



RESURGENT REPUBLIC

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Ed Gillespie, Whit Ayres and Leslie Sanchez

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RE: Independents Move Closer to Republicans on Fiscal and National Security Issues, and Align with Republicans on One-Party Government

Overview

In the year since Resurgent Republic conducted its inaugural survey in April 2009, President Obama and Democrats in Congress have seen dramatic deterioration of their public standing, driven by disaffection from Independent voters who have steadily moved toward siding with Republican policymakers on fiscal, domestic and national security policies. Today, by more than a two-to-one margin, self-identified Independents think “we need more Republicans in Congress to act as a check and balance on runaway Washington government that is bankrupting the country and mortgaging our children's future” versus those who think “more Republicans in Congress will lead to more gridlock and stand in the way of President Obama's agenda to create jobs and make needed reforms to our economy.”

In last year's initial survey, President Obama enjoyed a 61 to 32 percent approval rating (+29), with 59 percent of Independents approving of his job performance versus 32 percent disapproving (+27). Today the President's approval rating has fallen to 48 to 48 percent, including a 52 to 41 percent *disapproval* rating among Independents, a 29-point swing overall and a 38-point swing among Independents.

In that same period, the favorability rating of Democrats in Congress dropped from 45 percent favorable versus 42 percent unfavorable (+3) to 41 percent favorable versus 50 percent unfavorable (-9) while Republicans increased in favorability from 37 to 47 percent to 40 to 47 percent – still unfavorable, but now less so than Democrats. And Republicans hold a four-point advantage in the congressional generic ballot of 42 to 38 percent (which Resurgent Republic did not test last April).

Much of this change seems rooted in the Economy/Jobs/Government Spending/Health Care issue areas which remain of most concern to voters (a combined 68 percent in 2009 and 62 percent in 2010), where voter attitudes – and particularly those of critical Independents – have moved toward a more conservative perspective.

More than a month since its passage, predictions by Democratic leaders that the health care reform bill would become popular with voters once passed have not proved to be accurate, despite the White House's concerted effort to tout the bill. Overwhelming majorities of likely voters say the health care reform plan will increase their premiums, their health care costs, their taxes, and the federal deficit, while simultaneously decreasing their quality of care. Only 22 percent of voters support leaving the bill in place, while 72 percent of voters support amending and modifying it (37 percent) or repealing and replacing it (35 percent).

Voters reject the idea of a value added tax by a margin of more than three-to-one, are seemingly ambivalent at this point about financial services reform legislation (a slight majority says they have not heard enough to form an opinion), and are divided on immigration reform legislation.

By a margin of 62 to 19 percent, voters think that it's a bad thing for the country that the average pay and benefit package of federal government workers is now higher than the average pay and benefit package of private sector workers. The fact that 19 percent answered "don't know" to the question indicates that further public discussion of the fact may be warranted.

On most issues across the policy spectrum, Independents approach a two-to-one alignment with the conservative or Republican perspective over the liberal or Democratic perspective. That mirrors the margins for winning Republican statewide candidates in Virginia, New Jersey and Massachusetts in the last seven months, and indicates the potential for significant Democratic losses this fall if they do not make gains among Independents.

The Political Climate and One-Party Control of Government

- 1. Voters are more likely to say the country is on the wrong track now than they were a year ago.** Likely voters say the country is on the wrong track by a 59 to 33 percent margin compared to a 50 to 40 percent margin a year ago. Independents say the country is on the wrong track by a 65 to 25 percent margin, compared to a 52 to 34 percent margin a year ago. The economy remains the most important issue (38 percent now versus 57 percent last year), with increased mentions for health care (16 percent now versus 5 percent last year) and government spending (8 percent now versus 6 percent last year). Concern about spending is similar to that about health care for Independents (11 and 12 percent, respectively).
- 2. Republicans are more likely to vote in the 2010 election than either Independents or Democrats.** Republicans currently hold an advantage in intensity, with 64 percent of Republicans saying they are absolutely certain to vote in the elections for Congress this year, compared to 59 percent of Independents and 58 percent of Democrats.
- 3. President Obama's job approval rating seems to be hardening at below 50 percent.** After posting a lofty 61 to 32 percent approval rating last April (59 to 32 percent among Independents), the President now draws a 48 to 48 percent split – including a 52 to 41 percent disapproval margin among Independents. This result is consistent with a number of recent nationwide surveys.

