

DEMOCRACY CORPS

CARVILLE ♦ GREENBERG

10 G STREET, NE ♦ SUITE 400 ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20002

202-478-8330 (TEL) ♦ 202-289-8648 (FAX)

WWW.DEMOCRACYCORPS.COM

Founders

James Carville
Stanley Greenberg
Robert Shrum

Executive Director
Jim Gerstein

Senior Advisor
Karl Agne

Research Conducted by:
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Date: July 10, 2006

To: Friends of Democracy Corps

From: Stan Greenberg
James Carville

RE: THE STRATEGY

Bush has improved his standing modestly in the last month, particularly with conservatives and past Bush voters, but produced no change whatsoever in the number of intense supporters or intense opponents. In short, nothing has happened to change the structure of the race, diminish the desire for change or reduce the Democrats' lead in the races for the U.S. House and Senate. In fact, there is some evidence that the ongoing debate on Iraq has increased the Democratic margin.

That argues for Democrats not being distracted from their main strategic task – how to bring up their vote and margin to the level that one would expect given the tumultuous political mood in the country. Democrats are doing well – ahead by 9 points in the real congressional (not generic) ballot and at 51 percent of the vote. But they need to do better to win control. Fortunately, 63 percent believe the country is on the wrong track, 57 percent want a significantly different direction than Bush's and another 57 percent support virtually every Democratic message tested in comparison with the Republicans. Democrats' 9-point vote margin is about half of the margin they get when testing the key choices before the country.

The Democrats need to catch up with the country, which wants to vote for outsiders, is demanding change and ready to respond to the Democrats' message and definition of the election. All things considered, this is not a bad problem to have, but it requires a new intensity and focus to grab ahold of the forces for change and take the Democrats to a new level.

Our efforts are fragmented to some extent by the surfeit of forces that are driving voters to demand change. These distinct dynamics almost give us too many choices. These include –

Change dynamic one: The Iraq war. This is the biggest voting issue for Democrats (and independents and change voters). While voters are divided on policy issues (like timetable for withdrawal), the continuing attention to the war increases dissatisfaction and elevates the change vote.

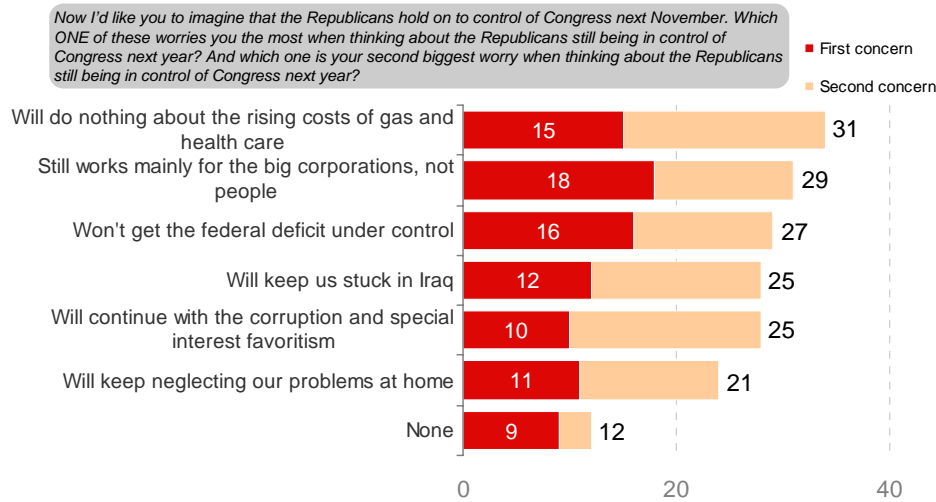
Change dynamic two: Washington is working for big corporations and the privileged, not the people or the country. There is an abiding sense that things are out of balance in Washington, with political leaders working for the big corporate interests and the privileged, rather than trying to have America work for everyone. This is the top reason (along with rising costs) for wanting to change the Republican Congress.

Change dynamic three: They're not taking care of America. Across a whole range of issues – Iraq, Katrina, the borders and immigration, and trade and manufacturing – voters think the political leaders are failing to step up and take care of America. This is why the House Republicans are trying to keep immigration focused on the borders.

