



To: Interested Parties
From: Global Strategy Group
Date: August 18, 2026
Re: Messaging Guidance for Candidates Facing Trans Sports Attacks

New polling from Global Strategy Group across battleground House districts shows message-disciplined Democrats can clearly win when attacked on transgender participation in sports.

Key Findings

Democrats can win on sports *without* supporting a ban. A Democrat who clearly states their position and what they value outperforms a Republican who attacks them on a range of anti-trans policies.

Which of the following candidates would you be more likely to support, even if neither is perfect?

[DEM – SAFETY PIVOT W/ SPORTS ASSN] The Democrat who says, “As a parent, nothing matters more than keeping my daughters safe. It’s why I believe sports associations should be setting rules to keep women’s and girls’ sports safe and fair. But protecting kids goes way beyond the girls’ playing field. It means releasing the Epstein files, putting sexual predators behind bars, and giving parents more insight and control over their kids’ online safety. That’s what I’m focused on.”

[GOP ATTACK] The Republican who says, “My opponent is another extreme liberal who wants biological boys in our girls’ locker rooms and on our girls’ playing fields. They are putting our daughters at risk and taking away your rights as a parent.”



Voters prefer a range of approaches to an all-out ban. Candidates who stress safety, fairness, and rules regularly outperform a candidate who supports a ban by double digits.

Statements from Democratic Candidates – More/Less Favorable toward Candidate (Among Swing Voters[^])

	% Much More Favorable / % Total More Favorable		Overall More Fav Much Total	Independents* More Fav Much Total
Sports associations should set rules to ensure girls' sports remain fair and safe – not politicians.	51%	76	43 73	48 63
Keeping our daughters safe is my top priority, whether it's on the playing field or in the locker room.	46	73	49 75	43 71
Girls and women deserve a protected athletic category where they can compete fairly and safely.	46	69	45 74	39 65
I don't believe biological boys should play girls' sports	42	59	43 61	39 55
The girls in our community work hard to excel in sports, and they deserve a fair shot.	42	70	44 72	45 68

[^] Swing voters (28% of the electorate) do not always vote for one party's congressional candidate throughout the [survey](#), or are always undecided.
^{*} Denotes small sample size; results are directional.

Well-crafted responses to anti-trans attacks bring the vote back to where it started. After voters hear a standard Republican attack on a hypothetical Democrat, the vote goes from D+2 (46% Democrat/44% Republican) to R+14 (35%/49%). But when voters hear a response, the vote bounces right back to D+3 (46%/43%).¹

Going on offense is similarly powerful. A Democrat who has been accused of “letting biological boys compete in girls’ sports” outperforms a Republican who...

- **...has been accused of overturning a law that banned convicted sexual predators from working with young kids** (61% Democrat/39% Republican overall; 69%/31% among swing; 70%/30% among independents)
- **...voted against releasing the Epstein files three separate times, even after learning these sexual predators trafficked girls as young as 14** (58% Democrat/42% Republican overall; 67%/33% among swing; 64%/36% among independents)
- **...has been accused of pushing a law that requires a young girl to have her body inspected if someone accuses her of being transgender** (56% Democrat/44% Republican overall; 66%/34% among swing; 64%/36% among independents)

But we cannot let the attacks stand. It’s critical to respond. The worst thing we can do is let these attacks break through without response. Democrats need to respond clearly, leaning heavily on values, and show what they stand for.

Crafting a Strong Message

As you build your response, it’s important to:

- **Show confidence and openness to the discussion.**
- **Lean on your own background,** whether as a parent, a coach, a former athlete, or something else that shows you get it.
- **Lead with values: fairness, safety, and rules.** Our top approach says “sports associations should set rules to ensure girls’ sports remain fair and safe – not politicians.” Wording matters deeply here (see below).
- **If you discuss limits, make high-stakes competition the dividing line.** The majority of voters are comfortable with transgender youth participating at recess (72% at least somewhat comfortable), in non-physical sports (62%), and in non-contact sports (58%), like T-ball (61%).
- **Pivot to avoid seeming overly-focused on this issue.** Voters are far more concerned with costs, general safety, corruption, you name it. But they perceive Democrats as focused on culture issues. Don’t exacerbate that perception.
- **...but not before you’ve established a clear position.** If you pivot too quickly, you risk coming off as evasive and/or dismissive.

¹ See Appendix for full text of messages tested (note that we have combined results for the split Democratic responses tested, but directionally we see similar results regardless of message).

Our Message

In a sentence: Sports associations should set rules to ensure girls' sports remain fair and safe – not politicians.

Example of a slightly expanded response: As a parent, nothing matters more to me than my daughters' safety. So when my opponent lies about where I stand, I take it personally. Here's the truth: I believe sports associations should set rules to ensure girls' sports remain fair and safe – not politicians. But our kids need more than a fair shot on the playing field. They need a fair shot in life. In Congress, I'll lower costs and protect our healthcare.

