

DEMOCRACY CORPS
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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner
From: Stan Greenberg and Ana Iparraguirre
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RE: MELTDOWN
Report on the Special Survey in 49 Republican-Held Seats

We do not often get to write such a report — changes so large over such a short period that they certainly portend a whole new playing field for the November election. This survey of 1,200 likely voters was conducted in only Republican-held seats, yet Democrats are ahead by 4 points overall in the named congressional vote (49 to 45 percent); indeed, they are ahead by 2 points (48 to 46 percent) in the bottom tier of presumably safest seats.

This vote represents a dramatic change in the state of the race over the last two weeks. The end of the Congress — with the increased pessimism and anger about Iraq and the Foley scandal and subsequent partisan brawl — has moved voters to shift their assessments of the parties and their votes. The 1994 election broke at the end; this one just broke. The shift is evident on every indicator — party, Bush, war, intensity and morale.

The shift this poll shows in the Republican held seats reflects a dramatic change nationally in the generic congressional ballot. On Monday, Democracy Corps will release a report that shows that a 5-point swing on average to the Democrats in the ten media polls conducted in October. The Democratic vote, stuck at 49 percent for months, suddenly jumped to 53 percent in the last two weeks.

We highlight these findings this Friday afternoon because Democrats and progressives need to think radically differently about the 2006 battle — in this three-week window. In 1994, the race shifted dramatically at the end, but Democrats have a chance to consolidate gains large enough to affect congressional control over this decade. That means allocating resources and finding new resources to lock in the gains, as the Republicans move their much greater resources up to the new barricades.

In addition, the meltdown was produced by a collapse in confidence in Republicans without a comparable surge for the Democrats. After flat-lining for a year, the Democrats have edged up but their favorability (warm responses) is only 2 points higher than the Republicans. Amidst all the mudslinging, Democrats can consolidate and expand these gains if voters will hear what Democrats want to do with a new majority — work with both parties and the President to take a new direction in Iraq and wage a better war on terrorism, work to lower drug and gas costs, and to achieve energy independence.

Why is this meltdown happening?

- Iraq. The new belief — and by very big number — that the U.S. is losing ground in Iraq, and the thinking that it is making us less secure, has turned voters against the Republicans.
- The President has tried to nationalize the election around national security, but instead, he has nationalized the Iraq war — which is now clearly dominant as a reason for voting.
- Individual Republican incumbents have suddenly lost their incumbent protection and are now fully associated with the Congress that people hate. Drop in incumbent job approvals is the biggest factor opening up the playing field.
- The Congress is seen as a bickering mess that is getting nothing done for people. Disapproval hits new highs.
- Intensity is tilting the playing field: strong disapproval of Bush is double strong approval; those voting Democratic are now 16 points more likely to be enthusiastic about election than Republican voters.

The result is the lowest scores in more than a decade for the Republicans and the Congress; a president in people's faces who is more unpopular than any president in memory, a likely electorate even more Democratic than the broad electorate; and an across the board shift in the vote across Republican districts.

This meltdown is real but given its timing, an immense opportunity for Democrats to move strategically to consolidate gains at an unimagined level.