

Date: January 18, 2011  
To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Campaign for America's Future  
From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville, Robert Borosage

## It's Jobs, Stupid

The voters have a clear and dramatic message for the new Republicans in Congress and the President on the eve of his State of the Union Address: focus on jobs and the economy and show how America is going to be economically successful again. This is not a nuanced poll. If Democrats did not get the message in 2010, voters are ready to send a message again, according to the first Democracy Corps-Campaign for America's Future survey of 2011.<sup>1</sup>

The media pundits and Washington conventional wisdom say deficit reduction and cutting government spending are the top priorities for the nation; yet, the Republican Congress has prioritized health care repeal and Social Security cuts (which are on the table for the first time.) They could not have it more wrong. It is jobs, stupid.

This survey, conducted after the Tucson shooting but before the President's memorial address, shows the President's personal favorability up appreciably and intense disapproval down significantly. He is marginally ahead of Mitt Romney and dramatically ahead of Sarah Palin in the 2012 race. Against Romney, Obama is already even among independents.

Democrats have improved their position modestly from 2010 when they lost by 8 points. In a named Congressional ballot today, Democrats trail the Republicans by 3 points (44 to 47 percent). Democrats only trail by 4 points among Independents. The two national and congressional parties are at rough parity in public image.

But Republicans are about to confront the gap between the mandate they claim and the voters' priorities. This presents an opportunity for Democrats to define themselves, the choice ahead, and more importantly, to finally show what they believe about the economy and how they plan to achieve growth – above all, how to create jobs now and in the future. Right now, Democrats are basically invisible on the economy and jobs. Republicans are more trusted by 4 points on the economy and the parties are at parity on creating jobs. Democrats are also down 10 points on taxes and 14 points on the budget deficit.

---

<sup>1</sup> This memo is based on a poll conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps and Campaign for America's Future. The survey was of 1,480 2008 voters (1001 weighted) conducted January 9-12, 2011. Margin of error: +/-2.5 percentage points unless otherwise noted.



We all know the unemployment rate will exceed 9 percent for some time to come, and will probably remain above 8 percent up to the election. There is no more important fact. In this survey, 17 percent report being unemployed in the past year; 41 percent counting themselves or someone in their immediate family – one half of white non-college men.

The President and the Democrats have to start over in communicating their vision on the economy. The country embraces long-term plans for investment to create jobs and favors growth as the best route to deficit reduction – strongly favoring investment over austerity.

How this gets played out matters. Republicans say they want to challenge Obama's agenda: that was their mandate, and the health care repeal is the symbol of their larger position toward the president. But voters in this survey strongly want the Republican Congress “to work together with the president to find compromise solutions to the country's problems.” The image of the Tea Party has turned dramatically more negative in this new chapter of our politics. And most important, just 34 percent of presidential voters approve of the way the Republican majority is handling its job – falling to 27 percent among independents.

### **It's Jobs, Stupid**

Though respondents could choose two problems, just 25 percent say “the budget deficit is big and growing.” While it is important, it is not their top concern.

Just 17 percent think the priority for the new Congress should be repealing health care. The Republican obsession with health care repeal does not correspond with the views of the voters. (Democracy Corps will release a full survey tomorrow with Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund on health care.)

The new Congress is about to get it very wrong. The voters believe the top priority should be economic recovery and jobs (46 percent), protecting Social Security and Medicare (34 percent), and making sure children receive an education for these times (27 percent). Cutting spending and the size of government is fourth on the list, at 25 percent, and reducing the size of the budget deficit is sixth—at only 15 percent.

We asked voters to give an overall rating to –

- *A plan to invest in new industries and rebuild the country over the next five years (57 warm and 16 cool)*
- *A plan to dramatically reduce the deficit over the next five years (52 warm and 20 cool)*

While deficit reduction is very important, voters want to see a growth strategy. Indeed, when we marshaled a big debate on brave deficit reduction versus a jobs plan to reduce the deficit and achieve growth, the country rallied to the latter, 58 to 35 percent, with 42 percent strongly embracing growth over austerity.