Example of a long-form response and why it works:

What to Say	Why it Works
I'm glad you asked.	✓ Shows confidence, not evasiveness.
As a parent, keeping our kids safe is my top priority, whether it's on the playing field or in the classroom. And our girls work hard to excel at sports. They deserve a fair shot.	✓ Establishes you have skin in the game and a level of protectiveness. ✓ Names key values: fairness and safety.
That's why the experts at sports associations should absolutely set rules to keep girls' sports safe and fair.	✓ Names who should set rules. ✓ Again emphasizes key values.
Like the IOC, for example. I personally agree with the International Olympic Committee's decision to limit transgender women's participation. It's elite competition, after all. And I support their right to enforce those rules.	✓ Gives a specific example they can get behind that involves elite competition.
But that's a job for sports associations—not politicians.	✓ Contrasts sports associations with politicians.
And from my conversations in our community, it's clear that too many of the bills under consideration put our kids more at risk. Under my opponent's bill, adults are allowed to inspect young girls' bodies, paving the way for abuse.	✓ Shows they have been listening to their community. ✓ Names how gender checks aren't just inspections; they pave the way to abuse.
And that's especially concerning given my opponent also voted to weaken background checks on adults working in youth sports, making it easier for sexual predators to access kids.	✓ Pivots to a completely different way the opponent has exposed kids to unsafe, creepy people.
I am glad we're having this conversation, because safety matters and fairness matters. And when I'm in Congress, I'm going to fight for those values on the playing field and off of it.	✓ Ends with a tone of confidence, repeating key values.

Messaging Tips

Say This	...Instead of This
Put <u>sports associations</u> in charge (e.g., "Sports associations should set rules to ensure girls' sports remain fair and safe — not politicians.")	...instead of <u>states</u>
Say "sports associations <u>should set</u> rules"	...instead of "rules should <u>be left to</u> sports associations"
With short declarative statements, start with the caveat and end with the need for rules (e.g., "No one should face discrimination <u>but</u> we need rules")	...instead of saying the rules and then caveat (e.g., We need rules <u>as long as</u> no one is discriminated against)
When talking about gender checks, explicitly name abuse (e.g., "this bill allows adults to inspect girls' bodies, paving the way for abuse")	...instead of just mentioning inspections or just emphasizing the scrutiny/humiliation girls will face
When talking about why blanket bans don't work, make them visualize the differences (e.g., "It doesn't make sense to apply rules made for elite athletes to kindergarteners at recess")	...instead of just arguing against blanket bans
Talk about all girls (e.g., "Girls deserve a fair shot, and sports should be safe and fair for everyone.")	...instead of centering transgender kids or transgender girls only
If you're going to explicitly endorse limits, emphasize serious competition. - "When championships, records, roster spots, and scholarships are on the line, there should be rules that protect fair competition." - "In competitive sports, limits on who can participate make sense." - "I agree with the IOC's decision to limit transgender women's participation"	...instead of making an absolute statement - "Transgender girls should never compete in girls' sports."

Appendix

Statements from Hypothetical Democrat and Hypothetical Republican Tested

[DEMOCRAT – SPORTS ONLY + ATTACK] Mike Smith says, "As a parent, nothing matters more than my daughters' safety. So let me be clear: we need rules to keep sports fair and safe. That's why I support things like the NCAA limiting transgender women's participation. But my opponent is going way too far. He's threatening to defund our schools if they don't apply those same rules to kindergarteners playing at recess. Our kids deserve better. In Congress, I'll take fairness seriously without losing sight of what matters most: a life you can afford and schools you can trust."

[DEMOCRAT – DIRECT-SOUNDING LIST] Mike Smith says, "As a parent, nothing matters more to me than my daughters' safety. So when my opponent lies about where I stand, I take it personally. Here's the truth: I support limiting transgender women's participation where necessary to keep sports fair and safe. I support safeguards when it comes to medical care for young people. I believe parents — not politicians — should make decisions about their kids' healthcare. And when I'm in Congress, I'll take these issues seriously without losing sight of what matters most, so we can get back to the business of lowering costs for everyone."

[GOP ATTACK] The Democratic candidate Mike Smith is so extreme he opposes any reasonable limits on letting biological boys compete in girls' sports. That's outrageous: it puts our daughters at risk, and it makes sports less fair. Girls work hard from a young age, and they deserve for their competition to be fair - not to be competing against boys with a biological advantage. That puts their safety at risk, making the chance of injury even greater. It makes sense to everyone except this Democrat. He's too out of touch with what's best for our community.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH: Global Strategy Group conducted an online survey of 1,001 likely 2026 voters in House battleground districts between July 28 and August 3, 2026. The survey has a confidence interval of +/- 3.1%. All interviews were conducted via web-based panel. Care has been taken to ensure the geographic, political, and demographic divisions of the population of likely voters are properly represented.