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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

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Olympia Snowe: The Political Problems of Stopping Health Care Reform

Olympia Snowe enjoys broad support in her home state, but she faces significant political problems if she opposes President Obama's health insurance reform. A Snowe vote against health insurance reform results in Mainers evenly divided on whether she should be re-elected, while support for Obama's plan produces 53 percent who want to re-elect Snowe compared to 38 percent who want someone new as U.S. Senator.¹

Mainers worry that Republicans are obstructing passage of health care reform and they want Senator Snowe to do what she thinks is right, rather than hold out for a more bipartisan bill:

- By 50 to 39 percent, voters in Maine believe Republicans in Congress "aren't being constructive and just want Obama to fail" rather than that they "are playing a constructive role in improving a health care reform bill."
- By 62 to 29 percent, Mainers believe President Obama "has made an effort to reach out to Republicans on health care reform" rather than that he "has ignored Republicans' ideas on health care reform."
- And by 64 to 28 percent, they feel Senator Snowe "should vote for the health care bill if she thinks it's a good bill even if she is the only Republican who supports it" rather than that she "should only vote for the health care bill if it is a bipartisan bill that other Republicans are willing to support."

¹ Based on a survey of 808 registered voters in Maine conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps, September 23-27, 2009. Margin of error 3.5 percent.



Finally, it is clear that Mainers overwhelmingly support a government sponsored non-profit health insurance option, 63 to 27 percent. And they support this option from the start significantly more strongly than they support a “trigger” (52 to 34 percent) that would create the government sponsored non-profit health insurance option only if private health insurance companies do not make affordable coverage available within several years.

Democrats Hold Major Advantages in Maine

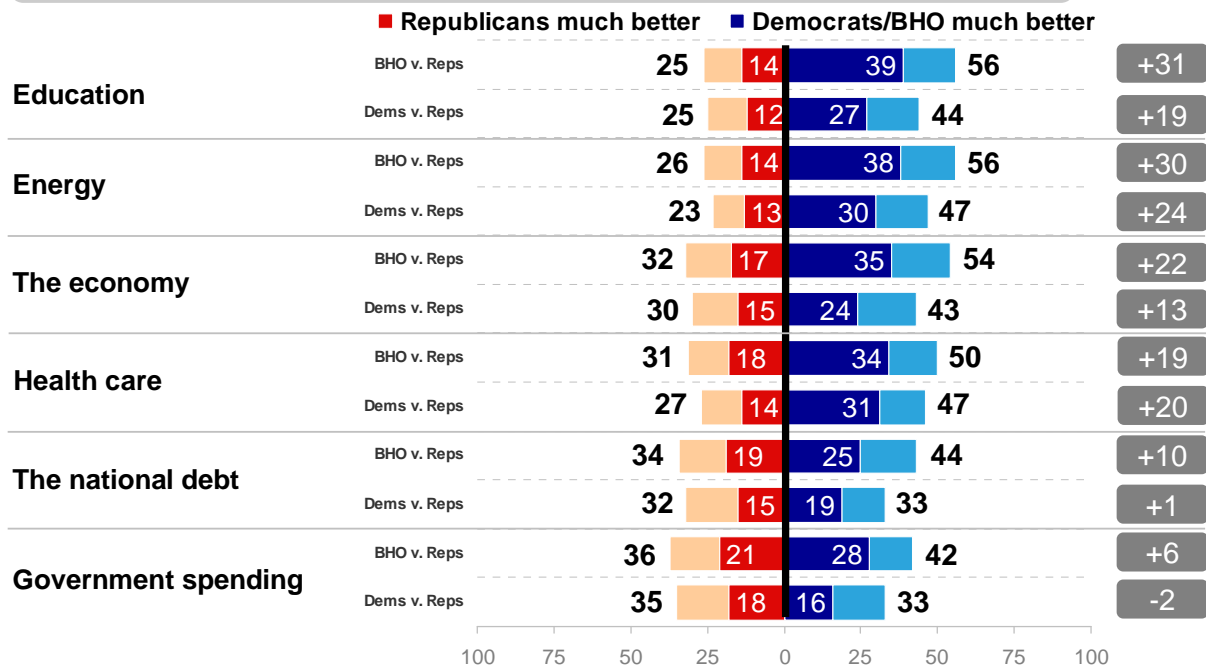
In the home of one of the most important Republican votes on health care, Democrats hold major advantages. While voters here give Democrats a net 15-point positive favorability rating (47 percent favorable to 32 percent unfavorable), they give Republicans a net negative 22-point rating (27 percent favorable to 49 percent unfavorable).

