CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

To: Eric Greenberg

From: Karl Agne

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Greenberg Millennial Focus Group Analysis
Review of Conversations with Americans Under 30 Across the Country

The polling we conducted last summer among Americans under the age of 30 provided a tremendous amount of new learning about the transformative Millennial generation and the unique attitudes which separate them from previous generations of Americans. Their clear sense of generational identity, their complete rejection of the current political system and the larger institutions that have traditionally shaped American society, and their embrace of and confidence in the power of innovation and technology to overcome even the most daunting challenges facing our country all point to a dramatic change in our political environment as these young Americans move into the electorate.

At the same time, the new insights and perspectives that this research provided into the Millennials' worldview and core values raised even more questions about their origins and implications. In an unprecedented effort to delve even deeper into the attitudes and beliefs of these critical young Americans, Gerstein | Agne Strategic Communications conducted 12 focus groups in four locations across the country with a diverse cross-section of Millennials.

➢ **New York** (Monday, 12/3/07)
  o   Group #1 – Non-college, non-students
  o   Group #2 – African-Americans
  o   Group #3 – College grads

➢ **Denver, CO** (Wednesday, 12/5/07)
  o   Group #7 – Suburban residents, no kids
  o   Group #8 – Hispanics
  o   Group #9 – Evangelicals

➢ **Birmingham, AL** (Tuesday, 12/4/07)
  o   Group #4 – Evangelicals
  o   Group #5 – African-Americans
  o   Group #6 – College grads

➢ **Los Angeles, CA** (Thursday, 12/6/07)
  o   Group #10 – Non-college, non-students
  o   Group #11 – Hispanics
  o   Group #12 – Parents

Individual groups were divided based on important distinctions revealed in our polling[1], but the broad scope of the entire project provided a comprehensive view of this historic generation. The

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[1] All focus groups were mixed gender and consisted of a mix of respondents 18-29 years of age.

differences we discovered in discussions with these sometimes disparate groups were fascinating, but the similarities that we found were much more striking.

These focus groups were designed to explore in greater detail how Millennials define themselves and their generation, how they view the world they are inheriting, what vision they have for the future, and how they believe the country will get there. On every one of these topics, we saw again and again the pervasive influence of technology on this generation and the extent to which they pride themselves on casting off the conventions of the past and looking for new ways to accomplish their goals, both personally and collectively.

The rise of personal technology, especially the Internet, is at the heart of this generation's unique identity. They believe that the Internet has opened their eyes to a sense of the world around them and the possibilities it holds for them that previous generations never could have imagined. They believe this has had positive and negative implications, but it has undoubtedly made them much more global in their outlook, made them less anxious to settle down and start a family, and made it much easier for them to connect with others outside of their immediate acquaintance or geographic area.

The vitriol that Millennials express for the current leadership in our country – not just in government, but corporations and other large institutions as well – is stunning. They reject the two-dimensional partisan and ideological axes of modern politics and refuse to be constrained by any of the traditional political labels. Instead, they define themselves largely in opposition to the status quo and express a fervent desire for new ideas and new leadership that will offer them fresh alternatives to the same old partisan, lesser-of-two-evils choices they are now forced to make.

The priorities of this generation are shaped by the failures of previous generations. They are most focused on two issues – health care and alternative energy – that they view in a very unambiguous manner. They believe that decades of American leaders have ignored unmistakable warning signs, sacrificing the country's long-term interests for their own short-term political gain. As a result, we face a pair of preventable disasters that threaten our national and personal security, as well as our economic strength. Again and again, their discussion of these issues goes back to the innate failures of the current political system, where lobbyists and special interests hold sway, subverting the common good.

Despite their cynicism and their frustration, Millennials are relatively optimistic about the future and have unmistakable ideas where they want to take the country. Not surprisingly, their path forward starts with addressing our country's dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels and the growing health care crisis. Rejecting the incremental thinking of current political leaders, they are eager to strike right at the root causes of these challenges and to harness the power of innovative leadership, cutting edge technology, and a resolve to accomplish the goals we set as a country.

Despite their enthusiasm and urgency on these issues, it is clear that most Millennials are hesitant about assuming a greater level of personal responsibility and uncertain about the level of

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leadership their generation can realistically exercise at this early stage. Despite their intense frustration with the country's current leadership, they are skeptical about how much impact they can really have. There is a readily acknowledged need for strong leadership that sets 'big goals' and then lays out a realistic means of achieving those goals. They are ready and anxious to move beyond the materialism and short-term thinking that characterizes their current lives and to work together, starting at a local level, to affect the significant changes they believe are necessary and to advance their vision of the common good. And in their efforts to provide the kind of leadership they believe is so desperately needed, we see the outlines of a new model, based on the technology that has shaped their generation.

A Generation in Transition

Looking at previous generations of Americans, Millennials believe there was much more predictability and a more finite set of options available to young adults. In their view of times they never actually experienced, women's roles were severely limited, workers could realistically expect to have the same employer for their entire career, and most Americans were likely to remain close to the area where they were born and raised. Today, shifting cultural norms, the explosion of technology, and the disappearance of long-term 'career tracks' or job security have all contributed to leave Millennials feeling unsettled. Most still feel uncertain of their long-term professional goals and are in no hurry to settle down in one place, get married, and have kids as early as their parents or even older siblings did. This unsettled feeling has important ramifications for their political views, as their lack of engagement in their communities leaves them less inclined to get involved in issues that don't directly affect them.

I think a lot of people in our age generation especially I think are a little bit nervous, understandably. I think we all are, about what is going to happen in the next five to ten years. Are you going to start a family? Are you going to have a steady job? Who is going to provide income? Where are you going to live in the next five to ten years? How is the world going to be like?... I think a lot of people are just not sure. While they're interested and excited to see what is going to happen in the future, I think at the same time also people are just a little unsure of it. (White college grads, New York)

I think making a major impact at the level that we are at now and the age that we are at now requires maybe more of a commitment than some of us are willing to put in at this point and time. I think it goes back to that selfishness versus selfless feeling. You know the independence. We are making steps in our lives to get to some sort of end point but to make an impact like that would interrupt that. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Others believe that this period of their life is an inherently self-focused one that will set the stage for later engagement with the world around them. They somewhat defensively explain their lack of focus on the common good as necessary to establishing the foundation, professionally and personally, for a fuller and more engaged life in the

future. In their view, it would be great to be more involved in issues outside of their own narrow self-interest, but they simply can't find the time.

> *It may have a little bit to do with the age in a sense that, at our age, you're trying to make a way for yourself. For those who don't have a family, we're trying to prepare ourselves for that. People who do have a family, they're trying to make way for their family. It's really at this age, you kind of decide where you're going to be when you retire and all these other things, so I think it has a lot to do with that.* (African-Americans, Birmingham)

> *I think sometimes it's hard for like time management for some people. Some people want to help, but where is the time because like the older people and stuff, they already are established. And since they are established, they can donate and they can make time. For us, we are trying to build a career, we're building our foundation for the rest of our lives. I mean this is our future. So that's what I mean maybe once we step towards that like build a couple of steps up we would have more time to where we could donate that.* (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

> *We are running after so many different things... I think we have more responsibilities. Yes, we have the technologies...but there is so much more to have that we strive for more each day, a better car, higher mortgage.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

Several participants went even further in rejecting a focus on the common good and an active engagement in their communities. They expressed a belief that there is a time and a place for these things, but that time is at least a decade away for most of them.

> *Plus it's kind of like the time to be all about you. The twenties and thirties, you have to kind of...that's your base for adulthood. After your mid-thirties, I would suppose that in your early forties, then you could start being proactive. I don't see how us, collectively as a generation of twenty-somethings, can be all proactive. It's kind of like the time to make mistakes.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

> *My guess is that in the absence of some sort of a hot button issue, some sort of a big war that affects us, I would guess that most generations don't have serious political convictions until they get into their forties or so. I think when people are in their twenties and thirties, by and large they are in the mindset that they want to provide for them and theirs. As they get older and have that stable life, then their generation takes on some shape ideologically. I don't think that happens in the twenties or thirties.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

It is critical to point out that this was definitely a minority view but interesting that it was most prevalent among parents, the subset of Millennials who would logically be most connected to

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their communities because of their involvement, either current or pending, in the schools and most concerned with major issues such as health care.

This question of selfishness, of whether Millennials are really a 'Me Generation' like their immediate predecessors in the 80's and 90's, became a very important issue among participants in all of our groups. On the one hand, they were broadly agreed that money and material wealth are the primary motivators for their generation and that the rapid growth of technology has made them obsessed with 'toys' – the latest mobile phone, flat screen television, computer, or car – to a degree that most labeled as bordering on the absurd, even while acknowledging their own complicity. On the other, they saw the disappearance of traditional safety nets such as long-term careers, affordable education and health care, and retirement security as creating the need for a certain level of selfishness and mercenary thinking on the part of any responsible young person hoping to make their way in the world.

> *And maybe that's part of the reason why our generation is so money hungry now is because we don't have that security. We don't know what it is going to be like when we are sixty. So it's like let's get as much as we can now, we are like the little squirrels packing our cheeks with acorns because we don't know what the future holds with Social Security.* (White college grads, Birmingham)

> *Everything we do is to better our own situation or the situation around us. A lot of people are trying to better the situation of their family. It's not necessarily selfish to want a better, bigger home or a better school for your child or whatever, but it's in our definite self interest. We are always going to try to get to the next level.* (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Others simply characterized their selfishness as a part of the personal maturation process and applauded themselves and their fellow Millennials for taking the time to establish themselves before taking on the tremendous responsibilities of a family.

> *I don't think like you do things and it's intentional to be selfish, but it just boils down that this is the best way that I can get where I want to be if I follow this path. I don't put myself as a selfish person, but when it comes to certain things I realize that I have to be on my ground if I'm going to make it happen, so that's when I got to get how I get.* (African-Americans, New York)

> *I think we are learning to be selfish, but also not be that negative selfishness. I think you have to look at yourself, but you also have to look at others. And to be selfish or to not be selfish is a kind of medium where we are all learning how to do…especially now I'm learning how to learn about myself, to dedicate time to myself, but also to others. It's a balance in life. I think we are all learning how to do it.* (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

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Technology and 9/11 Shape Millennials' Worldview

It is incredible the degree to which the Internet and associated technologies dominate Millennials' own conception of their generation. Every discussion of their unique generational identity ultimately leads to the Internet and the ways it has opened up new horizons and limitless information, shrunk the world, changed the way they communicate, transformed their professional possibilities, and shaped their perceptions of the world by allowing them to gather information from a variety of personalized sources.

