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Overall Narrative

In America, we value our freedom. Working people deserve the same freedom corporate CEOs have: the freedom to negotiate a fair return on our work so we can provide for our families. But billionaires and corporate CEOs pay politicians to do their bidding, chipping away at the freedoms people in unions have won for all of us.

Real freedom is about more than making a living; it's also about having time to take a loved one to the doctor, attend a parent-teacher conference and retire in dignity.

We need the power in numbers of unions to protect things our families need like Social Security, health benefits, and paid time off to care for our loved ones. We are a nation of people that fight for our rights. We must protect our freedom to join together in union so we have the power in numbers to rewrite the rules for our families. Standing together, we can fight for our freedom to prosper.

Key Research Findings and Narrative Principles

We can and must own 'Freedom'. Our message anchored on freedom beats the opposition messaging on freedom, job creation and the free market.

Lead with an aspirational message and shared values. Leading with problems depresses enthusiasm of the base and turns away persuadable listeners.

Define the villain. Supporting our solutions requires a clear origin story for current problems: the rich and powerful are rigging the rules to take away our freedom.

Speak about work through the lens of family. The gains people seek and the motivation to join together in union comes from desire to provide for and have time with family, not merely improve conditions at the worksite.

Broaden what working people in union fight to achieve. Move beyond transactional "wages and working conditions" to affordable health care, clean and safe environments and workplaces, good schools, Social Security, and Medicare.

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Opposition Attacks and Our Rebuttals

They say...

Right to Work laws guarantee our freedom to work hard and achieve success on our own terms.

Our response...

These laws take away our freedom to join together and negotiate for a fair return on our work.

if time add...

Working people simply want the same freedom corporate CEOs have: the freedom to come together in union to negotiate a fair return on our work. Real freedom is about more than making a living; it's also about having time to take a loved one to the doctor, attend a conference at your kid's school and retire in dignity.

They say...

You shouldn't be forced to pay dues to a union just to keep your job.

Our response...

Billionaires and corporate CEOs know that standing together in union is how we take back our freedom to prosper. That's why they're rigging the rules to take away our freedom to come together in union.

They say...

Letting the free market work without too much regulation is what creates jobs and raises wages.

Our response...

The way ensure every American can have a good job with a fair return on our work is to guarantee working people the freedom to join together in union.

if time add...

Working people are the backbone of our country and we must ensure our freedom to prosper.

They say...

Unions are out for themselves and make it impossible to fire incompetent workers and stay competitive.

Our response...

With the rich and powerful rigging the rules to take away our freedom, we need the power in numbers of unions to protect Social Security and Medicare and to fight for a fair return on our work and good jobs for all of us.

if time add...

America has plenty of great work to be done – roads to be paved, kids to be taught, energy to be generated. All work has meaning and all working people have rights.

They say...

You shouldn't be forced to hand over dues from your paycheck to fund politicians you don't even support.

Our response...

Billionaires and corporate CEOs pay politicians to do their bidding – taking away the freedom working people in union have won for all of us. People in unions support leaders who believe that people who work for a living ought to earn a living.

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Words to Use	Words to Lose
✓ Freedom / workplace freedom	X Freeloader
✓ Working people	X Middle class
✓ Take away our freedom to join together and negotiate	X Keep us from joining unions, make it harder to join unions
✓ Fair return on work	X Hard work should be rewarded
✓ Corporate lobbyists, wealthiest 1%, CEOs, wealthy corporations	X Business
✓ Freedom to join together	X Protect unions
✓ Freedom to stand together in union	X Right to join unions
✓ Power in numbers	X Strength in numbers X Unions do [X] for us
✓ Guarantee our freedom to come together in union	X Strictly enforce our right to join unions
✓ Working together	X Unionized
✓ Join together in union	X When working people are in unions
✓ Negotiate together	X Collective bargaining, bargain collectively
✓ Negotiate a fair return on our work	

Findings and recommendations based on a national online dial survey of 1201 registered voters with an oversample of union members and samples of activists and advocates fielded April 28-May 3, 2017. Margin of error for the overall sample is +/- 2.8 at 95% confidence interval. Current study builds upon previous research on issues ranging from perceptions of the economy, how to persuade on “collective bargaining,” state-based Right to Work fights and messaging for internal and external organizing from 2013-present. Authors wish to thank and acknowledge key partners in these previous efforts beyond, of course, the AFL-CIO itself, including Jobs with Justice, NEA, Center for Community Change and Make It Work.