## The Policy Choice

The President's bipartisan deficit commission set out a course to achieve \$4 trillion in deficit reduction by 2020. A sizeable majority of 56 percent like the goal, but a nearly identical bloc hate the plan itself – 54 percent. They turn dramatically against the plan when they hear the details without any rhetoric.

*Last month, the co-chairs of the bipartisan deficit commission appointed by the President and the leaders of Congress presented an extensive plan to reduce the federal budget deficit by nearly 4 trillion dollars by 2020. It lowers corporate and income tax rates, but raises tax revenues by eliminating many deductions, including limiting the home mortgage interest deduction and taxing health insurance benefits. It cuts spending by reducing the federal workforce by ten percent and cutting defense spending. And for future retirees, it cuts Social Security benefits and raises retirement age to 69 over time. Do you favor or oppose this deficit reduction plan?*

Republicans say that Social Security is no longer the “third rail” in politics, but they could not be listening to voters. They have no mandate for cutting Social Security – and the voters have no appetite for it. A large majority of 56 percent opposes the commission's recommendation to raise the retirement age to 69 by 2075. An almost identically large majority oppose the proposal to reduce future benefits of those now entering the labor force. Young people are even more opposed to these proposals than the elderly – in case the Republicans plan to take up inter-generational warfare.

The Republican conflict with public priorities will become even more evident in the budget battle ahead.

- By two-to-one, voters disapprove of Republican positions that add to the deficit (repealing health care reform and making permanent tax cuts for the wealthy).
- A sizeable majority of 52 to 43 percent oppose the planned \$100 billion dollar in cuts for this year that cut education, student loans, energy, and environment.

## The Politics Ahead

After the Republicans' landslide win in 2010, the country has quickly moved to a position of party parity in vote preference, image and identification. About equal numbers identify with the Democrats and Republicans; the two national and congressional parties are equally unpopular. In fact, the Presidential race starts almost even with Romney as the Republican and the congressional race has moved to Republicans only 3 points ahead.

Some of this has emerged because of the Presidential electorate ahead and some because of shifts among those who voted in 2010. Democrats need to move well beyond parity, but it is nonetheless a better environment than last November.

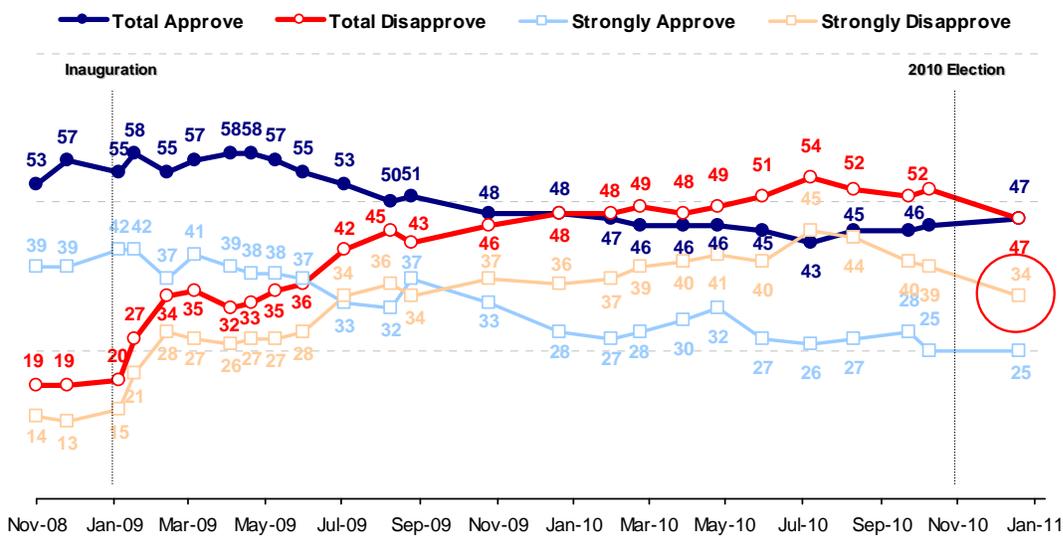


The independents already look very different – Obama is even in the Presidential contest against Romney and Democrats are at -4 in the named congressional ballot. If the Republicans nominate a Sarah Palin, Democrats win independents at this point by a double-digit margin.