Change dynamic four: This economy brings you high gas and health care costs and financial pressure for the middle class. Because the elites, journalists and the Republicans think this is a strong economy, the campaign thus far has neglected the great frustration with rising costs and financial pressures – for many groups, the top reasons to change the Congress.

Change dynamic five: They've bankrupted the country. There is a sense of foreboding in the country that this Republican government has bankrupted the country, run up the deficits and passed on our debts and obligations to future generations. They have made a mess of things financially and hurt the country. This is one of the top worries about any future Congress, and one of the key things voters want to put a halt to.

Greatest worry about Republican Congress



The Republicans have a strategy, which is familiar to us from 2002 and 2004, but in a very new context. Rove is working methodically, issue after issue, to energize Republican loyalists and above all, to consolidate the Bush 2004 voters – one-in-five of whom are now voting Democratic for Congress. Half of the undecided voters backed Bush in 2004. So, the Republicans will work “no amnesty,” “cut and run,” “gay marriage,” and “tax and spend” because they have no choice. But it is important to understand how far they have to go. First, just 50 percent of Republicans “strongly approve” of Bush, down from 76 percent at the beginning of 2005 and 61 percent at the beginning of 2006. Recent efforts have left the number unmoved. Second, the number of voters identifying themselves as Republican has dropped from 37 percent to 34 percent since the last election (comparing the last five Democracy Corps polls), which may make the Republicans even more desperate. Expect that Rove and the Republicans will only become even more intense in the use of these issues.

The Republicans are trying to deny Democrats the voters they need. Understand that those undecided and dislodged voters do respond to these conservative issues, yet these are the voters Democrats need to raise their vote. They have not closed the deal because the image of the Democrats has not improved over the last year and the number of Democratic identifiers has not risen.

Thus, Democrats must do better in identifying with the forces for change and making them matter in the election. If they do that, they will consolidate their vote, win over the undecided, increase turnout and demoralize the Republicans. But Democrats must also act

aggressively to confound and undermine the efficacy of the conservative issues, thus allowing these voters to vote for change. That combination can take the Democrats to a dramatic level.

A Democratic Strategy

To drive up the Democratic vote, Democrats need a strategy that aligns them more effectively with the dynamics for change. That is what this new survey for Democracy Corps has set out to address. That strategy includes four re-enforcing elements:

1. ***Agents of change.*** Demonstrate that Democratic candidates and Democrats in general are the outsiders demanding change. They need to be as much for change as the voters. In this survey, there is nothing as powerful as the commitment:

No pay raise for members of Congress until the incomes of average Americans starts to rise again.

Three-quarters found this reassuring, including 56 percent very reassuring –10 points stronger than anything else considered. That says Democrats are the outsiders challenging Washington and are concerned with the incomes of ordinary Americans (the same commitment linked to minimum wage is also strong, though less so).

This position on the pay raise and voters' income re-enforces our main message below – making the economy and America work for everyone.

2. ***The main choice for the election: whether Washington works for the privileged or for all Americans.*** That Washington does not work for all Americans is the strongest critique in this research and the most motivating, which will be strengthened when linked to the economy and American jobs (discussed below). This is the strongest formulation of the critique of what is going on in Washington and the country:

Bush and the Republicans are working for the CEO's and the most privileged. The Democrats say, America should work for everyone.

For Democrats, there is nothing closer (81 percent much more likely to support the Democrat after hearing this difference), and it is the second strongest definition for independents. It is also the strongest definition helping Democrats with seniors and for white rural voters. Gains here greatly expand the battlefield for Democrats.

Democrats' strongest definitions of the election are more than 10 points stronger than the strongest definition advanced by the Republicans, with about 66 percent more likely to support the Democrat. Being the voice of this choice raises the Democratic candidate up.

Democrats need to set out this choice as outsiders: Washington can't just work for the privileged and biggest corporations; America must work for everyone.

3. ***Focusing this choice on the economy and American jobs.*** In this survey, the economy, high gas and health care costs and financial pressures are top motivators for change and give Democrats their biggest message advantage when posed in the context of this electoral definition: *an economy that produces stagnant wages and rising costs for most Americans or an economy that works for average Americans.*

There are two ways to elevate the economy within this framework:

- Bush says the economy is strong but this is an economy of stagnant incomes, rising prices and financial pressure. We want an America that works for everyone.
- Bush says outsourcing is good for the economy, but our priority is creating American jobs. We want an America that works for everyone.

