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To: Interested Parties

Fr: Justice Democrats, Sunrise Movement, New Deal Strategies, Data For Progress

Re: GA Victories Show What Happens When Democrats Follow Grassroots Progressives

Dt: January 6, 2021

Tuesday's victories in the Georgia Senate races show the gains that can be accomplished when Democratic leaders follow the leadership of progressives and the grassroots. Back in November, our organizations [issued a memo](#) calling on Democrats to do three things: reclaim a populist economic message, invest in a progressive, base-turnout-ground-up organizing strategy, and run against McConnell. In a [memo](#) on December 10, we urged Democrats to run on direct checks. In the Georgia runoffs, Democrats did all of these things and won. Tuesday's victories happened because of the infrastructure and deep-work built through decades of grassroots organizing and base-building led by Black Georgians, Georgians of color, and progressive and Democratic organizers. It also happened because of the willingness of the Warnock and Ossoff campaigns to be responsive to shortcomings in the general election and feedback on how they could build upon and improve their campaign strategies.

Invest in a progressive ground-up organizing strategy. Progressives urged national Democrats to invest in grassroots organizing, base turnout and mobilization, and break the cookie-cutter mold and strategies of conventional candidates. Thanks to the organizing efforts of leaders like Stacey Abrams, LaTosha Brown, Cliff Albright, Nse Ufot, Rebecca Hart, Lauren Groh-Wargo and grassroots organizations such as Mijente, Fair Fight Action, New Georgia Project, GALEO Black Voters Matter, Asian American Advocacy Fund, SONG Power, Color of Change, Working Families Party, Indivisible, Sunrise Movement and many more, as well as the efforts of the Georgia Democratic Party, the campaigns themselves, and the Democratic coordinated campaign, there was historic turnout of voters for the Democratic candidates. Tonight, although both Democratic candidates won, it is worth noting that Warnock, who received late-coming support from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, consistently outperformed Ossoff in county after county. And once again, the hard work of grassroots organizations carried both candidates to victory. As Senator Doug Jones [said](#), "Stacey Abrams' work in Georgia should be a model for the party. The DSCC and DCCC spend too much time investing in candidates and not the electorate. They don't invest in House districts, they don't invest in states." The national party should spend less time and money trying to hand-pick candidates and dictating to the grassroots, and more time investing in the grassroots and listening

to them. In Georgia, that looked like a strategy first and foremost focused on registering and turning out Democratic base voters, especially Black voters, other voters of color, and young people. When we focus on our voters and the base of the party, we win.

Direct checks: Reclaiming a populist economic message. Direct checks played a key role in the Democratic victories tonight, but they were only on the table because progressives forced them there. On December 1st, Democratic leaders ruled out direct checks by rushing to [embrace](#) a \$900B bipartisan framework that excluded checks. By December 13th, Democratic leaders [were even ready to drop below the \\$900B bipartisan baseline](#) to \$748B, still excluding the checks and now jettisoning state aid. With a last-minute pressure campaign, progressives [forced](#) direct checks back onto the table. In a [memo](#) on December 10, we urged Democrats to take up a populist economic message and run on direct checks in Georgia, an issue that wasn't just the right thing to do but was politically popular: [78%](#) of national voters support additional \$2,000 coronavirus relief checks according to Data for Progress, a mantle Georgia Democrats picked up. Senators-elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff [ran hard on](#) the checks, which became a mainstay of both paid and earned media, demonstrably proving the value of running on policies that are overwhelmingly popular with the electorate. By any credible analysis, direct checks played a major role in the races — but if it were not for progressives, Democratic leaders would have abandoned direct checks months ago. Progressive activists pushed to keep direct cash relief as a part of the conversation, and progressive Members of Congress like Bernie Sanders, Ed Markey, Rashida Tlaib, Ro Khanna, and more made sure it stayed on the legislative agenda. The simple fact is that progressives' message of multiracial economic populism is far more compelling to voters than anything Democratic leaders offered in 2020 — an election in which the economy was voters' top concern. The progressive vision offers voters a government that produces clear, tangible results that improve their lives, rather than abstract technocracy.

Run against McConnell: Warnock and Ossoff made McConnell the villain. Rather than playing into McConnell's hands by elevating him as a good-faith negotiating partner in a vain attempt to chase the outdated politics of a bygone era, Warnock and Ossoff ran hard against McConnell, explaining to Georgia voters that McConnell was the main force standing between them and direct improvements in their daily lives. McConnell is deeply unpopular, but Democrats frequently decline to take advantage of his unpopularity on a systematic basis in campaigns. Instead of lending McConnell precious credibility by talking him up as a good-faith negotiating partner, which he is not and never will be, Democrats should hold him up as the villain he is. Warnock and Ossoff did this, and won.

Whatever their other differences, the Georgia runoffs proved that it is time for Democratic leaders to embrace progressives on at least three key points:

- Embrace an aggressive, populist economic message
- Run against Mitch McConnell

- Invest in the grassroots

As the Peach State proved, this is the way to fight Republicans and win. But now that we've won all levers of power, the real work begins. What are we going to do with the power we have and how many American lives are we going to choose to save? Democrats must meet the needs of working people with urgency and solutions that address the scale of our problems so we can see visible and tangible changes to people's lives, especially this year.