

**BRIEFING MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Ed Goeas and Brian Nienaber

**Date:** November 7, 2006

**Re:** Key findings from a recent national study on immigration

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**Methodology**

These findings come from a survey of a nationwide survey of “likely” voters with oversamples in contested Congressional Districts (N=200), in Arizona (N=100), and in Pennsylvania (N=100). All respondents interviewed in the main sample were part of a fully representative sample of N=800 registered “likely” voters nationwide. Responses to this survey were gathered November 3-5, 2006. The confidence interval associated with the main sample is  $\pm 3.5\%$  in 19 of 20 cases.

The contested Congressional districts for this survey are: AZ01, AZ05, AZ08, CA 04, CA11, CO04, CO07, CT02, CT04, CT05, FL13, FL16, FL22, GA08, GA12, IL06, IL08, IN02, IN08, IN09, IA01, IA03, KY03, KY04, MN01, MN06, NV02, NV03, NH02, NM01, NY20, NY24, NY26, NY29, NC11, OH01, OH02, OH12, OH15, OH18, PA04, PA06, PA07, PA08, PA10, TX22, VA02, WA08, WI08, WY-AL.

**Introduction and Overview**

On the eve of potentially historic elections for Congress, this survey reinforces the trend seen in other data that the Republicans may be improving their standing with voters in terms of vote intensity and in terms of performance on the generic Congressional ballot.

In addition, the survey finds that despite a high level of voter intensity and voter interest, immigration is not a top vote determining issue and is not a top turnout motivator. In fact, voters remain supportive of comprehensive immigration reform and expect Congress to take action on comprehensive reform next year.

**Political Environment is Improving for Republicans**

The generic ballot stands at 49% for the Democrats and 43% for the Republicans. Given the institutional 5-point Democratic advantage in the generic, this places the Republicans at near parity with the Democrats. In contested Congressional Districts, this margin is 7-points for the Democrats (47%-40%). Looking at the turnout model of 70% of the electorate most likely to vote, the parties are locked in a statistical tie with 47% for the Republicans and 46% for the Democrats.

For President Bush, 52% of likely voters disapprove of his job performance and 42% of likely voters approve of his job performance. In contested Congressional Districts, President Bush stands at 40% approve and 54% disapprove.

### **Immigration Is Not a Key Issue in This Election**

Fully 63% of likely voters say they are “extremely” likely to vote and 49% rate their level of interested at “10” or “extremely interested” and the numbers for contested Congressional Districts are similar (69% and 59% respectively). Despite this high level of enthusiasm and interest, immigration is not a critical issue in this election.

Just 11% of likely voters select immigration as the most important issue in deciding their vote for Congress, putting it behind the War in Iraq (29%), terrorism and homeland security (15%), and the economy and jobs (11%).

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of likely voters and 38% of voters in contested Congressional Districts say they plan to use illegal immigration as one of their top issues when deciding their vote. So, a strong majority of these voters do not plan on using illegal immigration as one of their top issues.

Just 26% of likely voters and 27% of voters in contested Congressional Districts say that illegal immigration is one of the top issues motivating them to come out to vote in the Congressional elections. Again, an overwhelming majority of these voters are not using illegal immigration as a top issue motivating them to vote.

### **Support Continues for Comprehensive Reform**

Likely voters are informed of the recent law providing more resources for tougher enforcement at the border, including the construction of a 700 mile fence.

Likely voters are then presented with the option of thinking of this law as a solution that means it will be years before we need to consider more legal immigration or allow current illegal to earn legal status OR thinking of this law as a first step towards comprehensive reform, which includes securing the border, dealing with the future flow of legal immigration and creating an earned legalization program. A plurality (48%) of likely voters and 47% of voters in contested Congressional Districts say they think of this law as a merely a first step towards comprehensive reform. In contrast, 28% of likely voters and 23% of voters in contested Congressional Districts say they think of this law as a solution.

Looking at partisanship on this question, Republicans have more intense support for thinking of this law as merely a first step. Fully 62% of Republicans think of this law as just a first step.

On the next question, likely voters are given viewpoints about whether Congress should consider comprehensive reform or give these new border security and enforcement measures a chance to work first. The two views presented were:

Since it was an election year it was fine that all Congress could do this year on immigration reform was to provide more resources for tougher enforcement of current immigration laws at the border, including the construction of a 700 mile long fence along the Mexican border. However, the next Congress should consider comprehensive reform that deals with other immigration issues like the adjusting the flow of legal immigration and creating an earned legalization plan for current illegal immigrants, OR

Since Congress has already passed a law that deals with the critical issues of border security and enforcement, we should give these measures time to work before considering more comprehensive measures like adjusting the flow of legal immigration and creating an earned legalization plan for current illegal immigrants.

