

**MEMO** Published August 28, 2025 • 4 minute read

# The Reaction to "Was It Something I Said?"



*Third Way,*

To: Comeback Retreat Participants

From: Third Way

Re: The Language Dems Use

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Last Friday, we put out "[Was It Something I Said?](#)" to warn Democrats and their allies that the language we use in elite circles and progressive advocacy zooms can repel voters who may otherwise be willing to look our way. We knew this memo would be controversial, and we braced for the reaction. But we also knew it had to be done. This is the conclusion we came to after our Comeback Retreat, when participants repeatedly brought up the off-putting words and phrases too many Democrats use to please the few which turn out to alienate the many.

As you were a participant in the retreat, we wanted to give you an after-action report on the type of reactions we got to this memo, both publicly and privately. The bottom line: the reaction was positive beyond our most optimistic expectations. Yes, the memo got noticed: POLITICO [featured it in Playbook](#), and [Adam Wren's tweet of our list](#) got 3.5 million views. It was featured in [Axios](#), a bunch of news outlets, on all the cable networks, and on several Sunday shows.

But we cared more about *what* people were saying. From progressives to conservatives, from electeds to NGO heads, from traditional press to online media, there was an overwhelming relief that someone was finally shining a light on this topic and calling for change.

We are not writing this to take a victory lap, but to make a point. The hunger from the entire breadth of the Democratic Party to return to normal language and to end the era of walking on eggshells is real. This is something that you can share with your networks and colleagues: It is safe to press delete on the interest group-driven, faculty lounge language, and if you find yourself editing it out of drafts from your staff, you should proceed. This stuff is actively making our collective task—beating MAGA—harder.

Of course, there were some who strongly disagreed. Several called us [scolds](#). Ok, guilty. Another longed to see [polling data](#) to test phrases like “inseminated person” or “Overton Window,” to which our response was “Do you really need a poll to prove those phrases repel the typical swing voter?” Still others argued that “woke language” was a [“few years ago”](#) problem for Democrats, and we’ll resist the impulse to provide dozens of examples from recent months, pointing simply to the DNC meeting this week for a real-time example of how too many in our party continue to use this out-of-touch language that’s driving away voters in droves.

But we were encouraged by the overall reaction, and we hope you are too. Privately, we heard from more than a dozen Members of Congress, with the overwhelming theme of “yes, totally!” and “please help me get my staff to stop writing this way.” Pollsters, ad makers, and other operatives had a similar take, summed up by one: “Funny, horrifying, needed, embarrassing and obvious at the same time.” Another noted, correctly: “Our swing voter is a 55 year-old woman who hasn’t got any education past high school, can we please not sound insane?” Even leaders of NGOs, some of them operating in fairly far-left places, wrote privately to agree. One example: “I have so many stories to share related to this all. This is overdue. I’m over it.”

Publicly, we got support from people who’ve run campaigns, like Jim Messina on [Morning Joe](#), and veteran observers, like Dana Bash, who said on [CNN](#): “They (voters) do think the Democratic Party speaks a different language. I don’t know whether this list is the answer.... But it’s a real thing.”

As noted above, this memo was not universally loved. [Amanda Litman](#) of Run for Something, who we respect deeply, tweeted that it was “silly,” and strategist [Rebecca Katz](#) wrote, “Just what we need right

now: another think tank trying to make itself relevant by picking a stupid fight that doesn't actually matter.”

So yes, some criticisms, but what is striking is how little substantive pushback we received.

Conclusion: the water is fine, come on in. Spread the word.