



RESURGENT REPUBLIC

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Ed Gillespie and Whit Ayres
DATE: December 11, 2009
RE: Voters Age 55 and Older Strongly Reject Democrats' Health Care Reform Plans

With their health care reform proposals, Democrats in Congress are digging an enormous political hole with voters age 55 and older, a demographic group that plays an outsized role in non-presidential year elections. Voters age 55 and older think health care reform will raise their taxes, increase the deficit, raise their premiums, cause their health care costs to go up, and cause the quality of the health care they receive to go down. Simply put, these voters reject every central argument made by Democrats in support of their legislation.

That conclusion is clear in Resurgent Republic's latest survey of 1000 registered voters age 55 and older conducted Sunday through Wednesday, December 6-9, 2009. Resurgent Republic focused on this group because they are the greatest consumers of health care, and thus have the greatest stake in health care reform. Moreover, turnout among this group historically surpasses that of younger voters in non-presidential election years like 2010.

The party balance among voters age 55 and older stands remarkably close to that of registered voters overall. Democratic identifiers enjoy a seven-point advantage over Republicans in this sample, at 32 to 25 percent. The Pollster.com average of recent surveys shows a Democratic advantage among all registered and likely voters of six points. President Obama's favorable rating is 53 percent among these voters, almost identical to his 54 percent favorable rating nationally in the Pollster.com average. But the Democratic party ID advantage and President Obama's majority favorable rating does not translate into support for Democratic health care proposals among voters age 55 and older—reflecting strong opposition from Independent voters as well as Republicans.

- 1. Voters age 55 and older overwhelmingly view health care costs as their greatest financial concern.** 40 percent say paying for health care costs is their greatest financial concern, far more than those who cite paying for retirement (17 percent), paying their taxes (14 percent), paying their mortgage or rent (9 percent), or losing a job (5 percent). Paying for health care costs ranks first for all three partisan groups, Republicans (34 percent), Independents (42 percent), and Democrats (43 percent).
- 2. Consequently voters age 55 and older think "lowering the costs of health care" should be the top health care priority for the country, but they think President Obama's top priority is "covering more of the uninsured."** When asked which health care priority the

country should focus on first, 45 percent say lowering costs, 28 percent say covering the uninsured, and 18 percent say improving the quality of health care. But when asked about the President's top priority, 43 percent say it is covering the uninsured, 32 percent think it is lowering costs, and 14 percent say improving quality.

3. Voters age 55 and older oppose "the health care reforms being debated in Congress" by 48 to 39 percent. Republicans are overwhelmingly opposed at 83 to 9 percent, as are a majority of Independents at 52 to 33 percent. Only Democratic voters in this survey support the reforms, 70 to 16 percent. Opposition among voters age 55 and older tracks the latest Pollster.com average where voters of all ages oppose the health care reform plan by 52 to 39 percent.

4. The reason for their opposition is readily apparent: voters age 55 and older think health care reform will raise their taxes, increase the deficit, raise their premiums, cause their health care costs to go up, and cause the quality of the health care they receive to go down.

É By 76 to 3 percent, voters age 55 and older think "the health care reforms being debated in Congress" will increase rather than decrease their taxes. 89 percent of Republicans and 80 percent of Independents think reform will increase their taxes. But surprisingly, even 62 percent of Democrats think their taxes will go up as a result of health care reform.

É 68 percent think health care reform will increase the federal deficit. Only 7 percent think the deficit will go down, and 15 percent say reform will have no effect on the deficit. 84 percent of Republicans, 77 percent of Independents, and 46 percent of Democrats think the deficit will go up.

É 61 percent think health care reform will increase their health insurance or Medicare premiums, and only 13 percent think reform will lower their premiums. 70 percent of Republicans, 67 percent of Independents, and 46 percent of Democrats think reform will raise their premiums.

É 61 percent think reform will increase their health care costs. 78 percent of Republicans, 66 percent of Independents, and 43 percent of Democrats think their health care costs will go up as a result of reform.

É 41 percent think health care reform will decrease the quality of health care they receive, 22 percent think it will increase quality, and 30 percent think it will have no effect. Republicans think it will decrease rather than increase their quality of care by 61 to 17 percent, as do Independents by 48 to 16 percent. Only Democrats think it will increase their quality of care by 33 to 15 percent, while 41 percent say reform will have no effect on quality.

5. Voters age 55 and older overwhelmingly oppose the primary funding mechanisms for health care reform in the Senate plan: cutting Medicare spending, taxing Cadillac health plans, increasing Medicare payroll taxes, and cutting Medicare Advantage. Taxing elective cosmetic surgery is the only funding provision that receives majority support.

É 81 percent oppose cutting Medicare by \$400 billion, and only 11 percent support the Medicare cuts "to fund health care reform." Opposition stands at 92 percent among Republicans, 79 percent among Independents, and 76 percent among Democrats.