Fifty percent (50%) of likely voters and 52% of contested Congressional District voters say they want the next Congress to consider comprehensive reform. In contrast, 37% of likely voters and 33% of contested Congressional District voters say they want to give the current measures time to work.

In contrast with conventional wisdom, there is not a notable partisan divide on this question. For Republicans, 54% want comprehensive reform to be considered next year and 37% want to let the current law be given a chance to work. For Democrats, 48% want comprehensive reform to be considered next year and 37% want to give the current law a chance to work.

This interest in comprehensive reform is also seen in a Candidate A versus Candidate B match-up. In this match-up, Candidate A advocates a border security and enforcement only measure and Candidate B advocates comprehensive reform. A majority (57%) of likely voters and 53% of contested Congressional District voters select Candidate B, the comprehensive reform advocate as the candidate they would be more likely to vote for.

On a specific ask about dealing with comprehensive reform, 75% of likely voters and 68% of contested Congressional District voters say they expect Congress to deal with comprehensive reform next year, including the creating a guest worker program and creating an earned legalization program for current illegal immigrants. On partisanship, 76% of Republicans and 76% of Democrats expect Congress to deal with comprehensive reform next year.

In addition, likely voters already accept two of the key premises for any debate on comprehensive reform. A strong majority (65%) of likely voters and 60% of contested Congressional District voters disagree that just vigorous enforcement of current laws would cause most illegal immigrants to go back home. Similarly, 68% of likely voters and 69% of contested Congressional District voters agree that a program in which illegal immigrants can earn citizenship over several years by meeting a variety of requirements including paying a fine, working, paying taxes, living crime free, and learning English is not amnesty.

## **Conclusions**

In these critical Congressional elections, Republicans appear to be closing the gap with Democrats. However, these gains are certainly not being made by making harsh criticisms about the dangers of illegal immigration and amnesty. In fact, most voters view the recent efforts on immigration as a first step. Likely voters remain committed to finding a comprehensive solution that deals with all aspects of the immigration issue including guest workers, legal immigration flow, and an earned legalization program for current illegal immigrants.

### Addendum

The table below compares the key results for likely voters nationwide, voters in contested Congressional Districts, voters in Arizona, and voters in Pennsylvania.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Likely voters nationwide</b>	<b>Contested CD voters</b>	<b>AZ voters</b>	<b>PA voters</b>
Vote Likelihood	63% extremely likely	69% extremely likely	53% extremely likely	80% extremely likely
Interest in election	49% extremely interested	59% extremely interested	59% extremely interested	54% extremely interested
Generic Cong. ballot	43%=GOP and 49%=Dem	40%=GOP and 47%=Dem	42%=GOP and 44%=Dem	42%=GOP and 50%=Dem
Presidential job approval	42% approve	40% approve	40% approve	37% approve
Top issue in deciding vote for Congress	11%=illegal immigration	10%=illegal immigration	16%=illegal immigration	16%=illegal immigration
Will use immigration as top vote deciding issue	39%	38%	60%	34%
Immigration is a top GOTV issue	26%	27%	46%	30%
Recent immigration law as first step or solution	48%=first step; 28%=solution	47%=first step; 23%=solution	42%=first step; 29%=solution	54%=first step; 25%=solution
Comprehensive reform next year or let current reforms work	50%=comprehensive next year; 37%=let reforms work	52%=comprehensive next year; 33%=let reforms work	59%=comprehensive next year; 27%=let reforms work	53%=comprehensive next year; 36%=let reforms work
Enforcement would force most illegal immigrants to go home	65% disagree	60% disagree	74% disagree	60% disagree
Earned legalization with requirements is not amnesty	67% agree	69% agree	74% agree	67% agree
Cand. A (enforcement only) vs. Cand. B (comp. reform)	37% (Cand. A) to 57% (Cand. B)	39% (Cand. A) to 53% (Cand. B)	34% (Cand. A) to 61% (Cand. B)	42% (Cand. A) to 52% (Cand. B)
Expect Congress to deal with comp. reform next year	75% yes	68% yes	69% yes	71% yes