



BENENSON STRATEGY GROUP

777 3RD AVENUE NEW YORK NY 10017

TEL 212 702 8777 FAX 212 750 6518

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Joel Benenson
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State of Play

- Our data continues to show, unequivocally, that the nation's economic health remains voters' overriding priority.
 - ✓ Even amid a cascade of news cycles focused on the Affordable Care Act, Syria, the government shutdown and the NSA, voters' primary focus has never shifted from their economic well-being and financial security.
- While we have seen a marked increase in voters' sense of financial stability throughout most of 2013 – worries about the immediate loss of jobs or homes had subsided – we have a long way to go before voters feel truly secure in their economic futures, and that of the nation.
 - ✓ Fully aware of the long road ahead, voters are extremely eager to see Washington once again put economic issues at the center of their attention.
- Over the course of 2013, we have seen improvement in voters' views of the economy. Four years of deeply entrenched pessimism around the economy has finally begun to give way to a brighter outlook.
- After steadily improving since January, this June we reached high points on two key metrics we have been tracking since 2009:
 - ✓ 68% of voters described the economy as “getting better”, a 9-point increase over our 2012 average. Just 29% – mostly Republicans – said the economy is “getting worse”.
 - ✓ 21% of voters rated the economy as “excellent” or “good”. This number was in almost invariably in single digits from 2009 until 2012, and averaged 13% throughout that year.
- However, the government shutdown and debt ceiling fight all but wiped out this burgeoning optimism. We are starting to see these metrics slowly creep back up, but the shutdown and ongoing dysfunction have had a lingering effect on views of the economy.
 - ✓ The number saying the economy is getting better dropped to a shutdown low of 50% in mid-October.
 - ✓ By last week, this figure had ticked back up to 56%, still well below the highs of the first and second quarters of this year.

- In part, this is because voters believe that the shutdown and now the political focus on the ACA website are distracting from the work they see as paramount for Washington to get done: building on the economic progress the nation was making.
- Our guiding light needs to be our focus on creating a more secure economy for hard-working American families, with smart investments now and for the next generation.
 - ✓ In polling immediately following the shutdown, voters ranked cutting wasteful spending, making job-creating investments in research and technology, and improving our schools to put our kids on a path to good jobs and middle class lives as their top three priorities.
- Focusing on the economy is as critical as ever. We need to align Democrats with a future-oriented agenda that focuses on the issues that matter to families across the country – strengthening the economy, creating jobs, investing in education, promoting a living wage – and not getting caught up in inside-the-beltway political dramas that have little bearing on their immediate well-being.

Where We Should Focus

- It is imperative that we return to the core issues that animate voters' lives: a desire for financial security – that goes beyond just making ends meet from month to month – and a fairer economy that rewards hard work and responsibility.
- Job creation is the number one priority for voters, but they don't see it in isolation. They understand the importance of education, training and living wages as integral to creating an economy that can sustain good, middle class jobs.
- Proposals put forward by the President and Democrats in Congress that invoke the notion of a more "durable" economy for working families generate high levels of support, including:
 - ✓ Raising the minimum wage is supported by two thirds of Americans, including half of Republicans, and in our polling, support withstands strong attacks on the idea.
 - ✓ We also reach two thirds support for providing a year of free pre-k for all 4-year-olds in America (paid for by a cigarette tax) to help ensure our kids have the best start to their education.
- Support for fixing our broken immigration system increases when framing it in economic terms.
 - ✓ Immigration reform helps speak to our commitment to building a fairer economy by bringing illegal immigrants into the system where they can pay taxes like everyone else and fully contribute to the services they use, such as schools and hospitals.
- The American people believe that sectors of the economy are thriving and that a partnership between the private sector and government can help to build on the growth we have seen in the tech sector, construction, housing and the auto industry.
 - ✓ Voters fundamentally reject the central GOP premise that the way to get our country back on track is to reduce government regulation and lower taxes.

- In a forced choice question, just 39% of voters and 23% of Independents agree: *The way to get our country back on track is to get government out of the way and unleash the power of businesses and markets to create jobs by lowering taxes and eliminating needless regulations.*
- While 59% overall and 65% of Independents agree with the alternate choice: *The way to get our country back on track is to get the public and private sector working together to invest in manufacturing, technology, small businesses and education to create jobs our country needs and train our children to succeed in the new economy.*

Views of Republicans

- Internal data confirms the disastrous view of Republicans in Congress that we have seen in every public poll in recent months.
 - ✓ Disapproval of Republicans in Congress hit a record high in our polling during the shutdown.
- Polling shows that the Republicans have gained no ground since the HealthCare.gov problems became the focus of so much news coverage and conversation.
- The shutdown helped to cement a view of Republicans we have seen gathering pace throughout the year: that they are so focused on undermining the President that they are risking our economic progress to make him look bad.
 - ✓ In a forced choice, 53% of voters agreed: *Republicans in Congress are so focused on undermining President Obama that they are willing to risk harming the economy rather than work with him to get things done.*
 - ✓ Just 41% agreed with the alternative choice: *President Obama has been so destructive to our economy, spending recklessly and driving up our national debt, that we need Republicans in Congress to stand up to him and not just rubber stamp his ideas.*
- Our data suggests that voters worry that the recklessness of Republicans in Congress has hurt ordinary American families is destroying the progress they've worked so hard for.
- They see Republicans as:
 - ✓ **Extreme and obstructionist:** 45% "strongly" agree that Republicans in Congress are taking their extreme opposition to the President too far and it is hurting the economy; 41% "strongly" agree that they are so tied to the extreme wing of their party that they are prepared to do whatever it takes to make the President look bad.
 - ✓ **Out of touch:** 43% "strongly" agree that Republicans have lost touch with the American people and are more focused on political wins than moving the country forward.
 - ✓ **Out of ideas:** they have no new plans or ideas and are obstructing any and all progress.
 - Just 40% of voters think the GOP has an economic plan, and to the extent that they do, 57% see their economic focus on helping big banks and corporations rather than ordinary Americans.