.</p>
<p>Our representatives</p> <p>Our elected officials</p>	<p>The Government</p> <p>Politicians</p>	<p>Those who run our government are real people making real decisions that affect our lives. We elected them to legislate on our behalf and need to talk about them as such.</p>
<p>Ability to support our families/put food on the table</p> <p>Families' financial security</p> <p>Good paying jobs</p>	<p>The economy</p>	<p>There is no independent being named The Economy — it is merely a way we measure human activity. When we personify 'the economy' as capable of acting or being acted upon, feeling pain or being revived, we fuel opposition framing that positions the wellbeing of 'the economy' as separate from and more important than the well-being of actual human beings. Instead, we should specify what we mean, whether that's jobs, families being able to put food on the table, or people's broader economic well-being.</p>
<p>Fair return on our work</p> <p>Paid the true value of our work</p>	<p>Raise wages</p>	<p>Anchor this argument in real people and the work they are doing.</p>

**Say:**

**Instead of:**

**Because:**

Certain politicians

Some people in power

A powerful few

MAGA Republicans

Far-right extremists

The MAGA Agenda

[Certain politicians]... trying to get back into power/ get and hold onto power

... who want to block us from joining together to demand what we all deserve

... who want to pick and choose who counts

Politicians

The wealthy/powerful

Republicans

The Right

Conservatives

Transphobes

Racists

Bigots

etc

To credibly name a villain, it's critical to make clear that you're implicating specific individuals (e.g., certain or some politicians) as opposed to vilifying whole categories of people.

In addition to naming our villains, we must expose the motivations behind their actions. "Getting back into power," "getting and holding onto power," exclusion and control broadly, and blocking us from demanding the resources we need all currently resonate with base and persuadable audiences in explaining why the opposition introduces these attacks.



# FREEDOM FROM GUN VIOLENCE

**No matter who we are or what we look like, we all want to feel safe and welcome when we enter our places of worship, on a night out with our friends, or while we learn in our schools.**

But some politicians are more responsive to the gun lobby than to the will of the people. They block legislation that would prevent mass shootings, and introduce bills that would result in more harm for our neighbors who experience the most trauma from gun violence - our children, teachers, and communities targeted for our race or sexuality. They try to distract us from their failure to protect us by rehashing proposals that put even more guns into our schools and into our communities. But, we know that common sense gun laws and robust social services are what actually keep our communities safe.

We came together and talked to our lawmakers about protecting our freedom from gun violence, and Democrats took action.

ISSUE-SPECIFIC NARRATIVES



**Democrats used their expanded majorities to:**

- Ban the sale and distribution of assault weapons that are often used in mass shootings
- Enact a 10-day waiting period on all gun purchases
- Create accountability for gun dealers & manufacturers
- Ban ghost guns and high-capacity magazines
- Ban open-carry in certain locations
- Create rules for removing firearms from domestic violence perpetrators
- Create the office of Firearm Violence Prevention to collect data on gun violence and make the data available for public health research

The will of the people must matter more than power and profit. When we come together we can make sure that our lawmakers take action so that we can all feel safe as we go about our daily lives, no matter our identities or beliefs.

# FREEDOM FROM GUN VIOLENCE

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
Gun violence prevention Responsible gun ownership Restrict access to Prohibit	Gun control Anti-gun Ban Confiscate	Our narrative is about keeping our schools and communities safe. Phrases like “Gun control” play into the opposition debate about constitutional rights.
Close dangerous loopholes Commonsense gun laws Strengthening existing laws	Government database or registry	“Database” conjures anti-government sentiment and makes government the villain. Our government is a tool for creating safety.
Gun lobby	NRA	There are multiple powerful entities trying to block new laws and “gun lobby” encompasses them all.



# A HOME WE CAN AFFORD

**Home. It's the place where we lay our heads, prepare our meals, and hug our loved ones. All of us should have a home we can afford, with a door that locks, and heat that works.**

But, this most basic of human needs - shelter - has been kept out of reach for many of us for decades. Corporate landlords and greedy developers influence legislators to keep laws in place that allow them to jack up the rents, build homes only the wealthiest can afford, and grow their profits. They oppose increasing affordable housing options in their neighborhoods. Then they push public narratives that make us fear those who turn to cars or tents for shelter and shame those of us who rely on social services.

In recent years, we've demanded better from our lawmakers and Democrats have delivered.

