

June 26, 2006

Swing Nation

To: US Action and US Action Education Fund

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Swing voters in swing districts and swing states overwhelmingly support a plan to invest more in clean energy, affordable health care for all, and education when it is paid for by rolling back tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. This support will be strongest and best survive attacks when it includes measures to increase government accountability and when the tax cut rollback leaves enough funds to reduce the deficit.

This survey¹ reflects the views of the “swingiest” of voters in the country—the voters likely to decide the outcome of the 2006 election cycle—in a mood demanding fundamental change in the direction of the country. Their current political disposition suggests both intense anger at the ruling class in Washington coupled with, and related to, a broad sense of economic insecurity and inequity.

These voters embrace an agenda of change, an agenda that invests in the future and focuses on improving lives of average people, not subsidizing corporate special interests and the wealthy. The agenda’s focus on improving education (including child development, preschool, public schools and college aid) expanding affordable health care and addressing energy independence drive support for the agenda. These voters support paying for these investments by rolling back the Administration’s tax cuts for the wealthy and big corporations.

¹ Between May 20 and May 25, 2006, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner interviewed 613 swing likely voters. For the purposes of this survey, swing voters are defined as voters who are self-ascribed Independent or lean-Independent or Democrats and Republicans who do not support the Democratic or Republican candidate (respectively) in a named trial heat. The survey geography was limited to swing congressional districts and swing Senate states (see appendix for specific districts and states). The survey carries a margin of error of +/- 4.0 percent.

Importantly, however, these swing voters hold concerns about government, particularly the current size of the deficit and accountability. Thus swing voters' support of an investment agenda is strongest when it includes measures to increase government accountability and reduce the deficit.

Key Findings

- It is almost impossible to overestimate the anger of swing voters.** A whopping 73 percent describe the country as off on the wrong track, 66 percent disapprove of the performance of George Bush and nearly half (49 percent) strongly disapprove. The antecedents of this anger are, of course, diverse, reflecting reactions to our misadventure in Iraq and to current scandals swirling around Washington among other issues. But much of the anger reflects persistent economic anxieties four years into the Bush economic "recovery." By nearly a 2:1 margin, voters describe the economy in negative terms; nearly one third struggle to make ends meet.
- Politically, the swing vote swings against the Republicans.** In *named* trial heats, these swing voters prefer Democratic candidates for Congress 45 – 28 percent over the Republicans; the Senate race, influenced disproportionately by Republican travails in Ohio and Pennsylvania, looks even worse for the incumbent party (53 – 31 percent).² The President's numbers represent a wholesale collapse (66 percent unfavorable job performance ratings) from November, 2004; note that these voters, in large part, elected George Bush to his second term.

■ Table 1: Preference for Congress

Electoral Results in Named Trial Heats for Congress

	All Swing CDs	Democratic Incumbent	Republican Incumbent
Democratic candidate	45	57	37
Republican candidate	28	20	34
Undecided	25	20	26
Democrat-Republican	+17	+37	+3

- The economy and voters' frustrations with current priorities in Washington lies behind some of these results.** Fully 73 percent agree, "It seems like the federal government always puts the needs of corporate special interests ahead of the needs of average families." Another 74 percent agree, "Government should do more so that working class and middle income people do not get left behind in today's economy."

² Where possible, names of actual incumbents and challengers were used in measuring voters' preferences.

- **Swing voters embrace an agenda that invests more money in new clean energy , affordable health care for all and strengthening education from early childhood development through public schools and college aid – with these investments paid for by eliminating recently passed tax cuts for corporations and people making over \$200,000 a year.** Initial support for the agenda runs better than two-to-one and this majority includes every demographic and regional subgroup. What drives support for the agenda is its focus on new energy, health care and education policies, in that order.