It is hard to underestimate the importance of Democrats focusing on creating American jobs. This is the strongest definition of the election for all voters, but particularly the undecided and the most alienated voters, and it is the strongest definition among independents and Republicans. It allows Democrats to trump Republicans standing up for America, including immigration. This is an opportunity to share voters' frustration with the Washington establishment and Bush administration that allow American jobs to go abroad and industries to decline, without any effort to create new American jobs.

Defining the choice in the election

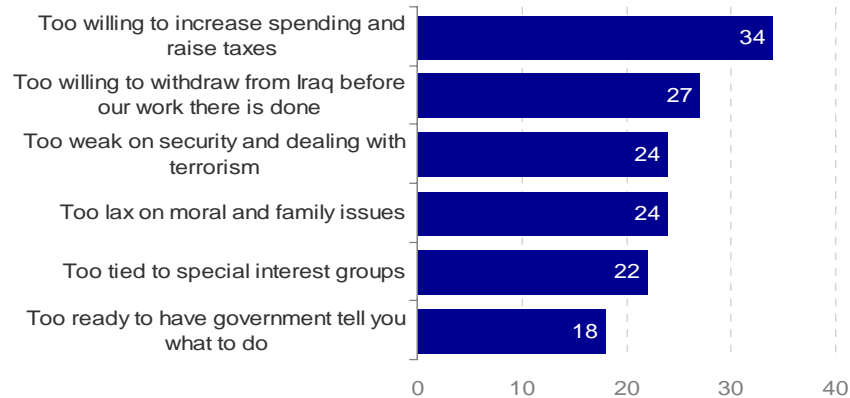
<i>Now I am going to read you what some people say are some differences between Democrats and Republicans. For each, please tell me if it is a difference that makes you much more likely, somewhat more likely, or doesn't make you any more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate, or is it not at all a difference between Democrats and Republicans.</i>	Much more likely	Total more likely
Bush and the Republicans say outsourcing is good for the economy. The Democrats say our priority must be to create American jobs	47	66
Bush and the Republicans are working for the CEOs and most privileged. The Democrats say, America should work for everyone	47	62
Bush and the Republicans have created a culture of corruption that puts corporate special interests first. The Democrats say, we should clean up Washington and put the people first	44	57
Bush and the Republicans prioritize every problem around the world, but neglect America. The Democrats say, a strong America begins at home	42	63
The Republicans want to continue Bush's direction. The Democrats say, we need a new direction	42	58
The Republicans want to continue Bush's direction in Iraq. The Democrats say, we need a change of course in Iraq	40	57

4. ***Reassuring the dislodged and undecided so they can vote for change.*** The change voters are holding back. That is why Democrats' vote is at 51, not 55 percent. The first three elements identify Democrats with the forces for change and align them closely with the desire to turn our economy and our country back to all the American people. But Republicans will wage war on a range of emotive issues to try to get their voters back. Democrats need to be vigilant with the reassurances on which they are most comfortable. The strongest are summarized below:

- ***Tax cuts for the middle class.*** The biggest worry about the Democrats is that they will raise taxes at a time when people are under great financial pressure. This is one of the strongest definitions of the election for the Republicans. However, that the Democrat will cut taxes for the middle class, particularly for college costs, is the second most reassuring thing Democrats can say (after the pay raise). It is consistent with an overriding goal, making America work for everyone.

Worries if Democrats control Congress

Now I'd like you to imagine that the Democrats take control of Congress next November. Which ONE of these worries you the most when thinking about the Democrats being in control of Congress next year? And which one is your second biggest worry when thinking about the Democrats being in control of Congress next year? (COMBINED)



- Anger with the reckless, deficit spending.* Democrats actually win their biggest advantage in this survey when we put a Republican tax cut message against a Democratic one that attacks them for cutting taxes for the wealthy, running up the deficit and passing on the bills to our kids. It puts them on the defensive, but more importantly, reassures them about a Democrat who is focused on the out of control deficits. And like the other reassurances, it shows Democrats wanting a country that works for everyone.
- Iraq: oversight and accountability for no-bid contracts and wasted and lost money in Iraq.* The debate around a timetable produces a modest edge for the Democrats, but there is very strong support for a candidate who is demanding accountability on no-bid contracts for Halliburton and the wasted and lost money in Iraq. The Democratic lead jumps to 14 points when they say the following:

We need a Congress that will use its investigative powers to look at the no-bid contracts for Halliburton, how \$9 billion in U.S. government cash went missing in Iraq while our troops struggled to get body armor, and what role oil companies are playing in Iraq.

