



DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

**EVEN WITH
MILLIONS SPENT
AGAINST IT, A
PROGRESSIVE
PHARMACEUTICAL
AGENDA CAN WIN**

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On December 10, Democrats in Congress passed the Elijah Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which would allow Medicare to negotiate the price of many drugs with pharmaceutical companies and would prevent drug prices from rising faster than the rate of inflation. It is likely that H.R. 3 will be outspent on the airwaves by the right. This polling memo explores a new, innovative experiment designed to test how this spending could affect support for the policy and for Democrats in the 2020 election. We test opposition messages—even deceptive ones—in a five-way split sample, with a control. We find that H.R. 3 is durable to arguments, both when delivered by Republicans and when delivered by a “coalition of pharmaceutical companies and unions.” We also explore some other, over-the-horizon progressive pharmaceutical ideas, which enjoy strong support.

Key Findings:

- ▶ Even facing incredibly aggressive opposition messaging, H.R. 3 has strong support among registered voters.
- ▶ Even in the scenario when neither a description of H.R. 3 nor a pro-H.R. 3 message was presented, Democrats perform strongly on the generic ballot.
- ▶ Fewer than one-third of registered voters oppose the legislation in all but the most unflattering description. And even with that most unflattering description, only 38 percent of voters oppose H.R. 3.
- ▶ Several over-the-horizon progressive pharmaceutical policies have strong support among the general public.

We surveyed 5,881 registered voters nationwide. These registered voters were separated into six groups: One group saw no information about H.R. 3 (and were not asked about the bill), while the remaining five groups saw one of the below descriptions of the legislation. (The description of the bill was randomly assigned, to allow for a valid comparison across the different groups.)

We examined support for H.R. 3 based on the description provided to registered voters. In Version 1, registered voters saw a Democratic argument in favor of the bill and a Republican argument in opposition. Here the bill received overwhelming support, with 60 percent in favor of it and just 27 percent opposed—a net support of 33 percentage points. Versions 2 through 5 provided messages were stronger anti-bill messages. Despite this, Versions 2, 3, and 4 still see overwhelming support for the legislation, with net support at 19 points, 17 points, and 14 points, respectively. It is worth noting that these three versions produce only small increases in opposition to H.R. 3, and in each, there was also an increase in the percentage of voters who answered “don’t know” to the question.

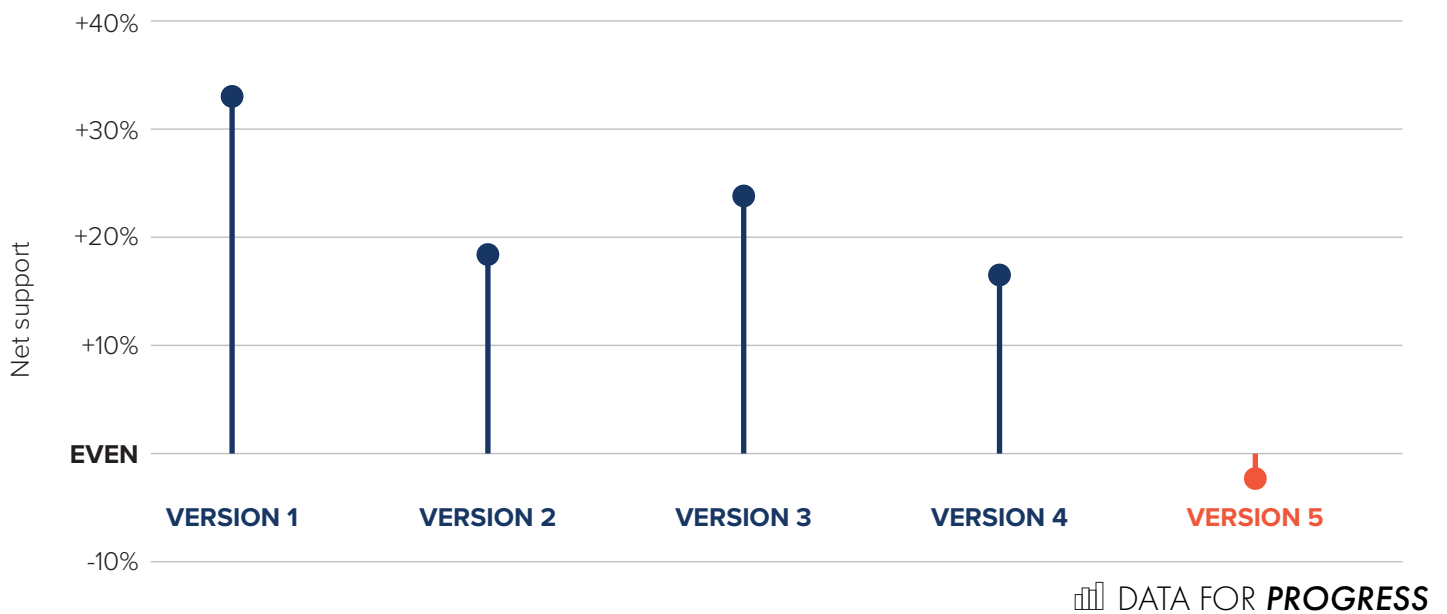
Version 5 provided no description of H.R. 3 and a strong statement in opposition to the legislation from unions and consumer groups. Despite the overwhelmingly one-sided nature of the message in this version, registered voters were evenly split, with 37 percent in support, 38 percent opposed, and 26 percent saying they didn’t know what their position was. One notable pattern in the data is that while people who saw the stronger arguments in opposition to H.R. 3 were less likely to support the