4. **Democrats in Congress are now viewed less favorably than Republicans in Congress.** Democrats in Congress hold a 50 to 41 percent *unfavorable* image, after holding a 45 to 42 percent favorable image last April. Independents view Democrats in Congress unfavorably by a 55 to 31 percent margin (45 to 39 percent unfavorable last year). The 47 to 40 percent unfavorable rating for Republicans (52 to 34 percent among Independents) is similar to the rating last April (47 to 37 percent overall, including 47 to 32 percent among Independents).
5. **Republicans have an advantage on the generic ballot.** Voters prefer Republicans on the generic congressional ballot by a 42 to 38 percent margin, including a 39 to 27 percent margin among Independents.
6. **Majorities of voters want more Republicans in Congress to serve as a check and balance on runaway Washington government.**

Congressman A says more Republicans in Congress will lead to more gridlock and stand in the way of President Obama's agenda to create jobs and make needed reforms to our economy.

Congressman B says we need more Republicans in Congress to act as a check and balance on runaway Washington government that is bankrupting the country and mortgaging our children's future.

A majority of voters agrees that more Republicans are needed to provide a check and balance by 51 to 40 percent, including a two-to-one margin among Independents (61 to 28 percent).

Fiscal Issues

1. **Three-fifths of voters are very concerned about the current level of spending and debt.** Sixty-two percent of likely voters say they are very concerned about the federal government's current level of spending and debt, including 84 percent of Republicans, 64 percent of Independents, and 38 percent of Democrats.
2. **Likely voters think the federal government's priority should be spending less to reduce the deficit, and think the stimulus package wasted money that had to be borrowed, with a two-to-one margin among Independents.** By a 59 to 34 percent margin, voters say "*spending less to reduce the deficit*" should be a higher priority than "*spending more to help the economy recover,*" including a 63 to 30 percent margin among Independents and an 84 to 12 percent margin among Republicans. Democrats disagree by a 59 to 32 percent margin. By a similar 56 to 33 percent margin, voters say the \$787 billion federal stimulus package "*wasted billions of dollars that the country had to borrow on unnecessary spending programs*" rather than "*protected or created millions of jobs in both the public and private sector.*"

3. **Voters think a value added tax, or VAT, is a bad idea for America.** Respondents were asked which of the following statements they agree with:

A value added tax is a good idea. It could raise billions of dollars in new revenue for the federal government, reduce the federal deficit without raising income taxes, and would be paid only by people who purchase certain products.

A value added tax is a bad idea for America. It would be a massive hidden tax that would not appear on a bill, it would increase the price of almost everything, it would be paid primarily by the middle class, and it would hurt our economic recovery.

Voters think a VAT is a bad idea by 67 to 21 percent, including 53 to 31 percent among Democrats, 67 to 19 percent among Independents, and 82 to 12 percent among Republicans.

4. **Voters think higher average pay and benefit packages for federal government workers than for private sector workers is a bad thing for our country.** Overall, voters say having higher average pay and benefit packages for federal workers than for private sector workers is a bad thing by a 62 to 19 percent margin, including a 47 to 30 percent margin among Democrats, a 65 to 14 percent margin among Independents, and a 77 to 12 percent margin among Republicans.
5. **Voters believe the federal government has been squandering money on pork-barrel projects, bailouts, and big spending programs.** When asked whether “*the federal government is squandering money on pork-barrel projects, bank and auto bailouts, and big spending programs that create few private sector jobs,*” or “*the federal government has to do more during times of economic crisis, and spending by the government stimulates the economy and creates jobs,*” voters prefer the first statement by 54 to 40 percent, larger than the margin of 51 to 43 percent on the same question a year ago. Republicans think the federal government is squandering money by 78 to 18 percent, as do Independents by 56 to 38 percent. Democrats disagree by 65 to 27 percent.
6. **However, Independents agree more with Democrats that the Bush Administration is more responsible for the current state of the economy than the Obama Administration.** Echoing a finding from last December’s survey of voters 55 and older, these voters blame the Bush Administration more than the Obama Administration for the economy, by a 50 to 32 percent margin. This margin is 50 to 24 percent among Independents and 79 to 15 percent among Democrats, with Republicans blaming the Obama Administration by a 56 to 18 percent margin.

