

Focus Group Verbatims
August 22, 2006
South Bend, IN (IN-2)
Seniors
5 Kerry/ 5 Bush
3:00 pm

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

John B: retired from united, 5 children

Barbara: retired from Key Bank

Marlene: Married with 5 children, worked at St. Mary's, retired

Jim: worked with quality control, retired

Joe: Schoolteacher retired, works parttime

Pat: retired from customer service, getting ready for volunteer work, 4 kids

John G: Retired chemist, 7 kids, 13 grandkids

Shirley: Retired from Kroger

Helen: Divorced, employed full time with city

Catherine: Retired nurse, husband retired, quiet life

II. Direction of the Country (20 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? [**VERY EXTENSIVE – PROBE AND LISTEN**]

Worried about our input into the war – can't answer right or wrong, but concerned about the war

I agree, hard to answer now, because the answer will come. but I don't like where we are in the least, I don't like where we are in Indiana, but I'm not the expert here

I think everything is just spinning out of control. Stuck under very ungrateful people that don't appreciate all that we have and been given

HOW SO?

We don't have commitment anymore, and just do anything we want to do. Spinning out of control

I agree in the sense that there is no commitment, but people have changed. But when I was growing up there wasn't this kind of violence, kids could play outside, everybody took care of everybody else's kids. More community commitment to each other that I don't see today. I see a lot of people doing their own thing.

I see a lack of values – all these shows on television

I think our future generation is having less parental control because of both parents working. Times have changed and need to all be involved. Next door neighbors should be involved – I don't know my neighbors. I don't bother them and they don't bother me, but parents don't have control of their kids anymore

I'd like to begin with the war, whether is was the right or wrong thing to do. I think it was right to go in there, but should have gone in with more power

I was going to focus on the international side more...it wasn't really smart to go in with no exit strategy. The operational plan did not fit the services. The fact that this has dragged on for four years, but surprised there's no protest. No burning the flags. I don't know why we are at war with Iraq because of 9/11. To take a different nation, that had nothing to do with it is wrong. Al Qaeda was banned from Iraq, they were not allowed. There were protesters and there are protesters and it's not as it did happen in Vietnam, but maybe the problem is that we didn't protest soon enough. Everyone around this table grew up around WWII. We were in there to fight to save our butts. WWI was the war to end all wars. Now, this was a terrible war, but the guys in the foxholes could tell themselves that if I make it out of here I can go home, so my kids and their kids won't ever have to worry about this. Until WWII came along and their kids were the ones fighting. Then came Korea. Most of the people in the world don't know how to spell democracy

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO IN IRAQ?

High level blue ribbon commission. Retired secretaries of state, people of both parties should come together for a plan for withdrawal by sometime next year. We can't win this war and we can't pull out. Are stuck

President Bush said he won't pull out

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT

He started it so she should finish it

He should stick with it. He made a commitment and is sticking with it. I respect him for that. I think he made the right decision.

President Bush is on a

DO YOU THINK IT'S ACCURATE TO SAY ARE DEALING WITH A CIVIL WAR?

We're talking religious factions, not sectarian. Which you've got anywhere

- What things are going right?
- What things are going in the wrong direction?

- **Probe national direction vs. local direction**

2. How about the economy? What's going on with the economy here in Indiana?

I think it's surprisingly resilient even with the pressures right now. People can still earn a living and interest rates are ok. Thinking about the rest of the country pretty amazing are still functioning. I think it comes back to the people

I think we have a lot of poverty

I think the issue is with the wages. South Bend does not have enough good paying jobs.

When our children graduate they're not making enough money. And when high school graduates walk out, they end up working for \$8 an hour. Our young people are having to drive to Elkart for jobs

All the ones I know that graduated from college have left. There's no good paying jobs here

I think the employment situation has changed drastically. Back then an education mattered, your experience mattered and your age mattered. What matters now is are you

in the right place in the right time. If you've got what they need then you're hired. I don't think people stay with a job because you don't know if the company will be there in the next 5 years, moving around, and also the people don't have benefits

BENEFITS, LEAVING THE AREA, WHY ARE WE AT THIS POINT?

I think we lost our industry

Used to be people got a job and stayed there till you retired. Not anymore – move on. I want a job that will pay me a decent amount for a living.