legislation, much of this resulted in a higher number saying that they “don’t know” how they felt about the bill, rather than in outright opposition. In fact, fewer than one-third of registered voters opposed the legislation in all but the most unflattering description. These tests show the importance of progressives mobilizing to support H.R. 3. If voters know what the policy entails, it will be an electoral boon. However, even in a scenario where Democrats are massively outspent, H.R. 3 will not be an electoral drag on their prospects.

We also examined the partisan breakdown in support for H.R. 3. For this analysis, independents who leaned toward a party are classified with the party to which they lean. In all versions, Democrats overwhelmingly support HR 3, though support is significantly greater in Version 1 (+66 points on net). Notably, this version produced nearly as much support among independents as it did among Democrats (+61 points on net). In Version 1, Republicans are marginally opposed to the legislation, though not by a wide margin.

| VERSION | TEXT |
|---------|---|
| 1 | Some Democrats in Congress have proposed H.R. 3, legislation that would allow Medicare to negotiate the prices of drugs with pharmaceutical companies. Democrats say this would reduce the costs of prescription drugs. Republicans say this will reduce the incentives for companies to invest in new innovations, ultimately resulting in fewer life-saving drugs while destroying US jobs involved in exporting pharmaceuticals to other countries. |
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| 3 | Some Democrats in Congress have proposed proposed H.R. 3, legislation that would allow Medicare to negotiate the prices of drugs with pharmaceutical companies. A coalition of unions and consumer groups say this will reduce the incentives for companies to invest in new innovations, ultimately resulting in fewer life-saving drugs while destroying US jobs involved in exporting pharmaceuticals to other countries. |
| 4 | Some Democrats in Congress have proposed proposed H.R. 3, legislation that would allow Medicare to negotiate the prices of drugs with pharmaceutical companies. A coalition of unions and consumer groups say this will reduce the incentives for companies to invest in new innovations, ultimately resulting in fewer life-saving drugs while destroying US jobs involved in exporting pharmaceuticals to other countries. They say that the Democratic proposal won't pass the Senate and that Democrats should work with Republicans to get to legislation that can. |
| 5 | Some Democrats in Congress have H.R.3, legislation that deals with the costs of prescription drugs. A coalition of unions and consumer groups say H.R.3 will reduce the incentives for companies to invest in new innovations, ultimately resulting in fewer life-saving drugs while destroying US jobs involved in exporting pharmaceuticals to other countries. They say that the Democratic proposal won't pass the Senate and that Democrats should work with Republicans to get to legislation that can. |

| VERSION | SUPPORT | OPPOSE | DON'T KNOW | NET SUPPORT |
|---------|---------|--------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | 60% | 27% | 13% | +33% |
| 2 | 50% | 31% | 18% | +19% |
| 3 | 49% | 32% | 18% | +17% |
| 4 | 47% | 33% | 21% | +14% |
| 5 | 37% | 38% | 26% | -1% |



