

DEMOCRACY CORPS
CARVILLE ♦ GREENBERG

Date: July 31, 2007
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Ana Iparraguirre

RE: CURRENT BATTLES REINFORCING DEMOCRATIC LEADS
Report on Latest Democracy Corps National and Battleground Polls

The mood of the country grows uglier, with voters ever more dissatisfied with the President and direction of the country. Disapproval of the Congress now equals that of President Bush and the Democratic Congress, and leaders have lost some of the earlier glow; a 55 percent majority believes the Democrats have not made progress on their election pledges. Nonetheless, the Democratic advantage in Presidential and Congressional elections has been consolidated and Democratic members are gaining in strength, while Republicans weaken. It seems, just as the President and the Republicans own the Iraq war, they also own the battles and gridlock. By more than 10 points, voters say the current gridlock in Washington makes them more likely to vote Democratic for Congress and the White House.

Democrats should not be for complacency in the face of lost trust in Congress and perceptions that the new Congress is not effective or honoring its pledges. There are legitimate concerns: Democrats should not relish an increasingly alienated electorate on any grounds; increasing alienation from both parties can drive down turnout and create protest voters looking for other vehicles for change. The goal should be to build confidence in Democrats and this memo presents findings on the strongest messages for Democratic House and Senate members, as well as for those making the broader case for the Democratic Congress. We will soon release a study with Al Quinlan on how Democrats lead on making government more accountable to the American people.

Some have focused on the gridlock, partisan bickering and the declining esteem and concluded the electorate is poised to say, “a pox on both your houses.” Many in the press have reported both parties as equal offenders against the public good and sensibilities. That completely misreads the current moment and the trends unfolding before them.

As a start, the Democrats are maintaining stable and nearly landslide leads in both the race for President as measured by generic performance (51 to 41 percent) and the named ballot for Congress (52 to 42 percent) — untouched by the battles between the Democratic Congress and the President. More importantly, we have recently conducted surveys in the battleground for

2008, and the results look like a rerun of 2006 — an election when Democrats lost no incumbents and swept the competitive seats¹.

- In the battleground of the 70 most competitive congressional districts (35 Democratic and 35 Republican-held), the Democratic incumbents, including the big class of freshmen, have quickly moved into dramatic leads in the named congressional ballot (52 to 40 percent)². Whatever is happening for Congress is not evident for the individual members whose named job approval is rising along with their vote advantage over the Republicans. (These battleground results are based on 1,451 interviews in a survey of 1,600 that will be completed tomorrow.)
- In the 35 Republican battleground districts, the named Republicans trail their generic Democratic opponent by 5 points (49 to 44 percent). Republicans are almost in as much trouble as in 2006 in their top tier congressional races.
- In a poll conducted for MoveOn across seven Republican-held U.S. Senate seats, the named U.S. Senators had a vote to re-elect of only 37 percent and were garnering only 44 percent of the vote against a generic challenger. The current battles are putting even more Republican Senators in jeopardy.³
- The overall image of the Democratic Party has fallen back from the honeymoon post-election period to essentially where it stood for the whole 2006 election period — and that has been stable since April. On the other hand, the Republicans have weakened in the current period since April to their lowest thermometer score in the past half century.
- A growing percentage of the country, now 61 percent, want their member of Congress to vote to change President Bush's direction on Iraq and start requiring a reduction of troops; just 35 percent want their member to not undermine the President. The margin for a Congressional mandate has grown from 16 to 26 points in the last month. The forces pushing voters to demand change are growing, not diminishing.

¹ Data based on a Democracy Poll survey conducted July 25-30, 2007 of 1,000 likely voters nationwide.

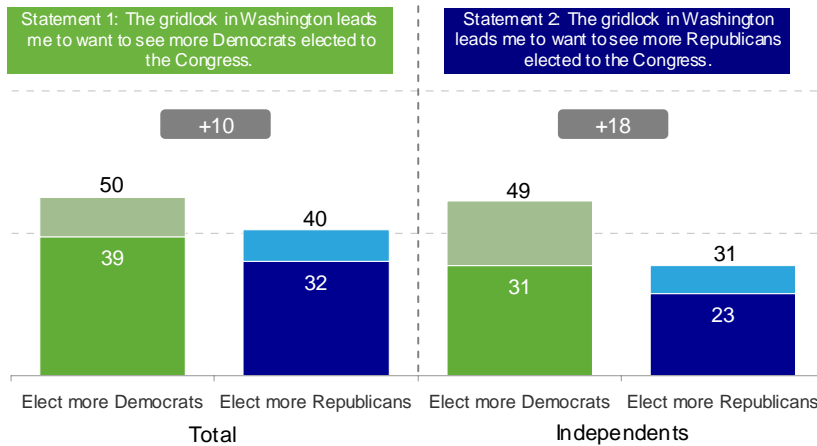
² Data based on a Democracy Poll survey conducted July 25-31, 2007 of 1,451 likely voters in the 70 battleground congressional districts. This survey is scheduled to finish August 1st with a total of 1,600 interviews once completed.

