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AS VOTER ENGAGEMENT INCREASES, DEMOCRATS GET ANOTHER BUMP IN GENERIC CONGRESSIONAL BALLOT

Obama remains unknown among 42% of registered voters, Foley is most unfavorable among GOPers

NEW YORK, October 26, 2006 – Democrats experienced another bump in the generic congressional ballot this month, increasing their lead by another 5 points among registered voters (Sept. 43%-33%; Oct. 49%-34%). Among likely voters, Democrats' lead increased to 18 points, up from 15 points last month (Sept. 46%-33%; Oct. 52%-34%). With two weeks left until Election Day, voters are becoming more certain about which party they will choose. The number of registered voters saying "neither" went from 10% in September to 5% in October, and the number of likely voters saying "neither" went from 10% last month to 3% this month.

When asked which political party would make the country "better off" if they controlled Congress, Democrats' lead over Republicans increased from 10% in September to 12% among registered voters (42%-30%). Among likely voters, Democrats hold a 13 point lead over Republicans (46%-33%). 48% of registered voters also believe Democrats are most likely to have the majority in Congress after the election, compared to 34% for Republicans. Among likely voters, the margin is even greater (50%-37%).

The Diageo/*Hotline* Poll of 1,000 registered voters, with a sub-sample of 580 likely voters, conducted by Financial Dynamics from October 19-23, shows that voter interest in the election is peaking, with 59% saying they have "a lot" of interest in the upcoming elections for U.S. Congress, up 4 points from September. 69% of registered voters say they are "extremely likely" to vote in the midterms, as are 71% of Democrats and 73% of Republicans. Voter engagement among Democrats and Independents is slightly higher than among Republicans. While 43% of Republicans say they have watched or listened to a debate among the candidates, the same is true among 48% of Democrats and 49% of Independents. Democrats are also slightly more likely to make a financial contribution to a candidate (13%), than Republicans (11%) or Independents (4%).

"As voters become more engaged in the election, it seems to be helping Democrats," said *Hotline* Editor in Chief, Chuck Todd. "This could translate into a major impact on Election Day if it drives up the turnout of Democrats, turning the election into a numbers game of which party was more successful in bringing out the base."

President Bush's overall job approval dropped 2 points from last month among registered and likely voters, resulting in a 40% approval among both groups. Approval for President Bush's handling of Iraq has dropped 3 points to 33% among both registered and likely voters. In terms of Bush's handling of the economy, approval remains relatively unchanged, while disapproval has dropped by 4 points since last month. Among Republicans, however, there was an 8 point up-tick among those who "strongly approve" of how Bush is handling the economy over the last month (41%-49%), resulting in a 5 point increase in overall GOP approval of Bush on the economy.

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In the midst of the deadliest month for American troops in Iraq since the war began, Iraq remains at the top of voters' minds with 39% of registered voters stating that it is the most important issue facing the nation as a whole, up 6 points from September. However, the talk of taxes and the economy being heard along the campaign trail is not falling on deaf ears. Looking at "the most important issue facing their area," 16% of registered voters say the economy is the most important issue, doubling last month's 8%. Unemployment (11%) and taxes (8%) have also increased as the most important local issue by 6 points and 2 points, respectively.

Overall Congressional approval remains largely unchanged from last month, with 27% approving of Congress and 65% disapproving. Among likely voters, disapproval has increased to 72%, up from 70% in September.

Despite continuously low job approval and recent ethics scandals in Congress, ethics has not cropped up as a top priority among registered voters. Ethics trails the war in Iraq (72%-15%) and terrorism (58%-31%) as a top priority for Congress. Iraq remains the top priority for Congress as a whole (24%), and locally for "your member of Congress" (19%), with immigration (14%), the economy (13%) and health care (13%) following close behind for local Members. Ethics is not completely off the radar for registered voters, with 55% reporting overall unfavorable ratings of former Congressman Mark Foley and 42% are "strongly unfavorable." Foley's highest "strongly unfavorable" rating comes from his own party at 45%.

The increase in overall voter interest in the election translates into a bump in recognition that has benefited some, and damaged others. Bush's favorability decreased 1 point among registered voters since September to 42% this month, and decreased 3 points among likely voters to 41%. Congress' favorability also dropped – 5 points among registered voters (33%) and 3 points among likely voters (31%). While Hillary Clinton's overall favorability remained unchanged among registered voters, her "strongly favorable" increased 8 points among Democrats (51%) and 5 points among likely voters (31%), whereas John McCain's overall favorable rating dropped 5 points among registered voters (51%) and 6 points among likely voters (54%).

Despite recent media attention around Sen. Barack Obama's potential presidential candidacy in 2008 and Bob Woodward's new book, *State of Denial*, both remain relatively unknown: 42% of registered voters in the poll have never heard of Obama, and 44% have never heard of Woodward. Obama's favorability rating among registered voters is 32%, with 12% unfavorable. Among likely voters, Obama's favorability is at 40% with 14% unfavorable, and 33% who have never heard of him.

With the midterm elections only two weeks away, registered voters are just as pessimistic regarding the direction of the nation this month, with 29% stating the country is moving in the right direction, compared to 30% last month. Looking at the way things are going in their own area, there is a greater jump in the perception that their area is off on the "wrong track" – up by 5 points (38%) among registered voters and 7 points among likely voters (42%).

To obtain complete poll results please see www.diageohotlinepoll.com.

To schedule an interview with Ed Rollins, Ed Reilly or Chuck Todd, contact Megha Narayan at (212) 850-5600 or Megha.Narayan@fd.com

Methodology

The Diageo/*Hotline* Poll was conducted by telephone from October 19-23, 2006, among a random, nationally representative sample of 1,000 registered voters (margin of error +/- 3.1%), ages 18 and older. The likely voter subsample is among 580 likely voters (margin of error +/- 4.1%).

Complete results available at www.diageohotlinepoll.com

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