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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
From: Stanley B. Greenberg, James Carville, Jesse Contario and Kate Monninger

## Health Care Speech Brings Small Rebound for Democrats and Serious Problems for Republicans

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After a difficult summer for Democrats, which saw President Obama's approval ratings return to earth and support for his signature health care reform falter, a new Democracy Corps survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, after the president's joint-session address, shows Obama and his party's position rebounding in a small but significant way. Meanwhile, the Republican brand remains severely tarnished, and in fact, the party has lost major ground on key measures – just in the last few weeks. And, for the first time in months, voters show a glimmer of optimism.

The proportion of voters saying that things are heading in the right direction nationwide crept up to 39 percent this month, the first uptick we have seen since March, though a majority continues to believe that things are “off on the wrong track” (53 percent). Similarly, though voters remain overwhelmingly pessimistic about the economy, they now rate “the state of the economy” higher than they have at any time since the economic meltdown a year ago, with just over a fifth (21 percent) now rating “the state of the economy” positively.

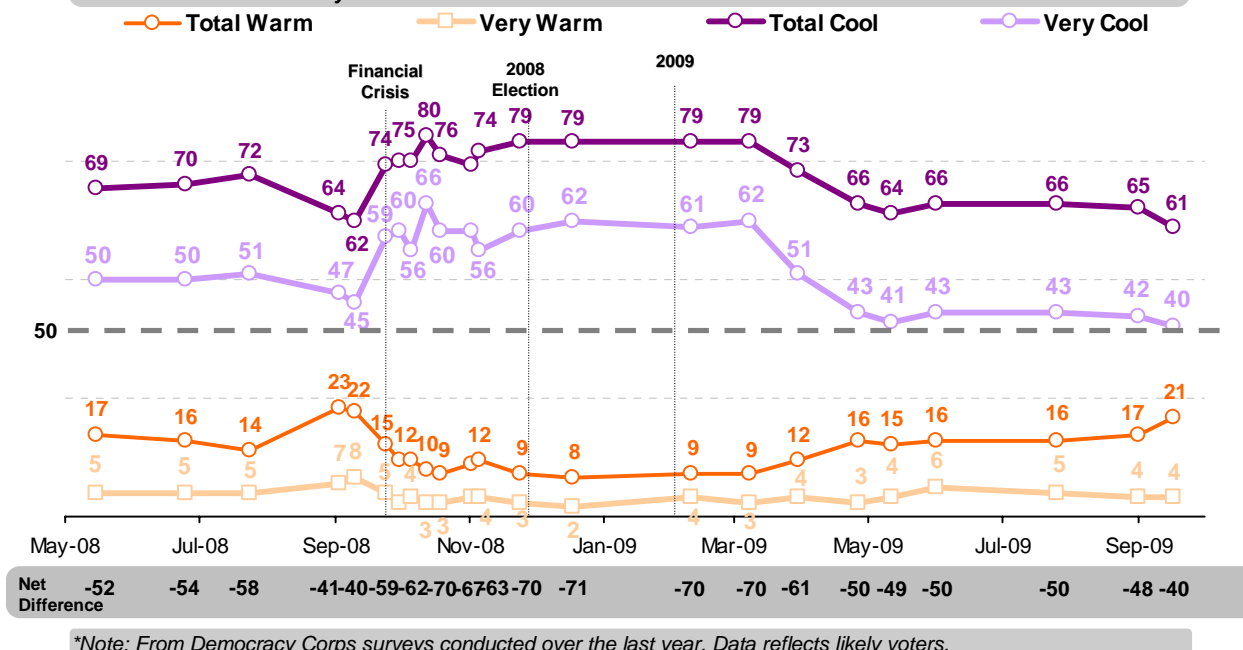
After Obama's approval rating slowly but steadily dropped over the past several months it has now stabilized with a slim majority of likely voters approving of the job he is doing. Importantly, Obama's strong approval rating is up 5 points since the beginning of the month and now exceeds strong disapproval for the first time since June. Meanwhile, both the president's and the Democratic Party's favorability ratings have rebounded in the wake of Obama's speech after dropping throughout the summer.

This rebound, coupled with the stagnant and unimpressive standing of the Republican brand, has left an overall political landscape that still strongly favors the Democratic Party, even after what many pundits have proclaimed was the best month for the Republicans in a long time: the favorability gap between the parties remains large, Democrats retain a lead of 4 points on the named 2010 Congressional ballot, and they enjoy growing advantages on who voters trust to handle health care and the economy – the two issues that are the strongest drivers of President Obama's approval rating according to our regression modeling.