I think like email and that whole My Space thing, that whole generation of cell phones and all that, I think it helped because you connect with people that you normally wouldn't connect with. It helps you keep in touch so I thought it's a good thing... the evolution of the internet, just having access to other people's opinions and not just being force fed the same news from the American media but gaining access to world media and you can get different opinions. (White college grads, New York)

I think technology allows everybody to seek out information very easily and have access to whatever different viewpoints they might want on any given subject and it really allows people to see the whole story rather then necessarily exactly what you are being told is what is happening and if you don't think this is the right way of looking at something there is always a counterpoint to it that you can find very quickly rather then how it used to be where I don't even know how you would get that type of information. I mean you had a couple of different newspapers and that was about the extent of it. And now you have newspapers, you have the internet, you have basically whatever you want you can find. (Non-college white voters, New York)

Well it allows you, I mean come on, it allows you to talk to someone on the other side of the world instantly...It makes the world smaller...Absolutely. It puts the world in your hands by definition. (White suburban residents, Denver)

The Internet has also had a very deep impact on their generation by empowering them to find new solutions and to overcome previously accepted obstacles or barriers. By redefining almost daily what is possible, the Internet has radically changed the rules and made Millennials believers in the power of innovation and technology to overcome virtually any challenge.

I think it is empowering the idea that, I feel that if I need to solve something or I need to learn about something or I need to get a hold of something, I can do it. I can do anything. If somebody says, "no, we can't really do that" and I'm thinking to myself "why not?" We will figure out how to do it. There is definitely a way to do it, you just have to figure it out and tap into the internet or tap into whatever means of information. (White college grads, New York)

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And unlike politics or other traditional institutions, age and social stature pose no impediments to an individual's ability to accomplish their goals online. The Internet is a great equalizer, and as the generation that has grown up with it, they see themselves as having a unique combination of proficiency and perspective when it comes to the online experience.

> *We also grew up, everyone in our age group, with the hugely, quickly expanding technology, everything that is happening around us and the result of that is the world has shrunk considerably since the generations that are older then us and the ones that are younger than us don't really have any concept of before when we were kind of just on that cusp.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

The other major factor that has had a profound effect in shaping the core values and attitudes of Millennials is the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Above all else, it was a wake up call to them that the rest of the world did not view our country the same we viewed ourselves. This realization has in turn forced them to adopt a much more global perspective.

> *I think people our age are more motivated, maybe because they are more educated, but they just have more of an interest in it to find out…And open us up to world politics and world news. As soon as 9/11 happened, I was like – I know a lot of people were like – "Who are these people?" "What is Islam?" "What does everybody else believe in?" "Why did this happen?" So you could look it up and read about it and, like, oh my God, I had no idea where Afghanistan was.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

> *You can just take what happened 7 years ago on 9/11. I mean that completely changed the world. It changed the world for a lot of people in our generation…Yeah. I think it made people realize that you know, well especially for people like us, I was 21-years-old at the time, and I only just kind of started getting my feet wet in global politics and stuff like that. I think it woke a lot of us up to what is truly going on around us and not just within what we call the United States because the United States is just such a small piece of the world. You know what I'm saying?* (White suburban residents, Denver)

Beyond this global awareness, 9/11 also made many Millennials pay more attention to domestic politics and to more fully understand the consequences that seemingly insignificant or unrelated political events could have on the fundamental security and direction of our country.

> *I think also living through the aftermath of 9/11…we see what the government is doing in such a different way from previous generations, so we question authority more.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

> *September 11th…I know for me it got me to talk to my friends more about politics because before we didn't really talk about it then all of the sudden it was like "Wait, you're a Republican," like it kind of opened up the conversation more…* (Non-college white voters, New York)

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I think with September 11th aside from that I think it is directly related to why our generation is much more political now because of Bush and Iraq and everything. I think people from the middle of some doo-hicky town in the middle of the country know what terrorism is, know what Al Qaeda is, whereas before September 11th they probably didn't. (White college grads, New York)

The political awakening of the Millennial generation was undoubtedly kickstarted by 9/11, but it is still unfolding for many as they struggle with how to reconcile their materialism and so-called selfishness with an instinct to make a difference in the world around them. It starts by simply paying more attention to current and world events, with Iraq an obvious catalyst for a generation that has tens of thousands of friends in Iraq and Afghanistan right now.

We keep up with politics more because it has to do with us being affected by it more. Sending friends off to war and stuff like that, that's when we keep up with it because we're being affected by it. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

Given their intense cynicism toward the country's current political culture, it has sometimes been difficult for Millennials to engage in current events and crucial political debates. But as Iraq and other issues have increased their sense of a personal stake, they have also increased their belief that they must have a role to play in addressing the problems they see.

I think we are the generation that kind of realized that these issues being in the past need to be fixed now or it turns into a downward spiral...I think our generation has more urgency to help the environment and to create progress in education. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

I would protest something if I don't believe in it. I mean, three years ago I wouldn't have a clue what was going on, but now that I'm learning more about politics, if I believe something is wrong and I feel like I'm knowledgeable about it and I can stand up for it and what I believe in, I will do it now...I know enough now to stand up for what I believe in whereas years ago I didn't really know. (Non-college white voters, New York)

I think that is true but I also think that we are also more self aware. I think we know that there are problems with the world, there are problems with the environment, there are problems with the government, there are problems with lots of stuff so I think we are self aware that this generation will be the leaders of the country in 20 years, 30 years, so it will be interesting to see how we deal with the problems now. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I think a lot of people are more aware that they can make a difference. I think we are more aware from other generations that each individual can make a difference. (White parents, Los Angeles)

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The one specific issue where most Millennials are taking some direct action and seeing tangible results is on the environment. Time and again, examples such as recycling and conservation were cited as the first steps taken by participants as they sought to expand their personal horizons beyond selfish pursuits. Going green is the first example of how an embrace of the common good has become a norm for their generation.

The thing is with the whole environmental movement it's not political, it's not against, it's not targeting at certain people, it's not religious, there is no hidden agenda behind it and we all know that we have to save the environment otherwise we are all dead, rich, poor, black, white it doesn't matter. So I think a lot more people are okay with trying to help the environment because there is no like political agenda behind it. (White college grads, New York)

I see our generation doing a lot with the green movement. I mean that people our age are really starting to be conscious of what we use, and it is kind of a popular cause…And instead of it being like crazy hippy, now it has just become how it needs to be. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Look at the environment for an example. The whole green movement, people are more conscious of that and that is all towards a greater good whether it's buying a hybrid or recycling. I work in cosmetics and we look at biodegradable packaging and all sorts of stuff that for the greater good. So kind of taking a step back from being very selfish and seeing what is good for the world. (White college grads, New York)

Rejecting Conventions and Labels

Most Millennials are very proud of the fact that they are not particularly constrained by the conventions of previous generations. Their determination to make their own evaluations about what is right and wrong and how to interact with the world is based in part on their own experiences but is influenced even more by the Internet. The fact that they have access to so much more information than any previous generation and that the world has shrunk so much as a result of this technology leaves them with a firm belief that they are operating in a new world where old rules don't necessarily apply.

I don't think we are a traditional generation. We are not overall, we're not. We don't base things on tradition. We do things our own way. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

I think back to what makes our generation different as well as that we have been exposed to more cultures, whether it be through our own personal travel or just the make-up of our country now having so many ethnicities here. I think that our generation is really one of the first to be very accepting of all cultures and empathy. (White suburban residents, Denver)

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We are not as insulated as our parents and our grandparents are. The world is smaller. It's more of a multi-cultural vibe to our generation. We don't worry so much about things like race or even sexuality nowadays. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I see more of exposure to different things. That kind of goes along the liberal thought process, but you have things that everyday we are exposed to that three generations ago just would drop their jaw at. The actual variety of things that we are exposed to or take part in actually just is a lot more wide variety. (White college grads, Birmingham)

Participants in our focus groups most often expressed this dynamic in terms of open-mindedness and tolerance. While we did not raise issues of race or sexuality at this point, they repeatedly did. And they were very proud of the fact, revealed so clearly in our polling, that they refuse to be caught up in divisive social issues that have helped contribute to the polarized political environment that they so thoroughly reject.

I think one of the things that we've gained is tolerance. I think we've all grown up after the civil liberties and the women's rights movement. So I think we're more tolerant, regardless of culture or sexual orientation. It might not be based on really love of one another. Maybe it's more, you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone. But I think that's one thing…That's goes all the way around, too. Not just ethnicity. But with people's beliefs, religion. That goes a lot of way around. (Hispanics, Denver)

I think we're more open to different perspectives or different opinions…we're a little more open than maybe our parents were, just from accepting of others maybe, to some degree. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

I think we are more aware collectively as humanity and as a world, as a group of people. We are trying to grow and not make the same mistakes past generations have made…Like in every way, environmentally, spiritually, emotionally. We don't treat our children the way we were treated. And our parents were treated worse. Stuff like that, we are just trying to get better and be more tolerant. (White parents, Los Angeles)

Not surprisingly, evangelicals were the one group that spoke out on behalf of the virtues of tradition and questioned whether their generation has been too quick to abandon core values that they believe serve as a foundation for any society or community. Evangelicals were the only participants to express a belief that the majority of their generation has gotten in wrong in rejecting debate over homosexuality and its place in society, but even in those groups, the voices of tolerance were loudest.

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I think we got bigger issues than whether a gay couple is getting married. I mean, can we worry about something else? (White evangelicals, Denver)

Millennials' rejection of traditional thinking and conventions leads naturally into a deep distrust of the old ideological labels that have been used to pigeonhole previous generations' political and social values. When asked to define their own views, they strenuously resisted the exercise at first, because they immediately viewed it as an effort to put them into the same old partisan boxes that have defined our nation's political discourse for decades.

Labels aren't as important as they used to be. You could imagine a conservative country where children would never think to change their identity or their religion, but here labels of religion and identity are much less important to us. I mean, if somebody called me a Caucasian or white, what does that matter to me? It is just what I was born, but who I define as myself is a lot more important than what other people say what I am. (White suburban residents, Denver)

I don't want to be labeled like, oh, I'm very liberal and then have that label as me and be like, well you said this, you are contradicting your liberalism. That's the way I feel. I don't want to be labeled. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Some found themselves still trapped in that paradigm and fought to find a way to define themselves without betraying their rejection of those labels.

