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From: Navigator Research

To: Interested Parties

Re: Do's and Don'ts of Communicating about a Government Shutdown

Date: March 11, 2025

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As the March 14th deadline to avert a government shutdown approaches, the foundational argument from progressives should be: *This shutdown is caused by Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress, who have full control of government and are requiring that any budget continues Elon Musk's DOGE cuts. Musk's DOGE cuts that are already impacting veterans' health care access, medical research, and the FAA.*

Navigator Research data shows a 40-point difference between Democrats making the case that they are supporting a budget as long as it doesn't do harmful things (70% support - 30% oppose) versus Democrats opposing a budget in order to stop harmful things (54% support - 46% oppose). Democrats should make the proactive case that Trump and Republicans' position is driving the shutdown

In fact, as the programs Americans rely on continue to be put at risk—whether through cuts from Elon Musk's DOGE or from Republican reconciliation packages—Americans believe the government should actually invest [more in programs like Social Security and Medicare, benefits for veterans, K-12 education, and reducing child poverty.](#)

Over the weeks ahead, when communicating about a potential government shutdown, there are two strategic communications priorities: (A) **Blame with reasoning:** Make clear the government shutdown is because Republicans have full control of government and will not put forward a budget without cuts to programs people depend on. (B) **Emphasize impacts with consequences:** Highlight how the programs being taken away because of this shutdown have real impacts on people's lives.

Before the shutdown even happens, Republicans in Congress are [seen as responsible for a potential shutdown by a 20-point margin.](#)

✓ DO...	● DON'T...
Place the blame for a government shutdown entirely on Trump and Republicans in Congress by emphasizing that they have complete control of the federal government.	Make this about Democrats in Congress reaching an agreement with Republicans – Republicans in Congress are choosing to disregard the livelihoods of millions of Americans at risk.
Characterize this potential shutdown as an extension of their ongoing purge of the	Let this be seen as accidental or a moment in time instead of a long-sought goal.

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<p>federal government led by Elon Musk's DOGE. This is just the next step.</p>	
<p>Address the real devastating impacts on Americans – highlighting things that are taken away and risks ahead of us (for a recent list of consequences from past potential shutdowns, please see here for previous <a href="#">Navigator work</a>).</p>	<p>Dive into the process of a government shutdown and neglect to put the impacts of real people front and center in your argument.</p>
<p>Hold Republicans in Congress accountable for what they <i>are</i> willing to spend tax payer dollars on: tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations while shutting down the government for working people.</p>	<p>Concede the motivation of Republicans in Congress to cut programs and bolster DOGE: so they can pay for tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans.</p>
<p>Talk about government employees who facilitate important functions of day to day life and will be put on leave/fired because of the shutdown.</p>	<p>Talk about government employees being “furloughed” or likely to get back pay or talk about government employees without specifying what kind of work they do.</p>