## Slight uptick in feelings toward the state of the economy

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold... **state of the economy.**



\*Note: From Democracy Corps surveys conducted over the last year. Data reflects likely voters.

The president’s address also resulted in a small but real boost in support for his health care reform proposal, with support now back to statistical parity with opposition in an uninformed test, and support rising to a 51 percent majority (versus 43 percent opposition) after voters hear a description of the plan that includes how it will be paid for. Importantly, for the first time in our polling, the proportion of voters who strongly favor reform in this informed test are not outweighed by those who strongly oppose it (33 percent strongly favor while the same proportion strongly opposes).<sup>1</sup>

### Obama and Democrats’ Position Stabilizes, Republicans Remain Weak

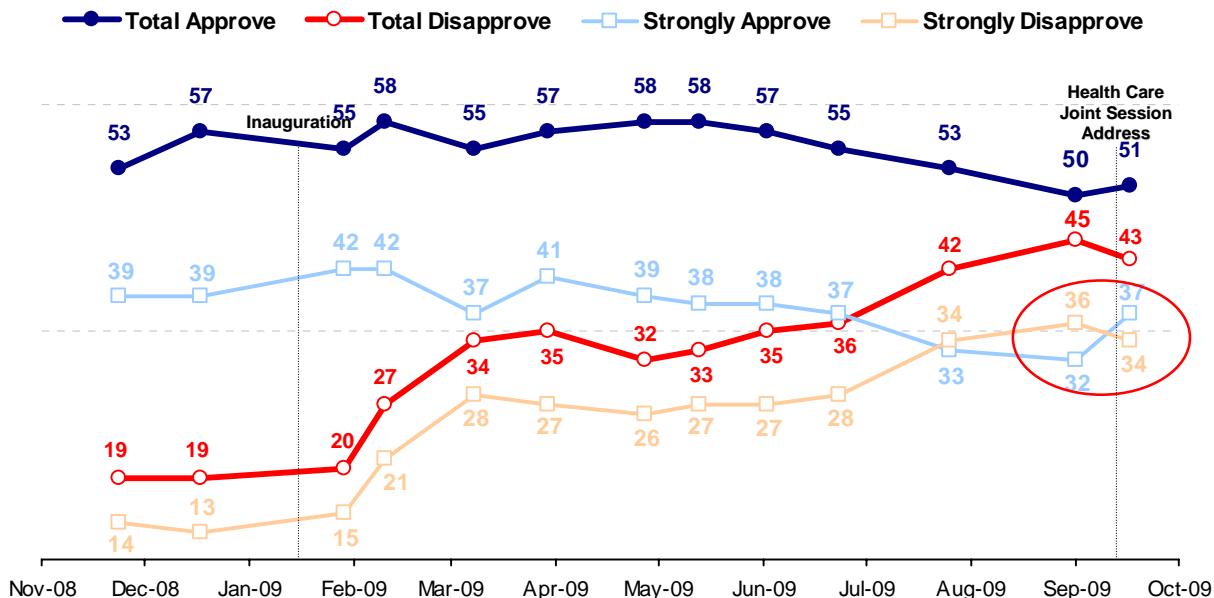
After a gradual slide since May, Obama’s approval rating has stabilized and now stands at 51 percent. The proportion of voters who strongly approve of the job he is doing is up 5 percent since the beginning of the month and now outweighs those who strongly disapprove for the first time since June (37 percent strongly approve while 34 percent strongly disapprove). Importantly, among seniors, a group of voters the president has traditionally struggled with, his approval rating has risen substantially, up 7 points with a near majority of seniors now approving of the job he is doing (49 percent against 42 percent disapprove).

<sup>1</sup> This memo is based on a Democracy Corps survey among 1,200 2008 voters conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner September 12-16, 2009.



## Obama job approval steady, but positive intensity shift

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



\*Note: From Democracy Corps surveys over the past several months. Before inauguration, question read: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by Barack Obama as president-elect?" Data represents likely 2010 voters.

Like his job approval rating, the president’s personal favorability rating has also improved. Obama’s mean favorability rating hit the lowest mark of his presidency earlier this month (55.0) but has since rebounded to 57.2 degrees on a zero to 100 scale, the highest it has been since mid-June.

