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## Where are the jobs?

Joe Biden was right.

The Vice President has often played the role of in-house skeptic in the Obama White House. Most notably, in the debate last year over the war in Afghanistan. Biden is reported to have argued for a more limited counter-terrorism strategy over a bigger counter-insurgency approach. Setbacks in Afghanistan—and the fecklessness of the Karzai government—now seem to be moving the Administration closer to the Biden approach.

On health care, Biden cautioned about the risks of pursuing an ambitious reform policy when the economy was so uncertain. The White House forged ahead and ultimately won on an almost totally party-line vote. Now Republicans are running on repeal, or at least major revision, of the new health care law.

Call it the agenda problem. It's the reason why the Democrats are in so much trouble. The Obama agenda has been out of sync with the public's agenda for the past year. The public's agenda: where are the jobs? Nothing else matters much.

Democrats did pass an economic stimulus plan right at the outset. The Congressional Budget Office and many economists say the plan was effective. It ended the recession and saved between 2 and 3 million jobs. But over 8 million jobs have been lost. And most voters believe the country is still in recession.

Voters behave as if the President of the United States is commander-in-chief of the

economy. He's not, of course. No one is. The economy is too large and too complex to be commanded to do anything. But if the economy is faltering—and that's exactly what people saw happening over the summer—

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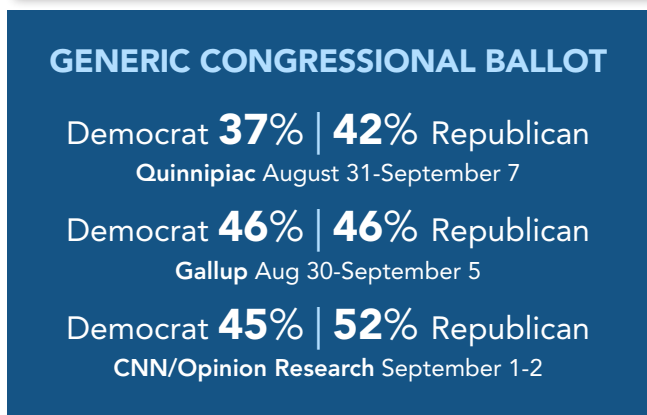
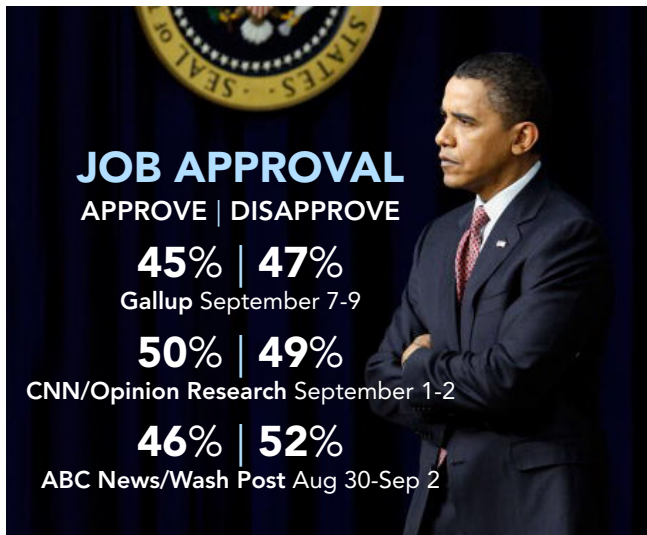
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then voters believe the President is not doing his job. The converse is also true: a good economy can save a President. The public did not want to see President Clinton impeached and removed from office in 1998 because the economy was booming. Therefore, he was doing his job.

Most voters believe the stimulus package was a failure. Fewer than a quarter think it made the economy better, according to a July CBS News poll. The vast majority said it had no impact (56%) or made things worse (18%).

President Obama seemed to be following his own agenda on health care, energy, financial regulations, Afghanistan, etc. They are all important policies with powerful arguments behind them. In the long run, they're likely to provide this Administration with an impressive legacy. But they weren't the voters' priorities. Voters only wanted to know one thing: where are the jobs?

Where did the Obama agenda come from? The tea party movement has its own answer—socialist ideology. They see the 2010 midterm as a showdown between left-wing ideologues and defenders of the constitution. Big government versus limited government. Most voters do not think in ideological terms.



They are not voting “for” something. They are voting “against” something—a Democratic-controlled Congress and White House that aren’t doing their jobs.

The evidence? The exceptionally high level of negative voting this year.

Fewer than half the voters (48%) who intend to support a Republican candidate for Congress say they are voting “for” the Republican, according to the August USA Today/Gallup poll. Almost as many (44%) say they are voting “against” the Democrat.