Conserva-liberal…You got to be able to go to both sides… you should be able to make the decisions that you want but if there are repercussions that you are aware of, then you are going to be handed that…You're not going to be able to please everybody, but you definitely can find some common ground. Democrats don't have all the answers, Republicans don't have all the answers, and it is being able to be open-minded to change. Because we are changing, and we are a different generation than the one before us. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I think we are a very independent generation… everything that we've been saying here, being independent and breaking out of your own roles and accepting people of different races or trying new countries, you know doing all different things…I just think we are independent from…Traditional roles…yeah, traditional roles and maybe we can still hold onto the morals and values that our parents instilled in us, but we get to be independent in our political views. And there are a lot of things going on with just who we want to be, and I think that we have an independence from maybe what people thought we were going to be. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Others were quick to abandon the traditional labels and instead to focus once again on technology and the way it has transformed and united their generation.

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We were probably the first generation to really latch onto the Internet from when it first started to now...I think technology might be the link between all of us...We are the digital generation...We are the Wi-Fi generation. (White college grads, Birmingham)

The microwaves...I like that, too...I'm just going off of what he said about the microwave. We want immediate gratification. I want results, and I don't want to have to wait a long time. I want to see something immediately in pretty much everything that I do...I guess immediate gratification. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

While their reticence to accept any labels left us unable to come up with a common name or tag for this generation's values and beliefs, there was much more unanimity in the thinking behind their rejection of traditional ideological labels. Their aversion to 'liberal' is based more on the way that term has been demonized in public debate over the course of their lives than any concerns about its intrinsic meaning. In fact, in discussing the open-mindedness and tolerance that characterizes their generation, they repeatedly used 'liberal' as a descriptor of their mindset on those issues. But they refused to use the term in defining their generation because of the negative connotations it has assumed.

Their rejection of 'conservative' was much more substantive and much more adamant. At its most basic level, 'conservative' suggests the traditions and conventions that these young Americans pride themselves on rejecting.

I mean I look at conservative as the man coming home and the woman having dinner fixed for him on the table. (White college grads, Birmingham)

Business, corporations...Way upper middle class, Protestant, blah, blah, blah. (White college grads, New York)

But the 'conservative' label also suggests a simplicity in thinking that ignores the complex realities of the world as these Millennials have come to know it. Whether that mental and emotional simplicity comes from naivete or intolerance, they want no part of it.

Probably their intolerance of other people because they won't accept the change in the big things. Just holding on to the idea that it's just not allowed. It's wrong...Right. It's black and white. (Hispanics, Denver)

My step dad...Uptight...Close minded...Everything is cut and dry. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Finally, 'conservative' is very closely associated in their minds with the Republican Party and most especially the Bush administration. Whatever positive connotations the term may have carried before, it has been discredited by the hypocrisy, incompetence, and excesses of the last eight years of Republican rule.

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There is a problem of being conservative nowadays...It has to do with the values of conservative people who label themselves conservative now. It has sort of changed. The reason I don't call myself a conservative now is because it tends to be a lot of divisiveness. It's based on sort of the evangelical core of the party. I can't consider myself a conservative because to me torturing prisoners of war is not a conservative position. The sort of what the current executive branch has done in terms of waging war and what they've done in the course of that war is not conservative in my mind. So I would say what I consider classically conservative, but not in step with the people who call themselves conservative. (White parents, Los Angeles)

Instead, the term that really appealed most to them and with which the most participants were comfortable aligning themselves was 'progressive.' What appealed most to them about this term was that it was not, in their eyes, polluted by the current political discourse and not affiliated more with one party or set of positions.

Yeah, I think that progressive doesn't really apply to either of the political extremes there, whether conservative or liberal, which are both pretty much set in their ways progressive is kind of like the proverbial point off the line if you will, over there. (Non-college white voters, New York)

Because the term is not part of the old battles and the partisan framework that so disgusts them, these voters associated 'progressive' with the kind of new, innovative thinking that they are eager to embrace.

I think our generation is probably sick of politicians and they are sick of the rhetoric. I think that progressive is grass roots, it's new, it's fresh. And I think that our generation is probably more apt to be that way. (White college grads, Birmingham)

I would say fresh ideas, new ideas, trying to work towards new conclusions, new outcomes. That to me is progressive...To me it means moving forward. (White college grads, Birmingham)

Progressive to me means sort of the causes that are newer... It's a new way of thinking...I think it's acknowledging the fact that the older terms don't apply anymore, that things have changed so much. (White parents, Los Angeles)

Whereas 'liberal,' 'conservative,' and even 'moderate' were seen as compromised terms that keep us mired in the tired, old politics of the past, 'progressive' was viewed as a positive, forward-looking, change-oriented term that captured better than any other the restless spirit of this generation.

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I think we're progressive because we're constantly striving. That's basically what everybody said today. We're not a generation that gets comfortable. We're constantly looking to move up…We want to know why. We ask a lot of questions. Asking questions, we do make progress. We're not just blind about the issues. We're trying to find out why something is. We're trying to get to the next level to see how we can change something. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

It means that they are out to change. It means that they are making moves. They are following those people that are making those moves and they are making change… when I think of progressive I think of people who could see beyond just how it has always been done and see actually what would be appropriate in this specific situation…not just what they've been told. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Progressive. That means interested in the progression of the American character, change it, advance it. Evolving. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Only a few participants across the 12 groups volunteered 'progressive' of their own accord as a way to define their generation, because it is not a term that has concrete meaning to them. However, once the phrase was offered and they defined it as a group, it became much more popular and was viewed as an effective means of capturing their volatile, innovative, non-partisan outlook.

The progressive generation…In the sense that we have more options out there for us, we are more open minded. We can move in so many different directions. A lot more can be done in less time than people in the past generations prior to us…so I think it's more progressive. (African-Americans, New York)

Disgust for Current Leaders, Dominant Institutions

Frustration, disappointment, and anger over the state of leadership in our country – mostly with government, but also corporate and other major leaders in our society – permeated every aspect of our discussion. At every level, the spirit of common good that these voters see as a critical goal is completely ignored by leaders who consistently put their own selfish interests ahead of those they ostensibly serve.

It's all about the money. Leadership, I believe, is all about the money and how fast can I get it. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

They are not serving us. They are serving themselves. I don't want someone not thinking about everyone else. You need someone up there thinking about everyone else. It is affecting everyone else. (White college grads, Birmingham)

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Millennials believe that so much of what ails this country can be traced back to the simple greed of our leaders, and it all starts with our elected officials.

> *Every one of those politicians...I want to think of me and my income in the next fifteen years...Politicians have big dollar signs on their heads...Every one of them...All of them...Someone is backed by somebody and that's a shame...To what would benefit them and not what will benefit our country and our society...There is no sense of altruism, there's no sense of patriotism. No matter what they give...they give their humble platitudes or whatever, they don't believe any of it. They are trying to get a vote so they can get that next check so they can buy the fourth house. There is no real leadership.* (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

> *So it's the moral issue as far as politicians go and the decisions that they're making. Because they know it's right or wrong when they do it. It's whether the price is right.* (Hispanics, Denver)

Corruption and greed in government is more offensive to these voters because of the inviolable nature of the democratic ideals that they want to still hold sacred, as well as the hypocrisy of politicians who appeal to voters with soaring rhetoric and high ideals while behaving as nothing more than common crooks. Greed and mismanagement among corporate leaders is less offensive to them on some level, almost predictable, but that doesn't minimize the damage it does to American workers and consumers.

> *You know I have a problem with the way that big corporations represent themselves within the United States... corporate leadership is very disappointing these days especially within the last decade or more...They are not thinking about what they are going to do with all those people who are working underneath them and actually seeing that myself, it is kind of is like...it can't be about yourself. You have to look at what your decisions are going to do that are going to affect other people also, and I don't think that is happening right not with most corporate leadership.* (White suburban residents, Denver)

> *Really and truly, they are trying to please the stockholders...That's not leadership, that's appeasement. They appease the people that they answer to...It sort of takes away from the whole taking care of the next generation. It's more like here and now, let's see what we can go ahead and get done. These are cost centers, not people...And that's poor leadership.* (White college grads, Birmingham)

And in the interaction between government and business, it is once again the so-called leaders conspiring to advance their own narrow interests. Two different groups pointed to the incestuous relationship between pharmaceutical companies, the members of Congress who have jurisdiction over them, and the federal agencies that supposedly regulate them as the prime example of this destructive dynamic.

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Because of the relationship that they have with the governments, with the pharmaceutical companies, those people that retire from politics go work for pharmaceutical companies and make that FDA policy. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Look at the health care, the pharmaceuticals a couple years ago when the major chairs of the bills, they are all working for pharmaceuticals now and making ten times what they were before. (White college grads, Birmingham)

According to these Millennials, hand-in-hand with the greed and self-interest of current leaders comes an appalling level of deception. This deception alienates and confuses young Americans and threatens to drive them further from taking an active role in their communities or in confronting the growing challenges facing the country.

Because there is always an angle. Every decision they make has an angle behind it and they always have favors to repay. It's like, you know, whoever contributed to get them in the office, whatever party they are in. Sometimes I think they vote on things they disagree with but they have to. So, you can't trust people like that. You can't trust people with two heads. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

I think the leadership of this country is just misleading… because I think there are so many different things that contradict and don't seem to add up, that don't seem to make sense. I think as far as our generation is concerned, there seems like there is a lot of confusion. (White college grads, New York)

They're out for them or their friends…Whoever was within that group, that's what they're out for. Any type of law or anything that they come up with, there's always something behind it that you don't see, that benefits them more than it does you. They tell you one thing, and do something else…They tell you what sounds good, what you want to hear. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

While we did not discuss the point explicitly, one gets the feeling that these voters, at this point, would be willing to overlook the greed, deception, and hypocrisy of their leaders if those leaders were actually accomplishing anything. But they're not. Millennials see a country adrift, with leaders who are either uninterested or incapable of making the difficult decisions needed.

I mean, all the major issues that I hear about are the war in Iraq, illegal immigration, health care and nothing has, they have been talking about those three main issues to me for the last 2, 3, 4 years and nothing has really been done about any of those problems. (White evangelicals, Denver)

The government is a failure…The leadership is horrible…The middle class is disappearing. (White college grads, New York)

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Well we are, the problem I see is that people are out for the immediate gains and the immediate progress with not really having the foresight to look down the road to see what's around the corner. I think that leaders have to be strong people who are able to see the long picture and the big picture, what they're going to have to do to make things livable for the entire population. You know 50, 100, 200 years down the line and that is kind of what we are lacking right now. (Non-college white voters, New York)

And so, the country continues to drift, our problems only get worse, and a sense of hopelessness takes hold among young Americans who see no hope of change.