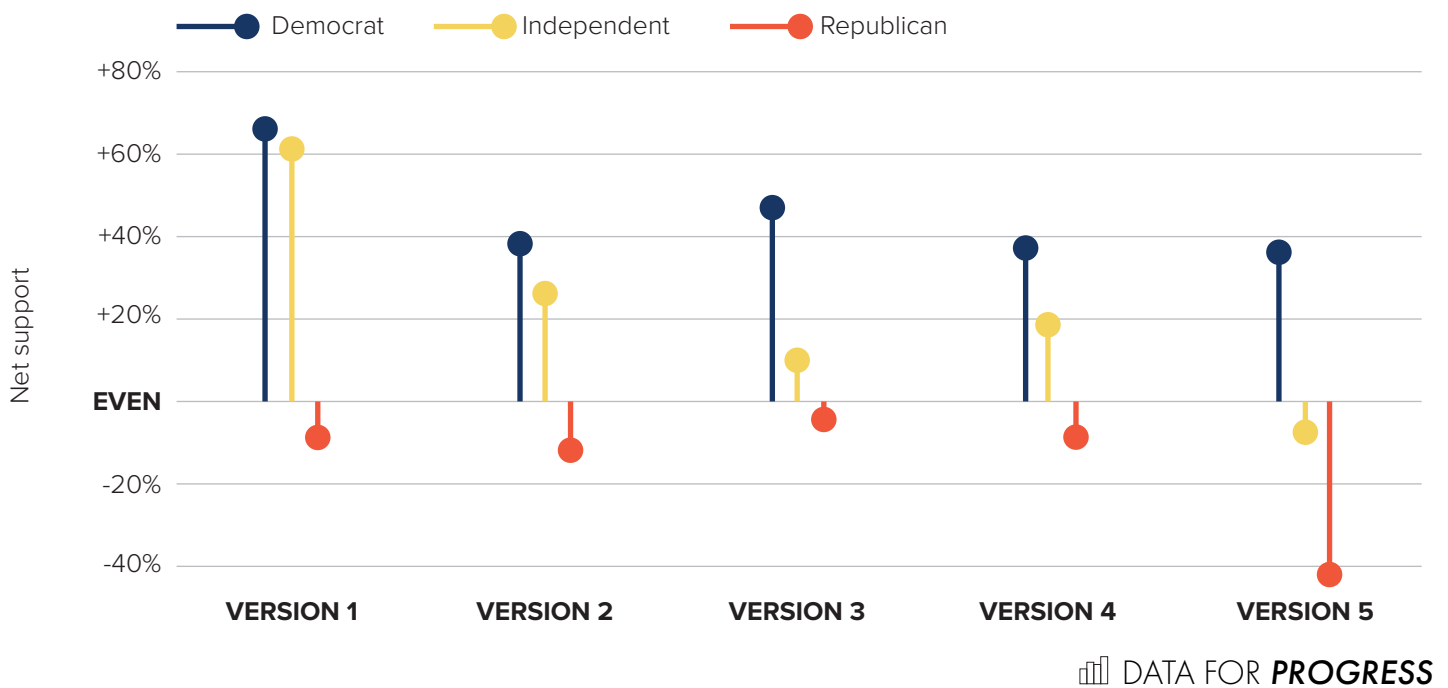
In fact, Republicans are only marginally opposed to H.R. 3 in all but Version 5—the one that provides no arguments in favor of the legislation. That is also the only version where the bill receives net-negative support from independents. Independents provide double-digit net-positive support for H.R. 3 in every other version of the description.

NET SUPPORT AMONG PARTISANS BY VERSION

| Version | Democrats | Independents | Republicans |
|---------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | +66% | +61% | -8% |
| 2 | +39% | +27% | -12% |
| 3 | +47% | +10% | -4% |
| 4 | +38% | +19% | -9% |
| 5 | +36% | -7% | -41% |

We also tested whether seeing different descriptions of H.R. 3 would affect how voters responded to a House generic-ballot question. Specifically, this question asked: “If an election for U.S. Congress were being held today, who would you vote for in the district where you live?” We asked this question of a randomly selected group of voters who did not see any information about H.R. 3, as well as each of the groups who saw different versions of the legislation.

When H.R. 3 was described to voters, Democrats fared better in the generic-ballot question. Specifically, Democrats had a 7-point advantage over Republicans on the generic ballot among voters who did not see any information about H.R. 3. However, among those who were exposed to a neutral description of H.R. 3, the advantage grew to 11 points. This difference in margins is statistically significant; substantively, it would likely mean a significant improvement in the chances that the Democrats would keep the House and win the Senate in 2020.



Unsurprisingly, the Democratic margin is most improved when the description of H.R. 3 is most favorable (e.g., in Version 1), though even Version 3 produced a statistically significant increase in the Democratic margin on the generic ballot. Only among voters who saw Versions 4 or 5 was the difference in Democratic support not significantly different from what it was when the legislation was not described at all. In the chart below, note that the margin was not worse in these conditions, merely unchanged. What this suggests is that H.R. 3 could significantly increase support for Democrats—with no evidence that it might reduce support.