This approach denies Republicans the ability to monopolize the time talking about “cut and run.” In the theater of war, it is Democrats who can be trusted to watch out for our troops and the taxpayers’ money – an America that works for everyone.

- *No amnesty; enforce the laws.* The San Diego experience teaches us that Republicans can turn nuance into “amnesty”. Indeed, in this survey, one of the Republicans’ strongest definitions for the election centers on immigration and enforcing laws. However, the Democratic message (tested in earlier surveys), done right, can contest this effectively. It emphasizes no amnesty and a respect for the law, even as we allow a path to citizenship for the law-abiding. Democrats should attack Bush and the Republicans for losing control of the borders and no longer penalizing employers for employing illegal immigrants. We are for expelling the criminals and allowing a path to citizenship for the law abiding immigrants who pay taxes. Our approach is no amnesty and respect for the laws.
- *Gay marriage.* We hate this issue but we promise you that the Republicans will run hard on this issue, as it is critical for their dislodged voters and those in rural areas. That the Democrat believes marriage is between a man and a woman is among the strongest reassurance for older blue collar voters, seniors and those in rural areas. If this is what a candidate believes, it is important to say it.

Undermining GOP Issues – Reassurance messages

<i>Now let me read you some things about the Democratic candidate for Congress. After each one, please tell me whether you find it very reassuring, somewhat reassuring, a little reassuring or not at all reassuring.</i>	Very reassuring	Total reassuring
The Democratic candidate says no member of Congress should get a pay raise until the incomes of average Americans start to rise again	56	75
The Democratic candidate supports middle class tax cuts, including making all college tuition costs tax deductible	46	77
The Democratic candidate believes marriage is between a man and a woman and opposes legalizing gay marriage	37	54
The Democratic candidate supports regulations to help parents limit the amount of sex and violence their children are exposed to through television, music and video games	34	62
The Democratic candidate opposes any amnesty for illegal immigrants, wants greater law enforcement on the borders and in the work place, and a practical solution for the undocumented, if they are working and law abiding	31	66
The Democratic candidate is opposed to any precipitous withdrawal from Iraq, though believes we must have a change of policy and direction there	22	58

The reassurances on these issues get a very strong response from the voters, suggesting that it is quite possible to keep these voters open for change. After hearing these reassurances, the respondents are about 4 points more positive in their responses to Democratic statements defining the election.

The Democrats advance when they embrace change and give people the permission to vote for change.

An America that Works for Everyone: The economy and American Jobs

One of the new insights from this survey is the need to focus on our change message on the economy and lost American jobs, living standards and income, rising prices and financial pressure on people. The more the Republicans talk about the strong economy, the more Democrats talk about their economy that fails the middle class. The Democrats lead this debate by 19 points, with 57 percent siding with the Democratic economic argument.

The Economic Debate

Now I would like to read you a pair of statements about the economy. After I read them, please tell me which statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.

	Strongly	Total
The Democrat says, incomes have been stagnant for five years and people are under great financial pressure, but Bush and the Republicans say the economy is great. They've done nothing about rising health care and gas prices, or jobs outsourced overseas. I'll work to get health care and gas prices down, cut middle class taxes and reward companies that create jobs here.	45	57
OR		
The Republican says, our economy is strong and our tax cuts for families and businesses made this possible. Last year our economy grew faster than any industrialized nation's in the world. We created over 5 million new jobs over the last two and a half years and homeownership is at the highest level ever. The economy is moving in the right direction and none of us can afford the Democrats' new tax increases.	29	38

The Republicans have to speak of the economy as being a success, but Democrats should address that claim from the outside and from the world of real people who face growing financial pressures, worsened by high gas and health care costs. The Republicans speak for the elite and the elites' economy; Democrats speak for the middle class.

The specific contrast between Bush applauding “outsourcing” and Democrats committing to “create American jobs” actually produces 66 percent more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate.