³ Data based on a poll of 1,056 likely voters conducted July 22-25, 2007 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner research for MoveOn.org in seven states with vulnerable senate seats; Maine, Minnesota, Kentucky, New Mexico, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Virginia.

Right now, Republicans own everything, including the gridlock, the direction of the country and Iraq. There is no other way to understand the rock solid stability of the Democrats' current leads. We went to the bottom line and asked this question, 'The gridlock in Washington leads me to want to see' — 'more Democrats elected to the Congress' or 'more Republicans elected to the Congress.' We asked the same question but in the context of the vote for President. In both cases, the margin for the Democrats is at least equal to the current advantage in the vote. Rather than pulling down the margin, the current battle is confirming the desire for change in who leads in Washington.

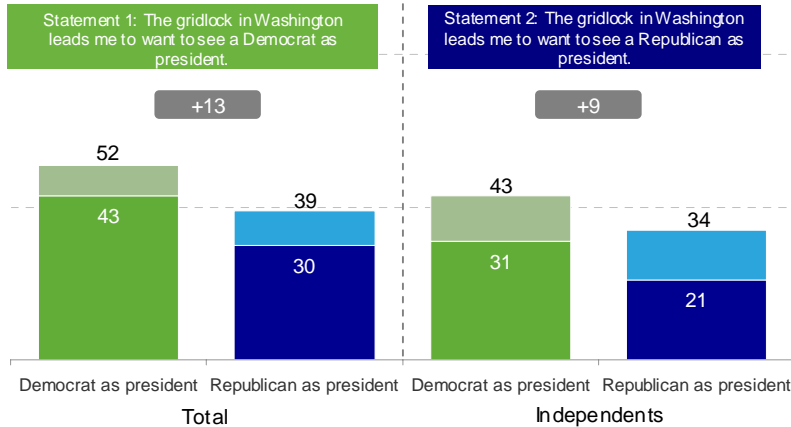
Gridlock leads voters to want to elect more Democrats to Congress

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.



Gridlock leads voters to want to elect a Democratic president

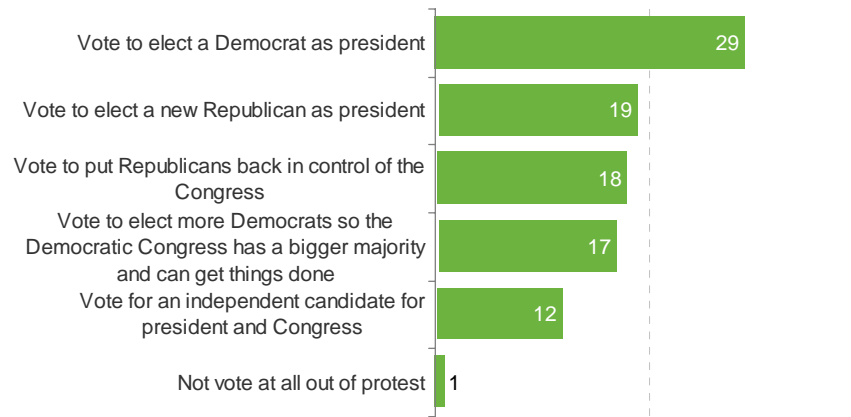
Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. As I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right.



When you give voters the whole range of choices potentially before them when surveying the situation on the battlefield in Washington, voters move toward electing a Democrat for President — as the best way to change the direction and get beyond the gridlock. The Democrats have a 10-point advantage on this choice, comparable to the vote for President. The choice of President is giving people a way out and that is moving voters to the Democrats.

To get things done voters want a Democratic president

Given what is happening in Washington today, please tell me which one of the following options you find most appealing when thinking about the election in 2008.



It is important to note that, faced with the current gridlock 12 percent want to vote for an independent candidate for President or Congress, a fairly impressive base for an independent candidacy; almost a third of independents are ready to respond in this way. The situation in Washington does have consequences, which is why Democrats have an obligation to address the mood, even as their political situation seems consolidated.

Message Strategy for Incumbent Democrats

We should not forget that individual members have different needs than the institution and very different message strategies. Just as we urged candidates in 2006 to run as outsiders, the same holds true now. Voters want change and the members, particularly the freshmen and those in competitive seats, should be championing what they got done against the odds, the reforms and changes they are supporting even if not popular with the party leaders, and the future-oriented ideas they will be battling for.

