The Missing Link in Reconciliation Messaging: Meeting Americans Basic Needs
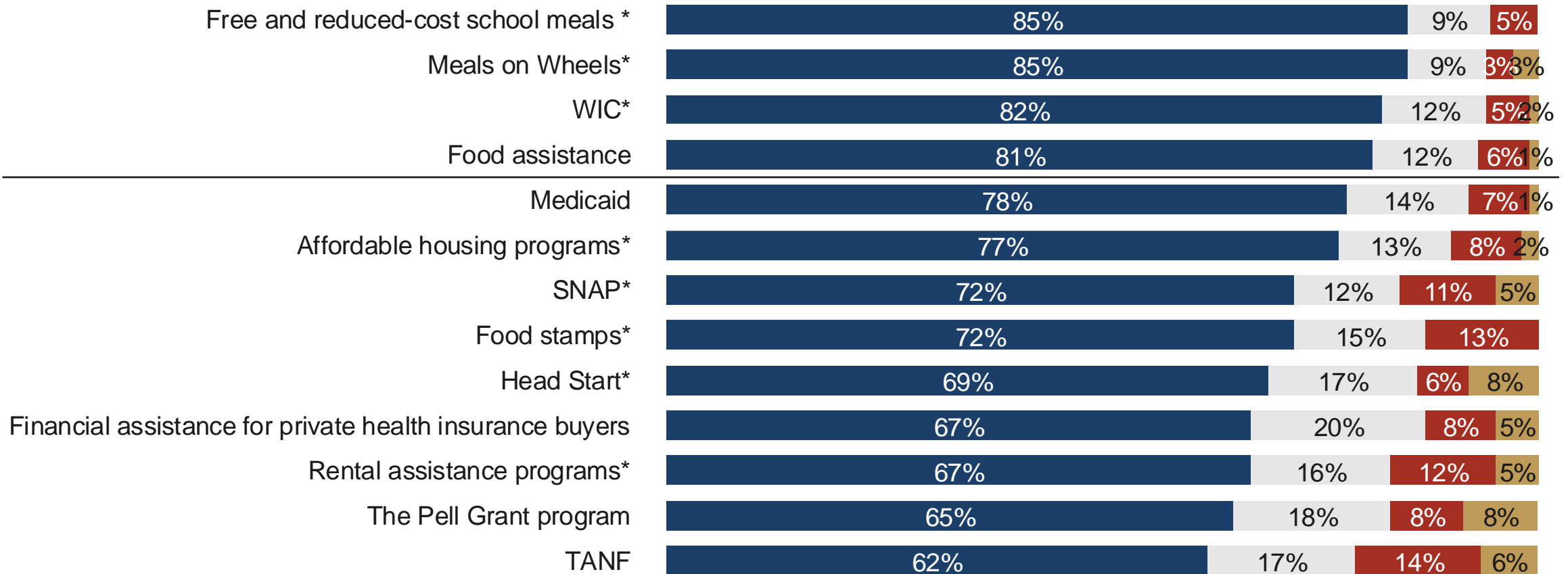
*Analysis prepared by **Geoff Garin, Guy Molyneux** and **Livia Baer-Bositis** at **Hart Research** on behalf of a coalition working to protect services for Americans in need including the Center for American Progress, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, National Women's Law Center, Community Change, and the Coalition for Human Needs among other partners.*

