

KEY FINDINGS

A Wisconsinite is:

- **Hearty and down-to-earth.** They'll be happy with whatever you bring to the barbecue, whether it's a nice steak or frozen tater tots.
- **Hardworking.** Very blue-collar. Appreciate when someone puts in the time rather than getting handed something.
- **Midwest nice,** meaning generous to anyone they come across, always willing to invite someone over, accepting of who they are.

These voters are looking for a Supreme Court justice who:

- **Is impartial, “not narrow-minded,” and open to hearing both sides.** They want to avoid pre-judgments and instead hope everyone gets a fair hearing.
- **Is nonpartisan; keep politics out of it.** They know this election, despite being nonpartisan, will be intensely political. However, they still want candidates who at least *try* to put politics aside.
- **Wants to do what's best for all of Wisconsin.** They talk about helping the majority and the whole state. Implied here is the idea that some politicians are focused on a narrow subset of people.
- **Is focused on safety and protecting rights.** They are generally concerned about government involvement in private decisions. Abortion, especially, is very top of mind.

When it comes to transgender people and policies, they:

- **Are unfamiliar.** These voters know little beyond what they've heard on the news (largely about trans sports) and stumble with terminology.
- **Are uncomfortable talking about such a “hot topic.”** They feel this is a sudden and very charged topic driven by those on the fringes. They clearly would prefer to keep their feelings to themselves to avoid stepping on toes.
- **Feel the issue gets too much attention.** They see it as extremely low priority because it is very personal and impacts so few people.
- **Feel supportive of the idea of privacy.** They believe “the decision to be transgender” should be private (similar to abortion).

When it comes to anti-trans people and anti-trans statements, these voters:

- **Say it comes from a place of concern and genuine care.**
- **Don't love name-calling, aggression:** Calling a trans person a “predator” or “radical liberal” goes a step too far. If Schimel takes this tone, it could actually heighten negative reactions to him.
- **Think some people are a little too far down the YouTube rabbit hole.** They understand concern, but the level of concern has gotten a bit high for some.

- **Are willing to make excuses for parents who simply want to protect their kids.** Even when they dislike the way someone communicates, that doesn't mean they disagree with the person.

They say people who want trans girls to play sports with cis girls:

- **Don't value fairness and hard work.** They see an immutable biological difference.
- **Put women and girls' safety at risk.** This is less widespread than concerns about fairness but does come up.
- **Chaotic.** This goes back to the need for rules. If you don't get that rules are necessary, you're just allowing chaos and a free-for-all.
- **Liberal/Extreme.** They understand allowing someone to transition in private, but this is a step too far. It makes them question what else about you is extreme.

The inoculation ideas below seek to show how none of these labels fit neatly on Crawford.

When it comes to the Supreme Court and trans policy, they:

- **Feel certain there needs to be "rules"** and "parameters" around sports.
- **Are uncertain who should make these rules.** There isn't anyone they trust to make these rules. It's a hot potato that we can maybe use to our advantage. • **Believe the Court has a role to play as the arbiter** and ultimate decider but not as the ones *writing* the laws.
- **Are concerned about a slippery slope in the case of Black voters.** They worry the Supreme Court will go after abortion and interracial marriage next. These Black voters quickly tied the risks to civil rights together.

After showing Schimel's opening ad and bio, they felt Schimel was:

- **Harsh, excessive.** The combination of his puffed-up chest and focus on crime drove this.
- **Too overtly political.** Again, being a Republican talking about crime played into this. Even more so though, his accusation she'll make the court extremely liberal while she stays focused on giving everyone a fair shake and public safety comes off as him being extremely political.
- **Potentially intolerant and crass.** This came through more after we claimed the four statements we wrote on trans people came from Schimel. Terms like "radical liberal" and "forcing biological boys" specifically came across as close minded and immature.
- **Going to push his ideas onto you.** Schimel has not made a point of including his religion in his communications, but when we mentioned it, people sensed his Catholic background would make him overzealous and pushy.

Crawford's ad and written bio left voters feeling she is:

- **Mostly moderate.** People sense she's the Democrat, but her focus on public safety tells them she's pretty down the middle. Crawford's bio and opening ad together were moderate sounding enough that many assume she had a more conservative opinion on transgender policy.
- **Veering on liberal.** Her Dane County background and work with Planned Parenthood tell some she's liberal, though they still don't call her "extreme."
- **Not a DC Democrat.** The fact that she doesn't seem judgmental or condescending and grew up in a small-ish town suggests she's not some big city, Washington DC Democrat.
- **Fair and reasonable.** They like that she explicitly says no matter your partisanship, you get a fair shake in her courtroom.
- **Cares about women and protecting them from government intrusion.** They cite her work on abortion with Planned Parenthood.

