

## Focus Group Guidelines

October 16, 2006

Clifton Park, NY

NY-20

3 Bush, 3 Kerry, 2 Non-voters

### I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

**Alonzo – Wilmington, DE. Usually consumer products. Married, 3 girls.**

Zack – Retired NY DOT. Work for Lowes. 2 daughters.

Yevgeni – retired from GE. 1 daughter, she's married. Snowmobile, motorcycle. 130 year old house.

Xavier – 46, married, 2 teenage boys. Meat cutter at a family business. Work for outside companies. 4 years as a Marine. Married to a sped teacher, enjoy ocean fishing.

William – Married, 3 kids out of the house. By day a Wal Mart manager, published novelist and poet. Music fanatic. 8k CDs and wife is addicted to Las Vegas.

Vic – 59, married 35 years. 1 son, 2 daughters. Worked for town 30 years, retired a few years ago. Involved in the fire company.

Utah – Married, wife works for BoA. Daughter, 24, really smart. Teacher. Finishing her masters.

Ted – Married, 3 kids. 1 married, 2 not. Work at Shenandahowa. Enjoys gardening. Wife chases him away from computer.

Sam – Married, 2 stepkids. 18/12. Love to go to vegas. Have a motorcycle, old corvette.

### 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]**

Relative to what?

What issues?

**Gut reax**

Politically wrong.

I agree.

Environmentally, wrong. Economically, not too bad. Educationally, wrong.

I'd agree with all four of those.

Economically I don't think we're doing half as good as they say we are.

I think it's relative to where you are in the economic strata. The economy's not doing too bad, but depends on where you are.

I'd love to change. I didn't plan to be here, but we all got passels of kids, all wanted to go to college, cars.

It's tough when you're on fixed income. 4 years, gas gone from 1.50 to 3.50, wish my state pension went like that. Times you've got to balance. . .

They won't raise the minimum wage, again they denied it. I was making 10/hour when I was fifteen, they still want to pay me that. When are we going to start catching up with the economy.

Prices keep going up but wages aren't. Middle income people aren't going anywhere. You both have to work. . . My mother didn't have to.

I think in the last five years we're all starting to get sticker shock. Houses, gas, the cost of college education. I have a 12 year old, and think what that's going to cost. We're heading for a lot of problems.

I think there's a lot of unreported inflation. They say our rat's only 2,3 percent. Houses went from 40k, to 300k in the last few years.

They're going back a little, but they won't go all the way back.

The areas that went through massive escalation. . .

I think the war's a mess. I know we need our freedom, and I know we got crapped on five years ago and have to defend ourselves, but we've got to take care of our country. I lost two friends It's tough to see their wives.

I don't see we have any plan over there. 1 of my best friends lost his son, another one his son in law will be back over in January. It'll be his 9<sup>th</sup> tour. Stirring up a hornet's nest.

Poorly planned war. I can't say it was intentional, but they didn't listen to their intelligence had said 15 years before. When he's gone, there'll be chaos. . . now we've got chaos.

It's like in Yugoslavia — tito was a dictator, but he held it together.

### **Where do we go from here?**

There is no plan. Why rebuild Iraq when we're not doing anything in NO. We got rid of Saddam, and can't find Osama Bin Laden? Lot of lies, a big mess.

I don't think the amount of money and time is worth the amount of life. I was in the marine corps and lost a friend in Beirut. What's happening now, 3000 soldiers have lost their lives, these missions they're sending them on — getting killed by mines and maimed. I have a son who's going to be 18 soon. . . I won't discourage him if he wants to go in the service, but I don't think it's worth it.

Environment. I think the federal government is finally starting to wake up to the global warming issues. Gore's movie hit home.

There's an iceberg park in Montana, 350 of them ten years ago, 18 now. There's something wrong. Nobody wants to admit that these guys were right about global warming.

Lobbying. Time to go. Time to make our vote count. I believe there were 40, 50 lobbyists. Now there's 30000. That's criminal. I write horror. I don't write anything that scary. People with more money than me, they have access. The abramoff scandal. If that's going on on a regular basis, we're the worst schmos. The only thing we're good for is putting money in the tax coffers.

I think it's not so much the lobbyists as the people who are in it, listening to them. There's a serious lack of accountability and standards, ethical and moral. It isn't just with Republicans, but they happen to be the ones right now that are in there.

I think it's probably necessary to limit the amount of money spent on political campaigns.

Having an unlimited pot, if you're an incumbent you have a definite advantage. It makes it next to impossible to unseat them.

A senator needs to generate 6, 8, 9,000 a day to get reelected.

