

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: AFL-CIO
FROM: PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.
DATE: DECEMBER 9, 2005
RE: PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND CONGRESS

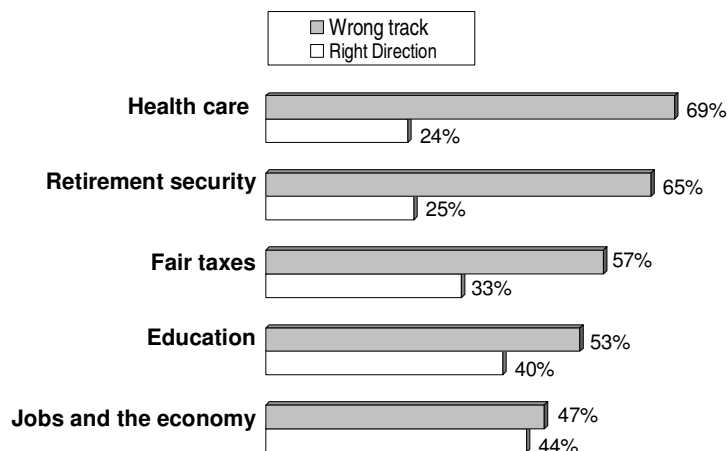
On behalf of the AFL-CIO, Hart Research conducted a national survey from December 1 to 4 to review Americans' assessment of the state of the nation, satisfaction with the priorities set by Congress and President Bush, and reactions to senators' and representatives' key legislative decisions over the first half of the 109th Congress. The survey was conducted among a representative sample of 801 registered voters, with a margin of error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

Voters: Nation on Wrong Track Domestically

By a two-to-one margin, voters say that the nation is off on the wrong track today. Just 29% say that America is headed in the right direction, while 56% say it is "off on the wrong track." Concern about the nation's direction rises to 58% among employed adults, 64% among working women, and 63% among members of working families with incomes below \$40,000. Nearly three in five voters in the Northeast (59%), Midwest (60%), and West (58%) believe the country is on the wrong track. Southern voters are somewhat less negative (48% wrong track, 35% right direction).

Commentators often attribute the negative mood in the country to concern over the war in Iraq. While that is certainly one factor, the survey findings document Americans' deep dismay about domestic trends as well. We asked voters to apply the right direction/wrong track standard to five key domestic issues; wrong track responses exceed right direction for *every* issue, usually by a large margin. About two-thirds feel the nation is on the wrong track regarding health care (69%) and retirement security (65%).

Right Direction Or Wrong Track?



Not surprisingly, Democrats offer negative judgments on all issues, while Republicans express more confidence in the country’s direction. However, a plurality of Republican voters gives a thumbs-down verdict on health care (48% wrong track) and retirement security (47%). Moreover, independents have a more negative outlook than do voters overall on every domestic issue, and voters in closely contested “purple” states also feel very anxious about these trends. Majorities of independents (53%) and purple state voters (54%) believe the nation is on the wrong track on the issue of jobs and the economy.

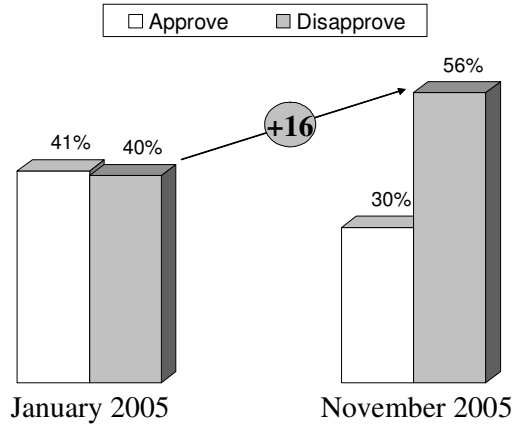
NATION ON WRONG TRACK ON DOMESTIC ISSUES

	<u>All Voters</u>	<u>Independents</u>	<u>Purple States</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Health care	69	76	72
Retirement security	65	67	69
Fair taxes	57	63	59
Education	53	61	51
Jobs and the economy	47	53	54

Congress and Bush Are Out of Step

As the 109th Congress completes its first year of work, just 30% of voters approve of its job performance, compared with 56% who disapprove. This marks a sharp deterioration since January, when 41% of voters approved and 40% disapproved (source: NBC/WSJ poll). Dissatisfaction with Congress is widespread; a plurality (43%) of Republicans joins solid majorities of Democrats (67%) and independents (59%) in rendering a negative verdict. We find majority disapproval among men and women, all income groups, and both the highly educated and less well educated.

Congress Job Approval

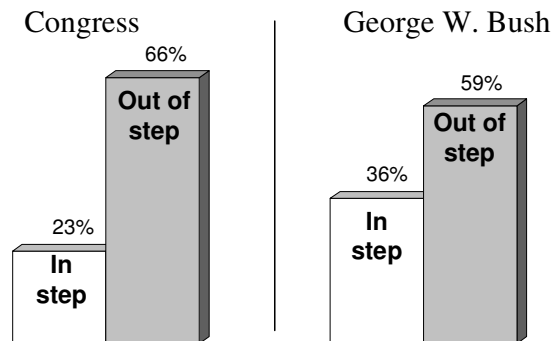


A key contributing factor to these poor job performances is the public’s conviction that national leaders are out of step with voters’ priorities. Fewer than one-quarter of voters feels that Congress is in step with their priorities, while fully two-thirds (66%) believe Congress is out of step. Red states (64%), purple states (65%), and blue states (65%) share the perception that Congress and the public have different priorities.