Every dynasty comes to an end and it looks like we're coming to ours because of poor leadership. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

It has made me somewhat pessimistic. Iraq and Vietnam are not the same but Washington is still Washington. They haven't learned a lesson about going into conflict without a real vision of what the outcome will be like, what is peace going to look like. They didn't solve it in Vietnam and they don't seem to have ever considered it even in Iraq…It is hard for a nation to look itself in the eye and say we messed up and that is really where we are. Getting out is a lot harder than getting in. (White suburban residents, Denver)

The levels of despair and anger are very deep on the issue of leadership, or more accurately the absence of it in our country today. The following quote from the Hispanic group in Los Angeles provides a particularly explicit and colorful example of what we heard in virtually every group.

You look at Bush – he is a fucking, oh excuse me, he is a nightmare and his whole cabinet, they're nightmares, and the Democrats were sitting back watching it happen, they're nightmares you know. The Republicans keep winning, not because we like their agenda, because we can't find a Democrat that we want to vote for or anybody else that we want to vote for. The Terminator is our governor do you guys realize…(much laughter… this is terrible. This is terrible. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

A natural byproduct of their antipathy toward the overall leadership in our country was their distrust of the major institutions that have historically dominated and shaped American society, especially government, large corporations, and organized religion. Most alarmingly, they increasingly see little distinctions between these institutions. In their eyes, each exhibits the same level of short-term, self-interested leadership with no consideration for the common good, and the leaders of each have merged into a separate social class whose interests are clearly at odds with the rest of the country.

Religious, political, pretty much the whole realm. They've all got their agenda to make money. Or make themselves look better or profit off it. (Hispanics, Denver)

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There is also a thrust where a lot of people involved in politics and political leaders are involved in businesses, they are CEOs of companies. So I think that has a huge impact on the laws that are being passed to benefit corporations as opposed to individuals and people...A lot of hidden agendas...Directed towards certain socioeconomic groups I would think...It's been like that from the beginning of time. I mean it's not like a new thing. (White college grads, New York)

Looking specifically at the government and political leaders, the greed and deception that they share with the leaders of other major organizations are only half of the problem, as described by Millennials in our groups. The bitter partisanship of our current political culture is a source of immense frustration for these voters. They see a system that is designed to maximize conflict, to discourage any attempts to find common ground, and to reward obstruction and extremism.

There is too much fighting between Republican and Democrat, and there is too much lobbying going on...It's kind of tough the way our system is set up, it's kind of fighting against itself constantly. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

You can have the most charismatic, best leader come in there, but they are so on both sides. If they are Republican, they are going to be hated by the liberals and the Democrats just because of that word, and if they're Democrats, it is going to be the same way. You'd have to be an Abraham Lincoln or a Roosevelt or something right now to bring this country back together where you are going to get people from one side liking you and people from the other side liking you. You are just going to have to be an extraordinary person. You know as far as politics, I don't see that person out there. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I think the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. But there's just always these two extremes. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

Beyond the gridlock that this partisan atmosphere creates, there is a larger concern that it is alienating voters who do not feel connected to either extreme. Millennials believe that the vast majority of Americans remain in the middle, even as the two parties move further and further toward the extremes.

I think that's a problem with politics. Like the leaders are not necessarily the people that live in this country. I think if you put any ten people in a room to work out an issue and more then likely they are going to come to some sort of reasonable compromise but with politicians who have vested interests in getting reelected and getting their projects pushed through and everything. It's not going to happen because they have too much at stake. While you put regular people in a room and I think people are pretty much in that center area and are able to come to compromises but the leadership just isn't there and they are not seeing the

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aspect of it so they are saying everything is polarized. We're conservative or we're liberal and you can't be either or and that is the end of it. You have to stick to party lines. I think that is a big problem with our politicians. (Non-college white voters, New York)

It means that I don't like to be affiliated with such extremes. Like it's not black and white to me. There are too many shades of gray. For instance when I vote, the last election was my first – very exciting – but I don't like voting for either of the major parties because it's too extreme for me...Like I said, shades of gray, what is important to you, what is going on in the world. (White college grads, New York)

Participants in our focus groups made it clear that partisanship and what they considered to be a growing extremism among both parties had a serious impact on their voting intentions. They harbor serious doubts about the efficacy of voting and engaging in our political system at all, and several pointed to the debacle in Florida in 2000 as a seminal moment for them, making them question whether their vote really does count after all.

People are also disillusioned like the whole 2000 debacle with Gore and Bush. Gore won and Bush became President. People got disillusioned...It's true. There is this two party system, and especially after you saw what happened with Gore and Bush, it became sort of like if you vote for a third party it's a wasted vote and you're going to lose. It's like a vote for a third party is a vote for Bush...It's a waste...And that sort of a system is very confining, and it means that you don't have that choice and you kind of lose of that freedom because you are stuck in the system. (White college grads, New York)

Defining the Challenges

Millennials have no illusions about the size and scope of the problems facing our country today. There is certainly more education that is needed, both about the nature of the problems and the potential solutions, but their diagnosis of the problems facing the country is very clear. And it starts with two fundamental issues – health care and energy.

Participants in our groups were very passionate and emotional in discussing the health care crisis in our country. They believe soaring health care costs, insufficient coverage, and declining quality of care are issues that affect all Americans, but they also believe their generation is uniquely at risk.

Because the cost of getting your own health care is so tremendous if your employer doesn't offer it to you or if you are self employed. It is so crazy to afford healthcare on your own...You can't afford it. I was paying 750 a month because I'm an independent, I'm not with a group. So I have no choice but to not be insured. And if something happens they can take everything from me. Like if I get cancer, I'm pretty much going to have to die. Because chemo is like hundreds of

thousands of dollars. And it's ridiculous they are making money off of people suffering. (Non-college white voters, New York)

Most of our generation is without health insurance. They don't have any sort of coverage. They don't have anything to fall back on. (White college grads, New York)

Millennials see a ripple effect from the health care crisis that exacerbates many of the challenges facing our country today, especially economic inequality. They believe that the rate health care received by the poor in our country is second-rate and that companies are guilty of targeting poorer communities with low-cost foods that are destructive to the long-term health of anyone who consumes them.

There is no other issue on this list that has more impact on inequality in this country and the social stratification so you have to find some solution. (White suburban residents, Denver)

The food that we eat makes us sick and... the people who have the least amount of money eat the worst. And they have more health problems because of that...The processed foods we are eating is killing us and it's causing a lot of problems. (White parents, Los Angeles)

A lot of my kids are uninsured and they take off a day of school to go sit in the emergency room or sit at a doctor's office to get what they need...When you are in that situation... it just reinforces that you are not important enough to get in to see a doctor, and you are sitting there with a bunch of sick people and I think, especially for children, that is not right. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Concerns about the quality of food opened up a very important conversation about preventable diseases. This was a major focus of the statement we offered toward the end of each group on how to move forward on health care, but long before we introduced the concept of preventable diseases, these young voters were articulating very clearly the extent to which so much of the growing health care crisis comes back to a failure to take simple preventive measures and to the poisons we are putting into our own bodies.

Whatever happened to going to the doctor for an annual checkup? We don't do that anymore. We put ourselves in unhealthy situations. We talk about child obesity as one of our big health issues. Or the whole diabetes situation. These weren't issues in the 50's and 60's because we're abusing ourselves. (Hispanics, Denver)

I mean, if you see the people that are predominantly affected by diseases, people in lower income brackets are the ones affected by diseases that could be curable – diabetes, heart conditions, stuff that with education and if they had health insurance, they could be prevented. (White college grads, New York)

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The way I see it, an insurance company would rather treat a disease then prevent it so that's where everything starts. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

There is plenty of blame to go around for the current situation. Individuals making poor choices and failing to take better preventive care of themselves and their families undoubtedly plays a role. But it is the insurance companies and the pharmaceutical companies who are viewed as almost criminal in their greed and their lack of concern for the health and well-eing of their customers.

Health care…I am just amazed on how much is denied. You pay so much money for health coverage, and you get nothing and it is such a fight to get anything covered anymore. And it has become prohibitively expensive to even take care of yourself to stay healthy...Yeah, deductibles and, everything has gotten so expensive but yet we are not getting paid enough and it is a serious problem for our generation. Where are we going to be when we are 60, 70? How are we going to retire? I mean it takes everything just to make ends meet. It is not like back in the days where they got compensated where health care and different things worked out a little better. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I think it's a combination of things. The self serving motivation of the pharmaceutical companies and private practices, lack of accountability, and our food and our society's view on food, the diet industry, the entertainment industry. (White parents, Los Angeles)

There was some debate about the ultimate solution, with opinions divided on the merits of a socialized, government-run health care system similar to those in Europe and Canada. But there was broad consensus that universal access to affordable health care and preventive care was critical and should be a given in a country as wealthy as ours.

I have never had a fire but I pay for the fire department in my taxes, right? I don't have to call the police but I pay for the police in my taxes. And maybe I'll never need to use the health care, but I feel like it should be something that is a right. You shouldn't have to pay more for a service like that. (Non-college white voters, New York)

And they see broad implications for improved health and health care. With so many Millennials either one medical crisis away from financial ruin or stuck in a dead-end job just to hold onto the benefits, guaranteed access to affordable health care would allow them to focus more on their professional goals and to build a personal economic foundation.

Also people, if they don't have to worry about struggling for their health care, they can spend money and help the economy, they don't have to worry about doing all this medical. If they are provided for, they can focus more on their job, on working and not having to worry. (White college grads, New York)

The other primary challenge facing the country in the opinion of Millennials is our dependence on foreign oil, and to a lesser degree fossil fuels overall. In many focus groups we conduct with older voters, the focus is so intently on the short-term issue of gas prices, the broader implications of our dependence on foreign oil are often lost. But with these Millennials, the focus was sharply on the long-term economic, environmental, and security implications of the situation, with foreign policy and the link between our need for oil and the war in Iraq foremost in their minds.

> *Because it's so directly intertwined with America's foreign policy. America's foreign policy is completely focused on getting George Bush oil...it's really important for us to be able to sustain a little on our own because then we can have a just foreign policy, which isn't as oriented toward oil.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

> *I think it makes me mad that I have to pay so much for gas, but honestly it hurts my heart to see that people are dying for oil. That just infuriates me...I think it's up there for all of us because it has so many broad consequences, environmental, social and political. And it's the cause of a lot of problems...It's like all that is evil. It's horrible...I agree completely. It's political more than economical...Not just the Iraq war, but our entire relationship with the Middle East is based on our interest in fuel...And also the oil companies have a lot of say in our laws and things and so forth. For me, it was above all these things.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

> *Half of my paycheck goes to that department. Gas is so expensive and it's polluting our world. It's controlling us...Half of the reason we are at war is because of oil.* (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

> *It's a double edged sword. On one hand you have to have, in a country that is as capitalistic as we are in order to maintain growth and everybody make more, they have to buy and on the other hand it is completely at odds with the whole green thing and sustainability. So, on one hand you have to keep people having jobs and people bringing food home, and on the other hand what are you going to do about the sustainability factor.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

Politicians and oil companies, and the corrupt inner workings between the two, bear the blame for our current situation, according to these voters. They believe that the technology is available to at least reduce our consumption of oil and thus to reduce our dependence on foreign sources, but that technology is suppressed through the combined efforts of oil company executives and the politicians whose re-elections they fund.

