

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner
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October Surprise?

The special program of weekly message tracking says, “maybe”

We are very close to believing that the 2010 election can move to a new place. Our latest poll shows the Democrats with a 6-point deficit—and any shift will have a significant impact on the number of House seats and the hold on the Senate. This conclusion and recommendations on strategy and message are based on a special program of weekly October polling aimed at producing an ‘October surprise.’

This is not a fool’s errand. In the 1998 election, we conducted national polls starting in September to see if Democrats could push back against the Republican overreach on Ken Starr and impeachment, as Democrats faced the prospect of historic losses in both the House and Senate. Only two weeks before the election did the plates shift and a Democratic counter-message on impeachment became effective in our polls. In the end, Democrats lost no net seats in Senate, gained five House seats and Newt Gingrich resigned.

The national poll conducted October 2-4 by Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner¹ shows real movement – similar to changes reported by NBC News/Wall Street Journal and ABC News/Washington Post in the past week. The changes are summarized below:

- The Republican lead in the named congressional ballot with likely voters has come down 4 points.
- The image of Republican incumbent members (named) has become less positive in the last month.
- The number of strong Democratic voters has gone up 4 points.
- The mood about the state of the economy has become slightly less negative.

¹ This memo is based on a poll conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps. The poll was conducted October 2-4, 2010 among 816 likely voters (margin of error of 3.5 percentage points).



- Democrats have gained on the Republicans on key issues: the economy, the deficit and being on your side, and Democrats have re-emerged with an advantage on Social Security and retirement.

Now, it is still ugly out there. Over 60 percent still say the country is on the wrong track, unchanged; the president's disapproval is stuck at 52 percent; Republicans are marginally more popular than Democrats, though not much; Republicans maintain their standing on government spending and health care. Unfortunately, voters now are still more inclined to cast a vote against spending than against big corporations and for the middle class – very much in line with the vote.

These results are full of opportunity. When you have a wave election, nothing moves and your messages fall flat, but that is not the case a month before the election. Voters respond to messages – and we can change what this election is about. The messages tested here reduced the Republican margin another 3-points – significant in itself – but more importantly, they revealed voters who are starting to pay attention and respond to clear statements about the stakes and choice. The biggest shift in the vote comes with:

- Younger women, under 50 years (a 9-point net shift in congressional vote)
- Unmarried women (+8 points)
- West and Northeast (+8 and +6 points, respectively)
- Moderates and independents (+7 points)
- White seniors and white older women (+6 points)

Indeed, it is now clear that Democrats can make late gains with independents and moderates, women and older voters. Strategically, we must first act to extend Democratic support to independents and other groups that have been highly supportive in recent years; and then second, we must act to engage Democratic voters.

This survey points strongly to two dominant messages and attacks –

1. The first and strongest centers on ***changing Washington to work for the middle class and American jobs, not corporations and Wall Street.*** It is strengthened by attacks on ***Social Security and Medicare***, critical for the middle class. The messages are strongest with voters under 40, younger women and unmarried women. It is strong with 'winnable' and base voters – giving it greater prominence.
2. The second, very strong message, centers on ***made in America, creating American jobs and opposing Republicans who support trade agreements and tax breaks for companies that export American jobs.*** This message is powerful with older women and seniors – and it is buttressed by attacks on Social Security and Medicare and on trade issues.

In future polls and focus groups, we will seek to integrate and short-hand these messages.



The strongest message is set out in the box below. The Democrat is the one who wants to change Washington so it is not run by corporate lobbyists and Wall Street, but works for the middle class. He or she supports tax cuts for middle class and small business and new American industries, while the Republican has pledged to maintain tax cuts for the top 2 percent and protect the right to export American jobs.

We have to change Washington. That means eliminating the special deals and tax breaks won by corporate lobbyists for the oil companies and Wall Street. (REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE) has pledged to protect the tax cuts for the top two percent and the big tax breaks for companies who export American jobs. I'll take a different approach with new middle class tax cuts to help small businesses and new American industries create jobs. Let's make our country work for the middle class.

This message is quite powerful with the ‘winnable’ voters Democrats need to get to expand their support; also with white unmarried women and whites under 40 years. These last two groups were critical to the new Democratic base of 2006 and 2008 – but support has lagged. But they seem ready to move.

Please note that this message is weaker if it fails to begin with a ‘change Washington’ message. That straight middle class/corporate message is much weaker with these groups. Democratic candidates must be talking about change – with a populist tinge – to get heard this year.

There is a second message that centers on made in America, creating American jobs and opposing the Republicans who supports trade agreements and tax breaks for companies that export American jobs. The message is strongest with older women and seniors and with independents. These can be used in a targeted way, while working in our next poll and focus groups to bring these two messages together.

My passion is "made in America," working to support small businesses, American companies and new American industries. (REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE) has pledged to support the free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea and protect the loophole for companies outsourcing American jobs. I have a different approach to give tax breaks for small businesses that hire workers and give tax subsidies for companies that create jobs right here in America.

This message framework for the election is helped by an attack on the Republican candidate for supporting trade agreements and tax breaks that lead to lost American jobs. Those attacks are very strong with white older women and seniors.

We did test a robust form of the message that the president is using. It is painfully weaker than these messages. We made the message very populist and focused on continuing ef-



forts to help unemployed, new industries that create jobs, and ending tax breaks for exporting jobs. It says that the economy shows signs of life, but the Republican candidate wants to go back to Bush and the old policies for Wall Street that cost us 8 million jobs. It is very strong with core Democrats and African-American voters, but compared to the other messages, it falls very short: 25 points weaker with ‘winnable voters’ and whites under 40 years, 20 points weaker with white unmarried women, and 9 points weaker with white older women. That message framework cannot extend the Democratic vote.

The strongest attack on the Republicans centers on Social Security and Medicare – that have re-emerged as issues as Republican candidates, the Tea Party and House Republican leaders decided this is not a third rail. It is the strongest attack here.

(REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE) has pledged to make sweeping cuts, including cuts to off-limit programs for the middle class, like Social Security and Medicare. The Republicans plan to privatize Social Security by shifting those savings to the stock market, and ending guaranteed benefit levels. Medicare as we know it will end, as seniors will have to purchase private insurance using a voucher that will cover some of the costs.

This attack raises serious doubts with almost 60 percent of the ‘winnable’ voters and white older women.

Democrats must engage voters – and indeed, there is some evidence that Democrats are starting to come back into the electorate – reflected in the polls. The message with the greatest intensity for self-identified Democrats is our form of the “don’t go back to Bush” when Wall Street ruled and 8 million jobs were lost – and the Obama message centered on an on-going agenda.

The ‘don’t go back to Bush’ message scores no more strongly than the ‘*change Washington for the middle class*’ message among our strongest voters (37 percent of the electorate) and with the 43 percent currently voting Democratic for Congress – and much weaker among the group of winnable Democratic voters. That leads us to recommend against this message. Except for African-American voters, our messages to extend our vote do as well with the base as our base-oriented message. This allows for much greater unity of message.