Globalization has changed things. Manufacturing jobs that used to be here are in other countries. China is gaining in prosperity, third world countries. I believe in free trade but I also want to be fair

I think that companies nowadays don't want to pay benefits and it's not right. I retired and my premiums went up so high that I found another company

- **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas), employment, any inflation fears
 - How did things get to this point?
 - What direction do you think the economy will go from here – will it continue to get worse, will it start to get better, or will it continue at the current level?
3. Let's talk specifically about the war in Iraq...
- **[PROBE]** What are your feelings about our continued involvement over there?
 - **[EXPLORE]** Loss of American lives, cost, no plan or exit strategy, weaker at home
4. How about the growing violence in the Middle East?
- What are the implications of this for the U.S. and the broader war on terror?
5. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

I like it, because there is a donut hole that you won't get unless you have incredible expenses. This year I probably won't hit the donut hole but next year I might. Not the best plan in the world, but it works.

My wife – her company pays \$15 copay. If you're using a lot of drugs, not a great plan I have two that are about \$700 a month, so I'm very happy with it

I get my drugs from the VA and they negotiated to get the drugs and my wife's drugs are down. The donut hole doesn't make any sense to me. The pharmacist told people how it works, and they didn't listen to them

I think they negotiate a price, because one of mine dropped by about half
They're using what Medicare uses

III. Associations (15 minutes)

1. Evan Bayh

Like him

Nothing bad to say

I'd like him to be more forward, forceful but I don't know. He seems to explain things that are going on

Great political experience, decent man

2. Mitch Daniels

Privatization of SS is going to be a messy thing

3. Dick Lugar

Outstanding

Like him

Good man

Intelligent

Expert in foreign policy – article in paper about getting independent of oil

4. Chris Chocola [**Extensive**]

Multimillionaire

Decent man

Doesn't seem to be as much of a people's man that I thought. Has changed

Wrote his office about VA assistance – wrote me back, not him, his office, within 2 days.

Hating those damn back biting commercials. Don't care what he did, I want to know what he's going to do for me.

Why are the commercials so negative – I want to see what that person's going to do.

They all promise the same thing

5. Joe Donnelly [**Extensive**]

All the negative stuff

If they haven't messed up royally, they've got to be pretty good

I looked him up on the computer and found him pretty good.

ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR

Said has values, prescriptions, things about seniors – good things

Don't know too much about him

I think they would come across better if they said what they are going to do for the people instead of the bashing

6. Congress

Is anybody in there honest?

So much potential to do good and don't

All the raises for themselves, but won't raise the minimum wage

It was turned down in Michigan

On the whole it happens a lot

I think the system's bogged down a lot. Bill will disappear for a couple years and then will show up again

- Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual? I think it gets more tainted each year. A lot of people in Congress are being affected by lobbyists. Drug companies – I think we should have drug companies and dairy companies but I think they're buying people off. I think it is worse than it was. But there's no report card and no one questions how Congress is.

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

7. Now I'd like to talk specifically about George W. Bush.

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? **[Discuss]**
Nice wife
Good values, consistent, doesn't waver from his decisions
Term is almost over
Willing to take heat for the decisions he makes. Takes it personally and has lots of good people around him
He is a good orator
I think he's an American and wants America to be a great nation
I think he wants to do the right thing
He's a Christian and he's trying to do the right thing

- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**
His non-wavering attitude crosses over here and he's more abrupt when speaking to others
He's chosen some poor advisors. It's almost time he's inching up his time
Why does he have such confidence in Condoleeza
I have mixed emotions about killing people. Before you knew who the enemy was because they wore helmets; now you don't know
He hasn't brought the country together. Most Americans don't think he's honest
I don't think he believes everything he says
Doesn't strike me as being bright at all
He's kinda stupid
But not everyone has the gift of gab like Ronald Reagan

IV. Election 2006 (20 minutes)

In a little more than three months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

1. Are you more or less motivated to vote for Congress this year than in previous years? Why?

More likely because I think about how they're not going to know what I want. I feel more likely to want to vote. Look around colleges and see should be more interested

WHAT ABOUT FOR YOU IN THIS ELECTION

I always vote because people lived and died for our right to vote

I never miss voting because I want to say "I think this"

Feel it's very important to get the young people interested. Think they lost a lot of interest – the kids in college just aren't all that in tune with what's going on

■ **Probe on whether voting can help affect change**

2. For you personally, what is this upcoming election about? What is the most important factor that will determine how you vote for Congress?

I think the war is a big factor. September 12 went to PA, and sat at my brother's house, and was mesmerized in front of the TV and watched Bush.

Control of the Congress is up for grabs, the economy. I don't think the Congress has much to do with the war but they will for the economy

I would never miss voting but I'm dreading thinking about it at this point

WHAT ABOUT THE ECONOMY

That they do something, something for the people

ANYTHING ELSE?