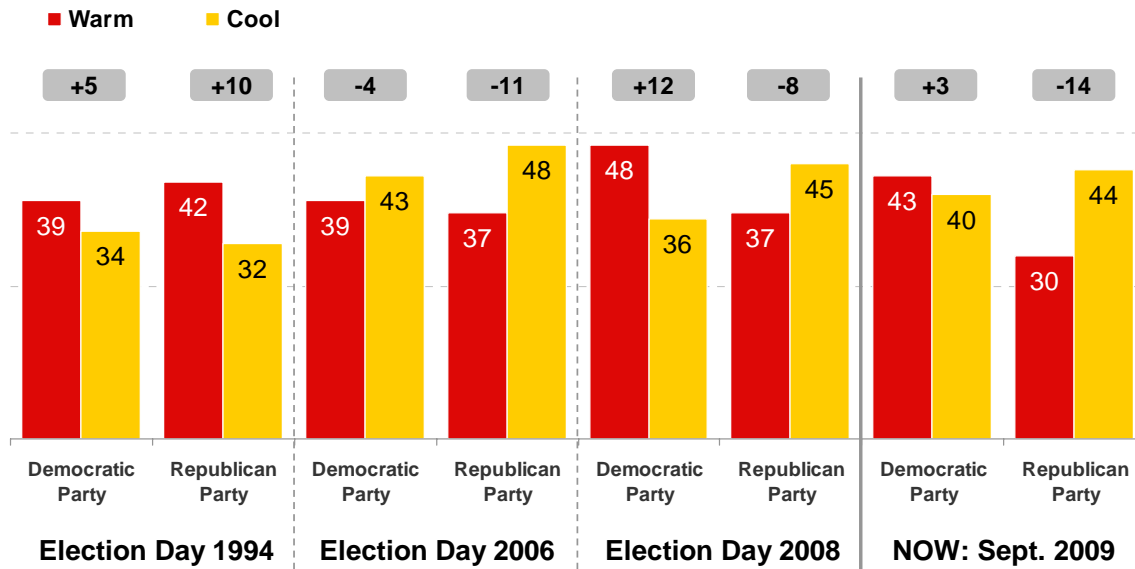
Similarly, the mean favorability ratings of the Democratic Party and the Democratic Congress have also rebounded, each up about 2 points and now standing at 49.2 and 46.6 degrees respectively.

Meanwhile, the favorability ratings of the Republican Party remain low and largely unchanged, registering at 44.2, the exact same rating they received on Election Day in 2008. The mean favorability gap between the parties again stands at 5 points after a brief decline in support for the Democratic brand earlier this month that put their favorability advantage at just 3 points. In fact, the Democrats’ net favorability advantage over the Republicans is down only slightly from Election Day in 2008 and is still substantially larger than when they secured their first of two successive wave victories on Election Day in 2006.



## Democrats maintain large favorability gap over Republicans

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with 100 meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold.



\*Note: 2006, 2008 data from Democracy Corps post-election surveys of voters nationwide. 1994 data from Greenberg-Lake survey conducted for the Democratic National Committee of 1,000 likely voters nationwide October 29-30, 1994.

## Obama Makes Gains on Key Measures, Republicans as Low as Ever

The joint-session speech gave President Obama a platform to reconnect with the electorate and again convey to them who he is and on several key attributes, he made important gains – particularly on issues related to spending and taxes. Obama’s greatest improvements came on the attributes “strong leader” (62 percent saying this describes him well, up from 58 percent earlier this month) and “has good plans for the economy” (55 percent, up from 52 percent earlier this month) – improvement on the economic attribute being particularly important as it popped in our regression analysis as a key driver of presidential approval. Despite the extremely partisan debate over health care reform pitting Obama against the Republicans, 62 percent of voters still say that the phrase “willing to work with both parties” describes Obama well, unchanged since July. On the other hand, the president’s ratings on being “on your side” (the other driver of presidential approval) remains unchanged from earlier this month (50 percent well)

It is impressive that the president made his biggest gains on not being a “big spender” – dropping from an all-time high of 67 percent at the beginning of September to 61 percent after his speech – even as he was making the case for a big new federal initiative on health care. Meanwhile, he also saw a 3-point decrease in the percent saying he would raise their taxes, now at 52 percent – his historic number and impressive, given the character of the Republican attack. Later, you will see that Obama and the Democrats have drawn even with the Republicans on public spending.