É Even when presented with the rationale for Medicare cuts, voters age 55 and older are still opposed.

Congressman A says cutting Medicare spending by \$400 billion is a good idea. It will cut out waste, require doctors and hospitals to charge less, and strengthen Medicare for the future.

Congressman B says cutting Medicare spending by \$400 billion is a bad idea. It will severely cut Medicare Advantage, cause rural hospitals to close, and make it harder for seniors to find doctors willing to treat them.

67 percent of voters age 55 and older agree with Congressman B, while only 24 percent agree with Congressman A. Not only is the margin great for Congressman B's argument, but intensity overwhelmingly favors Congressman B. 51 percent strongly agree with B, while only 13 percent strongly agree with A. Republicans prefer B's argument over A's by 80 to 15 percent, Independents prefer B by 69 to 21 percent, and even Democrats prefer B by 54 to 36 percent.

É 63 percent oppose "taxing employer-provided health care benefits that are worth over \$8,500 a year for individuals or over \$23,000 a year for a family." Opposition extends to 76 percent among Republicans, 67 percent among Independents, and 47 percent among Democrats.

É 63 percent oppose "increasing Medicare payroll taxes." Opposition by party is 78 percent among Republicans, 64 percent among Independents, and 49 percent among Democrats.

É 60 percent oppose "cutting or eliminating Medicare Advantage," the program that enrolls about 23 percent of seniors. 68 percent of Republicans are opposed to cutting funding for the program, as are 61 percent of Independents and 53 percent of Democrats.

É A slim majority supports "taxing elective cosmetic surgery," 52 to 40 percent. Republicans oppose the cosmetic surgery tax by 49 to 39 percent, while Independents support it 52 to 42 percent, as do Democrats by 61 to 32 percent.

- 6. Voters age 55 and older reject one of the critical rationales behind health care reform, that it will help the economy.** By a margin of 45 to 27 percent, they think the health care reforms being debated in Congress will hurt rather than help the economy (18 percent say it will have no effect, and 10 percent are unsure). Republicans overwhelmingly think it will hurt (77 to 5 percent), while a majority of Democrats think it will help (54 to 14 percent). But the swing group of Independents says health care reform will hurt the economy by a margin of three-to-one: 51 to 17 percent.

- 7. Voters age 55 and older support the abortion restrictions in the House bill.**

Congressman A says abortion should be allowed in a government-run health insurance plan, and abortion should be covered in federally-subsidized plans if patients pay for it themselves, because if abortion is legal it should be covered under government health plans.

Congressman B says abortions should not be allowed in a government-run health insurance plan, and abortions should not be covered by an insurance plan that receives federal subsidies, because it means taxpayers who object to abortion are forced to subsidize abortion.

58 percent of voters age 55 and older agree with Congressman B, the House bill, while 34 percent agree with Congressman A, the Senate bill. Republicans prefer B over A by 78 to 16 percent, as do Independents by 59 to 31 percent. Democrats prefer A over B by 51 to 40 percent.

- 8. Voters age 55 and older from all three partisan groups are skeptical about the government task force recommendation that women should delay regular mammograms until age 50.**

Congressman A says when a government task force recommends that women delay getting mammograms until age 50, we should follow their advice to reduce costs and eliminate unnecessary tests and radiation exposure.

Congressman B says when a government task force recommends that women delay getting mammograms until age 50, we should treat their advice skeptically because they could be more concerned about saving the government money than improving women's health.

By 63 to 26 percent, voters age 55 and older agree with Congressman B. Republicans prefer B's argument by 72 to 20 percent, Independents do so by 65 to 24 percent, and Democrats agree by 54 to 32 percent.

Opponents of the health care reforms being debated in Congress will find overwhelming agreement among voters age 55 and older on four messages:

1. The health care reform plans do not address your fundamental concern of lowering the cost of health care. Indeed, these plans do exactly the opposite by raising your health care costs.
2. Not only will these reform plans cause your health care costs to go up, they will raise your taxes, increase the deficit, raise your premiums, and hurt the quality of health care you receive.
3. The funding mechanisms envisioned to pay the cost of reform will harm Medicare and devastate Medicare Advantage.
4. Passing health care reform will harm our economy at a time when we need to focus on creating jobs.

Methodology

This survey consists of 1000 registered voters age 55 and older, chosen randomly from throughout the country through random-digit dialing targeted toward respondents 55 and older, using live interviewers. Calls were conducted December 6-9, 2009. Calling quotas were established by state, age, race, and gender using Census Bureau data for adults 55 and older. 78 percent of the sample is white, 10 percent African-American, 7 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent other or refused. Females constitute 54 percent and males 46 percent. The sample is seven points more Democratic than Republican: 25 percent Republican, 41 percent Independent, and 32 percent Democrat. The margin of error for the full sample is 3.1 percent.