We want to move this election as much as possible to the economy and American jobs.

The tax debate, when played out in the context of the Republicans making a mess of the country's finances, produces one of the strongest results for Democrats. Voters are nervous about high-end tax cuts in the current period, particularly when we focus on the middle class getting only \$20 in cuts and our children the bills.

Debate over taxes and country's finances

<i>Now I would like to read you a pair of statements about taxes. After I read them, please tell me which statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.</i>	Strongly	Total
The Democrat says, Bush and the Republicans have made a mess of the country's finances, with spending and deficits rising out of control. This year, they cut taxes by 70 billion dollars, but the average middle class households got just 20 dollars. We must stop passing on the debts to our children and start doing what's best for the country and get our deficits under control.	48	60
OR		
The Republican says, our tax cuts every year have eased the burden on businesses and working Americans and have created a strong foundation for economic growth. We must make these tax cuts permanent, but Democrats want to repeal them, which will damage our economy and increase taxes for the average family of four by nearly two thousand dollars.	27	36

Accountability for Waste and Corruption in Iraq

The increased attention to Iraq, even when Republicans control the debate, hurts them when people decide their congressional vote. The country is divided on setting a deadline (50 to 49 percent) and we win an actual exchange on the issue by just 4 points (50 to 46 percent). However, when we include accountability in the message – “exercise oversight and push for a new direction, not more of the same” rather than a deadline – Democrats’ advantage doubles to 8 points. More importantly, when we promise to send investigative committees to find the missing money, investigate the lack of armor and no-bid contracts, the lead nearly doubles again to 14 points (55 to 41 percent).

The Iraq Debate – Investigative powers

<i>Now I would like to read you a pair of statements about Iraq. After I read them, please tell me which statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.</i>	Strongly	Total
The Democrat says, we need a Congress that will use its investigative powers to look at the no-bid contracts for Halliburton, how 9 billion dollars in US government cash went missing in Iraq, why our troops struggled to get body armor, and what role oil companies are playing in Iraq.	43	55
OR		
The Republican says, the last thing our troops need is a bunch of congressional committees running around and second-guessing our military in Iraq. This will hurt the morale of our troops, when what they need is to concentrate on finishing the job they were sent to do.	29	41

After the Iraq debate in the survey, we re-ask the vote question and the Democratic margin rises to 12 points (52 to 40 percent). The more Iraq is discussed, the more trouble for Republicans. The Republicans, we are told, want to run this election on Iraq and the economy. So do we.

Special Attention to Seniors

Seniors deserve special attention in this campaign, as they will play a disproportionate role in the voting electorate in November. As you know, seniors swung heavily for the Republicans in 2004, but this year they are voting Democratic by 16 points (52 to 36 percent). More importantly, they are engaged in the election. Three-quarters rate their interest in this election as a “10” on a 1 to 10 scale, compared to only about half of all other voters.

In the last election, there were few “seniors’ issues”, but not so this year.

On the new prescription drug benefit, they have grown more negative in the last month: 44 percent negative and 32 percent positive. The intense opposition, 27 percent, is much above the intense support.

However, there is even more power and intensity when we get the issue back to Social Security privatization. The following definition of the election was very powerful for all voters:

The Republicans have a plan to privatize Social Security if they get the chance again. The Democrats will protect Social Security and peoples' retirement.

Among seniors, however, 54 percent say they are much more likely to vote Democratic after hearing that choice, and a total 66 percent are more likely (remember that Social Security privatization is still in the president's budget).

The seniors have a broad range of concerns that move them away from the Republicans this year, including a high level of concern with Iraq and worry about corporate influence in Washington. Other than Social Security privatization, they respond most strongly to a message about corporate influence in Washington and lack of concern for all Americans.

Elevating "seniors' issues" will be an important part of holding an election in which Democrats more and more demand that America work for everyone.

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The Democrats can clearly take their game to a new level with a new strategy that embraces change and poses this choice: a Washington that works for the privileged or an America that works for everyone. That choice needs to be posed above all in the context of the economy, financial pressures and American jobs. At the same time, Democrats need to let the change voters vote for change by not having to worry that Democrats will raise their taxes, promote amnesty, be reckless in Iraq or tamper with marriage. Change and reassurance form our strategy for 2006.