Another tentacle — the Pirro thing in the debate the other night. I used to make my kids go to their rooms when they got in fights like that. How about spending a couple minutes talking about education, the economy. Effect me, my family, kids. I'd like to leave them something. An environment.

I agree thousand percent. My biggest pet peeve is the USDA people in charge of food what they're allowing to do — there was a time 10 years ago where every hundredth piece of beef

would have something wrong with it. Now it's everywhere. They try to raise these animals as quickly as possible by any means.

Upton sinclair's distant grandson.

- 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 New York?
    - **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas and health care), 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; war on terrorism
  4. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

**III. Associations** (25 minutes)

1. Hillary Clinton

Read her biography, wouldn't elect her president. But she's a good senator.  
Not a good presidential candidate, but a halfway decent senator.  
Done more than I expected. Stuck her neck out quite a few times. Took on big people.  
I wish she'd voted against the war. I wish a lot of them had.  
I don't know. . . I wouldn't want her president. I'd vote for her again.  
I consider myself fairly liberal, liberal republican or conservative democrat. Hilary is left of the democratic party. Her heart is there. That's my fear.

2. John Spencer

Don't know enough about him.  
Hasn't gotten his name out.  
State politician.

3. Eliot Spitzer

Great attorney general.  
He's done a lot.  
When I met him, I'd say he's a class act.  
He went after the big guys.  
Wasn't afraid to.  
Accomplished a lot, and he's going to. I'm a republican and I'm voting for him.  
He's got it.

4. John Sweeney [**Extensive**]

Lives a stone's throw right up the road.  
I wish I had a stone.  
I'd like to have the power to vote myself a raise that often. I'm well off, but there's a lot of people that aren't. Those in office need to look out for them. I think his wallet's nice and fat, he's doing well. . . maybe he can bring money for a hospital here — and that's one reason we elect incumbents — but . . .  
Personally I think a lot of people don't like him. He's done a lot for the volunteer fire company. I'm not saying that Gillibrand won't do it, but I've seen that they run for office and promise anything. He's done a lot for my fire company. I've got nothing against the guy.  
I know he's local, and I'm local, if he is reelected maybe he'll keep an eye on this are.

5. Kirsten Gillibrand [**Extensive**]

If she replaces Sweeney, fine with me.  
I think she's got a family tradition of being socially responsible. I'd vote for anybody but Sweeney.  
I was going to say I have no idea on a lot of issues what either she or Sweeney want. It disgusts me.  
I was going to say the same thing. Need to say what they believe in, where they're going.  
The money they're pouring into the ads, can't say what they stand for.

I had someone come to my door. . . the kid was reading from a script. I said I'll take your literature.

We got a little information a month ago, but it's dried up.

6. Congress

Republican.

If I had a rocket launcher. . .

Somebody tried that already.

Crooks.

Attracts people who are looking for power and tend to abuse it.

Big position, big power. That's what I think about Sweeney himself. He's willing to abuse his position.

I'm a card carrying liberal, if we removed all the republicans and replaced the with democrats, they'd be doing the same stuff. It's the institution, not the party.

I remember Chicago in 68.

Back to lobbying.

The ideal would be for people not make it a profession. The opportunity to go there and spend maybe 6 years.

I want statesmen, not politicians.

The 2 party system is unfair. I was in the green party for a while.

Look what happens when you have multiparties, though, they have to have consensus and to this vote trading thing. I don't think it's any better than our system.

Not better, but does provide for a wider spread.

- Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual?

7. [IF NOT MENTIONED IN PREVIOUS DISCUSSION], Mark Foley [**Extensive**]

- What does the Foley case say about Congress?

I don't care. We've bigger problems than foley chasing pages.

That's not the issue — it's who knew about it.

Somebody actually knew what he was doing and preying on 16 year olds, and some leaders knew, and no one put pressure on him.

You can open any paper — I think people kept their eyes closed.

I think they were more worried about maintaining their power structure then following their rules.

- What does the Foley case say about Republicans in Congress?

I think it influences everybody a little bit. Makes you take a step back. What's going on with the republican party.

They have the presidency, the senate, the congress. They have absolute power and it corrupts. . .

**[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]**

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

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? [**Discuss**]

His last term.

His selection of Norm Mineta was excellent. Colin Powell. Not saying he listened.

Sometimes he's funny. Self deprecating. That's always endearing.

He's strong. Willing to make tough choices. Family man. Willing to go on the offense with terrorism. I supported his tax cut a few years ago.

Loyal to his supporters. And he does tend to follow through, whether you agree with him or not.

- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**

His policies on Human Rights and treatment of prisoners, torture. The whole Iraq debacle.

That's the biggest one. I think he could get control of the oil situation. You're not telling me there aren't people smart enough that'll get you 100mpg. There is.

That was my number 1. Do not like his oil company connections. In bed with them. I like him, but he's in bed with them.

Economic policies. If we look at his history during the 80s that folded. Is that a sign of somebody who's a good business man? While he was governor, did you see the immigration situation improve there.

I know he has some intelligence, but I don't think he understands what poverty is. I don't think he knows what it costs an independent trucker to go from here to IL. . . and what congress has done to only allow him 8 hours to drive. USDA again. The farmer still gets the same price per hundredweight of milk as in 1970, but the retail price has gone up. The war, by the time they pay for the gallon in Iraq it's almost 400 a gallon.

I think he has a basic lack of leadership. Hasn't held up the flag and said this is where we have to go. I don't see him doing the whole Kennedy thing.

He's a poor communicator though. . .

I guess he can't.

The time he put his arm around that firefighter, that's the only time he reached us.

Strong and tenacious, that can be a good strength, but he won't reassess. This is the course, no ifs ands or buts. It's a complicated world filled with all of us and a lot more. We need to listen and reassess more. They'll do what they're going to do, and screw anybody else.

Anybody who dares to disagree, was — any kind of insult they can make towards them. Tried to destroy them.

**IV. Election 2006** (10 minutes)

In less than two months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

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

Education. My wife being a sped teacher, she has 24 kids grades 1 through 6, she's been doing this 25 years. Why the increase in kids who keep getting passed on from year to year. Five years ago they set up these higher standards of tests, now they're setting impossible odds but allowing children to take them over and over again

It's more moral issues. What I'm mad about is kids not getting the attention. We need to get back to the basics, family. Back to religion. Teaching your kids right from wrong.

For me it's a lot on moral values, but my opinion on Mr. Sweeney's moral values from personal knowledge, there's no way I could vote for the man.

You vote for an incumbent or do you start from scratch and becomes a freshman in congress — the one term politician and then have no power in your congressional district. It's selfish but — But this is where you live.

**So which way do you lean now?**

Experience and influence. It's cynical — I'd prefer he be a Sam Stratton.

But in order to have somebody ever replace him, somebody has to eventually be a freshman, newbie.

You throw a new person in there, like throwing somebody to the wolves. I've seen politicians try, but they got nowhere because they were one person. What do you do? Want new blood and change, but unless you get a dozen, no change.

I confess, this year my vote will be a lotto ticket. I intend to vote for new people and hope others do the same and hope that we send a small message — flush the system.

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

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

What issues?

If you find out, let us know.

Tons of money, no issues.

A lot of mud. I have heard a lot of ads that said Sweeney voted so much for his raise and how he voted against some things but as far as actual issues, nothing.

And Gillibrand has said Sweeney voted against this and that — instead of him saying she's got this lush townhouse and stuff — he voted against giving some kind of bonus to veterans. What was it attached to? How about we spend some of this money on information. We used to hear politicians tell us all kind of stuff.

I would echo what he just said. I don't hear them defending against the charges, just attacking. Not clear the records or explain the records.

**Is there a place to talk about record?**

Of course, and character is everything. Let's talk about something though. . .

■ **Stay focused on House race**

3. Let's talk about the Republicans and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Republicans?

The parties don't even want to say we're the republican party.

- And what holds you back from voting for the Republicans?
- What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?
  - **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**

4. Now, let's talk about the Democrats and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Democrats?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Democrats?
- 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?

**V. Ad Testing (50 minutes)**

**[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#10]**

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Florida. 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>No</i>					<i>Likely</i>
<i>Gillibrand</i>					<i>Diff</i>					<i>Sweeney</i>
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

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?

**Gillibrand Pay Raise Attack on Sweeney**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>				<b>1</b>	

Dirty politics again.  
 Mudslinging.  
 Got a negative feeling about both candidates from this ad.  
 It’s not being done properly.  
 We don’t know did 90pct of congress vote for it, was it attached to something.  
 At the same time, it did have specific votes.  
 As it’s characterized, it’s just mudslinging.

**Sweeney Response**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>

**Gillibrand Iraq/100% Attack on Sweeney**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>			<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	

Stay the course? What course?  
 Maybe I always see a conspiracy.  
 I like the issue of change, the current course is heading nowhere. Did he really vote 100%?  
 That’s why I didn’t give it a five. It’s not true.  
 It’s funny, I look at the ad like she told how Sweeney voted. It made me like him more. I agree with the votes.  
 It’s just negative. These turn me off to the campaigns.