■ Table 2: Support for the Investment Agenda

The Issue Agenda

Let me tell you about something called the [plan]. Under this plan, government will invest more money to expand access to quality child development and preschool programs that help kids start school ready to succeed, will strengthen public schools, expand college aid and will provide access to high quality, affordable health care for all. This plan will also provide all Americans access to free high speed Internet and promote safe, clean energy to help end our dependence on oil. In order to pay for the plan, it would eliminate recently passed tax cuts for corporations and those earning over \$200,000 per year [and include new measures to hold government accountable and reduce corruption and waste.] Having heard this, do you favor or oppose [plan]?

Combined Support

69 percent favor
24 percent oppose
7 percent don't know/refused

- **But swing voters make plain their concerns about the deficit and government accountability.** Nearly three-quarters (70 percent) agree, “Americans are losing their sense of self-reliance and relying too much on government;” sixty-one percent agree, “I don't like paying taxes because the government wastes them because it is inefficient and spends too much money.” The investment agenda is clearly stronger and wins in a non-partisan electoral context when it includes measures of accountability and deficit reduction.
- **In fact, the investment agenda is even stronger when it addresses these concerns.** Addressing the current Administration's role in generating a huge budget deficit and its basic abdication of accountability strengthens swing voters' support of an investment agenda that will be carried out for everyone's benefit, not the privileged few and corporate special interests. Investment agenda advocates and candidates who make clear their support for rolling back tax breaks for wealthy corporations and millionaires earn credibility with swing voters because they are clear about how to both achieve these investments and reduce the deficit.

Appendix A: Swing states and swing districts

This survey limits research to swing voters of a geography including eight states with highly competitive Senate elections this fall as well as 66 congressional districts. The states, defined as Lean Takeover, Toss-up, or Narrow Advantage Incumbent Party by *The Rothenberg Political Report* as of early April, 2006, include Pennsylvania, Montana, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Ohio, Missouri, and Minnesota, as well as Tennessee. Congressional districts must have been considered at least “in play” by either Stuart Rothenberg, Larry Sabato, or Charlie Cook.

The states and congressional districts (ranked based on compilation scores from Rothenberg, Sabato, and Cook) are listed below.

- Swing States: Pennsylvania, Montana, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Ohio, Missouri, Minnesota and Tennessee
- Swing Districts: IA 1, OH 6, CO7, AZ8, OH18, TX22, NM1, PA6, IL8, IN9, IN8, CT2, LA3, CT4, GA8, IL6, WA8, GA12, FL22, CA50, VT-at large, IA3, MN6, PA8, WI8, NC11, TX17, WA2, CO3, KY4, SC5, NY29, IN2, NV2, CO4, CT5, LA7, NC8, FL9, OH13, OH15, AZ1, OH1, KY2, MN2, NH2, VA2, KY3, PA7, PA10, CA11, NY20, NHY1, NY1, UT2, KS3, NV3, TN4, OH5, IN7, NJ7, FL8, NY19, ND at-large, and SD at-large

Appendix B: Agenda with accountability message

Let me tell you about something called the [plan]. Under this plan, government will invest more money to expand access to quality child development and preschool programs that help kids start school ready to succeed, will strengthen public schools, expand college aid and will provide access to high quality, affordable health care for all. This plan will also provide all Americans access to free high speed Internet and promote safe, clean energy to help end our dependence on oil. In order to pay for the plan, it would eliminate recently passed tax cuts for corporations and those earning over \$200,000 per year and include new measures to hold government accountable and reduce corruption and waste. Having heard this, do you favor or oppose [plan]?

Appendix C: Agenda without accountability message

Let me tell you about something called the [plan]. Under this plan, government will invest more money to expand access to quality child development and preschool programs that help kids start school ready to succeed, will strengthen public schools, expand college aid and will provide access to high quality, affordable health care for all. This plan will also provide all Americans access to free high speed Internet and promote safe, clean energy to help end our dependence on oil. In order to pay for the plan, it would eliminate recently passed tax cuts for corporations and those earning over \$200,000 per year. Having heard this, do you favor or oppose [plan]?