Positive view of endangered programs, especially health and nutrition programs.
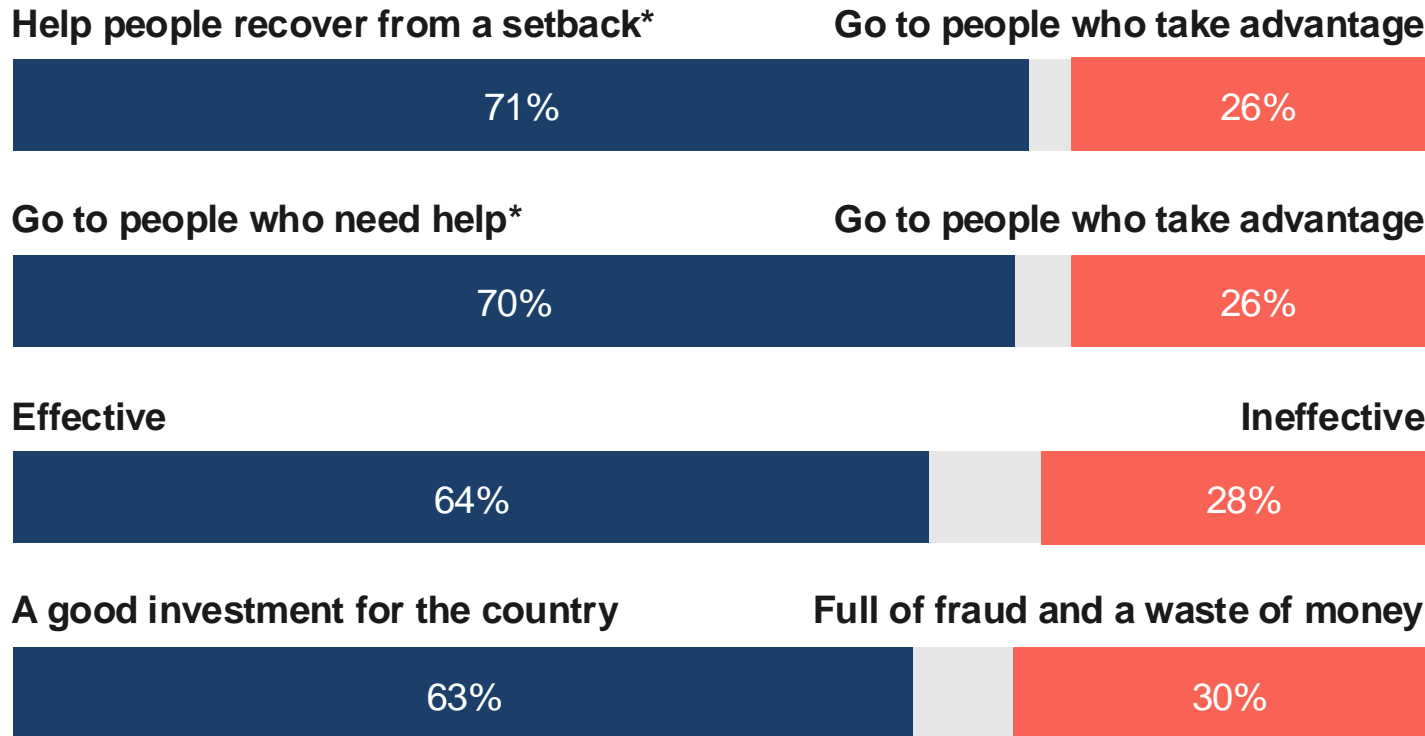
Rating of feelings

■ Favorable　　□ Neutral　　■ Unfavorable　　■ Not familiar

Free and reduced-cost school meals *	85%	9%	5%	
Meals on Wheels*	85%	9%	3%	3%
WIC*	82%	12%	5%	2%
Food assistance	81%	12%	6%	1%
Medicaid	78%	14%	7%	1%
Affordable housing programs*	77%	13%	8%	2%
SNAP*	72%	12%	11%	5%
Food stamps*	72%	15%	13%	
Head Start*	69%	17%	6%	8%
Financial assistance for private health insurance buyers	67%	20%	8%	5%
Rental assistance programs*	67%	16%	12%	5%
The Pell Grant program	65%	18%	8%	8%
TANF	62%	17%	14%	6%

Asked of one-half of respondents.