As the general election campaign begins, Democrats are trying to shift the focus to the extreme views of many Republican candidates. But a lot of those candidates have the advantage of running as outsiders. In the USA Today/Gallup poll, the top choice of voters was “a Republican candidate who has not served in Congress.” When voters are unhappy, newcomers are welcome.

The irony is that this has been an exceptionally productive Administration and Congress. But the voters refuse to be impressed.

- Health care reform? Still not popular.
- The war in Afghanistan? Almost as unpopular as the war in Iraq.
- The TARP bailouts? Unneeded, say voters.
- Financial reforms? Aha! Supported by nearly 60 percent of Americans. But nearly 80 percent say they don’t expect the new regulations to prevent another crisis or make people’s financial assets more secure.

Bottom line: where are the jobs?

If the unemployment rate had been dropping, the achievements of this Administration and this Congress would have looked a lot better. Less like a distraction from a bad economy. More like a payoff for an improving economy. Instead, Republicans are likely to be rewarded for just saying no.

Is there any solace for Democrats? Sure. If the unemployment rate drops over the next two years, Democrats will be able to say, “We told you so.” That’s how Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton got re-elected after dramatic setbacks in their first midterms. Moreover, those undervalued Democratic achievements will start to look a lot better.

And if the unemployment rate remains stubbornly high? Then Republicans will be looking for a candidate in 2012 who can claim a record of creating jobs. Sounds like Mitt Romney’s big chance. ■

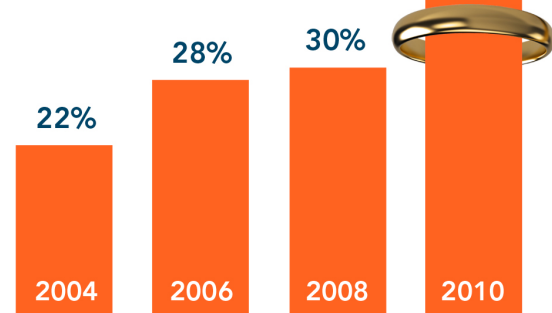
## Same-Sex Marriage

We seem to have reached a turning point on the issue of same-sex marriage: it may now be politically more risky to oppose gay marriage than to support it. The battle over California's ban on same-sex marriage, which is now making its way through the federal courts, has clearly raised public consciousness of the issue and activated a constituency in support of gay marriages.

Public support for allowing gay couples to legally marry has nearly doubled in six years, from 22 percent in 2004 to 40 percent in August 2010, according to the CBS News poll. Legal gay marriage is now the plurality position, while 30 percent favor civil unions for gay couples and 25 percent oppose any legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Until 2009, "no legal recognition" was the plurality position.

In August, the CNN poll, which asks whether gays and lesbians should have a constitutional right to marry without a third option of civil unions, showed most Americans (52%) in favor of such a right. Including one in three Republicans.

**Gay couples should be allowed to legally marry.**



Source: CBS News polls.

## The Bush Tax Cuts

The Bush tax cuts are an issue on which Republicans can't "just say no." If Congress fails to act by the end of the year, the Bush tax cuts will expire. And Republicans will have enabled a major tax hike.

**Keep tax cuts only for families making less than \$250K/year** 51%

**Keep tax cuts for all taxpayers** 31%

**Let tax cuts expire for all taxpayers** 18%

Source: CNN Poll August 2010

The debate puts both parties on the spot. If Democrats don't vote to extend the tax cuts, they'll be vilified for allowing a tax increase at the worst possible time. If the tax cuts are extended, Republicans will look like hypocrites when they denounce the deficit.

The White House solution is to keep the tax cuts for all but the highest two percent of income earners. That's fine with the public. In an August CNN poll, 51 percent think tax cuts should continue only for families making less than \$250,000 a year, while 31 percent feel the tax cuts should be retained for all taxpayers.