Moreover, they trust Democrats and President Obama over Republicans on nearly every issue, and they do by double digits on almost every one.

Obama leads big on all issues; Republicans extremely low

Now I am going to ask you something different. I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think Barack Obama/the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we will move on to the next item.

BHO/Dems.
– Reps.



President Obama remains very popular in Maine with 62 percent job approval ratings and a 61 to 27 percent favorable-unfavorable ratio.



Maine Wants Action on Health Insurance Reform

Mainers clearly want action on health care and they want it now, as 57 percent believe it is important to pass health care reform this year. Without providing any additional information on Obama’s plan, the starting point for voters in Maine points to a strong desire for action:

- By two-to-one, they are more concerned that “if we don’t change the system, health care will continue to be a problem in this country” than they are that “if we change the system, health care will be a bigger problem in this country.”
- They are more concerned that if we do nothing costs will go up than that if we pass Obama’s plan costs will go up, 51 to 38 percent.
- They believe this plan will give them stable coverage, not that they will lose coverage under this plan, 51 to 25 percent.
- And they feel the country will be better off rather than worse off with this plan, 53 to 36 percent.

Mainers Show Strong Support for Public Non-Profit Option

Maine voters do not yet know whether this plan would mean higher or lower costs for their family (30 percent say they are unsure or that the plan will result in neither higher nor lower), but they are very supportive of the central feature of the plan that will rein in costs – a government-created non-profit health insurance option. Mainers favor this option by a more than two-to-one margin (63 to 27 percent), with independents also showing strong support (62 percent support).

Support is less enthusiastic for Snowe’s proposal of creating a non-profit option with a “trigger” that would bring the non-profit option into effect only if private health insurance companies do not make affordable coverage available within several years. While a 52 percent majority favors this approach, the “trigger” approach is significantly less popular than a straight non-profit option among both Democrats and independents.

A Vote Against Health Care Imperils Snowe’s Electoral Prospects

Snowe starts with an impressive 70 percent job approval rating, including a stunning 76 percent among Democrats and 70 percent among independents. But her electoral success is predicated on maintaining the support of the very Democrats and independents who believe we need to reform health care.



At this point, Snowe receives credit for her performance on health care – 55 percent approve of her performance on health care, compared to 49 percent for Senator Collins and 57 percent for President Obama. In fact, 60 percent of Democrats approve of Snowe’s performance on health care, compared to 53 percent of Republicans and independents. Supporters of Obama’s health care plan are more likely to approve of Snowe’s performance on the issue than are opponents of the plan, suggesting that she is viewed as a constructive voice in the debate who wants to work with the president to pass reform.

At this point, an impressive 60 percent of voters want to re-elect Snowe, compared to just 30 percent who support someone new. A 57-percent majority of Democrats and 61 percent of independents want to re-elect her.

However, Snowe’s strong bipartisan standing should not be mistaken for blind allegiance to her. Through a simulation in which half the sample was asked to imagine Snowe opposed Obama’s health reform plan and half the sample was asked to imagine she supported the plan, we discovered the dramatic effect her vote could have on her electoral prospects.² Among voters who were asked to imagine that Snowe opposed Obama’s plan, her re-elect numbers dropped dramatically, with only 44 percent supporting her re-election and an equal 44 percent favoring someone new after the simulation. Among voters who were asked to imagine that Snowe supported Obama’s plan, 53 percent backed her re-election compared to 38 percent who want someone new after the simulation.