Solid Ground: Majorities reject negative characterizations of programs. The impact of the "fraud" attack is clear.
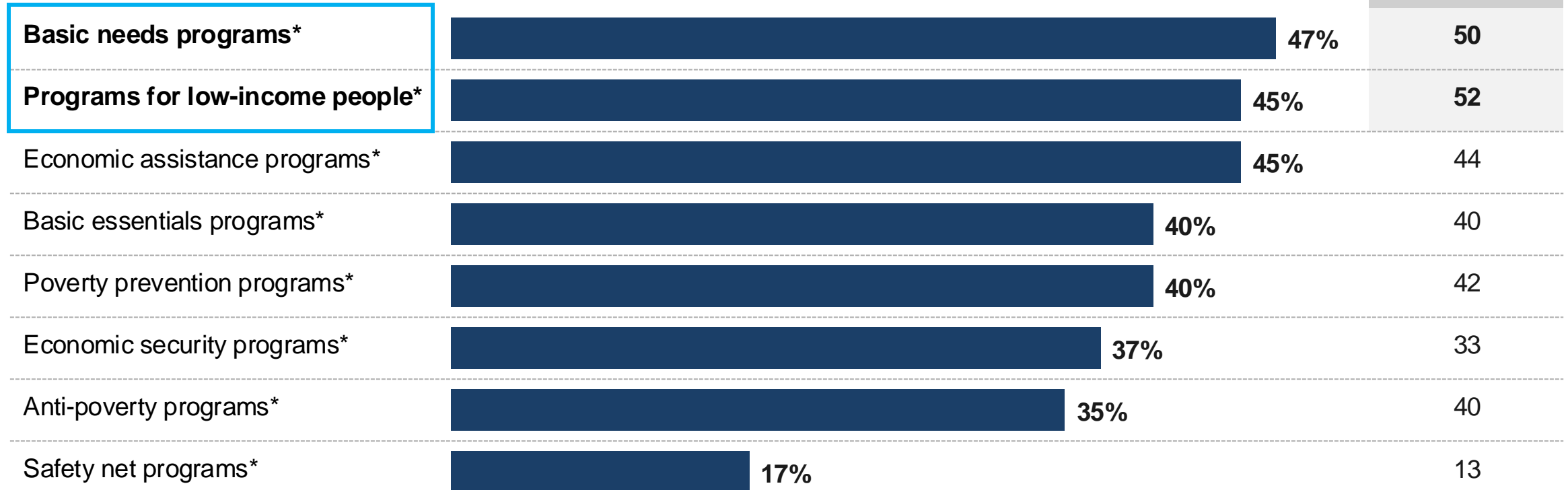
Which phrase better describes these programs?

Help people recover from a setback* **Go to people who take advantage**

| 71% | 26% |

Go to people who need help* **Go to people who take advantage**

| 70% | 26% |

Effective **Ineffective**

| 64% | 28% |

A good investment for the country **Full of fraud and a waste of money**

| 63% | 30% |

Asked of one-half of respondents.

Recover vs Advantage Investment vs Fraud	**Net Recover**	**Net Invest**	**Fraud impact**
All voters	+44	+33	-11
Liberal Democrats	**+73**	**+75**	**+2**
Non-liberal Democrats	+66	+55	-11
Independents	**+51**	**+39**	**-12**
Non-MAGA Republicans	**+30**	**+15**	**-15**
Republicans	+19	-1	-20
Opposed to Bill	+72	+67	-5
Neutral to Bill	**+31**	**+13**	**-18**
18-49	**+53**	**+48**	**-5**
50+	**+36**	**+18**	**-18**
White Low-Income	**+50**	**+34**	**-16**
$40K>	+49	+41	-8
$40-75K	+51	+35	-16
$75K+	+36	+26	-10

HART RESEARCH

3

Best descriptions make clear that programs benefit people who <u>need</u> help.

Top THREE highest priorities for government funding today:

		Key House districts %
Basic needs programs*	47%	**50**
Programs for low-income people*	45%	**52**
Economic assistance programs*	45%	44
Basic essentials programs*	40%	40
Poverty prevention programs*	40%	42
Economic security programs*	37%	33
Anti-poverty programs*	35%	40
Safety net programs*	17%	13

*Half of respondents saw "services" not "programs" in the question text and description of the government programs.

"Basic needs" and "economic assistance" are strong descriptors for Americans without set views on the budget bill, the "safety net" is not.