Those trying to raise the standing of the Democratic Congress and confronting the President have a number of strategic tasks discussed below. They will need to make the case for progress in key areas, and they will have to define the President and Republicans' role. But that is not the task of the individual members and indeed, dwelling on Bush and the vetoes only weak-

ens their message and makes them look like they are part of the partisan bickering in Washington.

The top messages for individual members — that we tested with their names attached — was the hard work ‘to get enacted the first increase in the minimum wage in ten years and a 50 percent increase in the money for health care for our returning veterans from Iraq.’ This is very powerful: 54 percent much more likely to support the member and 86 percent more likely overall. The members should claim this bit of success against great odds. Minimum wage on its own does not have the same kind of power.

- It is important to note that when the individual member included references to Bush — ‘I fought for a difference course than Bush’s’ and that these policies were ‘both opposed by the President’ — the message was 10 points weaker, especially with independents. The member does not want to highlight conflict with the President, as it suggests partisan bickering and makes him part of Washington. Just address the important things you really did get done.

Right at the top of our messages was the members’ support for investment in alternative energy. This scored remarkably high — and intense support was 5 points stronger when it included the term, ‘global warming.’

The members should be outsiders, not respectful of the conventions in Washington. Scoring near the top was the members’ vote against ‘a pay increase for members of Congress when so little is getting done in Washington’: 49 percent much more likely to support and 78 percent overall support. There is also added strength in expressing frustration with both parties and the ‘business as usual approach.’

Members will have to decide where they want to be on this issue, but we must point out that voters are very supportive when the new member addresses the issue of illegal immigration — a growing issue in the country. The member gets a very positive response when they ‘do not favor expelling 12 million undocumented immigrants,’ but favor tough enforcement at the border and work place and oppose illegal immigrants getting Social Security and other benefits — which, as you know, is current law. The inclusion of the social benefits raises the intense support by 7 points.

Strongest messages for individual members

<i>After hearing each one, please tell me whether it makes you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely, no more likely or less likely to support (incumbent member).</i>	Much more likely	Much/Somewhat More likely	Total more likely
I am proud of the fact that I helped get enacted the first increase in the minimum wage in ten years and a fifty percent increase in the money for health care for our returning veterans from Iraq.	54	74	86
I will support investments in the development of clean, alternative energy like solar, wind and biofuels which will create new businesses and jobs, reduce our dependence on foreign oil and stop global warming.	56	74	84
I will vote against any increase in pay for members of Congress when so little is getting done in Washington.	49	67	78
I do not favor expelling 12 million undocumented immigrants, but I do favor tougher border enforcement, penalizing employers who illegally employ immigrant workers, and I would bar illegal immigrants from getting Social Security and other benefits.	44	64	75
I am frustrated with both parties in Washington who think this is business as usual. I voted against a pay increase for Congress, to make the appropriations transparent to the public and for the strongest possible restrictions on lobbyists.	39	64	77

Message Strategy for Democratic Congress

The Democrats have two distinct strategic needs — for the public to have greater respect for what the Democratic Congress is doing and for the public to understand that the President and the Republicans are blocking progress on what the country wants done. Both can be communicated effectively, this research suggests, but not at the same time.

Progress. The public is very willing to listen to the idea that Democrats got something done — minimum wage and veteran’s health care — though it is 10 points weaker when intermixed with critiques of the president’s opposition:

‘Democrats in Congress are making progress to move America in a new direction. They increased the minimum wage for the first time in 10 years, passed the largest veterans health care increase in history and are protecting health coverage for millions of children. We need the support of the American people to continue moving forward.’

A striking 41 percent say they are much more likely to support the Democrats in Congress after hearing that; 62 percent much more or somewhat more.

- Part of the power of the message is asking for the support of the American people so that the Democrats can continue to try to make progress.

Defining Bush's obstructionism. The public is also very willing to believe the Republicans are trying to stop all the good things from happening. It is important to deliver that message, which our focus groups say hurt the Republicans incumbents and the President. That is a different strategic need than raising the standing of the Congress, but it is equally important. Intensity of response is equal to that for the progress message, and it tests more strongly than all the other progress messages.

'Democrats in Congress are working to make progress but President Bush has vetoed any change in Iraq and he's threatened to veto bills being passed by Congress — the bills to expand stem cell research, to lower student loan rates, expand health coverage for uninsured children and allow Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for seniors. We need the support of the American people to make these happen.'

Democrats should act with confidence on their current standing and the current dynamics — and use this moment to define what they are trying to achieve and what the President and the Republicans are trying to stop. There is every reason to believe that this will further strengthen the Democrats' already very strong position going into 2008.