Values for me

■ **Probe on personal traits, but push through to issues as well**

3. So what are you hearing so far in this election? Have you heard anything from the candidates here in Indiana, the candidates that you will be choosing from?

Don't pay their taxes

Haven't seen anything positive and haven't gotten any fliers or anything

I really don't know what either one of them intends to do

WHAT ARE YOU HEARING ABOUT CHOCOLA

I think he's referring back to what he's done. I don't know much about Donnelly except that he's a businessman

4. What are the Republicans talking about? Why do they say you should vote for a Republican for Congress?

Say they'll do a better job on the economy and national security

Haven't heard any strong statements about anything. Want to be a little more informed. Somebody needs to have some kind of economic policy – jobs being exported to other countries

Why have all our computer workers gone to India – have one of them, Chocola or Donnelly tell me why they've gone to India.

- Is this a compelling reason to vote Republican? Is it believable?
- As you know, the Republicans now have control of the White House, as well as both the House and the Senate. If Republicans maintain control of Congress, will anything change in Washington?

5. What are the Democrats talking about? Why do they say you should vote for a Democrat for Congress?

Haven't heard anything from them either

I think they're closer – do you want Bush and his buddies or do you want the other side?

They're not coming on strong

They're anti-war or anti-Bush

- Is this a compelling reason to vote Democratic? Is it believable?

No, but I think people will vote because of this

If you're better off now then vote for the guys in there

- If Democrats take back control of the House and/or the Senate, how will things be different in this country? What, if anything, will change in Washington?

- **Probe if there's any sense of sending Bush a message**

- What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?

I think we'll avoid gridlock, and Bush has two more years – we've had that before and it was just terrible. If you've got a strong Democratic presidential candidate...

I think the country is ready for a change. The Republicans have been in there for awhile, and people are ready for a change. Now I don't know if things will be any better, but I see the Democrats coming up with a strong presidential candidate

- **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**

V. Ad Testing (35 minutes)

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#11]

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Indiana. I’d like to show you some of these ads, and for each one, I’d like you to do two things:

First, rate how this ad makes you feel about your choice in this election on this scale (explain scale, shown below).

<i>More</i>										<i>More</i>
<i>Likely</i>										<i>Likely</i>
<i>Donnelly</i>										<i>Chocola</i>
5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Then below that, in just a few words or phrases, tell me **in your own words** what this ad says to you – that is, if you were watching television at home and saw this ad, what would you take away from it?

Chocola tax attack on Donnelly

I think this is a little misleading – where do they get their information from?
WELL, THEY ARE CITING NEWSPAPERS AND VOTING RECORDS
WHY 4’s AND 5’s?

He’s going to support us, Chocola, more than the other one.

I can’t support Donnelly if he’s going to ask us for more taxes, because I don’t have another dime

Why should we believe it?

IS IT BELIEVEABLE TO YOU?

No

Chocola tax attack		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	1
Donnelly	3	1
Donnelly	2	1
Donnelly	1	0
	0	1
Chocola	1	2
Chocola	2	2
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	2
Chocola	5	1

DCCC big oil attack on Chocola

LET'S START WITH THE 4'S AND 5'S

The ads better, but I'm not sure if it's true. I'd have to check the voting

In looking at the ad, Chocola's interest and his money is in the oil industry – what he voted it seems he's not for the people. Can't support high gas prices

High price of gas – I find it kind of hard to believe

But they put the voting record up on it

DO CITE A THIRD PARTY SOURCE

Well, the voting record is positive and that's how they voted and that's it

I gave it a 3 for Donnelly because if there's a way to control the price, alternative energy...raises concern about Chocola

IN THE BEGINNING OF THE DISCUSSION, NO ONE MENTIONED OIL COSTS MUCH. ARE YOU FEELING THE PINCH?

Oh yes

AND YOU THINK CONGRESS COULD CONTROL IT?

I think Congress has the ability to put a freeze on it

WHY DON'T THEY DO IT?

The oil money is putting them in office, or keeping them in office

DCCC big oil attack		
Donnelly	5	1
Donnelly	4	2
Donnelly	3	4
Donnelly	2	2
Donnelly	1	0
	0	0
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	0
Chocola	3	1
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Chocola positive on cutting taxes

Key words were our choice, our values. Lowered taxes affect everyone. He bought me

It gets very confusing because one he seems for the people, then no

Well he did those things. He was lucky to have all this money in gasoline stocks. Can't punish a guy for picking the wrong stocks. We've been awful lucky our prices haven't gone up already

I like the ad tell me what you're going to do for me – he's doing a snow job here, because my taxes have gone up

Chocola positive		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	0

Donnelly	3	0
Donnelly	2	0
Donnelly	1	0
	0	1
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	2
Chocola	3	6
Chocola	4	1
Chocola	5	0

DCCC Hostettler pay raise/troops

WHY 5?