Top THREE highest priorities for government funding today:

	All Voters	Feelings toward budget bill			
		Strongly oppose	**Somewhat oppose**	**Neutral**	**Favor**
Basic needs programs*	**47%**	**57%**	**49%**	**49%**	31%
Programs for low-income people*	**45%**	**63%**	47%	36%	22%
Economic assistance programs*	**45%**	53%	**50%**	**42%**	**32%**
Basic essentials programs*	40%	44%	42%	41%	**32%**
Poverty prevention programs*	40%	56%	37%	30%	21%
Economic security programs*	37%	31%	42%	37%	**42%**
Anti-poverty programs*	35%	50%	39%	23%	16%
Safety net programs*	17%	22%	12%	13%	15%

HART RESEARCH

Half of respondents saw "services" not "programs" in the question text and description of the government programs.

Voters' <u>want</u> these programs to help vulnerable people in need.

Open Ended: How would you describe the people who participate in these programs? (Based on responses)

43%   **Helps the poor/low income, less fortunate**

24%   **Helps people who <u>need</u> a helping hand, little bit of help, more opportunity**

20%   **Helps families/children, low-income family assistance, single parent households**

13%   Helps people who need economic relief, helps with the high cost of living

11%   Helps the lazy abuse the system, fraudsters

10%   Helps the elderly/seniors

8%   Helps people with disabilities, chronic health conditions

6%   Necessary, helpful programs

Top THREE highest priorities:

49%   **Help the most vulnerable people, like children and people with disabilities***

43%   **Help families afford the high cost of essentials, like food, healthcare, housing***

36%   Help Americans who need support *

35%   Help people get back on their feet and achieve independence

35%   Reduce fraud and abuse in these programs

27%   Make sure only American citizens receive support

25%   Require able-bodied people to work

25%   Make sure people have economic security*

21%   Make sure people have the opportunity to succeed*

12%   Reduce the cost of these programs

Asked of one-half of respondents.

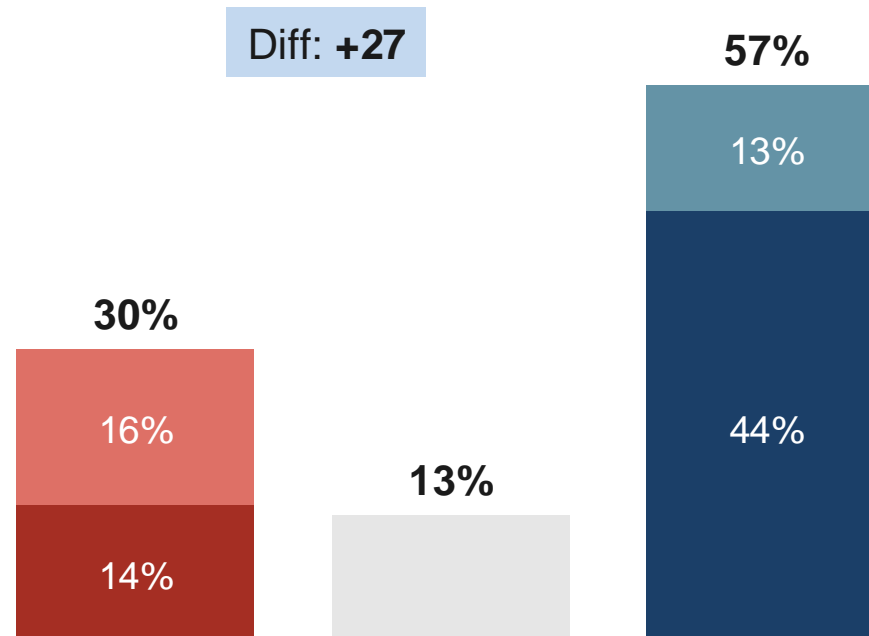# Voters strongly oppose the Administration's budget bill.

Description prior to question:

President Trump and Republicans in Congress are proposing a budget bill that would do the following:

- **Cut Medicaid, food stamps, and other safety net programs**

- Increase border security

- Extend all tax cuts in the Trump tax law, including those for the wealthy

Do you favor or oppose this budget bill that includes ALL of these elements?