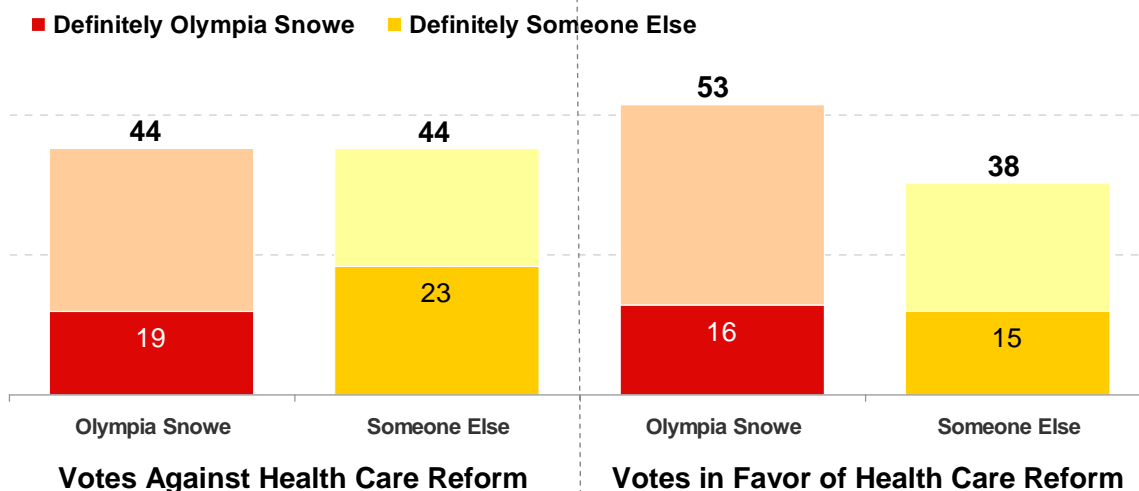
² The sample that was asked to imagine that Snowe favored Obama’s plan heard 3 attacks commonly launched by the opponents of reform while the sample that was asked to imagine that Snowe opposed Obama’s plan heard 3 attacks commonly aired by those supporting Obama’s plan (See Appendix A and B for the text of the attacks).



Vote against health care reform would damage Snowe’s electability

Still imagining that Senator Snowe votes **against** President Obama’s health care plan -- thinking about the next election for US Senate, if the next election for US Senator were held today do you think you would definitely vote to re-elect Olympia Snowe, probably vote to re-elect Olympia Snowe, probably vote for someone else, or definitely vote for someone else?

Still imagining that Senator Snowe votes **in favor of** President Obama’s health care plan -- thinking about the next election for US Senate, if the next election for US Senator were held today do you think you would definitely vote to re-elect Olympia Snowe, probably vote to re-elect Olympia Snowe, probably vote for someone else, or definitely vote for someone else?



**Note: The half of respondents answering “votes against” heard simulated attacks from supporters of reform while the half answering “votes in favor” received attacks from opponents. Data reflects respondents’ standing following those attacks.*

- Among independents, Snowe’s opposition to Obama’s plan causes a net 33-point drop in support for her re-election.
- Among Democrats, a vote for Obama’s plan produces a 10-point net increase in support for her re-elect even though the survey simulates attacks for supporting Obama’s plan, while a vote against health care reform produces a net 53-point drop among Democrats.
- Snowe’s vote against health care reform would disproportionately hurt her with women (net 24-point drop in her re-elect), among 50-64 year olds (net 24-point drop) and among college-educated voters (net 23-point drop). Even among seniors, she fares worse with a vote against reform than a vote in favor of reform.

In sum, Olympia Snowe is incredibly popular in her home state for a reason: she bucks her party when Republicans stand opposed to her constituents. This has earned her the respect and support of many Democrats and independents. But health care reform is too big an issue to bite the Democratic and independent hand that feeds her electoral success.



■ **Appendix A: Attacks from opponents of reform**

After taking over four hundred thousand dollars from insurance companies, Snowe voted to allow them to keep denying patients like you coverage because of an illness they had five years ago or to take insurance away from people when they get sick because of a typo on their insurance forms.

Snowe talks about being independent, but after proposing the creation of a non-profit health insurance option to compete with insurance companies if they don't reduce costs, she abandoned her own plan because of pressure she received from Republican leaders in Washington.

Experts say that Snowe's vote against health insurance reform means that health care costs for Maine families and small businesses will double over the next several years and that another 25,000 Mainers will lose the coverage they now have in the next year.

■ **Appendix B: Attacks from supporters of reform**

Snowe voted for a government takeover of health care that will put government bureaucrats in charge of decisions that should be made by doctors and patients. It will mean lower quality care, less doctor choice, longer lines and rationing of health care.

Snowe voted for a big government health care plan that will mean nearly a trillion dollars in new spending, and will result in bigger deficits and higher taxes for middle class families and small business in Maine.

Instead of working to achieve a consensus bill that everyone could support, Snowe voted for a partisan health care bill pushed through Congress by liberal democrats like Nancy Pelosi without support from any other Republicans.