> *I think that the progress is already there, and they are just slowly letting things out because there is way too much money. We could run cars off of water right now pretty much, but that ain't going to happen because Exxon makes $10 billion*

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a quarter in profit... I mean, if we don't have oil...we are not going to be able to defend ourselves. We are not going to be able to have medical, you know health because everything we do relies on oil and gas...Our whole economy relies on oil...and if we get cut off of this, we are going to be basically done. (White evangelicals, Denver)

We had electric cars and they were taken away from us. And other countries drive electric cars and they drive cars with different kinds of fuel other than petroleum. And we are not provided that option. We are provided a pacifier for that option, a hybrid, which really is not that different. It still runs on gas and we still have to pay a lot. I have a hybrid and I still pay a lot of money for gas. We just don't have much of a choice. It comes back to that again. (White parents, Los Angeles)

The solution to this problem is clear to these voters, and it doesn't involve drilling in Alaska or even focusing on conservation efforts. It's developing sustainable, renewable forms of energy that free us from any dependence on other countries to meet such a basic need.

We should be self-sufficient. We should be working on alternate forms of energy because not only would that make us stronger, but it would mean that we are not dependent. If you have dependency, you are not powerful. (White college grads, New York)

What was perhaps most encouraging was that, long before we introduced our argument for the potential of American innovation and technology in this sector and making this an Apollo-style mission for the country, these voters were already voicing similar arguments and connecting the dots on the ways in which getting out in front of these new technologies could transform our country and our economy.

There is so much potential for new technologies to solve some of our own problems. Our dependency on foreign oil, which is leading to a massive amount of money flying out of the country to the Middle East, and if we could get ourselves energy independent or at least start making steps towards that, it could be a technological revolution. And green technology can actually lead business becoming more progressive and more, have a major impact to increase the economy. (White suburban residents, Denver)

I don't think there is any reason why there shouldn't be a thrust on producing alternative energy sources. It's a great opportunity for the country to get out of debt, stop being dependent and become a world leader in environmental, green movements. I think there is a lot of potential, and instead of working towards getting more oil, if there was just a shift of energy and a shift of your concentration going in this direction it would be beneficial in so many different ways just not even the economy but the environment. I see no negatives

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there...This really supports addressing the root cause of things. Cause and effect and our future. (White college grads, New York)

In addition to energy and health care, the Millennials in our focus group focused on three other issues that they saw as critical to getting our country moving in the right direction again. The influence of lobbyists and special interests was closely tied in their minds to virtually every issue we discussed – partisanship and the failure of government, the efforts of oil companies to keep us addicted to foreign oil, the inability of government to rein in health care costs, and so on.

Everything else stems from that. Oil is, that's a special interest you're talking about. Our President is an oil guy. You talk about healthcare and all the HMOs are donating all the money in helping out with the campaigns and that is another instance where it is just basically all under the big umbrella of who is paying for the government to run their campaigns and who is catering to which company and which special interest and most of the other problems kind of stem from that...I agree with that. It's all about money. (Non-college white voters, New York)

It doesn't get very far because there is too much money going in the back pocket. I mean lobbyists are holding back probably my top 5. Probably 4 out of my top 5 would probably be corrected if lobbyists didn't have so much money, lobbyists and special interest groups, and weren't allowed so much access to my senator and my congressman. I guarantee that we would overhaul healthcare. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I put that as number one because our laws are the basis of our country, and if those laws are not dictated by the public, but rather dictated by people who don't have our interests in mind, things are going to go wrong really fast...That influences everything else. If you have the bad influences, then you can't fix anything else. If you have people in the government who are just worried about themselves, they are not going to fix anything else...Instead of the government being run by the people, it's being told what to do and manipulated by corporations. (White parents, Los Angeles)

Their greatest concern with the power of special interests and lobbyists is not that the interests of corporations and other big-money players are being heard, it is that the ordinary citizen is being completely removed from the process. As a result, lobbyists aren't just the loudest voice, they are the only voice that those in power are hearing.

I think politicians can be bought, and there is enough money in the lobbyist industry that they are just buying votes for their, whoever they are lobbying for, and it takes the vote away from the people. And the people aren't being represented, the company with the most money is being represented...You don't vote for lobbyists. (White suburban residents, Denver)

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Plus over time, so many tiny little laws have passed to make it not conducive for communities to make a change on a government scale. Like I said earlier, you have to have a lot of money. There are all the corporations that send out their little guys to write those laws and make changes and they are running their own agendas. They are doing it for money and they don't really do it for the welfare of the people. And they make the most difference in the government because they can. They have the power. And the little people, they just get kicked out of the room because they didn't qualify, they didn't have enough money. (White parents, Los Angeles)

The guys who get the money from the special interests are the guys who can afford to reach us because we watch television and we are on the internet and all this stuff. The guys who get the money from the special interests are the guys who can afford to reach us. We don't know about the guys who don't get money from special interests. If we took more of an interest, if we cared about something besides what was on that screen, then maybe things would be different. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Perhaps the most distressing part of the discussion over lobbyists and special interests was the hopelessness these Millennials expressed about ever addressing this problem. Whereas they have such faith in the power of technology and innovation to address most challenges, this is a systemic problem that they fear is ingrained in our system of government, and they seem to harbor little hope of ever regaining control of their own democracy.

There are too many hands in the pot. It all comes down to who has the most money to influence, who is going to be making the votes in Congress, which is going to determine what route it is taking…Lobbyists make six or seven figure salaries. They get paid big bucks just to influence decisions…It's a big machine that you can't stop regardless. (White college grads, Birmingham)

You have lobbyists who go around stuffing $100 bills in people's pockets to get them, to sway them to be on their side, to vote a certain way, to say certain things, to make certain speeches, to make certain decisions. I hate to say it, but without that type of power and money what is the average American going to do? (White suburban residents, Denver)

Education, of course, is another issue that has broad ramifications on many of the major challenges facing the country.

If you educate them, your growing number of uninsured decreases, you get a good job and health insurance. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

Just as with our dependence on foreign oil and our health care crisis, there was also a sense that we are falling behind other countries, putting our long-term security and economic strength at risk.

I'd start with the education process. Because I really feel that other countries are better preparing their youth to be leaders and to be at the forefront of technology and ideas. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

And once again, the issue of inequality was at the heart of their concerns. Several groups included detailed discussions of the huge differences in resources, facilities, teachers, parental involvement, and more between schools in more affluent areas and less affluent areas in their own local towns and communities.

People in poor neighborhoods are going to get a poor education and people in more affluent ones are going to get a better education. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I think it's one of the few areas of society that is still completely unequal. It makes a big difference whether you go to Northford or to Cherry Creek. This is an area where there should be absolutely no inequality. Everybody should be entitled to the same amount of education, not based on whether your dad is a lawyer or a construction worker. (Hispanics, Denver)

I live in North Hollywood which is bordered by Van Nuys on one side and Studio City on the other side. And the vast difference is blatant and marked and undeniable. You look at Van Nuys and you see the schools in these neighborhoods that are falling apart. And then you look at Studio City where these wealthy people live and you've got a lot of people who work in the industry and television and movies and these big houses and these really nice magnet schools, and yes there is definitely an inequality there and it definitely needs to be addressed. Call me a socialist or whatever, I think there is nothing wrong with some of the people from Studio City taking a little more out of their pocket to help out the poor people in Van Nuys. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

We were encouraged by the fact that the Millennials in our groups were overwhelmingly willing to tackle this inequality head-on. Even in the parents group, they agreed that they would be willing to see money from their taxes going to other, less affluent districts because they believe the long-term benefits, especially in terms of public safety, outweigh the costs.

Our nation's declining economy and burgeoning national debt were the final issues highlighted by multiple participants in virtually every group. As with groups of older Americans, the weight of the debt was acknowledged by virtually all as a problem, but most found it very hard to wrap their minds around the practical implications, leaving a lesser sense of urgency than with the other top issues discussed. They know it is weakening our country and lessening our leverage in the world, but that decline is difficult to quantify, and delineating a path forward is even more difficult.

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The debt as a whole relates to terrorism, it relates to foreign oil, it relates to so many different things on this list. If the debt continues to rise, then ultimately a lot of these countries will take our dollar and just crumble it up and that means they take more of our businesses, all that kind of stuff. (White college grads, New York)

Honestly, the debt that our country has is on our shoulders and on our kid's shoulders. The poor choices have been made and they have to be rectified one person at a time, one group at a time. (White college grads, Birmingham)

And we don't have any money for this. We are broke. We are a broke nation. (African-Americans, New York)

The rich is getting richer and the poor is, there is no middle class there, you know it is hard to find the middle class anymore. It is, you either make it rich or you're struggling, which is poor. (White evangelicals, Denver)

A lot of this stuff isn't sexy. It's not television. For instance, the trade imbalance, which I think is kind of important. Try talking about that on the six o'clock news. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Answering the Challenges

After identifying the major challenges facing the country and exploring the underlying dynamics of those issues, we presented participants with statements that captured the essence of your vision for a new path forward on three of the most important issues – health care, energy, and rebuilding our economy. Each of these statements sought to redefine the nature of the problems we face and to offer the broad outline of a solution that goes straight to the root causes of those problems. For each statement, we found widespread agreement for the framing of the issue and the underlying values expressed. Most importantly, we found a great appetite for dramatic changes rather than the incrementalism that has characterized the efforts of Democratic and progressive politics in recent years. Millennials don't want to throw good money after bad, and they don't want to wait until the perfect political moment to act. They want to state very clearly that the status quo is unacceptable and begin today to move forward with a very clear plan for a better future.

Health Care

While cost is always the central concern in discussions of our country's growing health care crisis, followed by access and unequal care, simply lowering costs will not address the larger trends of chronic diseases being caused by environmental factors and lifestyle. Even if we successfully lower costs and extend coverage in the short term, our long-term prospects are still dim unless we reverse the alarming increase in these preventable diseases. The statement we offered to participants in our groups sought to refocus the debate on this dynamic and to express

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the goals of universal coverage, comprehensive preventive care, and greater parental education in this light.