■ Strongly favor ■ Somewhat favor ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat oppose ■ Strongly oppose

Diff: **+27**

30%
- 16%
- 14%

13%

57%
- 13%
- 44%

OPPOSE-FAVOR	Net opposition
Key House districts	+38
Urban	+39
Suburban	+25
Rural	+18
Democrats	+79
Independents	+46
Republicans	-26
White voters	+19
Black voters	+64
Latino voters	+30
AAPI voters	+38
White low-income voters	+28
<$40k HHI	+36
$40-75k HHI	+26
$75k+ HHI	+21
Medicaid beneficiaries	+44
SNAP beneficiaries	+49

HART RESEARCH

The most important attacks to guard against focus on fraud and abuse – not the threat of a large tax increase.

This is a VERY (8-10) convincing reason to support the budget bill:

Strongest Message:
Reduce Fraud

49% Very Convincing

Weakest Message:
Tax Increase

35% Very Convincing

The federal government is wasting American taxpayers' money **by allowing massive fraud and abuse**. It's time to stop handing out blank checks and put Americans first. Assistance should go to those in need--not people who are able to work but don't.*

Congress must pass the Trump Agenda to secure the border, strengthen national security, and boost American-made energy. Failure to pass this budget bill will **automatically trigger the largest tax increase in American history**, raising taxes on the average family by nearly $2,000 a year to fund government waste.
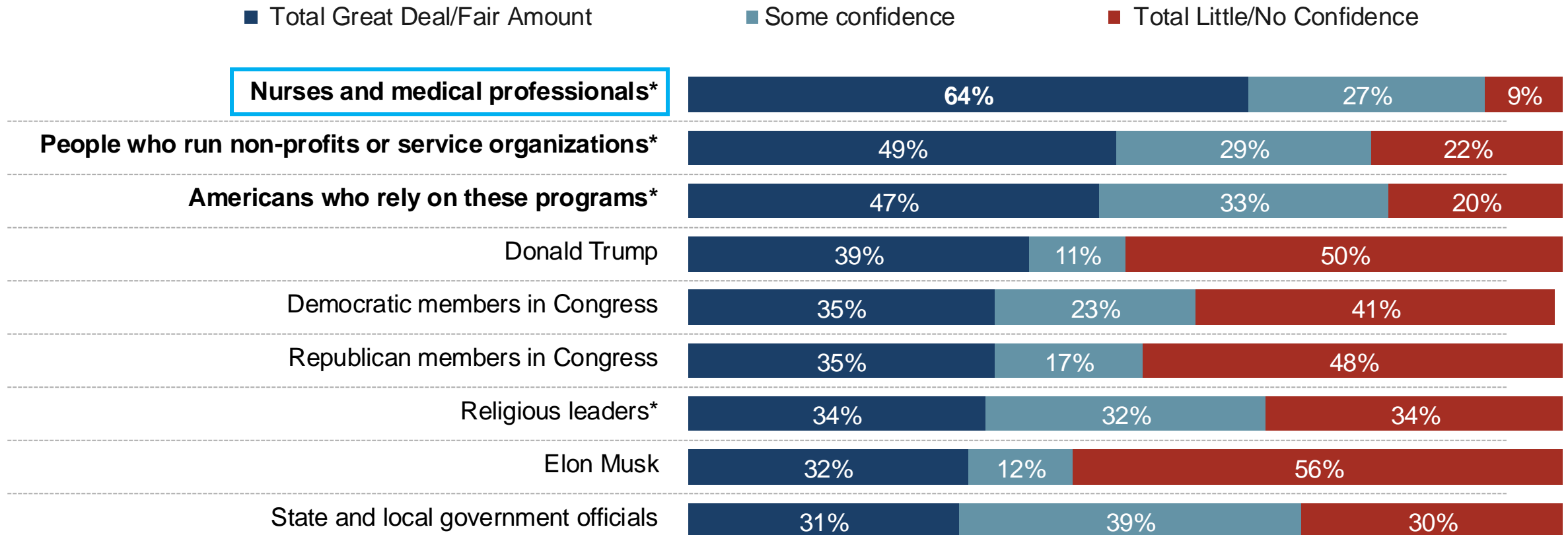
Stronger with **white non-college women (55%)** and **low-income whites (53%),** also strong with **non-liberal Democrats (42%).**

Weaker with **Independents (17%)** and **non-liberal Democrats (20%),** only average with **white non-college women (36%).**

HART RESEARCH

Strongest messages against the budget show you demand change, and contrasts against a cruel plan that harms Americans to benefit the wealthy.