THEMES TO EXPLORE IN MESSAGING:

INOCULATION IDEAS:

- **Talking about what's good for all of Wisconsin.** Talking about working for "all of us," "doing what's best for the most people," and "working for all of Wisconsin" could help show you won't hurt the majority in favor of a small minority. To emphasize this: if/when forced to talk about trans people specifically, making trans just one adjective of many could also help (e.g., whether you are white or Black, rich or poor, trans or not). But, otherwise, avoid dividing people into categories. It makes you sound like you're focusing on these narrow categories rather than the whole.
- **Emphasizing her competitive nature, especially as an athlete.** People don't buy that a competitive female athlete would willingly want to compete and welcome "men" into their space. Showing photos of or referencing her time as an elite athlete could be very helpful. As we look ahead to legislators who need to inoculate, referencing competition with China or for resources, for example, could also help.
- **Playing up the role of protective and "concerned parent."** They perceive the people concerned about trans inclusion as parents concerned about their kids. Showing a level of passion and protectiveness about her kids, even if it's in earned media or when talking about public safety, could be inoculative. That said, any woman showing passion also runs the risk of being tagged as emotional. But, ideally we want others to see her as a 'Mama Bear' that would never put her kids in harm's way just to do the 'politically correct' thing.

- **Showing what she has done as a prosecutor and judge to defend women and children from predators.** Whether fair or not, voters immediately think about predators abusing inclusive locker rooms. Show she has always protected women (e.g., defending abortion rights, prosecuting domestic abusers) and kids (e.g., prosecuting sexual abusers) to shape her image.
- **Emphasizing rules.** This comes back to the Constitution. It underpins everything; it's our rulebook and emphasizes values like fairness that these voters care about. Similarly talking about "playing by the rules," "upholding the rule of law" – even if it's in reference to public safety - could show shared values.
- **Talking about issues that are typically dominated by conservatives.** For instance, focusing on crime establishes her as moderate enough. The less liberal they think she is, the less sticky the attacks will be.
- **Showing openness/lack of judgement.** They think of Democrats as condescending, big city liberals who will judge them for their opinions, especially on "hot topics" like policies around transgender people. Showing openness and talking about hearing both sides out helps undermine these expectations and establish her as non-extremist.
- **Talking about "fairness" more generally.** Fairness is the core of the sports argument. If we can't prove inclusion is fair, showing how much she values fairness may dampen the impact of the attacks. Even minor things like talking about "giving everyone a fair shake" made the attacks less believable. Notably, including the word "fair" did not trigger thoughts of the sports attacks.

MESSAGING APPROACHES:

- **Showing a level of openness, not pre-deciding, listening to both sides.** This deprioritizes the importance of hearing from her, speaks to the need to be non-partisan and 'balanced,' and by virtue of what she's saying, undermines the very idea that she's out of touch or extreme (which is what would make the attacks believable in the first place). Talking about places where she ruled against a liberal majority could be proof that she doesn't let personal opinions override the facts.
- **Talk is cheap.** Actions speak louder than words approach. People don't trust what politicians say anyway, and this is a way of both undermining the attacks and showcasing her strengths and accomplishments relative to his when it comes to women and girls through her work on abortion, and penalizing sex offenders and child abusers.
- **Flip it so we're saying who is allowed in these spaces.** The other side keeps talking about men in girls' spaces abusing them. Don't give them space to assume it's a man with ill intent.

- **Not the Supreme Court's job.** People understand that the Supreme Court should be getting involved to the extent we need someone to settle these debates (as a mediator or tiebreaker), but they don't make the laws. That's for the elected officials in Madison.
- **Recentering the argument as being about what people decide in their homes.** We can win people and show shared values when it's framed as a family matter.
- **Leaning on abortion messaging.** The freedom/privacy values and themes certainly play very well, coming off as even-keeled and aligned with their values. The challenge is people hear it as these themes being about an abortion, and don't necessarily think of it as a response to trans attacks. And further, it is a distraction from sports, but doesn't solve that wholly. So, we'd need to make a clearer link between the two, but if we can, we're triggering something powerful.
- **Being the adult in the room.** Some attacks come off like an intolerant teenager calling someone names. But, these voters don't want an aggressive and brash candidate, especially as a Supreme Court justice. Responding maturely and simply, then moving on, could be a nice contrast.
- **Acknowledging shared concerns without giving credence to the more bigoted ones.** This plays into the aforementioned approach of showing shared values. It could be something like "it's fair to have questions" or go a step further if needed and talk about how women and girls are in a precarious situation.