**Iraq Vet Mother for Sweeney**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	

Any military ad hits home to me.

I'll say that a little bit of that, but did what? What did he do? They never said what he did.

That's the only thing that comes to mind. The armor that was added.

—  
It was abuse of a dead soldier's mother.

I find using the military image for political purposes in poor taste.

I don't care if you're a hawk or dove, we've got 3000 dead soldiers and we all support the troops. Did he vote for something to support the troops? Sure, but he also voted against them other times. You're for them once in a while when it's to your advantage.

He did stand up and say that it was wrong to take away combat zone pay.

**Gillibrand Cutting Taxes for Middle Class**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
		<b>2</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

Didn't mention Sweeney, or specifics, but we haven't been in power. . .

The idea of cutting taxes? She's a democrat — I question her sincerity.

I question her ability to lower property taxes from a position in Congress.

I reserve a bit on the issue of taxes. I'm still paying too much.

A single Congress person has an ad that says I'll lower taxes on middle income, it's a little bit theoretical. As far as taxes being a republican issue. . .

She's saying a lot but it's not coming across as what she'll do.

It's not believable. I've heard it before.

“No new taxes”

**Sweeney Attack on Gillibrand**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>

It just looked like a dirty politics ad. Don't tell me about her, just tell me what you'll do.

All over the place, does too much.

Funny how they do the negatives in black and white.

My fire department he took care of.

**What's he talking about with the war profiteering?**

We all probably are guilty of it if we have mutual funds. She didn't turn over her income taxes. But she isn't required to.

There's two guys on Madison avenue who just make trailers for films, said they could make anybody want to go see any movie by cutting it. You can pull anything out of context.

No documentation.

**Roskam Immigration Attack on Duckworth**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
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	1			2		3	2			
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Kinda dirty politics again. But it's a huge issue for me. But I don't know if I can trust it. I don't want a welfare state, but I don't know if it's true.

Don't know if it's the transfer, but it's blurry. Like the movie Se7en. Just underscored the negativity. The tone of the speaker, seemed like American Justice. Like this person's criminal. They lumped social security with the other benefits, which makes me question the veracity of the rest of the information.

My own knowledge, my inlaws are farmers, they have friends who get migrant workers. I see very little detail on what the real problem is, they just say immigrants as a generality. But they don't give what's happening with the immigrant situation.

**Perlmutter**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
					/	//		/	//	//

It's positive, has a first environmental theme. That candidate said what they're looking for. Nothing about the other person.

I thought the same thing. Four major issues, positive. Best ad we've seen.

It was really clean.

The beginning/caskets, was a little much.

It indicated things I'd like more information about, but didn't give the information.

If we weren't so dependent on foreign oil, we wouldn't even be over there.

I didn't like the coffin. I did like the corn being chopped for different energy. And the windmills.

For the price everybody's paying for gas, you do alternative energy, we'll drive you to your seat in congress.

We're a bunch of New Yorkers identifying with a theme from a western ad.

The only thing I don't like is the playing up the troops, using the image.

**Sweeney Health Care**

<b>5R</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5D</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>					

I applaud his effort to hit a direct audience. I give him credit for that. But I also think it's a good idea to get votes. That's what he wants to do.

He has been in power for a while, and he has procured vast amounts of money for his constituents. That's what people want their representatives to do. I was offended by the baby.

It was positive, not negative. . . considering the other ads.

Healthcare's a huge issue and it's going to get bigger.

Just as a note for whoever is listening — it's been running heavily in the last few days.

**For all ads:**

- Show of hands, then discuss each one
- Explore takeaways
- Which of these ads addresses what is important in the election?

- *Probe on takeaways: do Republican tax and immigration attacks hold you back from the Democrat? Are you concerned about Democratic Congress?*

**Mail Pieces (No written scale – Rate by hands, discuss)**

**Sweeney Drunk Driving**

We're getting too many phone calls. Tell me something important or at least sound friendly.

I think this is horrible, just mudslinging. The worst of the worst.

Horrible.

1 or 2 glasses of wine? Was it weather? Was he impaired? It's not documented.

I've gotta disqualify myself on this because my son and a friend of his witnessed. . .

It's innuendo, not substance.

No better. I don't care what side is slinging this crap. It's gotta stop.

If we were rating this, I'd give it a five for Sweeney.

**VI. Final Ballot (5 minutes)**

**[Written exercise – Handout #11]**

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]**