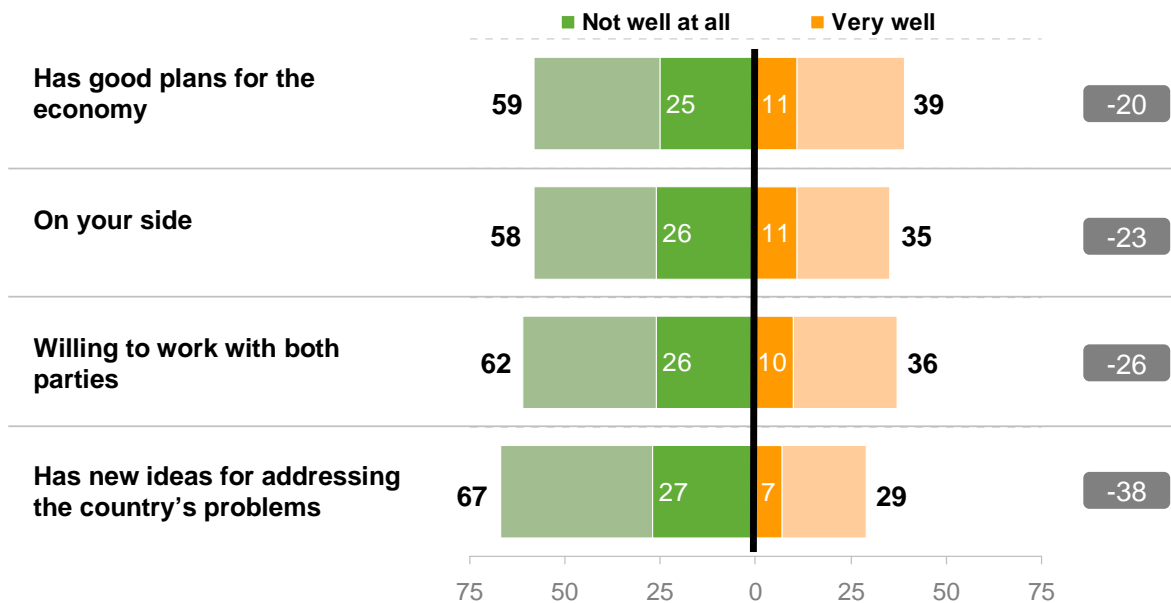


The national debate is taking a toll on Republicans. While the health care debate unfolds, a large majority (56 percent) say the Republicans are “more interested in partisan politics than solving the country’s problems,” “for the wealthy and big business, not the middle class” (55 percent) and “too conservative” (53 percent). Remarkably, just 35 percent say they are “on your side,” only 36 percent find them “willing to work with both parties,” and even less, 29 percent, believe Republicans have “new ideas for addressing the country’s problems”.<sup>2</sup> The Republicans’ marks on “on your side” represent a 7-point drop since we last asked this the summer before the wave election of 2006. Similarly, their rating on “new ideas for addressing the country’s problems” is lower than where it stood in 2005.<sup>3</sup>

### Majorities still can't describe Republican Party in a positive way

*Now, I am going to read you a different list of words and phrases which people use to describe political parties. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes the Republican Party very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.*

Well – Not Well



### Democrats Expand Lead on Key Issues

After the president’s speech both he and the Democratic Party have increased their lead over the Republicans on who voters trust to handle the issues, including health care and the economy, the two issues that are the biggest drivers of presidential approval according to our regression analysis. Both Democrats and President Obama now enjoy 9-point advantages over the Republicans on who would better handle the economy (44 to 36 percent for Democrats and 47 to

<sup>2</sup> From Democracy Corps poll of 1,000 2008 voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner August 30 – September 1, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> From Democracy Corps poll of 1,000 likely voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner July 16 – 18, 2006 and Democracy Corps poll of 1,000 likely voters nationwide conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner October 19 – 23, 2005.



38 percent for President Obama); this represents a net gain of 6 points for Obama since the beginning of the month.

