MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties
Re: Project LPAC 2021 Research Update – Focus Group Key Findings

2021 Research

In 2021, Project LPAC in conjunction with Lake Research Partners (LRP) began a research project delving into widespread political efforts to vilify transgender Americans. This year more than 100 pieces of legislation targeting transgender Americans were introduced in over 30 states. The recent “transgender sports ban” signed into law by Texas Governor Greg Abbott is just the latest effort to create a political wedge around transgender rights.

The project in its totality consists of focus groups in swing Congressional districts and a nationwide online survey. Specifically, the goal of the project is to understand and disseminate:

- What voters, especially those in battleground Congressional districts, understand about discriminatory policies targeting transgender Americans. This includes policies related to participation in sports, changing gender identity markers, accessing healthcare and seeking gender-affirming services, and entering public spaces.
- What voters think about conservative messaging around transgender discrimination.
- What can organizations, candidates and allies do to encourage voters to support political leaders who champion transgender rights and inclusivity – and disregard and even vote against candidates who sow fear and hatred among their base at the expense of the safety and dignity of transgender individuals.

Timeline:

- August & September 2021 – Focus Groups Prep, Execution & Analysis *completed*
- September & October 2021 – Survey Development, Execution & Initial Analysis *completed*
- Weeks of November 8-15th – final report & delivery from LRP

Focus Groups Report

LRP and Project LPAC held online video focus groups on September 1-2nd. The groups consisted of:

- Cisgender women from swing Congressional districts in the Eastern and Central time zones – mixed race, age, and partisanship (10 participants)
- Cisgender men from swing Congressional districts in the Mountain and Pacific time zones – mixed race, age, and partisanship (7 participants)

Key Finding – Anti-Transgender Legislation:

Focus Group participants are largely unaware of the scale of anti-transgender legislation that has been introduced and passed in state legislatures across the United States. In most instances they do not recall hearing politicians or political ads bring up transgender issues.
Key Finding – Conflict Between Ideals and Specific Situations:
Participants uniformly believed transgender people should have equal rights and live free from discrimination, however when it came to specific examples around sports, locker rooms, and parental rights many people expressed beliefs that belied those ideals:

- Due to biological factors, it is not fair for transgender women to compete in sports with cisgender women
- In schools it is not appropriate for transgender students (particularly transgender girls) to share locker room facilities with cisgender students
- Parents should have ultimate say over their transgender children’s’ lives to ensure they do not make irreversible decisions that they will come to later regret

Many participants suggested alternatives, or expressed the hope that alternatives could be found, to issues around sports or locker rooms. Rather than simply opting for nondiscrimination and inclusion, they sought to find another way out.

Key Finding – Understanding Around Transgender People & Issues:
Participants in both groups expressed familiarity with transgender people and the topic of transgender rights, however during discussion it was clear that people did not generally have a deep or nuanced understanding. This was particularly true of some older participants. In particular there was some confusion around:

- Whether an individual can be considered transgender if they have not gone through gender-confirmation surgeries
- The difference between gender expression and gender identity
- The ease and speed with which transgender young people can make major healthcare decisions
- The prevalence of transgender athletes competing in sports and their success when they do compete

Several participants personally knew someone who was transgender. In general, these participants had a better understanding of transgender people and issues, and were more likely to be champions for transgender inclusion.

Key Finding – Messaging:
In terms of candidates and messaging, participants:

- Responded negatively to the over-the-top tone of Republican attack ads used in Texas and Colorado in 2020 that focused on transgender issues
- Responded positively to pro-transgender rights messaging that was framed around everyone deserving respect and being able to have a good life
- Messages that suggested Republicans were using transgender rights to create division or for political gain were less well received