## Democrats used their expanded majorities to:

- Legalize more kinds of housing that working people can afford, like multi-family homes and ADUs
- Fund new housing that will be affordable and supportive for our neighbors with lower incomes
- Create an assistance program for new homebuyers whose communities were historically and racially barred from buying homes
- Provide down-payment assistance for first-time, low-income home buyers
- Create new laws to protect renters from predatory landlords
- Provide more rent assistance to keep people in their homes

No matter our race, our background, or how much money we have, we all deserve to live in a home where we can nurture our families, pursue our dreams, and make our memories.

# A HOME WE CAN AFFORD

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
People experiencing homelessness	The homeless The poor	Using people-first language humanizes our heroes and allows our audiences to form a connection.
Everyone should have a home. Having a home is a basic, human need	Housing is a human right	The word "home" conjures a feeling that everyone identifies with, versus "housing" which conjures images of buildings. Human "need" versus "right" holds similar differences in feeling.
Corporate landlords who jack up the rents Certain politicians who block affordable homes Politicians who created laws to exclude Black and brown people from buying or moving in	Rents are rising Neighborhoods are gentrifying Homelessness is increasing	Rents don't rise all by themselves. When talking about change in housing conditions and availability, we must name who is responsible. This cuts through cynicism and activates our audience to come together for change.



# THE FREEDOM TO DECIDE

**In Washington, we believe that no matter our race, income, or gender, we should have the freedom to access and make our own decisions about the kind of health care we need.**

But MAGA politicians, private insurance lobbyists, and greedy hospital CEOs have put their religious dogma and profit margins above all else, while they deny us quality, affordable health care. While women and trans people die, MAGA loyalists across the country are banning abortions and gender-affirming care.

Advocates and Democratic lawmakers came together to make Washington a welcoming and affirming state for all people to get the health care they need.



## **Democrats used their** expanded majorities to:

- Protect patients seeking abortions from in or out of state
- Protect our health care data from being sold to hostile entities
- Guarantee access to the abortion pill mifepristone
- Keep youth housed while they seek gender-affirming or reproductive care
- Cap insulin at \$35 a month, permanently
- Create a Medicare-like program so undocumented immigrants can see a doctor when they're sick
- Ensure that our health care plans cover us, whether we're affirming our gender or making decisions about pregnancy
- Ensure our state's paid family medical leave covers more of us who need time off work to care for our loved ones

Together, we are making Washington a place where we can get the care we need, no matter who we are or how much money we have in the bank.

# THE FREEDOM TO DECIDE

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
<p>See a doctor when we are sick</p> <p>Get the care we need</p> <p>Get and stay well</p>	<p>The Health Care System</p>	<p>Systems sound too big to change. But when we speak to our audiences about our individual care we activate empathy and motivate working for change.</p>
<p>Gender-affirming care</p> <p>Social transition</p> <p>Gender expression</p>	<p>Sex change</p> <p>Surgery</p>	<p>Avoid opposition framing that gender is permanent and only about surgery.</p>
<p>An abortion</p> <p>A woman</p> <p>A person</p>	<p>Abortions</p>	<p>The singular helps mitigate stereotyping about who and why people seek abortion care.</p>
<p>Decide for ourselves</p> <p>Decision</p> <p>Freedom to decide</p>	<p>Choose</p> <p>Choice</p>	<p>Choice evokes flippancy, activates stereotyping about abortion care.</p>

# THE FREEDOM TO LEARN

**We can agree that students in every neighborhood in Washington should have the freedom to learn in fully-resourced schools.**

But for years, our zip codes have determined whether schools in our neighborhoods have modern textbooks, early learning programs, or special education resources. Politicians in the past designed funding systems that give students in white and wealthy neighborhoods more education opportunities than other kids. Recently, MAGA extremists in many states have started banning books and accurate history from being taught in some classrooms, so that kids won't fully grapple with the mistakes of our country's past. They take away the tools our kids need to graduate fully prepared for adult life, then blame teachers for these failures.

Although a few Washington politicians have been trying to ban truthful history and cut funding to our schools, our parents and teachers know that schools play a critical role in our kids' futures. When we told our stories to our lawmakers, it was Democrats who listened and acted.

## Democrats used their expanded majorities to:

- Provide schools with more special education funds to give more students the support they need
- Keep more kids fed with free school meals
- Ensure working parents can send their kids to child care and early learning programs in more communities
- Ensure our schools and child care centers have the resources to keep kids growing up healthy and educated, no matter their age, zip code, or ability
- Make sure that the people who care for and teach our kids get fair pay for their work

By coming together and demanding change, we are ensuring that every child in every neighborhood gets quality care from providers who are compensated fairly and can learn in world-class schools, no exceptions.

