



# RESURGENT REPUBLIC

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Interested Parties

**FROM:** Ed Gillespie and Whit Ayres

**DATE:** December 15, 2009

**RE:** **Independents Age 55 and Older Prefer GOP Positions on Fiscal and National Security Issues; Older Independents View Republicans in Congress More Favorably than Democrats**

Voters 55 and older are now extremely concerned about the federal government's current level of spending and debt. Since Resurgent Republic's first survey in April, we have been noting the extent to which budgetary and fiscal issues have been driving Independents away from Democrats and toward Republicans. That is clearly the case with voters 55 and older, a cohort where Independents look far more like Republicans than Democrats on budgetary and fiscal issues.

On national security, voters 55 and older strongly support President Obama's decision to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. But they are split on whether his national security policies have made America safer, and they intensely oppose his decisions to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and to try 9-11 terrorists in New York City.

Congressional debates over fiscal issues, health care, and national security have led to Republicans in Congress being rated comparably to Democrats in Congress among all voters 55 and older. Moreover, Independent voters in this age cohort now rate Democrats in Congress significantly more negatively than Republicans.

Resurgent Republic conducted its latest survey Sunday through Wednesday, December 6-9, 2009 with 1000 registered voters 55 and older. We focused on older voters because turnout among this group historically surpasses that of younger voters in non-presidential election years like 2010, and they are the voters most interested in the health-care debate dominating Congress at the moment.

The party balance among voters 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 five 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 policies among voters 55 and older.

**Among voters 55 and older, the three most important problems facing the country are the economy, health care, and government spending.** Twenty-seven percent of these voters say the economy concerns them most, 18 percent say health care, and 10 percent say government spending and the deficit. Republicans and Independents indicate higher levels of concern about government spending and the deficit (20 and 12 percent respectively) than do Democrats (3 percent).

**Older voters say Republicans are better able than Democrats to handle the problem they are most concerned about by a narrow margin, with a nearly two-to-one margin among Independents.** Overall, voters 55 and older say Republicans are better able to handle the issue they are most concerned about by 34 to 31 percent. The three-point margin for Republicans is remarkably close to the two-point generic ballot preference for Republicans among all registered voters in Pollster.com's average as of December 11 (43 to 41 percent). Not surprisingly, Republican voters in this sample trust Republicans (75 to 2 percent), and Democratic voters trust Democrats (69 to 3 percent). But tellingly for the 2010 elections, Independents trust Republicans by a 35 to 19 percent margin, 39 to 19 percent among Independents who say they are absolutely certain to vote.

**Among voters 55 and older, Republicans in Congress are now rated comparably to Democrats in Congress, with Republicans rated significantly better than Democrats among Independents in this age group.** Among all voters this age, the favorable/unfavorable ratings for Republicans in Congress are 46/42 percent, versus 44/45 percent for Democrats. Among Independent voters 55 and older, the ratings are 44/41 percent for Republicans and 36/52 percent for Democrats.

### *Fiscal Issues*

When it comes to how voters think their concerns should be addressed, the findings are encouraging for those advocating policies of less government spending and intervention.

- 1. Two-thirds of voters 55 and older are very concerned about the current level of spending and debt.** Overall, 68 percent of these voters are very concerned about current spending and debt, a figure that climbs to 90 percent when including voters who are somewhat concerned about spending and debt. By party, 93 percent of Republicans are very concerned (5 percent somewhat concerned), 71 percent of Independents are very concerned (21 percent somewhat concerned), and almost half of Democrats are very concerned (47 percent, with an additional 36 percent somewhat concerned).
- 2. A majority of older voters prefers spending less to reduce the budget deficit rather than spending more to help the economy recover.** Fifty-one percent want to spend less, versus 40 percent who want to spend more. Democrats want to spend more by 62 to 28 percent, while Republicans and Independents want to spend less by large margins, 76 to 20 percent and 54 to 35 percent respectively. At this point, older voters clearly want their national leaders to focus on controlling spending rather than adding to the deficit or increasing the debt.

3. **Majorities of voters 55 and older reject greater government involvement in the economy.** We noted in April that all registered voters preferred smaller government with fewer services and lower taxes to larger government with more services and higher taxes by a 69 to 21 percent margin. Today, voters 55 and older say they prefer smaller government by a 70 to 20 percent margin, including a 75 to 14 percent margin among Independents. Similarly, by a 53 to 43 percent margin, older voters think government is trying to do more things than it can do well, things that should be left to the private sector and individuals, rather than government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people. Democrats think government should do more by 70 to 26 percent, but Republicans (by 76 to 22 percent) and Independents (by 61 to 34 percent) think government is trying to do more things than it can do well.
4. **Strong majorities of these voters agree with conservative statements regarding federal spending and debt, including the statement that the deficit must be addressed now. Independents 55 and older are far closer to Republicans on these statements, with Democrats isolated in choosing the more liberal argument.**

É These voters agree that “*the nation’s high level of debt is a serious burden that will limit economic growth in this country for our children and grandchildren, and must be addressed now*” by a 63 to 31 percent margin, including an 84 to 13 percent margin among Republicans and a 65 to 29 percent margin among Independents. Democrats think that “*the nation’s high level of debt is a temporary response to an economic crisis, and can only be addressed after the economy turns around*” by a 48 to 44 percent margin.