> *Each new generation is suffering an epidemic of chronic, preventable diseases due to a polluted environment, a lack of basic health care, and the poisons we feed them every day. Every child in America – regardless of race, class, or income – should have full health coverage and proper nutrition. Parents must be taught the impact that preventive care and proper nourishment will have on a child. If we continue to spend more and more money on health care without addressing the root causes of this crisis, we will only weaken our economy and condemn millions more children to suffering and disease.*

Millennials immediately grabbed onto the assertion that our health care system is too focused on treating symptoms at the expense of better preventive care. They all have personal experiences or know someone who has a horror story demonstrating that insurance companies are pennywise, pound foolish when it comes to these matters, preferring to pay ten times as much for a surgery that could have been prevented with simple preventative care, or as one woman in New York pointed out, $10,000 to deliver a baby rather than $25 for the pills to prevent the pregnancy in the first place.

> *In America, we don't focus on preventative medicine; we focus completely on healing something after the symptoms have gotten to a point where you can't stand it anymore.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

Similarly, they expressed strong agreement that too many of the health epidemics facing the country are preventable, burdens we are putting on ourselves out of a combination of ignorance and laziness.

> *I think the key word here is preventable. I don't think completely that everything is preventable but we could probably decrease a lot of these problems going on with healthcare when children get sick and everything just like Kelly said with the McDonald's and everything.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

> *I think the key word is preventable because it doesn't have to be this way. These are diseases that people don't have to have.* (White college grads, New York)

> *It goes back to the old saying, prevention is better than the cure...We were just talking about that, especially with the nutrition for childhood obesity. You have these parents who let these kids scarf down anything...Every child in America, regardless of race, class or income should have health coverage and proper*

nutrition. That stands out to me…Addressing the root cause of this crisis.
(African-Americans, New York)

I circled preventable in both these places because obesity, there are a couple states right now that their population, over 30% is considered obese, and everything that it leads to that is [zapping] Medicare and Medicaid. And what you are talking about in New York, they are saying that Medicaid is going to run out in like 4 years or something completely because of Type II Diabetes, which is later onset diabetes because of poor healthcare. So, if I feel like all these diseases that we have from poor nutrition, from the ingredients in all these foods that are touted as safe and fine, we really don't know that they are making us sick and then we have to pay a lot of money to get better, or we're kept sick. (White suburban residents, Denver)

While the statement we offered did not identify any specific diseases, most groups immediately associated it with childhood obesity and identified fast food, soft drinks, and other junk food as the biggest poisons fed to kids on a regular basis.

Yeah, child obesity. Kids with diabetes. There are like 500,000 in New York alone. It is really scary. Why are we letting our kids have Coca-Cola everyday. I think like a lot of things you have to address the root of the problem if you want it to stop. I think Kaiser does a really good job of expressing that exact thought, preventative care and it starts with you making the choices, not needing however many hundred dollar health plan but getting your exercise and eating right and doing things and then you can avoid all the further health cost down the road. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Everybody in America, not everybody, the majority of people have an unhealthy lifestyle. There is people that live on frozen food and McDonald's day after day, and you don't think eventually that is going to cause a health problem? Of course it is! You're putting preservatives and junk in your body. And that's what causes all these diseases. That's probably what causes, I mean that probably leads to a lot of cancers. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

The poisons that we feed them every day, it's like the chemicals that you get in the candy and the chips, all the stuff that we feed our kids because it's easy and it's quick…It's the chemicals that are in everything we drink…The preservatives…You look at the stuff on the back and you can't even pronounce it and you look it up and you are like, oh my God. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Others interpreted 'the poisons we feed them everyday' as a reference to the growing reliance upon prescription drugs and pills to address even simple behavioral or medical issues. While acknowledging that there are some cases where serious medication is needed, many expressed a

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strong belief that too many parents are drugging their children rather than addressing the real causes of their issues.

> *I say everything has a prescription nowadays, and that is ridiculous. And the side effects are worse then what you are being prescribed for. I didn't have all this medicine when I was a little kid. It's not necessary…There is natural remedies, there is dealing with things, there is breaking a fever, so the poisons to me are the five different prescription commercials…That's poisons to me.* (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

> *Instead of treating the effects, we are treating the causes. I think that requires a total mindset change. If you watch TV you see all those ads for all the pills. Pills for everything. Pills for indigestion, a pill for asthma. A lot of asthma could be caused by the pollution of the environment.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

> *Cancer…Obesity…Diabetes…Blood pressure…Emotional diseases. People are attempting to fix them with pills and anti-depressants…ADD and ADHD, things like that…In the end, you are treating the symptom and not the root cause.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

The focus on children, and universal coverage of all children 'regardless of race, class, or income' also resonated strongly with these Millennials. They repeatedly stressed that the best way to enact these kinds of changes on a large scale is through education to the next generation, those whose unhealthy habits and dependence on various chemicals are not yet ingrained. But that education, of course, must really begin with the parents whose unhealthy habits are part of the current problem.

> *Parents must be taught the impact that preventative care and proper nourishment will have on a child. I'm so tired at seeing little kids with silver in their mouth already. It's from the parents not really knowing how to take care of the kids' teeth…The word, preventable or preventative, the idea that it's something doesn't have to be here. Putting the proper resources in place. And the idea of partnership, in this case, with the parents.* (African-Americans, Birmingham)

> *The thing that stuck me was, every child in America regardless of race, class or income…Health care is a right. I don't think it matter whether you pay taxes or not. I'm not going to turn away a patient. I'm a medical student. You can't turn away people, especially preventable and basic healthcare needs regardless of whether they pay into the system or not.* (Hispanics, Denver)

And while there was again discussion of the economic disparities seen on these issues, there was also agreement that there are many lessons that should be learned and adopted by those at any socioeconomic level.

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Absolutely. I mean, it is within everybody's nature to have some sort of physical activity and to have the right nourishment in your body to keep your immunity up and to keep your body functioning the way it is supposed to be. (White suburban residents, Denver)

Overall, Millennials agree enthusiastically with the statement presented and virtually all of its key components:

➢ We face an epidemic of chronic diseases
➢ This is an epidemic that is preventable and largely self-created, perpetuated by the food and chemicals we put into our own bodies
➢ Every child in America must have basic health care, regardless of race, class, or income
➢ Proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle are critical to basic health care
➢ Parents must be educated so they can in turn educate their kids
➢ We must go to the root of the problem and stop viewing this as a primarily economic problem

What's more, their passion for this issue and their view of it as one of the two primary challenges facing the country leaves them predisposed to take action. And the emphasis on education and making changes in individual lifestyles leaves them feeling that they can in fact get started by making small differences in their lives or the lives of those closest to them.

Alternative Energy

This statement was designed to be bold, to step out of the incremental thinking of hybrids and biofuels that dominates so much of the current discussion around energy and to shift the debate onto a fast track to the ultimate solution.

> *Our dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels is the greatest threat to our national security, our quality of life, and our economic future. That's why we must launch a massive, concerted national effort, similar to the Apollo Program that put a man on the moon, with the goal of moving America beyond fossil fuels and inventing the next generation of energy, based on new technologies such as hydrogen or fusion. This plan would require a huge national investment but would produce millions of new jobs, dramatically reduce environmental damage, and free us from our dependence on foreign oil that subsidizes regimes that support the terrorists who are targeting us.*

But for the Millennials in our groups, this statement wasn't a bold departure or a wake-up call, it was simply common sense. It is absolutely inconceivable to them that the leaders of our country, both in government and business, continue to bury their heads in the sand and ignore the threats

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that our dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels pose to our security, our economy, and our environment.

> *It's not only worth it, it's necessary. We are putting the gun to our own heads. By depending on oil, which is fueling terrorism, they are coming after us. We have to break that vicious cycle.* (White parents, Los Angeles)

> *We need to just get off of oil. It's not going to be there forever. There is a limited supply.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

After reviewing the statement, the one thing that jumped out at the them from the first sentence was the inclusion of national security, an aspect of the energy debate that many felt was not emphasized enough.

> *I think it's a great idea. I like how they throw in there the greatest threat to our national security. I think it is in our country's interest to get away from the hold of other countries.* (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

> *We are so dependent on those people that we are at war with right now basically. That is where we are getting all our oil.* (White evangelicals, Denver)

Overall, there was little debate about the substance of the message we presented – a lot of amen's and thank you's, but not a lot of debate. In their eyes, this was a unifying, affirmative statement that should appeal to Americans regardless of their partisan or ideological inclinations.

> *I think everybody could be happy with this whether you don't believe in global warming, if we changed the way we run things we aren't dependent like it says here 'the regimes that support terrorists.' You know I feel everybody wins if we kind of move in this direction…It is more jobs and helps the environment.* (White suburban residents, Denver)

> *The environment issue, don't think conservatives don't care about the environment we do, we care more than most liberals.* (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

Instead, the conversation shifted quickly to how to make this possible. There was broad agreement that the stakes are extremely high, that there will be significant global competition with huge benefits for the winner, and that any effort of this magnitude must be a joint venture of government funding and support with private sector expertise and innovation.

> *I think if we're the forerunners, then that benefits us economically…But we're not the only ones out there trying to be the first ones…We're talking about the Apollo program, something that's going to be massive. When America does something like that, we've been pretty successful.* (Hispanics, Denver)

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The education, the technology is out there. It is just a matter of standing behind it...Even if the government's providing the funding, it is not going to be primarily driven by the government. It has to be made in such a way that it can be self-sustaining and the business world will have a part to play in it. (White suburban residents, Denver)

What was most striking to me as I was moderating the groups was that this statement, and the subsequent discussion of how to make it a reality, was the first time that the participants in our groups really started to include themselves in the discussion of how to make it work. Just as conservation and other environmental efforts were the one example they could point to where their generation has taken a stand and committed to the common good, the effort to shift our country to sustainable, renewable energy sources was the issue that made them look for ways that their generation could not only play a role but take the lead.

I believe the government has this game where you set up so I don't know of any new way to change anything, but maybe if we played their game, donated money and put all of our support in people or companies that were developing hydrogen and things like that and have them be our lobbyists and have them be our voice and then that way donate money to their Presidential candidate and then put the information out and that way we could vote for them. I think that would be a good idea. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

I mean we are a huge demographic that a lot of people target as consumers and I think our opinions matter a lot and if our generation as a whole really boycotted these things like the SUVs and the Hummers and they were really supporting and actively buying products that were green or "organic", I think those things will become gradually more accessible. (White college grads, New York)

At the same time, the challenge of taking on the entrenched interests of 'old energy' and creating this type of movement is daunting. And so they returned to the need for real leadership, a movement that they could become a part of rather than lead on their own.