His vote seemed to be so out of line, not voting for the troops. I also don't believe that the war is making us safer

REST OF YOU

Take away that not helping people, just helping himself. Votes are public record, so if he did this, and know he got a big pay raise. Also, troops are out there putting their lives on the line – those that are here and then sent back for a 3rd or 4th time

Congress gets the raises because they do the voting

Not saying they shouldn't get a raise, but is a bit outrageous. Plus everything else they have is paid for

DCCC Hostettler pay raise		
Donnelly	5	1
Donnelly	4	0
Donnelly	3	5
Donnelly	2	4
Donnelly	1	1
	0	0
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	0
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

- *Explore exhaustively*
- *Gauge differences in reactions to Donnelly and Elsworth ads*

MoveOn Red Handed on Chocola

WHY 4?

Think that, assuming facts are correct, that congressmen can be impeached and should be. I think that ad should make people very angry about the whole system. Only way to correct it on our level is to vote for some change

OTHERS?

I thought Chocola is too involved – but I have trouble believing any of those ads

This is so common, and is just part of the party
 I put no difference because that would be pretty hard to prove, assuming it's true, then I assume it's hard to prove
 I think it was a cheap shot – no body armor – is negative campaigning and doesn't move me at all
 JIM, YOU GAVE IT A 3?
 Made Chocola look pretty bad

MoveOn Red Handed		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	2
Donnelly	3	4
Donnelly	2	2
Donnelly	1	0
	0	2
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	0
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Chocola response

Taxes are a hot spot, push button. If there's a record, I don't want them to go any higher, so I'll go to the other side.
 What they're saying on the Death Tax – think since he doesn't support it...

SEEN A FEW ADS ABOUT TAXES – DO YOU THINK THAT DONNELLY WILL RAISE TAXES IF HE'S ELECTED?

If we can bring our economy back to where it was before Bush took office...
 Yes – in some cases yes

Don't know

Well the ad is a bit misleading – couldn't have voted for it because he's not in office
 WHEN YOU GO TO VOTE, WILL DONNELLY'S POSITION ON TAXES BE SOMETHING THAT CONCERNS YOU?

Yes

Yes – because of bills

I think I would raise taxes depending on the issue

Chocola response		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	0
Donnelly	3	1
Donnelly	2	2
Donnelly	1	0

	0	2
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	0
Chocola	3	5
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Chocola late tax payments attack on Donnelly

FOR THE 2'S AND 3'S – WHY?

May leave the taxes how they are instead of raising them

SO MORE ABOUT CHOCOLA LEAVING THEM THAN DONNELLY RAISING THEM?

Right

WHY NO DIFFERENCE?

It's no big deal – don't know what this money has to do with campaign funding?

Very effective ad for Chocola, because it's factual – leaning toward Donnelly

Chocola late tax payments		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	0
Donnelly	3	0
Donnelly	2	1
Donnelly	1	0
	0	6
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	2
Chocola	3	1
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Donnelly late tax response

Feel the same way about this that I do about number nine

MOST SAY NO DIFFERENCE – WHAT DO YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THE BACK COURT?

They're just attacking each other like kids in school – tired of it

There's a lot of bad things that go on in Congress, so just because they mention it here doesn't really mean anything

EVERYONE HAS A NEGATIVE VIEW OF CONGRESS, BUT FAVORABLE VIEW OF CHOCOLA – THINK HE'S PART OF CONGRESS, PROBLEM OR UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT?

Don't think he spends enough time there

Doesn't make it better or worse

Don't think he spends enough time in Congress. This whole thing is making me realize that I need to take more interest in ads and what's being said about these people.

I don't think he's the problem – think he's doing the right thing

Donnelly late tax response		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	0
Donnelly	3	1
Donnelly	2	0
Donnelly	1	1
	0	7
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	1
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Seniors only: Chamber of Commerce ad for Heather Wilson

WHY 4 AND 5

Because she said “I did something”. People want to see something
 Medication is important for seniors – I’m a senior and I’m interested what my
 congressperson is going to do for me as a senior

Chamber of Commerce ad		
Donnelly	5	0
Donnelly	4	0
Donnelly	3	0
Donnelly	2	0
Donnelly	1	0
	0	0
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	3
Chocola	3	3
Chocola	4	1
Chocola	5	3

For all ads:

- Show of hands, then discuss each one
- Explore paired ads, which is more effective

VI. Election Debate (15 minutes)

Now I'd like to talk in more detail about a couple of specific issues and the role they will play in your decision making in this election.