É Even when presented with the rationale for higher spending at the beginning of 2009 ó that the federal budget brought us back from the brink of a depression and was the right thing to do for the good of the country ó voters 55 and older think that “*the federal budget spends too much, taxes too much, and borrows too much*” by a 60 to 35 percent margin, including a 65 to 31 percent margin among Independents and an 84 to 15 percent margin among Republicans. Democrats think that “*the federal budget brought us back from the brink of a depression*” by a 57 to 37 percent margin.

É These voters think that “*the stimulus spending is not working, and unspent funds should be returned to reduce the deficit*” rather than “*the stimulus spending is working and should continue to be spent as originally authorized*” by a 57 to 36 percent margin, including an 82 to 14 percent margin among Republicans and a 62 to 32 percent margin among Independents. Democrats think the stimulus is working by a margin of 58 to 32 percent.

É Voters 55 and older think that “*federal spending creates mainly government jobs, and makes it harder to generate more desirable private sector jobs,*” rather than “*federal spending is creating many government and private sector jobs, and avoiding numerous layoffs in state and local governments,*” by 53 to 34 percent, including 76 to 16 percent among Republicans and 59 to 28 percent among Independents. Democrats once again stand isolated in thinking that federal spending is creating more jobs by a 57 to 28 percent margin.

- 5. Independents do agree with Democrats that the Bush Administration is more responsible for the current state of the economy than the Obama Administration.** These voters still blame the Bush Administration more than the Obama Administration for the economy, by a 47 to 34 percent margin. This margin is 42 to 35 percent among Independents and 82 to 11 percent among Democrats, with Republicans blaming the Obama Administration by a 62 to 13 percent margin. This is a number that warrants watching over the course of 2010.

### *National Security Issues*

- 1. Voters 55 and older approve of President Obama's decision to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan.** These voters approve of the President's decision to send more troops to Afghanistan by a 62 to 32 percent margin, including 76 to 19 percent among Republicans, 61 to 32 percent among Independents, and 52 to 43 percent among Democrats.
- 2. By a 2-to-1 ratio, these voters disapprove of President Obama's decision to close Guantanamo.** These voters believe that *"holding prisoners at Guantanamo Bay helps protect America by keeping terrorists in custody who would kill Americans overseas"* by a 62 to 29 percent margin over the statement that *"holding prisoners at Guantanamo Bay weakens America's moral authority and isn't in keeping with our values."* Republicans and Independents overwhelmingly agree with the first statement by 87 to 9 percent and 64 to 28 percent respectively. Democrats narrowly prefer the second statement by 45 to 41 percent.
- 3. Voters 55 and older also disagree with the President's decision to try suspected 9-11 terrorists in New York City.** Given the following statements about trials for terror suspects:

*Congressman A says putting suspected 9-11 terrorists on trial in New York City instead of a military tribunal is a good idea, because it shows that America provides the same rights to everyone, including those suspected of the worst crimes, and a visible, open trial will prove to the world any convictions are deserved.*

*Congressman B says putting suspected 9-11 terrorists on trial in New York City instead of a military tribunal is a bad idea, because it elevates New York City as a terrorism target, will expose confidential intelligence-gathering methods, and gives terrorists captured on the battlefield the same rights as American citizens.*

Fifty-nine percent of voters 55 and older agree with Congressman B that suspected 9-11 terrorists should be subject to a military tribunal instead of a visible, open trial in New York City (34 percent agree with Congressman A), including an 82 to 15 percent margin among Republicans and a 65 to 30 percent margin among Independents. Democrats 55 and older agree with Congressman A, however, by a 54 to 36 percent margin, showing the Democratic base to be at odds with Independents and the older electorate as a whole.

4. **Voters 55 and older split on whether President Obama's national security and foreign relations policies have made America safer or less safe.** Thirty-three percent say less safe, 30 percent say safer, with 31 percent saying the policies have had no effect. Those results, however, mask a double-digit margin among Independents saying those policies have made America less safe, 38 to 25 percent.

The following messages will resonate strongly with voters age 55 and older:

1. More federal spending may be the agenda of the Democratic-controlled Congress, but it does not address your priority of cutting spending and lowering the deficit.
2. More federal spending is far more likely to increase deficits and debt than create good private sector jobs.
3. The Federal government is trying to do more things than it can do well, and the result will be a larger government, more spending, and higher taxes.
4. Congress cannot wait any longer to address the high level of debt that awaits our children and grandchildren.
5. President Obama made the right decision to send additional troops to Afghanistan, but closing Guantanamo Bay and providing 9/11 terrorists an open trial in New York City weakens our national security.

When these findings on federal debt and spending and national security issues are combined with findings about health-care policies tested in the same survey, on question after question, Republicans and Independents 55 and over stand on one side of the policy divide with Democrats standing on the other. Given the outsized role older voters play in non-presidential year elections, that pattern, should it persist, does not bode well for Democratic prospects in the 2010 elections.

### ***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. Seventy-eight 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.