I especially like the part about a massive concerted national effort. If you have somebody like Kennedy who said we are going to go to the moon and we are going to do it by the end of this decade. And if you have a politician with that kind of charisma and media savvy who can go on television and has the guts to say that and stand up to the oil companies and say, we are going to make you guys obsolete, I think that people would really respond. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I think it's a genius idea and I love it...It just needs someone to push for it that has got power. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

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But they made it clear that they would be prepared to reward the political leader who was willing to stand up to the oil companies and the coal companies to say that the time has come for our country to free itself and to create a new, sustainable energy future.

> *If a politician said this, he or she would have my vote immediately.* (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

Economy and Debt

The final statement we offered to participants started with the national debt and the inequity of today's leaders passing such a crushing burden onto future generations, then used that premise as a launching pad to introduce a sweeping reform of our economic system, reversing the trends of outsourcing the manufacture of essential goods and the huge trade imbalances we have built up with countries that now control a disproportionate share of our growing debt.

> *We must stop our elected leaders from spending money they don't have and passing their crushing debts onto our generation. But we can't dig out of this hole simply by cutting spending here or raising taxes there. We must rebuild our economic base by restoring the industrial infrastructure needed to provide the essential components for our defense and basic needs and reversing the decline of our middle class, which has always fueled our greatest economic expansions. This will in turn allow us to end our huge structural trade imbalances and more effectively compete with countries who currently exploit our growing need for basic goods.*

Participants strongly agreed with the values-driven first statement on the debt and een took the actions of current leaders a bit personally, understanding that they will be the ones assuming those debts.

> *We are the ones who have to pay it back. We have to make up that money somehow and it's coming out of our pockets whether we like it or not…We don't have the money for things like socialized health care because we are spending 4.7 million or billion a day in Iraq, it directly affects us.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

> *It's common sense not to spend money they don't have and passing crushing debts to the next generation. It's just silly…Even if you are going to go and spend money you don't have at least maybe subsidize American companies. If you're going to spend the money anyway, at least improve the country while doing that.* (White college grads, New York)

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However, the call to a new economic vision left most participants largely ambivalent. On the one hand, they agreed with the call to return manufacturing jobs to the U.S. and to once again assume responsibility for the manufacture of goods critical to our national security and defense.

> *I'm going back to what I said earlier, come up with a list of things that have to be made here that were beneficial to our culture and then the things that need to be made here that would not affect us if someone attacked us, make them here and other things let the fair market.* (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

> *I think people have to be willing to, who will pay more and have less. I mean rather then have a hundred pairs of shoes you have three pairs of shoes that are really nice. Like little things like that can bring certain types of manufacturing back to the States.* (Non-college white voters, New York)

At the same time, they questioned the cost implications and whether it would really make much of a difference, whether we could really go that far back in time. It is clear that discussion of issues such as the trade imbalance cause the eyes of many voters to simply glaze over. The mood of the discussion, after fiery and passionate back-and-forths on health care and energy, was more telling than anything else.

Understanding the Barriers to Action

Despite our obvious success in tapping into a deep vein of frustration among these voters and a desperation for dramatic change, their skepticism is deep, as is their commitment to their current lifestyles, most of which don't include any real effort to address the issues we've discussed. Overcoming their comfortable inertia and convincing them to take action is the ultimate goal of this project, and it must begin by understanding the existing barriers to action, the excuses and rationales that Millennials offer when confronted repeatedly with the same simple question – 'What can you do about it?' We identified six themes that emerged across these groups that capture the main impediments to action expressed by these voters:

1. **It doesn't work** – This is the most common and perhaps the most poisonous complaint we heard. These voters often look to the past, particularly their romanticized version of hippies and the 1960's, for examples of how young people have worked together to achieve social change and to advance common values. Yet they look at government and the media today, and they see no evidence that the protests or popular movements have any real impact.

> *Like I said before, I think people need to ban together in groups and really tackle these issues. Then again, look at illegal immigration. That was a huge thing in Los Angeles where millions of people got together and protested. Look what's that done. What did that accomplish? Nothing. So it comes back to the point of,*

at least from where I stand, what the hell does it really matter? What can any of us do? (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

In our country, the government is not afraid of the people. You look at other countries and when people are protesting, the government is actually afraid of the people. Some people have a say in that. I don't think people really have a say in this country. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I also think that the government is a little bit different than say like in the 60's, when you could organize a rally and the government would actually pay attention and take that into consideration when they are making their laws and things like that, so as not to piss off the masses. But nowadays it kind of seems like they don't really care. We have global gatherings on certain days about certain global issues and it's just completely ignored, at least in this country. And they do what they want when they want. And the only people that have any say in it are the people with a lot of money. (White parents, Los Angeles)

2. **The system is rigged** – The 2000 election had an undeniable impact on this generation's view of elections. If voting is the cornerstone of political engagement, and voting doesn't really matter because the outcome has been pre-ordained by corrupt politicians, then there is no motivation to engage at any other level either. Every election that sees more than 90 percent of incumbents returned to office or offers another 'lesser of two evils' choice between two candidates who simply personify the worst of partisan stereotypes serves to reinforce these doubts.

   Who believes in voting? It's all computerized. I don't trust the voting ballots. Look at what happened with George W. Bush in Florida. I don't trust it for a second. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

   Forgive me, but I don't think Bush was elected. I think he was kind of like….Put in the seat…And it's like where is the accountability? Well, I think it's pretty obvious…We don't have much say…And that to me as an individual, it kind of dissuades me from even wanting to vote. It's like, why? Why should I bother? (White parents, Los Angeles)

3. **I'm not old enough yet** – The last, and the least persuasive, of the structural complaints we heard is that these voters simply aren't old enough yet to make a difference.

   It's the baby boomers that are doing it all right now…Blame it on our parents, it's their fault…That hole has been dug already. To be able to change it, I don't know…Don't you have to be like thirty to be a senator or twenty-five to be a congressman or something like that? Forty-five to be a president or something?...So I mean you really can't do anything until you are that age. (White college grads, Birmingham)

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4. **Things aren't bad enough yet** – This goes right to the heart of the selfishness and materialism that these voters discussed at the outset of each group, as we sought to explore and deconstruct the motivations of their generation. As disgusted and cynical as they are on so many fronts, most still enjoy enough financial independence to chase the toys they so desperately crave and to achieve the limited, egocentric goals they set for themselves on a daily basis. Until an issue cuts close enough to home to interrupt their daily routine, it is still difficult to motivate many of these Millennials to action.

I feel people aren't going to take action until they are pushed to the point where they have to take action…As long as they are living their lives and you can go day to day and still have those comforts and you can still indulge yourself in things like I-Pods or computers or cable…People have revolutions when they are pushed to that breaking point. So, until we are pushed to that breaking point, I don't think you are going to see enough people taking action to have that big of an effect that you can see. (White college grads, New York)

5. **It's just too hard** – Similar to the last, but different in its final analysis, this rationale acknowledges the importance of the challenges facing our country but asks what one person can do about them.

I think that is where some of our selfish nature has come from. It is hard to help other people, and it is hard to make a difference, so I personally feel that I don't get into politics very much because I don't know what I could possibly do to make a difference. And it kind of rolls back to you know, like an independent generation that I have my beliefs and you have yours and yours and yours, and we just coexist and we make the best of it. (White suburban residents, Denver)

6. **I need instant gratification** – This complaint takes us back to where we started with the unique qualities of this generation and the impact that technology has had on them. If they are going to take the risk and get involved, they want to see short-term benefits from their actions rather than working toward some amorphous change off in the distance.

I would like to get more involved but I would want to get involved in something where it would actually make a difference like now I just sit around with my buddies. We're always talking political stuff but if I got involved in something I would definitely want to see some action…I think if you get involved and you do not see results, then you get frustrated with it and then you are done with it. (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

Waiting for a Hero

Despite all of the barriers to action outlined above, Millennials are not content to simply sit on their hands and do nothing as they continue to watch the country decline. They have a clear sense of the priorities that must be addressed, but the first step is always the hardest. As a

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generation, it appears that they do not yet possess the confidence and self-assuredness to claim the mantle of leadership.

I think it's having that dialogue whether it be on the internet, with each other on blogs and whatever else. But it's not enough have that conversation, that dialogue, that exchange of ideas, it's doing something. It's taking that next step and that's why I think that maybe our generation lacks a little bit of. (White college grads, New York)

I would say an example is Katrina. Something bad happens, so we all come together. Why does something bad have to happen for us to all come together? It seems like that community needed help a long time ago. It's the same thing when someone dies, we all come close together. Why weren't we close together before? Why does a funeral have to bring us close? (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

It's that feeling of apathy, that general malaise and it's the lack of hope. It takes an individual to really see everything that is going on, feel the necessity to change it and then actually go and do something about it even though you are going to be hit up against brick walls. It takes certain types of personalities. (White college grads, New York)

In past generations, you had people out there that you respected, out there talking about it that you could follow. Everybody is not a leader, so you need someone to follow, and we don't have anybody, anybody that is not bouncing a basketball or catching touchdowns. We don't have anybody. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

I think if we had a leader, somebody to kind of make us come together. Me at my house and you at your house we're not going to just… (Non-college white voters, New York)

Again, they look to the past, and they see that the models and vehicles for social change that existed in the past, by and large, are no longer a viable option.

Well, economists talk about this. Large companies are actually few, they are not that many people, but they are highly organized and they are able to organize because there is not that many of them. Consumers are so spread out and so disorganized and so far and wide that it is hard to be organized as a consumer. I mean unions at one point played that role, but they're not really anymore, and labor unions wouldn't really fill the role of solving this kind of problem today. (White suburban residents, Denver)

I think that in general we have lost faith in our President. So maybe I'm hopeful that whoever is next, regardless of what party, will be inspiring and make us want

to do something different. Because now we just kind of feel helpless I think, or at least I do. (Non-college white voters, New York)

We need a leadership that will, that we can get around and make that happen. Trusts were busted in the past under the administration of Teddy Roosevelt, and it's not impossible to do that today either. (White suburban residents, Denver)

They want to take action, they are not afraid to undertake bold changes and to challenge long-held traditions, but they want to be a part of a larger movement rather than creating a movement themselves. They are looking for leaders who share their values and their vision, but with the experience and knowledge to navigate the minefields of politics and the media.

I know there are a lot of people out there that are doing that same thing, that are just kind of traveling around and really making a difference about different things. Maybe Darfur, maybe Iraq, maybe the environment, but they don't get press because they are competing with Britney Spears. I think that there are those really great leaders out there and they are leading a lot of people, but we don't see it. (White parents, Los Angeles)

One person has to start it. Whether it would be corporate or the government, someone has to start it. (Hispanics, Los Angeles)

Others are waiting for a catalyst, some outside force or event that will be so dramatic that it will galvanize their generation, break down any divisions, and show the way forward.