GENERIC HOUSE BALLOT BY VERSION

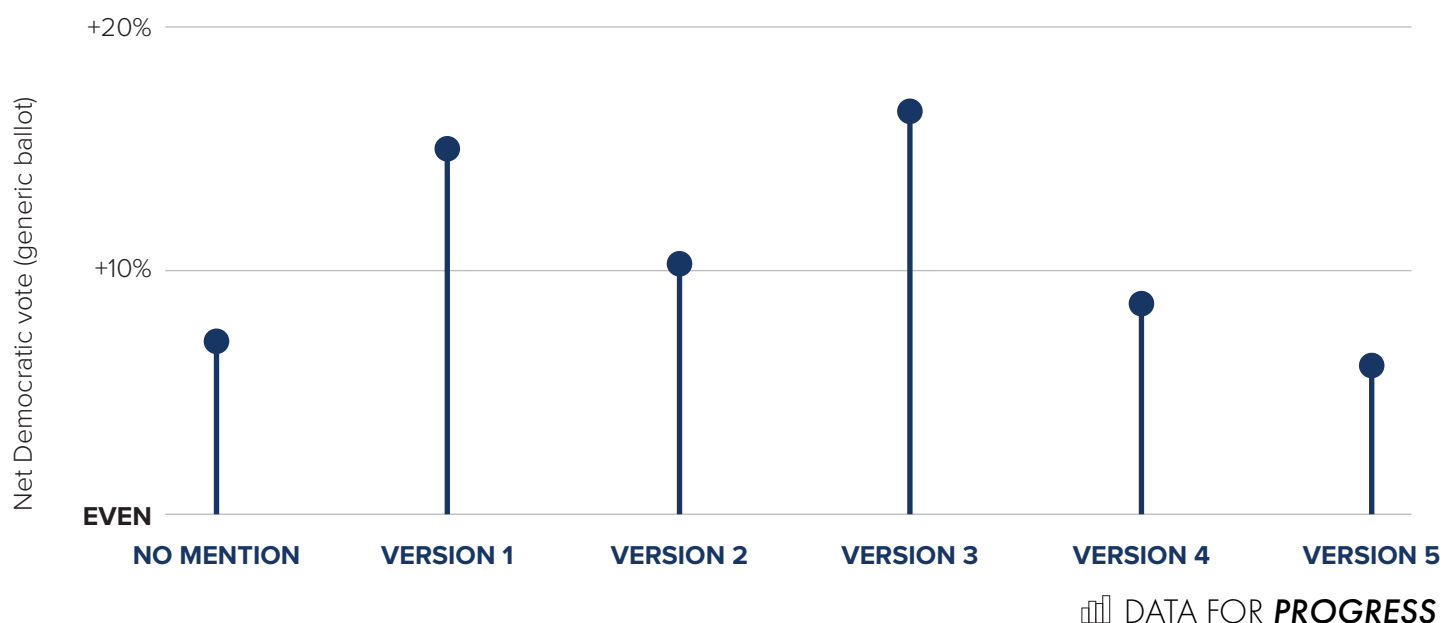
| Version | Democrat | Republican | Don't know | Democratic margin |
|------------|----------|------------|------------|-------------------|
| No mention | 47% | 39% | 14% | +7% |
| Version 1 | 50% | 35% | 15% | +15% |
| Version 2 | 46% | 36% | 18% | +10% |
| Version 3 | 49% | 33% | 18% | +17% |
| Version 4 | 45% | 36% | 20% | +9% |
| Version 5 | 43% | 37% | 20% | +6% |

The Future of Pharmaceutical Reform

In past polling, Data for Progress has tested three pillars of a progressive pharmaceutical agenda: competitive licensing, generic manufacturing, and public research and development. Competitive licensing, sometimes called “compulsory licensing,” is when the government requires patent holders to license other companies to produce generic versions of their drug. Generic manufacturing is where the government produces generic versions of high-cost drugs itself. Together, these policies—which all have strong support among the general public—would fundamentally transform the pharmaceutical sector.

Conclusion

Even if H.R. 3 faces millions of dollars in spending from the pharmaceutical industry and the Republican Party, voters will remain broadly supportive of the legislation and Democrats will not face an electoral penalty.



| POLICY | SUPPORT | OPPOSE | DON'T KNOW | NET SUPPORT |
|---|---------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Allowing government to produce generics if price is too high | 70% | 13% | 17% | +53% |
| Increasing government funding of research on affordable drugs | 69% | 15% | 16% | +54% |
| Allowing companies to produce generics if price is too high | 78% | 12% | 10% | +68% |

Details

From November 20 through December 3, 2019, using the Lucid online panel, Data for Progress surveyed 5,881 voters registered in the United States. Post-stratification weights were implemented to make the sample nationally representative of registered voters by gender, age, region, education, race, and the interaction of education and race. This survey included a split-message test of H.R. 3.

On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey on a sample of 1,280 registered voters, using YouGov's online panel. The survey fielded between from September 11 through September 12, 2019, and was weighted to be representative of the national population of US voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US census region, and 2016 presidential vote choice. This survey included a module asking support levels for various pharmaceutical policy proposals. We also included two message-testing experiments.

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COVER PHOTO
Adam Nieścioruk/Unsplash