The President’s standing is stronger since the election. His approval is up to 47 percent – but more important, strong disapproval has plummeted. This is a major change in mood and climate for the period ahead.

### Obama approval: sharp drop in disapproval

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?



\*Note: From Democracy Corps surveys since the 2008 election. Before inauguration, question read: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by Barack Obama as president-elect?"

The President has further to go to have a clear lead and congressional Democrats have further to go if they are to rebuild their majorities.

The Democratic majorities of 2006 and 2008 were produced by a new broad progressive base and by gains among key swing groups. Presidentially, that made possible the stretching of the Electoral College map to the inner mountain west, the winning of former Republican states, like Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina and Indiana. Congressionally Democrats, closed out New England and New York, made major gains in Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and won Senate races in Colorado and New Mexico. Republicans increasingly were isolated – geographically to the South and parts of the West, racially to whites, generationally to older voters and seniors, religiously to evangelicals, and ideologically to conservatives.

In the broad base at the heart of their electoral majority, Democrats are doing respectably at the outset of 2011, though they have to make significant additional gains with young voters and unmarried women if they are to get back to 2012 levels. They also need to do better with union households.



---

The economy could not be more important for the base voters that are underperforming. They have been hit hard and more strongly than other voters, hate the course Republicans propose to go – starting with cuts in Social Security and education.

- **Young voters** are near 2008 levels of support for Obama in a contest against Palin, 64 to 29 percent, but only reaches 54 percent at this point against Romney. In the congressional contest, Democratic candidates lead the Republicans 50 to 39 percent today, well below the 63 to 18 percent advantage Democrats achieved in 2008.
- At this point, Obama leads Romney among **unmarried women** by 20 points, 56 to 36 percent, and leads Palin by more, 66 to 30 percent margin. Unmarried women prefer a Democratic candidate for Congress over a Republican by a margin of 56 to 36 percent. Yet, more than two-thirds of unmarried women voted for both Obama and Democratic congressional candidates in the 2008 elections.
- Obama's performance won nearly 60 percent of **union households** in 2008, but is now getting half of the vote against Romney. The 37-point advantage for Democrats in union households in 2008 currently stands at 14 points, 54 to 39

Among the key swing voters that produced the Democrats' national majority, the story is more mixed. In this poll Democrats are regaining support in the suburbs, which could be a reaction to the way Republicans are choosing to govern. That is obviously critical to the battle ahead.

- Among suburban voters, Obama's approval rating has reached 55 percent.
- Suburban voters prefer the Democratic candidate to the Republican candidate 47 to 40 in the named Congressional ballot.
- Among suburban voters, Barack Obama leads Mitt Romney by 18 points (56 to 37) and Sarah Palin by 14 points (51 to 36).

But there are key swing groups where Democrats face continuing problems:

- Among **white non-college voters**, Democrats trail in the Congressional margin by 23 points (34 to 57). Among white non-college men, the margin is much wider, at 35 points (27 to 62). Barack Obama is losing white non-college voters by 22 points to Sarah Palin (34 to 55) and by 21 points to Mitt Romney (36 to 57).
- **White seniors** continue to pose problems for Democrats. Barack Obama loses white seniors by 8 points (40 to 48) to Sarah Palin and by 25 points to Mitt Romney (35 to 60 percent). The congressional margin is slimmer, but Democrats are losing white seniors by 16 points (40 to 56 percent).