# THE FREEDOM TO LEARN

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
<p>Children of every race, background, and zip code should have the freedom to learn and pursue their dreams</p> <p>Every child deserves an accurate, honest, and quality education, no matter the color of their skin or where they call home</p>	<p>Equitable schools</p> <p>Equity in education</p>	<p>The words “equity” and “equitable” don’t carry the same meaning for everyone. It can be confusing to our base and persuadable audiences, who are more likely to associate the terms with real estate wealth and loans than racial and economic justice. When we spell out what we mean by those terms, we have the vast majority of voters on our side.</p>
<p>Educators want to provide every child an accurate and quality education, while certain politicians want to whitewash parts of our history so they can control a political narrative</p> <p>Educators want to provide every child an accurate and quality education, while certain politicians want to exclude certain children, denying their schools funding and writing people who look like them out of our history books</p>	<p>Anti-CRT parents/protesters are...</p> <p>Politicians are trying to indoctrinate our kids</p>	<p>When we juxtapose educators with politicians, framing the latter as wanting to exclude certain children – both by denying funding and by writing people out of history books – our base and persuadables all agree strongly. “Certain children” is a deliberate word choice to expose how the villains are picking and choosing who counts.</p>



# RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

**In Washington, we believe that all our neighborhoods are worthy of nurture, care, and safety, no matter what's in our wallets or the color of our skin.**

Throughout our state's history, many white elected leaders and law enforcement have deprived Black and brown communities of resources, overpoliced our neighborhoods, and built a criminal legal system that targets and punishes communities of color. All the while, some politicians and media stoke fear against Black protesters and survivors of police violence to maintain the status quo.

People of all races are coming together in every county in Washington to fight for our vision for our future - one in which the color of our skin or where we were born doesn't determine how we are treated.



## **Democrats used their** expanded majorities to:

- Permanently repeal the death penalty
- Prioritize and fund treatment over arrest for substance use disorder
- Provide relief from court debt
- Enact groundbreaking accountability measures that encourage de-escalation of situations over using dangerous force
- Introduce an alert system for missing Indigenous people
- Pave the way for further reform by restoring voting rights to people with past felony convictions

If we continue to speak out together, we can create a future where public safety means safety for all of us, where Black and brown people can live our lives without fear, and where our tax dollars are spent keeping us housed, healthy, and educated.

# RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
Use our tax dollars to fund social services that keep people safe and help keep our communities vibrant	Defund the police (alone) Abolish the police (alone)	Our persuadable audiences are activated when we talk about what we are for. "Defund" and "abolish" language don't tell us what the outcome of this action is and leaves audiences skeptical.
People impacted by the criminal legal system Formerly-incarcerated people People with a conviction history	Felons Convicts Ex-cons Offenders Parolees Criminals	Using people-first language humanizes our heroes and allows our audiences to form a connection.
Criminal legal system	Criminal justice system	The communities who are over-policed, over-convicted, and mass-incarcerated are not experiencing "justice" from our system.

# FUND OUR FUTURE

**No matter what's in our wallets, we should all have the freedom to provide for our families, contribute to our communities, and have enough left over to make meaningful choices about our lives.**

But in Washington, working families pay seven times more of our income in taxes than the wealthiest. For decades, white and wealthy corporations have lobbied to maintain a tax code that enables a powerful few to build unimaginable amounts of wealth. While the rest of us foot the bill for the schools where our kids learn, the parks we play in, and the roads we drive on, they are able to live on their wealth and avoid paying what they truly owe in taxes to our communities.

In recent years, thousands of us have joined together to hold our legislators accountable for bringing more justice to our tax code and funding our future.



## Democrats used their expanded majorities to:

- Pass a capital gains tax to make the ultra-wealthy pay what they owe to our communities when they profit off the stock market
- Bolster funding for childcare and early learning programs so more of us can return to work knowing our kids are in nurturing environments
- Put cash back in the pockets of working people through a Working Families Tax Credit and Basic Income in Tacoma
- Expand relief to those of us struggling with unemployment and court debt

Washingtonians joined together from all walks of life to make sure that a recovery from the pandemic includes and centers the needs of low-income, undocumented, and communities of color that have been most harmed by our unjust tax code. Together, we are rewriting the rules so that our communities are funded, and all of us have what we need to be happy and healthy.