There has to be some type of catalyst, something for everybody to rally behind and get behind. (White evangelicals, Denver)

There has to be a catalyst. You know we put somebody on the moon because we were afraid that the Russians were going to do it first so there has to be some catalyst that brings this whole nation together, Republican, Democrat, conservative, non-conservative, Muslim, Christian. (White evangelicals, Denver)

I think we are all getting fed up, hopefully in the next couple of years, not decades. There has got to be something. And people like us, our generation, is going to have the power. I'm optimistic. I think something is going to give...I think the first step is learning about it and becoming aware. That's where we are right now. We are learning more about it and we are becoming more aware. And then the next step is to kind of act upon it. (White parents, Los Angeles)

There were only a few who were willing to look inward for the leadership they believe is needed. But the sentiments they expressed suggest that there may be more leaders waiting in this generation, if they are given the confidence to lead and a better roadmap for the journey ahead.

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I think it takes more than just voting and waiting for something to happen in our own favor, I think it takes more leaders to point us in the direction of where to go. I think that it starts with ourselves. If you want to see a change in our community, if our community is very dirty, it starts with us holding that piece of garbage in our hands and finding a garbage and throwing it out...I think it starts from us starting community up again. (African-Americans, New York)

I say we can do it now. I totally agree that we can handle it now...I don't think any of us are going to just sit here and sit by the sidelines and wait twenty years for something to happen. I think our generation can do it and will do it. (Non-college white voters, New York)

We don't need somebody to come in and lead us, but we need somebody who can come and say you know what, you are all leaders, now lead yourselves. (African-Americans, New York)

Understanding Millennial Leadership

Among those Millennials who embrace the burden of leadership and see it as the natural outgrowth of their convictions and their unique understanding of the challenges facing the country, a model of a unique leadership style emerges. They see leadership as an inside-out process. It starts with the individual, making a conscious decision and then taking action in their own life. It spreads to their immediate communities, whether it be friends, online acquaintances, or groups to which they belong such as neighborhood associations or parent committees at school. It then builds, predominantly through use of the Internet and online social networking tools, to a collective social movement.

1. **If not me, then who?** – The model for a uniquely Millennial style of leadership begins with the conscious decision to reject the tradition of waiting until a certain age to assume a position of leadership in one's community and to overcome their own innate concerns and inertia. And respondents made it clear to us that understanding the stakes before us and the failure of current leaders should be all the evidence that is needed.

   We need to do something. We need to make a change in order for us to survive at 50, 60 and I think if we don't do something and I think that is where our family comes in, we're protective of our family but that is kind of the greater good, we need to step up and do something about the way that the world is going. (White evangelicals, Denver)

   I think accurate information and truth gets me in a place where I want to act. (White suburban residents, Denver)

   I think necessity will make it happen. When people realize how ill-prepared we are for the future, and different areas of society start crumbling, like health care,

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Social Security, we are, I think, the most prepared generation. We're probably the most educated generation. I think what would really push us into the forefront is seeing that if we don't do it, there's going to be serious consequences. (Hispanics, Denver)

2. **Be the change you wish to see** – Millennials clearly embrace this central teaching of Gandhi, as they repeatedly stressed that any change you wish to see in the world must start in your own life and your own home. This speaks to the sense of personal integrity and authenticity that they feel is so lacking in today's leaders.

Individual action is the most important thing and the only option you have. I don't know who said it, but a great journey starts with the first step. It's all about the individual action...Yeah, you can't start anything without individual action...And you can't really think of it that way. You can't really think of it as, 'Is what I'm doing going to help?' You just kind of have to do it. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I think it's each individual person. If you want to make a difference, you can make a difference. If you think you can't, then you won't...It's a cop-out to say I can't make a difference. It starts with recycling or whatever it is, I don't have to drive a fifteen-mile to the gallon car, I can drive a hybrid. I have that choice. I can conserve. I can do these things and so we all can make a difference. It's a matter of whether we want to or not. (White college grads, Birmingham)

I think it still takes younger people to step up so that you can lead by example yourself. If you can step up and get more younger people in the limelight they are going to see that and go, "Oh my gosh, I can do this." (White evangelicals, Birmingham)

If you're going to have a voice in something, yeah, you can pray about it. But I think that you need to take action. You need to move forward. If that means you need to write letters to your local government. There are things in the newspaper, editorials, opinions. If you don't like something and you don't like the school system, go to PTA meetings. Go to different things that, I just think that there are so many things that people have an opportunity to speak out. We just kind of brush it aside. Yet we complain. We talk about the schools, but what are we really doing? Are we volunteering in the schools to help the teachers and aides? (African-Americans, Birmingham)

3. **Exercise consumer power** – Because they are a generation so driven by money and material goods, they understand the power of the wallet. They also believe that the larger institutions in our society respond to money above all else, and if you want to get their attention, you have to hit them where it hurts. Exercising consumer power is a relatively simple way for these voters to express their values and to establish the authenticity required for leadership.

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I feel like sometimes, I feel that the only power I have is my consumer power. So I can choose what I buy, who I buy from, where I buy from, the stores I buy from, and who I definitely won't buy from. And I am just one person, but sorry, I don't go into WalMart. (White suburban residents, Denver)

I think we have a lot of power with our dollar too. Really pay attention to what you buy and make a statement with that. If a lot of people do it, it makes a difference. A couple of months ago I noticed Ralph's came out with their own organic line. I was really excited. I don't have to go to three different stores to get my stuff. That is because people are buying more organic and they are responding to that need. If you buy less plastic…They'll start making less of it… And it also goes full circle. You are not only not providing that demand, but you are also not creating that waste. There's just a lot of different things that you can do with what you buy. (White parents, Los Angeles)

At what point are people demanding the things, interested in the kinds of things and then the company says we have the potential to market something new. We are a capitalist market economy so to the extent that we become informed, we become more demanding and have newer, better interest, so that is not going to solve itself but that situation where companies see that they have an opportunity and incentive to create new and better things. (White suburban residents, Denver)

4. **Word of mouth** – The first step in this model of Millennial leadership beyond individual action is spreading the good news by word of mouth. This is a step with which most are still comfortable, and they view it more as activism than leadership. They don't yet see it as putting themselves out there for public inspection and scrutiny. The word of mouth stage is still relatively intimate and less intimidating, but it requires developing a rationale and a cogent argument in support of their chosen position. And by sharing their beliefs and actions with those closest to them, they are planting the seeds of a larger collective social movement.

The more people you talk to about it, the more people might do something, might make a call, might write a letter. And I was never moved until I had a child, which is why I'm more interested in taking a stand. Anything that contributes to something being easier for her, healthier, safer for her, I get involved in. I think just having kids in itself moves people forward to wanting to make a change in these areas. (White parents, Los Angeles)

It has to just build person to person. The best way to make things happen is naturally, and I think that it can work that way. If one person tells a hundred people and five of those people believe and each one of those five people can spread that to another one or two people and things will eventually grow. (Non-college white voters, New York)

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5. **Develop a plan** – When these individuals make the decision to go beyond their personal communities, they know they have tremendous resources upon which to draw, particularly the successes and failures of previous generations. And they know that, in order to overcome the same skepticism they themselves harbor, they must be able to show not only that their cause is worthy but that their prescription for action will produce real results.

Show me that it works. I would have to show them that something actually works. Then you get a lot of people to jump on board. If they did it there, then you can do it here…Show me if you have a plan. I've been to organizations and you go there and you expect to see that it's kind of developed. And you get there and it's just confusion and you don't see a developed plan. So that would be a turn off. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

I think this generation has a greater potential to make changes…Because of all the knowledge of a lot of the things that the people before us made possible for us. We have knowledge of that, we have knowledge of technology now, we have knowledge of business…We have all of these different resources at our disposal now. (African-Americans, New York)

Use the technological advances that we have beyond for the idiocy that we use it for. Like she said, it's a new medium, it's a new way of thinking. 60's marches, they threw rocks, that era is over. If we do have these luxuries, use them. (African-Americans, New York)

6. **Harness the technology** – The Internet is not only the greatest tool for gathering information available to these voters, it is also the greatest tool for disseminating information. This generation is fully conversant in the language, the customs, and the protocols of social networking and video sharing tools such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube, and they know that this is the most effective way to reach other Millennials in a way that can really resonate. And again, they can look to successful examples from the past to shape their online communications strategy.

I think with the Jena Six March and everyone went out, marching isn't the same and petitions aren't the same. I think our generation, we just need to be a lot more creative. When I say creative, YouTube is a big thing right now…We are in the technology age and we just have to find something that is so universal and it's not going to be limited to like TV1 where only certain cable stations get it. Something where we are able to produce an opinion…Those things, they give a different opinion, so there has to be an outlet that we can create of our own. (African-Americans, New York)

The truth of the matter is that, with the internet now, you can share your ideas and have it go to everyone in every country all over the world. I think if we have

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great ideas and if we want to make change the internet and You Tube and all these technology type things is where we should look to do that. (White college grads, New York)

A video comes up on You Tube and it's funny as shit, ten people might send it to you and you might send it out to another ten people. It's as easy as that. A video can get 100,000 hits in like a week. (Non-college white voters, Los Angeles)

I mean you see these multimillion user things go up in video games and online message boards and chat rooms and My Space and Face Book and I think there is a chance that you have a situation where something somehow galvanizes this large group of people together and some change would come from it, but that's the kind of thing that happen organically not manufactured. (Non-college white voters, New York)

7. **Launch a collective social movement** – Our polling showed that Millennials viewed collective social movements as the most effective means for enacting change, so it is no surprise that this is the final step in their leadership paradigm. As their word of mouth and online efforts grow, the challenge is to continue to provide fresh information and to keep their network of individuals engaged, even as they simultaneously seek to keep it growing.

What happened to collective change? …When you get a group of people together, they can change their corner of the world and that can spread. That sounds like a great story, but I really believe that. I think it has to be a collective change. That we're not necessarily bound by the government. We have to take it upon ourselves. (African-Americans, Birmingham)

Talk to every person you know about an issue, what you're going to stand on, write to your elected officials, attend the hearings, be more vocal out there, letters to the editor, websites, you've got unlimited information, unlimited access. (White college grads, New York)

You know it has to start somewhere so if you get the amount of people, even if there is a few steps then those few steps will grow and you just, the support increases. (White college grads, New York)

The success of any such effort is dependent on successful execution and commitment at all stages of the process, but the model is the most important lesson for our efforts. This is a uniquely Millennial approach, combining the technology that has shaped them with the values that drive them and seeking to make a difference, starting with themselves and then branching out along the many networks that connect them to the world around them.

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