		All Voters	Feelings toward budget bill (MaxDiff)			
			Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neutral	Favor
WORK BETTER / TAX WEALTHY	We don't need to cut services--we need to make them work better. Instead of gutting healthcare, food assistance, and public schools, Congress should fix them by making the wealthy pay what they owe in taxes. That would help everyone afford the basics like healthcare, groceries, and housing.	136	132	137	129	144
COST OF LIVING	The cost of living is hurting everyone, and any of us could be just one paycheck away from a crisis. These programs have been a safety net when Americans fall on hard times. We must protect and strengthen them so they're always there when we or our loved ones need them.	130	118	130	141	145
HIT CHILDREN HARDEST	These cuts will hit children the hardest and we will pay a steep price for them down the road. Less school support means more kids fall behind. Less food assistance for families means more kids go hungry. Less housing assistance means more families get evicted, leaving more children homeless. We can't afford to bankrupt our future.	123	126	135	121	113

HART RESEARCH

Confidence in potential messengers can unify the story.

How much confidence do you have in ___ to have the right views and positions when dealing with safety net programs?

■ Total Great Deal/Fair Amount   ■ Some confidence   ■ Total Little/No Confidence

	Total Great Deal/Fair Amount	Some confidence	Total Little/No Confidence
Nurses and medical professionals*	64%	27%	9%
People who run non-profits or service organizations*	49%	29%	22%
Americans who rely on these programs*	47%	33%	20%
Donald Trump	39%	11%	50%
Democratic members in Congress	35%	23%	41%
Republican members in Congress	35%	17%	48%
Religious leaders*	34%	32%	34%
Elon Musk	32%	12%	56%
State and local government officials	31%	39%	30%

HART RESEARCH

Asked of one-half of respondents.

We tested videos opposing cuts to basic needs programs like Medicaid and SNAP. Three were <u>informal</u>, one from a creator.

Senator Chris Murphy (informal)
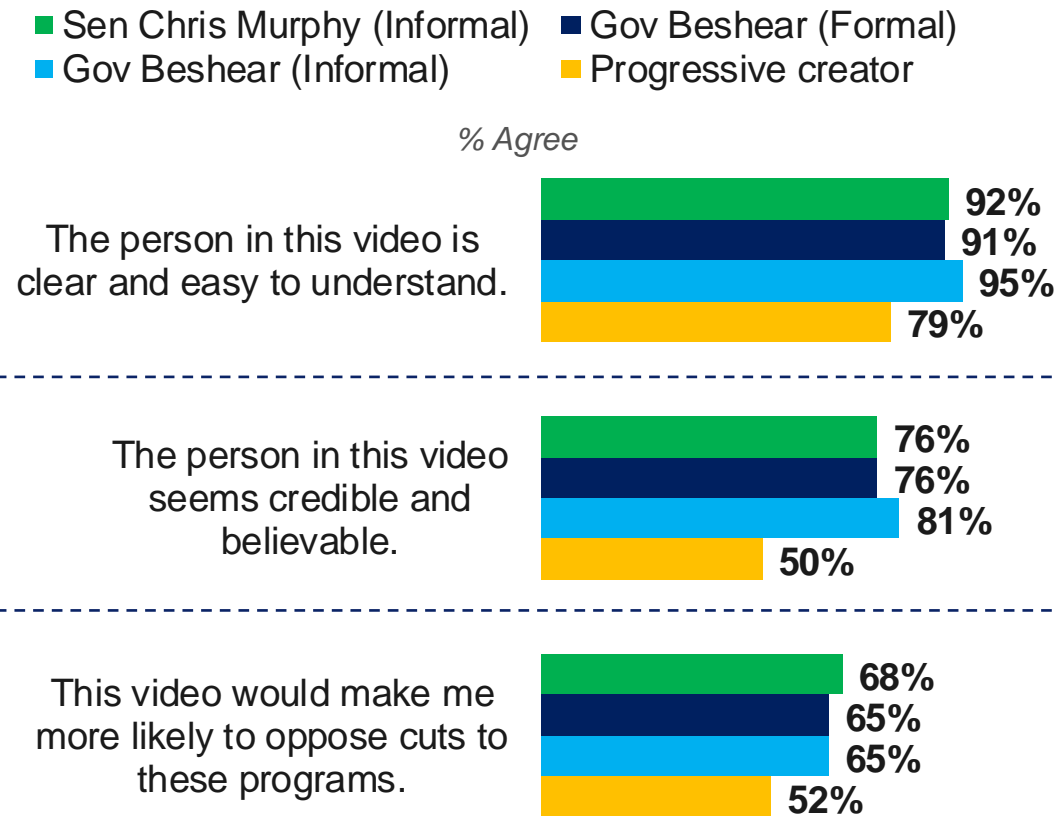*(1:31 minutes)*

