**Frequent Messaging Mistakes**

*In communicating our campaign messages, we should attempt to be clear, consistent and persuasive. Sometimes we accidentally use words or phrases that conflict with our strategic framework or create confusion. Some of the common mistakes that we make are listed below.*

“basic needs” “Basic needs” is a phrase that has historically been used to describe what humans need to subsist, nothing more. *Basic* needs are just the absolute minimum for physical survival. However, we believe that human beings must both survive *and* thrive. So we should avoid the old language of “basic” needs, as it does not fit our understanding of needs. Instead, we can use the phrase *human* needs or *fundamental* needs. Although grammatically “basic” and “fundamental” mean the same thing, *w*e use *fundamental* to try to divert our legislators and the media from the belief that all we require is subsistence. In this way we can call attention to our position, and we will then explain what we mean by linking needs to rights. We have the right to live dignified lives and realize our potential as human beings, not just subsist as animals. We need the bread *and* the roses (or: survive and thrive). By “thrive”, we mean that every person should be able to achieve their full human potential and live in dignity.

“citizen” Our campaigns are based on human rights principles, one of which is *universality*, which means that people are included because they are people, not because they are citizens or taxpayers or male or white or Christian or wealthy. Better word choices include “person” and “resident”.

“deserve” We have rights to healthcare etc., so it is not a matter of being deserving or not. Who would not be deserving if they are human? This word is usually used as a wedge term to single out poor people as undeserving.

“government” If we say “government”, we might mean either elected representatives or public services. It is important to be clear about which we are referring to. Generally the problem with government is not public services but elected representatives.

“help” Often people will say that they just need some help to get back on their feet. But that is not the point — we are not asking for charity, we are demanding that our rights are met. And that is not a matter of “help.” We do not need “help” — from the government, from the state, from others — we have a right to live in dignity with all our needs met, and the government has an obligation to make this happen.

“income” (not to be confused with *wealth*) The rate at which money is received. In other words, money divided by time. This money can come from either wages or investments.

“paying more” We argue that the rich should pay *proportionally more*, not just that the rich should pay *more*, to finance public goods and services (equity in finance). In other words, the rich can afford to pay a larger proportion (or percentage) of their wealth or income than the non-rich. Another way of saying it is that the tax *rate* should increase with income or wealth.

“productive” Human rights are not conditional on anything and not instrumental for achieving goals other than human dignity, equality and freedom. In other words, our rights do not have the purpose of making us more “productive.” Just think of all the people who may not be very “productive” in the economic sense — children, old people, people with disabilities etc. Our rights enable us to live with dignity and in freedom. There is no economic goal to our rights.

“single payer” The Healthcare Is a Human Right campaign seeks much more than just good payment methodologies for healthcare. Though we agree that a single payment channel, a single benefit package and a single administrative system for healthcare would make it possible to improve our healthcare system, those things, like cost control, are *means to the end* of achieving a universal, equitable healthcare system as a public good, not *ends in themselves*. So we do not say that we are seeking a single payer healthcare system. We say we are seeking a healthcare system that treats healthcare as a human right or as a public good.

“take care of us” This is a common colloquial phrase, but we should avoid it in relation to the government. While it is ok to say that we should all take care of each other, it is different if we say the government should take care of us. The right-wing immediately picks up on this; they love pointing out that freedom-loving people do not want the government to take care of them. It is also a patronizing notion that is related to “help” and “the needy,” and evokes a vision of dependence.

“taxpayer” (see “citizen” above)

“Vermonter[s]” This term can be seen as excluding some groups, in particular immigrants. Better phrases include “the people of Vermont”, “everyone in Vermont” and “Vermont residents”. In the singular, it is somewhat more difficult to find a good word, though “Vermont resident” still works, and “person” is often workable.

“wealth” (not to be confused with *income*) Money or other assets that is possessed.