Health Care

- 1. Voters oppose the health care reform plan that Congress passed, with opposition more intense than support.** Voters overall oppose the plan by a 49 to 44 percent margin, including 41 percent strong opposition and 25 percent strong support. Independents join Republicans in opposition (53 to 38 percent and 89 to 8 percent, respectively) while Democrats support the plan (82 to 12 percent). Indeed, among voters who name health care as the most important issue, 54 percent disapprove of the plan passed (46 percent strongly disapprove) and 41 percent approve (22 percent strongly approve). Intensity around the health care issue clearly remains on the side of those opposed to the bill.
- 2. Overwhelming majorities of likely voters say the health care reform plan will increase their premiums, their health care costs, their taxes, and the federal deficit, while simultaneously decreasing their quality of care.** Voters say the plan will increase their premiums by a 60 to 11 percent margin (64 to 8 among Independents), their health care costs by a 61 to 13 percent margin (62 to 12 among Independents), the federal deficit by a 70 to 8 percent margin (76 to 5 among Independents), and their taxes by a 73 to 4 percent margin (78 to 2 among Independents). Interestingly, pluralities of Democrats agree that those four items will be increased as well. Voters overall say the plan will decrease the quality of health care they receive by a 44 to 22 percent margin, including a 76 to 11 percent margin among Republicans and a 48 to 16 percent margin among Independents, while Democrats disagree by a 34 to 13 percent margin (46 percent of Democrats say it will have no effect on quality).
- 3. Voters split between wanting Congress to “amend and modify” the plan and “repeal and replace” the plan.** Thirty-seven percent of voters want Congress to amend and modify the plan (26 percent among Republicans, 43 percent among Independents, and 44 percent among Democrats), 35 percent want Congress to repeal and replace the plan (67 percent among Republicans, 36 percent among Independents, and 5 percent among Democrats), and 22 percent want Congress to leave the plan in place (4 percent among Republicans, 16 percent among Independents, and 43 percent among Democrats).

Immigration Reform

- 1. Likely voters split on what legislation they prefer to address immigration reform.** Respondents were asked which of three types of legislation they prefer for immigration reform:

A bill that concentrates on border security but does not include a temporary-worker program or a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants who are already here, because we have to secure the border first before we can think about other solutions.

A bill that includes border security and a temporary-worker program, because we have to address the need for workers by U.S. employers if we are ever going to get control of the border.

A bill that includes border security, a temporary-worker program, and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants who are already here, because any solution to the immigration problem must deal with the illegal immigrants who are already in America.

Forty-three percent of voters prefer a comprehensive bill with a path to citizenship, but 48 percent of voters prefer something short of that, with 24 percent preferring a bill that includes a temporary-worker program and 24 percent preferring a bill that focuses on border security first. Independents mirror the overall result (43 percent for a path to citizenship, 27 percent for a temporary-worker program and 23 percent for border security first) while a majority of Democrats prefers a path to citizenship (54 percent, with 23 percent for a temporary-worker program and 17 percent for border security first). Republicans split among the three options: 35 percent for border security first, 24 percent for a temporary-worker program, and 31 percent for a path to citizenship.

- 2. Given two statements on immigration reform, voters prefer the statement that includes a path to citizenship.** Respondents were asked which of the following statements regarding a path to citizenship they agree with:

Congressman A says illegal immigrants who have no criminal background and meet strict guidelines like registration, paying a fine, and learning English should be allowed to earn citizenship over the course of several years.