Kentucky Governor Beshear (formal)
(0:49 minutes)

Kentucky Governor Beshear (informal)
(0:53 minutes)

A progressive content creator
(1:47 minutes)

HART RESEARCH

The informal videos from Senator Murphy and Governor Beshear performed the best. An informal format increased credibility especially with typically less engaged people.

Legend:
- ■ Sen Chris Murphy (Informal)   ■ Gov Beshear (Formal)
- ■ Gov Beshear (Informal)   ■ Progressive creator

% Agree

The person in this video is clear and easy to understand.
- Sen Chris Murphy (Informal): 92%
- Gov Beshear (Formal): 91%
- Gov Beshear (Informal): 95%
- Progressive creator: 79%

The person in this video seems credible and believable.
- Sen Chris Murphy (Informal): 76%
- Gov Beshear (Formal): 76%
- Gov Beshear (Informal): 81%
- Progressive creator: 50%

This video would make me more likely to oppose cuts to these programs.
- Sen Chris Murphy (Informal): 68%
- Gov Beshear (Formal): 65%
- Gov Beshear (Informal): 65%
- Progressive creator: 52%

This person seems *CREDIBLE* and *BELIEVABLE*:	Beshear / Formal %	Beshear / Informal %	Advantage
All voters	76	81	+5 Informal
Liberal Democrats	95	91	**+4 Formal**
Non-liberal Democrats	86	94	**+8 Informal**
Independents	69	74	+5 Informal
Republicans	62	73	+11 Informal
Moderates	**77**	**84**	**+7 Informal**
Neutral on Bill	**64**	**79**	**+15 Informal**
Under $40k HHI	**74**	**85**	**+11 Informal**
$40-75k HHI	73	81	**+8 Informal**
$75K+ HHI	79	79	**None**
White voters <40k HHI	**73**	**84**	**+11 Informal**
Non-college	**73**	**82**	**+9 Informal**
College+	80	81	+1 Informal
Medicaid beneficiaries	81	89	+8 Informal
SNAP beneficiaries	81	88	+7 Informal

HART RESEARCH

Key Messaging Takeaways

1. **One story on costs:** Place this in the context of <u>unaffordable prices</u>, to help Americans identify with the challenges facing those in need and see themselves as part of the story. With tariffs, economic uncertainty, cuts to food banks and rising grocery bills, officials who fight for their constituents' basic needs will be on a strong foundation.

2. **Basic needs:** All these services help Americans meet <u>basic needs</u>, such as **food** and **healthcare** which had strong support. These services are <u>essential</u> – there is nothing extravagant about them.

3. **Demand better:** Americans want these programs to work, and <u>taxing the wealthy</u> is a much better way to address any budget problems than cutting off vulnerable people from basic needs.

4. **Fraud:** Opponents' strongest argument is that they are only targeting fraud and abuse – supporters should contest fraud and emphasize they are <u>cutting the heart out of these programs, not the fat</u>. This isn't an argument won on whether fraud exists or not, the supporters of the budget are already decimating the core of these programs.

5. **Children:** Focus on how these programs help <u>children</u> and disabled people. Americans understand that cutting services to needy children will impose long-term costs on the country.

6. **Informal Content**: Vertical video and other informal content is especially effective at connecting with lower-income and non-college Americans. These groups are less set in their views on issues.

HART
RESEARCH