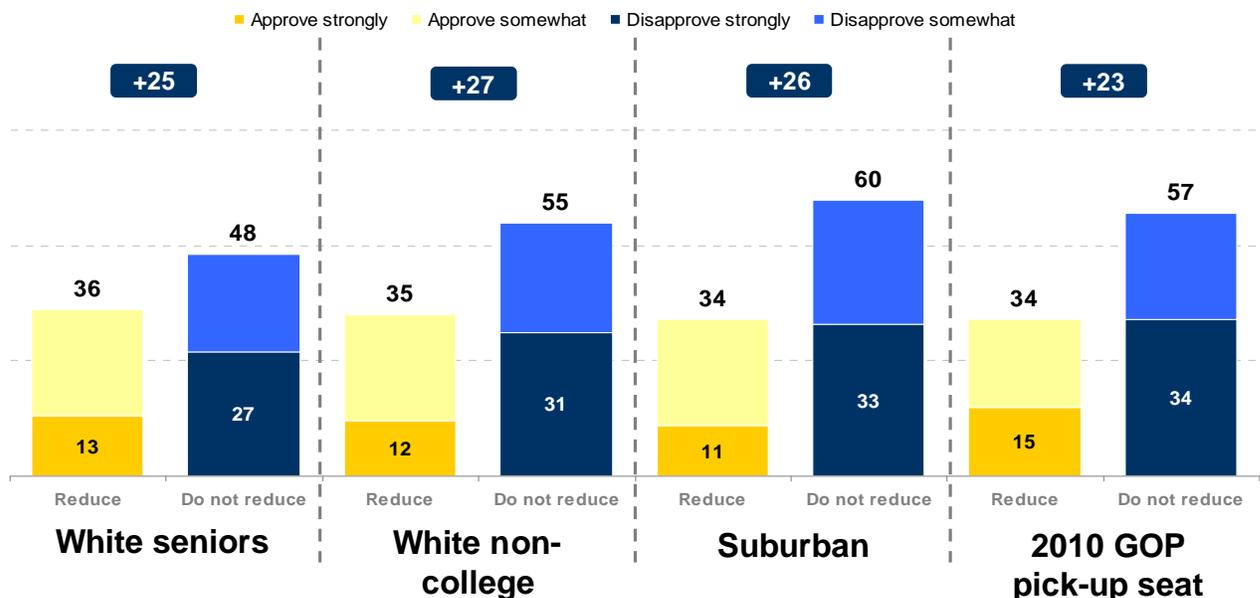


- Among **rural non-South white voters**, the Democratic candidate for Congress is losing by 30 to 61 percent, a 31 points margin. Among white voters in the rural non-South, Barack Obama trails Sarah Palin 42 to 48 percent and Mitt Romney 30 to 57 percent – a 26 point margin.

The difficulty that Democrats are having with white non-college and blue collar voters is no doubt closely linked to the economy and job situation. If Democrats are to reach these voters, they have to understand the scale of problems people are facing and how hungry they are for Democrats to show how they are going to get the country back to growth and creating American jobs. On most issues and priorities, these swing blocs are more aligned with the Democrats than the new Republican Congress – and part of any strategy to regain the Democratic majority.

## Reduce Social Security Benefits

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After each pair, please tell me whether the **FIRST** statement or the **SECON**D statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.



Voters could be on the verge of registering some buyers' remorse for the Republican leadership they just elected (among all voters, the Republican Congress's job approval is 34 percent). That regret will only grow if Republicans continue to ignore the clear priorities of the voters. This is an opportunity for Democrats and the president to show that they get the message: jobs and a big plan to get America going. Protect Social Security and Medicare. This is both good policy and good politics.



## Republicans in Congress job approval: Independents disapprove

*Do you approve or disapprove of the way Republicans in Congress are handling their job in charge of the House of Representatives?*