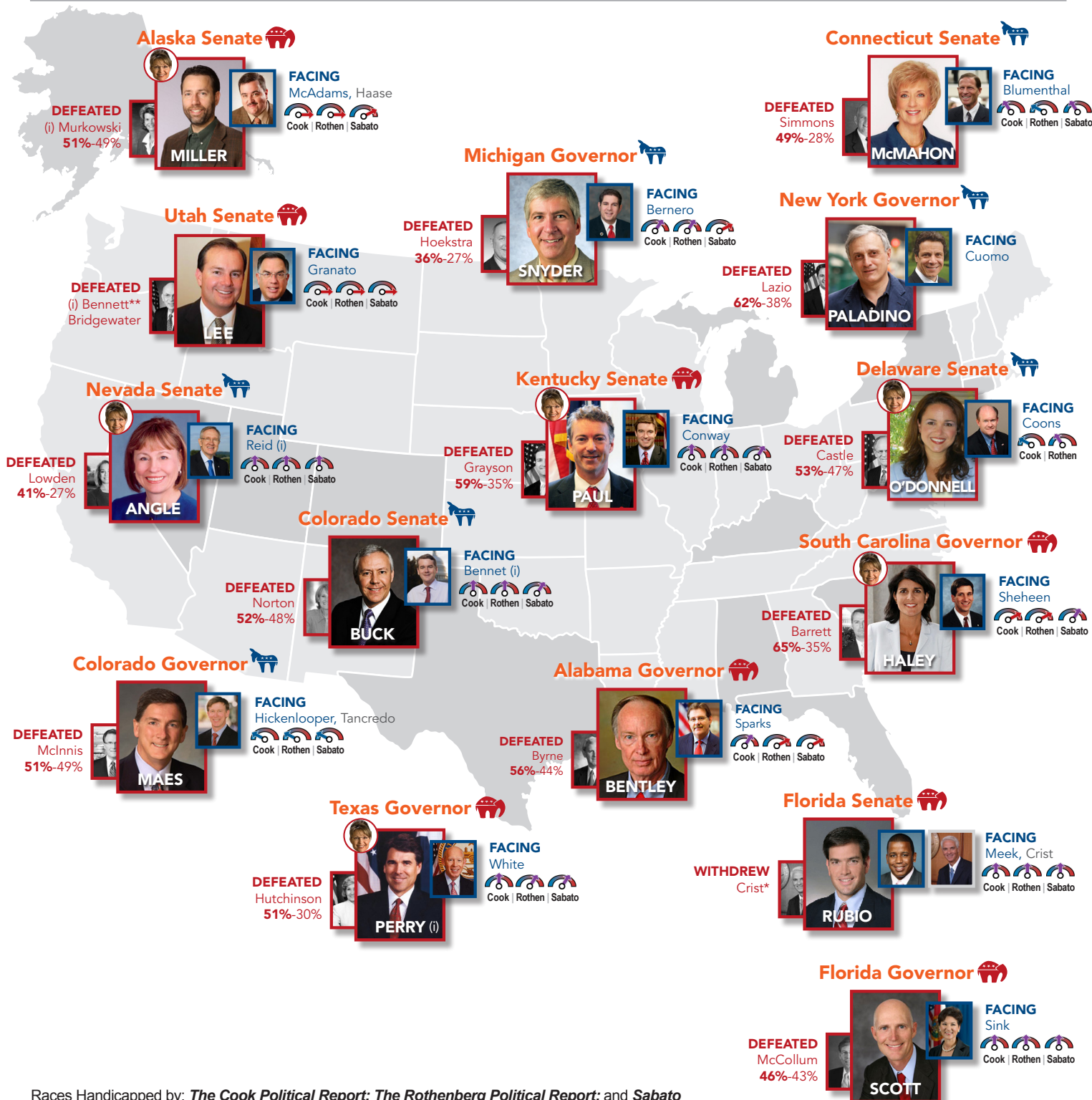
We're seeing an odd reversal of party positions here. Suddenly it's Democrats who are alarmed about the deficit, while Republicans who denounced the Obama stimulus plan are quick to embrace stimulus spending when it comes in the form of tax cuts.

Republicans believe some things, like tax cuts, are so important that you shouldn't worry about how to pay for them. Not unlike Democrats who argue that some spending programs are so urgent that you shouldn't worry about how to pay for them.

And that's why we have such alarming deficits.

# INSURGENT REPUBLICANS

Current Seat/Office Holder    (i) = Incumbent    Sarah Palin Endorsement    
 Safe Dem    Likely Dem    Lean Dem    Toss-Up    Lean GOP    Likely GOP    Safe GOP



Races Handicapped by: **The Cook Political Report**; **The Rothenberg Political Report**; and **Sabato Crystal Ball**. All race ratings updated as of September 15, 2010. At press time, the Ayotte-Lamontagne New Hampshire GOP Senate primary was still too close to call.

\* Trailing opponent Marco Rubio in the polls, Gov. Charlie Crist withdrew from the GOP Senate primary and ran as an independent.

\*\* During the Republican state convention, Sen. Bob Bennett did not qualify for the primary ballot. Mike Lee and Tim Bridgewater did qualify for the ballot, with Mike Lee winning the primary.