TAX AND SPEND

1. You remember that one of the ads we watched tonight was about taxes, raising questions about the Democratic candidate's position on the issue of taxes. Let's watch it again, just as a reminder.

[Written Exercise – Handout #12]

2. We saw a couple Democratic responses to this ad. But now I'd like to look at what some other Democrats are saying about this. So flip to Handout #12 now. I'll read this message out loud, you follow along with me and then rate it, just as you did the ads we watched earlier.

Democrats say, Americans are struggling to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of gas, health care, and education. President Bush and Chris Chocola's economic policies have produced record deficits while giving away billions in tax cuts to their corporate backers and shifting the tax burden even further onto the middle class. We should repeal tax giveaways to companies that send jobs overseas and millionaires who don't need relief, and instead pass fiscally responsible middle class tax cuts: making college tuition tax deductible, tax credits for first-time homebuyers, and tax breaks for caregiving expenses on behalf of an aging parent.

■ Show of hands, then discuss

Handout 12		
Donnelly	5	1
Donnelly	4	5
Donnelly	3	1
Donnelly	2	0
Donnelly	1	0
	0	1
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	2
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	0
Chocola	5	0

Because that's everything we want – we want to have all this – college education deducted

The top of this actually does talk about issues
ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR

Tax breaks and tax credits for college tuition
 SO MOSTLY TAX CREDITS
 Well, I think that would help

SECURITY

[Written Exercise – Handout #13]

- Now I want to talk about one other issue and see what candidates from both parties have to say. Again, I'll read them out loud, you rate them, and then we'll discuss. Let's start with the Republican candidate.

The Republican candidate says, we are making significant progress in Iraq. After holding three successful elections, there is now an Iraqi government with a new constitution, and a quarter of a million Iraqi troops are trained and equipped. But there is still more to do, and the United States can't afford to bail out on Iraq before we complete the mission. If we follow my opponent's advice to cut and run, al Qaeda will have a new terrorist haven in Iraq and the whole world will see that America doesn't have the stomach to fight the war on terror.

■ **Show of hands, then discuss**

Handout 13		
Donnelly	5	1
Donnelly	4	1
Donnelly	3	0
Donnelly	2	0
Donnelly	1	0
	0	1
Chocola	1	0
Chocola	2	4
Chocola	3	1
Chocola	4	2
Chocola	5	0

WHY 4 FOR CHOCOLA

The second part of that is the terrorist

Don't think we should cut and run – would see massive attacks on American soil if go back

WHY 3?

Same reason she just said – we have to finish it out

[Written exercise – Handout #14]

- Now, let's hear from a Democratic candidate.

The Democratic candidate says, we need to chart a new course in Iraq. Our military has done its job in Iraq, and it is now time for Iraqis to take control of their own future. But my opponent and President Bush offer no plan to end the war and are sending even more troops to an urban war zone in Baghdad. With over 2,500 Americans dead and 3 billion dollars a week going to a war that has no end in sight, we need a change in policy. We won't withdraw precipitously or allow terrorist elements to seize control, but we must begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces before the end of 2006.

Handout 14		
Donnelly	5	1
Donnelly	4	1
Donnelly	3	2
Donnelly	2	1
Donnelly	1	0
	0	1
Chocola	1	1
Chocola	2	2
Chocola	3	0
Chocola	4	1
Chocola	5	0

HELEN YOU SWITCHED, WHY?

Because I think we do need a different plan. Don't know what that is, but want boys home and safe and think we need a different plan

Think we need a plan – doesn't matter when they want to end, but need a plan

HAS WHAT HAPPENED IN LONDON, HAS THAT IMPACTED YOUR VOTING IN THIS RACE?

Security wise, yes

Well, the threat is still there

It's mind boggling to me that the dollars that are spent and all the bombs that they have

■ **Show of hands, then discuss**

VII. Final Ballot (5 minutes)

[Written exercise – Handout #15]

1. Finally, I want you to choose, if the election were held today, which one you would vote for – based on everything we've discussed tonight. Circle which candidate you would choose, then briefly write why in the space below. **[Written only]**