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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Campaign for America's Future

From: Stanley Greenberg, Erica Seifert, and Scott Tiell, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner  
Robert Borosage, Campaign for America's Future

## **Take Back the American Dream Conference participants call for stronger, bolder, more progressive agenda**

The Democracy Corps-Campaign for America's Future straw poll of Take Back the American Dream conference participants found strong support for President Obama and the jobs bill but also reveals a strong desire to go further and strong support for independent action. Almost one-quarter of attendees took the survey, which was administered via iPad, laptop, and smartphone during the first two days of the conference.

Participants continue to support President Obama; 72 percent approve of his performance as president and three-quarters give him a warm personal rating—down from when he took office but nearly unchanged since last year's straw poll. However, their support for the Democratic Party on the whole is more muted, though impacted by the intense opposition to the Republicans in Congress and the Tea Party.

Their frustration is not that the agenda has been too liberal, too bold, or “socialist.” Rather, these progressives are concerned that the Democrats' agenda has not been big enough or implemented fast enough to meet the moment. Given the reality of the economy (90 percent give the economy a cool rating), progressives would like to see a stronger, more activist and progressive agenda from Washington.

- Nearly all of the participants (97 percent) support the jobs bill.
- However, more than three-quarters (78 percent) believe the jobs bill is “too small.” Just 22 percent say it is “about right” and only a single participant said it is “too large.”
- Two-thirds want President Obama to *not* compromise on his policy positions on the jobs bill and are eager to see Obama stand up to the Republican-led House.
- A striking majority (89 percent) believe that Washington should focus on creating jobs “even if it means more spending in the short term.” As a result, 90 percent agree that “the deficit is not the problem, lack of growth and shared prosperity is the



problem. Large corporations and the wealthiest Americans have prospered over the last few years, but the economy has suffered because that growth has not been widely shared.” This is a conference of Keynesians.

- They are very clear that the problem is lack of growth, not deficits.

When they went to the polls in 2008, many expected that this sentiment would become the new orthodoxy in Washington. Almost three years later, they have been disappointed by the slow pace and lackluster results from a government they believe is “influenced by big money and conservative ideas.” Indeed, participants are divided on the key question as to the priority that should be given to re-electing the President and taking back the House versus building an independent movement. We asked respondents to choose:

- “Re-electing the president and taking back the House of Representatives needs to be the first priority, because if the Republicans capture all branches of government, they will do dramatic damage to the country.”
- “We need to build an independent movement to challenge the influence of big money and conservative ideas in both parties. We should work from outside the electoral system but also make a concerted effort to recruit and support progressive candidates who are committed to real change.”
- “Both parties are compromised. We should build an independent movement to protest the way our two-party system operates. The movement should focus on public education and mass demonstrations, protesting big money and corporate influence in both parties.”

Among the respondents, 48 percent believe that electing Democrats must be a priority, while 52 percent give priority to building an independent movement – 42 percent who support building independently while recruiting progressive candidates and 10 percent who favor focusing on public education and mass demonstrations without an electoral strategy. In a separate question, about one-third say they would consider voting for a third party candidate.

### **Key Findings**

- Of the jobs proposals, participants believe funding for infrastructure projects like roads, bridges and airports will be the most effective at creating jobs (52 percent made that one of their top two choices). Nearly 40 percent believes that helping local governments avoid lay-offs of teachers, police officers and firefighters will be the most effective. One-third selected “funding for mass transit and clean energy transportation upgrades” as the most effective proposal. They were least



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- supportive of payroll tax cuts, either for employers or employees, reflecting perhaps their concern with protecting Social Security.
- While these progressives believe that creating jobs is more important than reducing the deficit, they do support progressive long-term deficit reduction solutions. The most popular reform to help fix the economy was raising taxes on millionaires and creating a new financial transaction tax (64 percent made that one of their top two choices), followed by reducing defense spending (with 53 percent support). The least popular, not surprisingly, was the conservative call to cut taxes and spending and rollback regulations to improve business confidence.
  - Nearly two-thirds oppose changes to Social Security and Medicare.
  - These progressives are strongly committed to an investment agenda; 92 percent give “a plan to invest in new industries and rebuild the country over the next five years” a warm rating. Only 30 percent give “a plan to dramatically reduce the deficit over the next 5 years” a warm rating.
  - Unions get high marks among these participants—92 percent give them a warm rating.
  - We did not ask participants to vote for Republicans. Instead, we asked which candidate in the Republican field was “most qualified.” Rick Santorum and Michele Bachmann are the least popular—only one participant ranked each as “most qualified” to be President. Rick Perry and Sarah Palin each received a meager 1 percent while Herman Cain received 2 percent and Newt Gingrich received 3 percent.
  - Nearly half of all participants (49 percent) selected Jon Huntsman as the “most qualified” Republican candidate. Mitt Romney was a distant second with 22 percent. In recent polls, Huntsman received the support of only about 2 percent of potential Republican voters.