Congressman B says immigration reform should not include a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. There should be no reward for illegal behavior.

Voters overall favor the path to citizenship with these conditions by a 54 to 42 percent margin, including a 54 to 43 percent margin among Independents and a 64 to 31 percent margin among Democrats. Republicans think that there should not be a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants by a 58 to 40 percent margin.

Climate Change

One area where Independents align more closely with Democrats is on perceptions about climate change (the subject, not legislation). Overall 52 percent of likely voters think climate change is happening and human activity is a significant cause, 16 percent think it is happening but human activity is not a significant cause, and 26 percent believe it is not happening. But a plurality of Republicans (49 percent) thinks climate change is not happening, while a majority of Independents (53 percent) and Democrats (76 percent) thinks climate change is happening and is caused by human activity. However, there has been some movement on this front since April 2009, when 58 percent of likely voters said climate change is happening and human activity is a significant cause (a six-point drop) and 20 percent said it is not happening (a six-point increase).

National Security Issues

- 1. Voters say President Obama has improved America's standing in the world.** By a 50 to 45 percent margin, including a 49 to 46 percent margin among Independents, voters say the President has improved the country's standing in the eyes of the world.
- 2. Just as a year ago, voters think holding prisoners at Guantanamo Bay helps keep America safe rather than undermines our values by nearly a two-to-one margin.** Voters agree that holding prisoners at Guantanamo Bay *"helps protect America by keeping terrorists in custody who would kill Americans overseas"* rather than *"weakens America's moral authority and isn't in keeping with our values"* by a 60 to 32 percent margin. This result is essentially unchanged from the 58 to 33 percent margin seen last April.
- 3. Voters overall agree that civilian trials for suspected 9/11 terrorists are a bad idea, in opposition to the Administration's current policy.** Respondents were asked which of the following statements they agree with regarding civilian trials:

Congressman A says putting suspected 9/11 terrorists on trial in civilian courts instead of a military tribunal is a good idea, because it shows that America provides the same rights to everyone, 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 civilian courts instead of a military tribunal is a bad idea, because it will expose confidential intelligence-gathering methods, and gives terrorists captured on the battlefield the same rights as American citizens.

Voters agree that civilian trials are a bad idea by a 56 to 36 percent margin overall, including a 61 to 32 percent margin among Independents and a 76 to 20 percent margin among Republicans (Democrats say civilian trials are a good idea by a 55 to 36 percent margin).

Message Recommendations

The following messages will resonate strongly with the American public:

1. Democrats in control of both the White House and Congress have concentrated too much power in one party's hands. Operating without a check and balance on their actions, Congress and the White House are passing too many taxes, too much spending, and too much debt instead of focusing on job creation.
2. A value added tax is a bad policy our nation cannot afford. It will add a massive hidden tax on families, increase the price of almost everything and hurt job creation.
3. The health care reform plan passed by Congress will increase premiums, health care costs, taxes, and the federal deficit, while decreasing quality of care.

4. Holding prisoners at Guantanamo Bay helps protect America by keeping terrorists in custody who would kill Americans overseas.
5. Providing 9/11 terrorists an open trial in civilian court is a bad idea. It gives terrorists the same rights as American citizens and weakens our national security.

Methodology

This survey of 1000 likely voters was conducted April 25-27, 2010. Respondents were selected randomly from a random-digit-dialing sample including both cell phone and landline telephone numbers. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote in the county in which they live. Quotas were set for state, age, and race reflecting previous turnout; and the sample was minimally weighted to reflect the Pollster.com average partisan balance for registered and likely voter samples of 36 percent Democrat and 32 percent Republican.

The margins of error for responses with an even split – 50 percent for one response and 50 percent for another response – is ± 3.10 percent for the full sample, ± 5.44 percent for Republicans, ± 5.65 percent for Independents, and ± 5.39 percent for Democrats. The margin of error is smaller when one response receives a higher level of support. For example, the margin of error is ± 2.68 percent when 75 percent of respondents in the full sample choose one response and 25 percent choose another response.