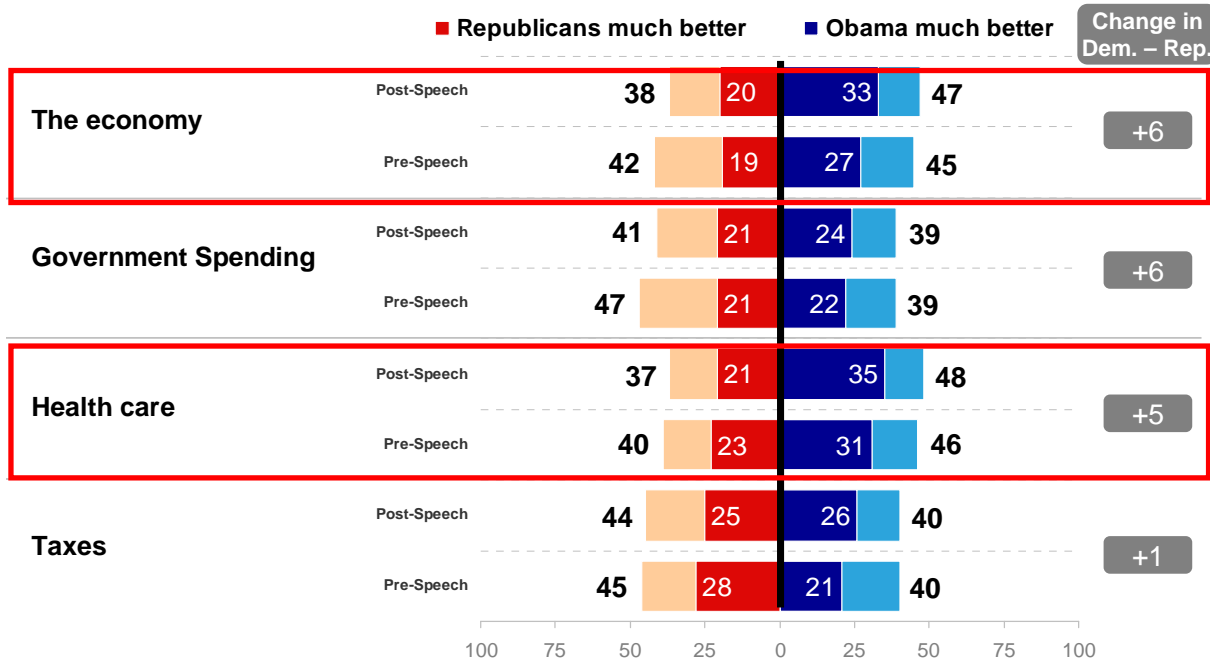
After losing ground on who voters trust to handle health care over the summer, both President Obama and the Democrats have rebounded to hold solid 11-point margins over Republicans on the issue (46 to 35 percent for Democrats and 48 to 37 percent for President Obama). Democrats made particularly strong improvements on health care with seniors, among whom they now lead Republicans by a 43 to 35 percent margin after trailing 45 to 38 percent earlier this month.

Democrats and President Obama also made significant gains on who voters prefer to handle “government spending,” with each now fighting to a draw with the Republicans (36 to 35 percent for the Democrats and 39 to 41 percent for Obama). This is the issue where President Obama made the biggest gain against the Republicans this month, improving 7 points from an 8-point deficit earlier this month (39 to 47 percent) to a dead heat now.

These gains for the Democrats and Obama are largely a result of losses in support for the Republicans, further evidence of their declining standing.

### Obama makes big gains on Republicans on issues

*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 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.*





### **Stable Democratic Lead on 2010 Ballot**

The named congressional vote is stable with Democrats enjoying a 4-point advantage over the Republicans (46 to 42 percent), though their share of the vote remains under 50 percent. While this gap has fluctuated since the spring, it is not substantially different than the 5-point margin Democrats enjoyed in March, when Obama was still riding the crest of his honeymoon.

Both the Democrats and the Republicans have solidified their bases behind their respective candidates, with Democratic candidates winning 88 percent of Democrats and Republican candidates winning 86 percent of Republicans, but Democrats lag with independents – trailing by 9 points. They will have to improve their standings with this group of voters if they hope to recapture the 8-point margin they achieved in 2006 and 2008.

### **Support for Health Care Reform Up Slightly**

President Obama's address to a joint-session of Congress also led to a small boost to support for his health care plan. Before the speech, opposition outnumbered support 42 to 50 percent, but this has now moved to statistical parity at 44 to 47 percent. Meanwhile, after voters are read a description of the plan, support rises to a 51-percent majority (with 43 percent opposed) almost exactly where it was in mid-June when the health care debate really started to heat up. Moreover, for the first time in our polling, intensity is even following the description, with strong support matching strong opposition at 33 percent.