

EVENT *Published March 1, 2026 · 6 minute read*

Winning the Middle

Third Way



Third Way's Winning the Middle convening in Charleston, SC is focused on building a Democratic Party that can win the middle anytime, anywhere. We've gathered hundreds of leaders, strategists, pollsters, elected officials, and influential voices from key early primary and battleground states that will determine the 2028 fight for two days of conversation about the path back to power.

The event features presentations, insights, and discussions on who Democratic primary voters are, their values and priorities, and how we win back the middle class, the middle of the country and the middle of the electorate to retake the White House in 2028. This event is bringing together an energized and growing coalition of Democrats focused on flipping red and purple places blue.

Why South Carolina? Because in 2028, it will be a key stop on the road to a Democratic renewal.

[Read Event Agenda](#)

Watch Day One's Panels and Discussions:

TW President Jon Cowan on the War with Iran

Third Way President **Jon Cowan** delivers remarks on Trump's war with Iran at the Winning the Middle convening.

Steve Benjamin's Primer on Winning South Carolina

Former mayor of Columbia, SC and Third Way board member **Steve Benjamin** delivers the welcome remarks at the Winning the Middle convening. He gives a primer on what South Carolina voters look like and what it takes to win this important state.

What it Takes: Winning the Middle Anytime, Anywhere

Third Way President **Jon Cowan** calls on Democrats to become a party that can win the middle anytime, anywhere and lays out a series of foundational truths that Democrats must confront at the Winning the Middle convening.

Take Five: Fighter by Gretchen Barton

Gretchen Barton, founder of Worthy Strategies, breaks down the kind of fighter Americans are looking for in their elected leaders.

Who We Need: The Indispensable Middle

Jim Kessler, co-founder and Executive Vice President of Policy for Third Way, breaks down the indispensable middle who will decide whether Democrats occupy or get locked out of the White House, House and Senate. He outlines who they are and what they want.

Palmetto Politics: Victory Runs Through South Carolina

A panel on the importance of South Carolina in the Democratic presidential nominating contest—and why veering to the left won't get you far.

Moderator: **Steve Benjamin**

Speakers: **Jalisa Washington-Price**, Versus Media Group, **Scott Harriford**, Hilltop Public Solutions, **Kendall Corley**, K.L. Corley and Associates, **Brady Quirk-Garvin**, SC Operative

Watch Day Two's Panels and Discussions:

Inconvenient Truths: Meet Your Democratic Primary Voter

Third Way SVP for Social Policy, Education & Politics **Lanae Erickson** sheds light on who the typical Democratic primary voter really is. She breaks down the data from our public opinion research on who they are, what they want in their leaders, and where they are on the issues.

Dueling Donkeys: How the Democratic Primary is Won

A conversation among senior presidential campaign operatives on the play-by-play, pitfalls, and opportunities of the Democratic primary.

Moderator: **Matt Bennett**

Speakers: **Becca Siegel**, **Simone Ward**, SLW Strategies, **Emmy Ruiz**, Former White House

Take Five: Affordability by Lynda Tran

Lynda Tran, CEO of Lincoln Room Strategies, shares her perspective and lived experience on what affordability means to the average American.

Take Five: Rural by Xochitl Torres Small

Former Congresswoman **Xochitl Torres Small** talks about the importance of the Democratic party reconnecting with rural America.

All About That Base: Who Powers the Party

A panel that unpacks who really makes up the bulk of the Democratic base and primary voters. Hint: they're not just liberal and far left.

Moderator: **Doug Thornell**

Speakers: **Shauna Daly**, Speaking with American Men, **Josh Doss**, HIT Strategies **Clarissa Martinez**, UnidosUS

You're Gonna Flip: New Strategies for Effective Persuasion

Third Way SVP for Social Policy, Education & Politics **Lanae Erickson** sits down with **Yasmin Radjy**, Executive Director of Swing Left, to discuss how volunteers are engaging with voters on the ground to flip seats and win back power for the Democratic party.

Take Five: Foreign Policy by Matt Bennett

Matt Bennett, co-founder and Executive Vice President for Public Affairs for Third Way, examines what 2028 candidates need to consider when developing their foreign policy strategies.

Don't F it Up: Restoring the Brand by Governing Well

A panel on how Democrats can show voters that we can run things well, actually do things, and earn back their trust when we gain power.

Moderator: **Matt Yglesias**

Speakers: **Mayor Justin Bibb**, City of Cleveland, **Brooke Jenkins**, San Francisco DA, **Rep. Jake Auchincloss MA-04**

Take Five: The Groups by Tré Easton

Tré Easton, Vice President of Public Policy at Searchlight Institute, tells Democrats what they need to do when approached by special interest groups. Tl;dr: take the meeting and say no.

“Affordability”: Buzzword or Breakthrough

A panel breaking down what voters actually mean when they say they prioritize “cost-of-living” and what Democrats can do about it.

Moderator: **Gabe Horwitz**

Speakers: **Matt Morrison**, Working America, AFLCIO, **Angie Kuefler**, Global Strategy Group, **Melissa Morales**, Somos Votantes

Take Five: Faith by Robert Raben

Robert Raben, founder and President of Raben, urges Democrats to rebuilding the party's relationship and engagement with people of faith.

The Red Zone: Making Your Case in MAGAland

A panel on how Democrats can reach new voters in different media ecosystems and make their case in unfriendly turf.

Moderator: **Sarah McCammon**

Speakers: **Yemisi Egbewole**, Former Biden White House, **Joe Walsh**, The Social Contract

Take Five: Patriotism by Jason Mangone

Jason Mangone, Executive Director of More in Common, talks about the value of Democrats embracing patriotism.

X'd Out: Elevating Moderate Voices Online

A panel on how moderate and mainstream Democrats can find their voice and pick strategic fights online. It's not just for the far left.

Moderator: **Jamal Simmons**

Speakers: **Brin Merkley**, American Hunters & Anglers, **Caitlin Legacki**, Legacki Communications, **Ethan Wolf**, Democratic Wins Media

Reclaiming the White House: Interview with Jim Messina

Third Way President **Jon Cowan** sits down with **Jim Messina**, CEO of the Messina Group and campaign manager for President Barack Obama's successful re-election campaign in 2012, to discuss the path back to the White House for Democrats.