# FUND OUR FUTURE

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
Wealthy few who rig the rules	The wealthy The rich	To credibly name a villain, it's critical to make clear that you're implicating specific individuals (e.g., the wealthy few or some politicians) as opposed to vilifying whole categories of people.
Shared contribution Contribute our share	Tax burden Tax relief	People resent taxes and thus understand the desire to avoid them; we must foreground what taxes buy, not the taxes themselves.
Pay what they truly owe our communities in taxes	Tax the rich Fair share	<p>"Owe" hints at a broader unmet and overdue responsibility that can encompass not only taxes but also wages and compensation for the wealth corporations and the rich take from our collective efforts. It is also more engaging for our base.</p> <p>"Fair share," on the other hand, suggests that government revenue is akin to a pie – or, when paired with "pitch in," that it is a metaphorical container into which everyone places funds. This obscures the more accurate story that the rich are actively taking the wealth we create. Further, "fairness" is a contested concept. For many, fairness means a flat tax, and "paying your fair share" reinforces that everyone pitches in the same thing: money.</p> <p>"Tax the Rich" frames taxes as a punishment when in reality they are what we all contribute to our communities.</p>
Providing...(outcomes like better schools, quality health care, etc) Fully fund Make sure...(children can learn in nurturing environments, we can see a doctor when we're sick, Black people can feel safe in our communities)	Invest in	"Providing" is immediate and direct. Investing implies a delay in realizing positive outcomes and primes expectations of a financial return. By talking about investing in roads, investing in schools, investing in people, or investing in communities, we make the argument about financial gain, ceding the moral high ground and priming expectations of a financial return.

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
Wealthy Corporations	Big Businesses	Size matters...less. It is less relevant of a descriptor than wealth, which corporations accumulate by refusing to pay people the true value of their work, and by not paying what they owe through taxes.
Free ride off of what we contribute	Tax breaks Avoid paying taxes	A "free ride" makes it clear that the wealthy few harm the rest of us when they dodge paying what they owe in taxes.



# FREEDOM TO BREATHE

**Whether we live in cities or suburbs, mountains or farmlands, we all want to protect our clean air and water for ourselves and future generations.**

But for too long, fossil fuel CEOs and their lobbyists have convinced us that we have to stay dependent on the dirty fuels that drive up their own profits. They convince some lawmakers to block new laws so they can continue to pollute our air, poison our water, pave over our forests with highways, and dump toxins into lower-income communities and neighborhoods of color. They try to hide that they are to blame for how our health suffers during the smoky wildfire season. They are counting on us to not fight back.

By coming together across race and place to rewrite the rules, we demanded that our lawmakers keep our air clean and our ecosystems healthy.



## **Democrats used their expanded majorities to:**

- Electrify our transportation systems and infrastructure while protecting our clean air and water
- Enhance salmon recovery efforts
- Create new clean energy and carbon sequestration projects
- Create a Clean Fuel Standard to reduce pollution from transportation fuels
- Limit the amount of toxins that manufacturers release into our air and water
- Begin to repair damage to Black and brown communities most affected by pollution through the HEAL Act

Together, we are building a resilient future where working people like us can get to our jobs, live in healthy neighborhoods, and protect the Washington we know and love for future generations.

# FREEDOM TO BREATHE

Say:	Instead of:	Because:
Keep our air and water clean Rules and fines to keep corporations from polluting our air Dumping toxins in our communities	Regulations Government steps	By focusing on what we want to preserve (clean air and water) or prevent (toxic pollution) rather than the government mechanism, we connect with our audience's daily experience of the environment.
Dirty fuels Outdated fuels Methane Gas	Fossil fuel energy Natural Gas	To prime our audiences to think about clean and renewable energy we must frame other energy sources as opposite of what we want.
Clean air to breathe Clean water to drink Create healthy and safe communities Protect our families' and children's health	Fix climate change Fight climate change Global warming	By naming the outcomes that keep us alive (breathing, drinking) we can make this a health argument. Connecting everyday experiences to changes in our environment helps inoculate against cynicism that "fighting" climate change is too big of a task.



# The **PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT** has a **compelling story to tell,**

rooted in collective action, shared responsibility, and community care.

The Communications Hub is a nonprofit communications program housed at Fuse Washington. Our mission is to build communications capacity in the progressive movement by training organizations on narrative and strategic communications.

**We're here to help you tell your story.**

Connect with us: [hub@fusewashington.org](mailto:hub@fusewashington.org)

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