The public also believes that President Bush is out of step with its priorities by 59% to 36%. This proportion rises to 70% among independents and 69% among voters in union households. Southern voters are divided on the president’s priorities (46% in step, 49% out of step), but voters in all other regions of the country are deeply dissatisfied (65% in the Northeast, 65% in the Midwest, 61% in the West).

Congress And Bush Out Of Step

In general, do you think _____ is in step with your priorities or out of step with your priorities?



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Failing Report Card for Congress

AFL-CIO compiles report cards for members of Congress based on 16 criteria. The survey asked voters to rate these criteria according to whether they would approve or disapprove if their senator or representative took this position. In most cases these positions were votes cast by a majority in one or both chambers, and in a few cases public positions taken by many legislators. On 14 of the 16 issues, 60% or more of voters say they would disapprove if their own representative or senator took this position.

CONGRESSIONAL REPORT CARD

	<u>Approve</u> %	<u>Disapprove</u> %
Retirement Security		
Voted to use money from the Social Security trust fund to pay for new tax breaks, most of which go to people earning more than \$350,000	8	88
Opposed a bill that would have protected pension benefits for 120,000 employees of United Airlines, when the airline tried to avoid meeting its pension commitments	26	64
Supported George W. Bush's plan to privatize Social Security	33	58
Jobs and Economy		
Voted for a bill that gives Wal-Mart a special 15-day warning before inspections take place to see whether their stores are violating child labor, health and safety, or wage standards	18	78
Voted for a bill that restructures wage and hour laws, eliminating overtime pay and minimum wage protections for millions of workers employed by small businesses	17	76
Opposed a bill that would have protected employees' right to receive pay and health benefits they have earned when their company files for bankruptcy	24	71
Opposed a bill that would have raised the minimum wage from \$5.15, its current level, to \$7.25 an hour	33	64
Opposed a bill that would ensure that workers on federal construction projects to rebuild the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina would be paid at least \$9.00 an hour	34	60
Voted for CAFTA, a new trade agreement similar to NAFTA that will increase trade with Central American countries	44	42
Health Care		
Voted to cut funding for Medicaid by 46 billion dollars over 10 years	18	77
Opposed a bill that would have protected seniors from large increases in Medicare premiums	23	73
Fair Taxes		
Voted to maintain tax breaks for companies that move jobs to other countries	10	86
Opposed a bill that would have made ensuring health coverage for children a higher priority than giving tax breaks to the wealthy	28	66
Education		
Voted to cut 784 million dollars in funding for public schools	12	85
Voted to cut 14.3 billion dollars from the federal student loan program	15	80
Opposed a bill that would have increased the amount of Pell grants available to college students	29	63

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The most deeply unpopular positions embraced by many members of Congress include: supporting tax breaks for firms that move jobs overseas, cutting funding for Medicaid, giving Wal-Mart special advance notice prior to workplace inspections, opposing pension protections, and cutting the federal student loan program. Clearly, senators and representatives will find many of these votes difficult to explain to their constituents.

The survey also asked seniors (age 65 and over) about the new Medicare prescription drug plan. Only 28% of seniors are satisfied with the plan, 49% are dissatisfied, and 23% still do not know enough about the plan to offer an opinion. Among those with an opinion, fully 63% are dissatisfied and just 37% are satisfied. Anger over the drug plan could intensify public dissatisfaction with the country's direction and emerge as a significant issue in 2006.

Voters Looking for Change in 2006

As a result of this discontent with the nation's direction and leaders' priorities, voters seem inclined to make changes at the ballot box in 2006. By 11 percentage points, voters say they would prefer to see a Democratic-controlled Congress (45%) to a Republican-controlled Congress (34%) next year. This 11-point spread is the largest lead for either party in the 40 times this question has been asked since 1994. Groups that seem particularly inclined to vote for a change in direction include independents (14%), union household voters (27%), women (14%), voters under age 35 (21%), and Midwestern voters (19%).

Another troubling sign for the Republican majority is the outlook of voters who are undecided about their preference for party control of Congress, the "swing voters" of 2006. They believe the country is on the wrong track by better than three-to-one, disapprove of Congress' job performance by 60% to 21%, and feel that both George Bush (61%) and Congress (62%) are out of step with their priorities. This negative outlook seems likely to lead these voters to opt for change in 2006.

OUTLOOK OF VOTERS BASED ON PREFERENCE FOR CONTROL OF CONGRESS			
	Prefer Democrats	Undecided	Prefer GOP
	%	%	%
Nation going in right direction	11	16	62
Nation on wrong track	79	58	23
Approve of Congress performance	21	21	48
Disapprove of Congress performance	68	60	38
Congress in step with my priorities	11	13	46
Congress out of step with my priorities	83	62	44
Bush in step with my priorities	8	27	80
Bush out of step with my priorities	88	61	19