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REPORT: BARRAGE OF GOP TV ADS ON ECONOMY, INFLATION & TAXES OVERWHELMS DEMOCRATS IN 2022 FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Washington, D.C. — Democrats being clobbered in the Congressional midterm elections by Republican TV ads on economic issues are failing to adequately fight back even though they have available to them effective, poll-tested responses. That’s the conclusion of Americans for Tax Fairness Action Fund (ATFAF) after reviewing 351 ads aired over the last three months by Democratic and Republican congressional candidates in very competitive races and by their parties’ congressional super PACs.

The two GOP congressional super PACs’ relentless attacks centered on inflation, government spending, taxes and IRS enforcement—all key features of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) enacted by Democrats with great effort last August—went largely unanswered.

Democratic ads made up 57% of the total ads analyzed but just 30% of those on economic issues. And even when Democratic forces did address economic issues, it was not to counter GOP claims or promote the many popular features of the IRA. Instead, in Senate races Democrats and their congressional super PACs focused their advertising on jobs/supply chain/outsourcing and on prescription drugs, Medicare and Social Security. In House races, the economy message for the Democratic congressional super PAC was focused on drug prices, Medicare and Social Security. **Many of the Democratic economy ads—particularly on Social Security and Medicare—did not appear until mid-October, in a scramble to correct for the earlier message miscalculation.**

Below are more details on findings from the TV ads broadcast from August 1 to October 27, (also available in the table on the next page):

- **Of 351 TV ads compiled and analyzed by ATFAF, 57% (200) were broadcast by Democratic candidates and their two congressional super PACs; 43% (151) were broadcast by Republican candidates and their two congressional super PACs.** Nearly three-quarters of the ads (73%, or 257) were broadcast by super PACs, the remaining 27% (94) by candidates.
- **62% (216) of all the ads examined were primarily or somewhat about the “economy”, which ATFAF defined as mentioning inflation, government spending, taxes, IRS enforcement OR prescription drugs/prices—all components of the Inflation Reduction Act.** (We generally excluded ads about covid relief spending, another major theme of GOP broadsides). *This “economy” definition mainly applied to GOP ads. For Democratic ads, the “economy” criteria were broadened to include Social Security, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) due to the shortage of Democratic ads under the narrower definition.*

- **Of those 216 “economy” TV ads, 70% (151) were run by two GOP congressional Super PACs (126) or Senate GOP candidates (25).** The two Republican congressional super PACs, which are focused exclusively on attacking Democrats, are the Senate Leadership Fund (SLF), which ran 35 economy ads, and the House Leadership Fund (CLF), which ran 91 economy ads.
- **The two Democratic congressional super PACs and Senate Democratic candidates ran 30% (65) of all economy ads:** Super PACs broadcast 5 ads in Senate races and 34 in House contests. The Senate Majority PAC (SMP) and the House Majority PAC (HMP) exist to attack GOP candidates. Senate candidates ran 26 ads.
- **The two GOP super PACs, which ran 126 (58%) of all economy ads, focused much more intensely on an “economy” message than did their Democratic counterparts.** The ads were solely focused on making fraudulent claims about the IRA: pretending it will raise taxes on people making less than \$75,000 a year; result in a lot of wasteful government spending; and unleash an army of 87,000 IRS agents on regular taxpayers.
- **Senate candidates of both parties ran a quarter (24%) of the “economy” ads—51 of 216.** These were divided almost equally: 25 for Republicans and 26 for Democrats. (Due to their large number, House candidates’ ads were not analyzed.)

CONGRESSIONAL RACE TV ADS ABOUT THE “ECONOMY” & OTHER ISSUES

August 1 to October 27, 2022

Entity Paying for the TV Ad	Number of Races	Total Number of Ads Compiled	Percent of All Ads	Number of Ads on the “Economy”: Inflation, Taxes, Spending or IRS *	Percent of All Ads	Money Raised 2022 Cycle As of Sep. 30
Senate Leadership Fund (SLF), Republican Super PAC	7	35	10%	35	16%	\$224 million
Republican Senate Candidates	9	25	7%	25	12%	NA
TOTAL	–	60	17%	60	28%	
Senate Majority PAC (SMP), Democratic Super PAC	7	17	5%	5	2%	\$203 million
Democratic Senate Candidates	10	69	20%	26	12%	NA
TOTAL	–	86	25%	31	14%	
Congressional Leadership Fund, Republican Super PAC	31	91	26%	91	42%	\$220 million
House Majority PAC, Democratic Super PAC	36	114	32%	34	16%	\$134 million
GRAND TOTAL		351	100%	216	100%	

* Democrats’ ad topics include Social Security, Medicare, prescription drugs and the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Undoubtedly because of its long and tortured path to enactment, the IRA is not familiar to most Americans. **But a [recent poll](#) by Biden pollster Impact Research for ATFAP and its sister organization, Americans for Tax Fairness, that oversampled pure Independents found that once voters are told what's in the new law, 70% of likely voters—including nearly all Democrats, two-thirds of Independents and even a plurality of Republicans—approve of the IRA.** Particularly telling is that the tax reforms making the rich and corporations pay a fairer share are about as popular as the prescription drug reforms, especially with swing voters. The poll tested [numerous compelling messages](#) Democrats could use to energize voters and to effectively counter GOP critiques.

“Democratic ads have mostly focused on threats to abortion rights presumably because polls show that message resonates with both the party’s base and with swing voters,” noted Frank Clemente, ATFAP’s executive director. “But failing to also prioritize economic issues when inflation and other pocketbook issues are uppermost in voters’ minds is a major mistake.”

A recent [New York Times poll](#) confirms that idea, finding:

- “The share of likely voters who said economic concerns were the most important issues facing America had leaped” since a similar survey over the summer to 44% of respondents.
- More than a third (38%) of women call the economy or inflation the nation’s number one problem, compared to 9% that cite abortion rights.
- Four of ten independents similarly chose economic issues as their main concern, far above any other issue.

“Democrats fought hard the past two years to secure legislation addressing the economic issues that now animate voter concerns and Republican advertising,” Clemente said. “We’re not questioning the choice made by individual Democratic candidates and their super PAC supporters to air TV ads on topics that they felt best undermined their opponents or showed the Democrat in the best light. But we are critiquing the failure of Democrats more generally to create ads that draw a contrast with Republicans on which party is doing more to address the economic concerns of working families. It’s clear from the polling that Democrats can win that debate—but only if they raise the issue.”

We have seen only two TV ads [one TV ad](#) this cycle making this case against big money special interests and about taxes. [One is by Sen. Chris Van Hollen](#) (D-MD), former head of both the House and Senate Democratic campaign committees. Another [ad is by Rep. Mike Levin](#) (D-CA) in a “frontline” race. The progressive populism both ads are similar to that proposed by legendary pollster Stan Greenberg in this video: [The Economic Argument That Democrats Aren’t Making—But Should!](#)

[The full report with all the ads compiled can be found here.](#)