



ISSUE 6 : JULY 2010

## Not supposed to

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs committed a “not supposed to” on “Meet the Press” July 11. He said something that everyone knows is true—that Democrats could lose control of the House of Representatives this year. But you’re “not supposed to” say it.

In fact, Democratic control of Congress is looking more imperiled every day.

Is there anything Democrats can do to save their majorities? Sure. All are worth trying. None is guaranteed to work.

### 1. Run against George W. Bush.

In a June poll taken for Third Way, only 36 percent of voters said they would support a candidate for Congress who wanted to go back to the Bush economic policies.

To most voters, however, Bush is history. The Third Way poll asked people whether they thought a Republican Congress would “return to George W. Bush’s economic policies” or support “a new economic agenda.” The public believes Republicans would go for a new agenda, 65 to 25 percent. Even Democrats think the Republican Party has moved beyond Bush.

### 2. Run against the Tea Party.

Republicans are being more and more defined by the Tea Party movement. The Tea Party is

proving its ability to win Republican primaries all over the country, sometimes with inexperienced candidates who are out of the mainstream (Rand Paul, Sharron Angle). Those candidates make juicy Democratic targets.

But in races with an incumbent, the vote is usually driven by feelings about the incumbent, not the challenger. Harry Reid may have gotten a new lease on life when Nevada Republicans

nominated Angle to run against him, but it still won’t be easy to re-elect an incumbent with a 33 percent job approval rating.

### 3. Localize the race.

That’s how Mark Critz saved the late Rep. John Murtha’s seat for the Democrats in the May special election in Pennsylvania.

But it gets harder to localize races as we get closer to November. The media focus changes. The campaign becomes national. That happened in Massachusetts in January, during the special election campaign to fill the late Sen. Ted Kennedy’s seat. The press transformed the election into a referendum on health care reform.

### 4. Rally the base.

Your base are the people who are with you when you’re wrong. In 1982, President Reagan certainly looked wrong. Unemployment was up

***I think people are going to have a choice to make in the fall. But I think there’s no doubt there are enough seats in play that could cause Republicans to gain control. There’s no doubt about that.***

– Robert Gibbs  
White House Press Secretary

to 10.8 percent. Reaganomics was not working. In the 1982 midterm, Reagan rallied his conservative base with a call to “stay the course.” He ended up limiting Republican losses (26 House seats and no Senate seats).

Suppose President Obama tries to rally Democrats to “stay the course.” Would it work? Only if Obama retains a base of true believers: voters who continue to have faith in his course.

A rally-the-base strategy is deliberately divisive—“us versus them.” It’s not clear that President Obama has the temperament to lead that kind of campaign. It’s also not clear that liberals would respond with much enthusiasm.

Right now, Democrats are frustrated (“Obama’s not a real liberal”). Republicans are angry (“Obama’s a socialist”). And Independents are impatient (“Obama can’t solve problems”).

## 5. Turn the economy around.

That’s the most promising and the most problematic answer. No one knows how to get unemployment down in just a few months. In fact, there’s considerable puzzlement among economists over why unemployment has stayed so stubbornly high this year.

A group of sixteen prominent economists and historians recently signed a manifesto for The Daily Beast arguing, “The urgent need is for government to replace the lost purchasing power of the unemployed and their families and to employ other tax-cut and spending programs to boost demand.”

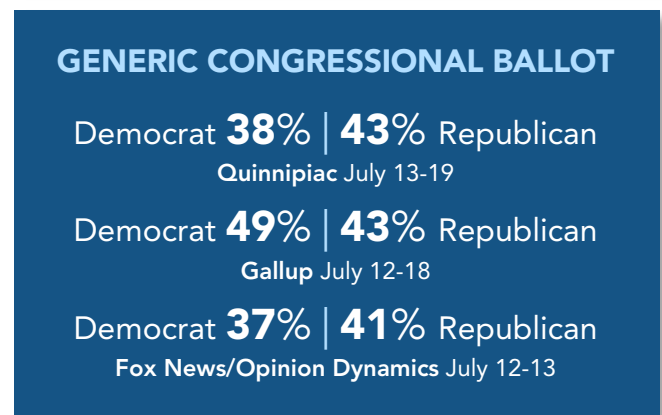
The prospect of getting a new round of stimulus spending through Congress this year looks bleak. Moreover, it’s highly unlikely the impact would be felt before November.

Nor is there much pressure from voters for more stimulus spending. The public doesn’t believe the 2009 stimulus package has worked, despite the White House claim that the stimulus has funded three million jobs. In the July CBS

News-New York Times poll, 56 percent say the stimulus has had no impact on the economy. An additional 18 percent say it’s made things worse.

## 6. Manipulate expectations.

Expectations for Republicans are rising fast. So fast that Republicans are trying to tamp them down. Minority Leader John Boehner is no longer saying, as he did in March, “I think we have a chance at winning Republican control of the House.”



The latest Rothenberg Report projects Republican gains of 28 to 33 seats, which is slightly short of a majority. If that happens in November, Republicans will be seen as doing “worse than expected.” Could Robert Gibbs have been trying to manipulate expectations when he said Republicans could win a majority? ■

## The Midterm Electorate

The midterm electorate is likely to be smaller, older and whiter than it was in 2008.

A midterm draws about one third fewer voters than a presidential election. Turnout shrank from 122 million voters in the 2004 presidential election to 81 million in 2006—a 34 percent decline. Then in 2008, turnout surged to 133 million.

Seniors were the only age-group Obama didn't carry in 2008. They were also the only age-group in which a majority did not vote Democratic for Congress. They're likely to make up a larger chunk of voters in 2010.

So will whites. In the 2006 midterm, whites were 79 percent of the voters. In 2008, they dropped to 74 percent. In the 2008 House vote, Republicans led by 8 points among whites. This year, the July ABC News-Washington Post poll reports a Republican lead of 23 points among white likely voters.

How can Democrats drive turnout up among young people and minorities? There seem to be only two people who can do that—Barack Obama and George W. Bush. Neither will be on the ballot this year.

## The War in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan is now as unpopular as the war in Iraq. That's the message of a July Washington Post/ABC News poll.

Does it make any difference that Afghanistan is now being called "Obama's war"? A little. Since last year, support for the war in Afghanistan dropped 14 points among Republicans. But it also dropped 5 points among Democrats.

Republicans are more enthusiastic about both wars.

Many leading Republicans, like Sen. John McCain, are urging President Obama not to adhere to his stated deadline of July 2011 to begin withdrawing U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan. Gen. David Petraeus, Obama's new commander in Afghanistan, has also criticized the deadline.

Suppose sometime after the November midterm election President Obama announces that the U.S. will no longer adhere to the July 2011 deadline. He could face a full-scale revolt from his Democratic base. Democrats have a lot of experience with antiwar politics, even against a President of their own party.

### African American Vote

	2006	2008
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Selected States:</b>		
Virginia	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Pennsylvania	<b>8%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Georgia	<b>16%</b>	<b>30%</b>

Exit polls from National Election Pool (NEP)

### Was the war worth fighting?

	Iraq	Afghanistan
<b>YES</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>NO</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>53%</b>

### War was worth fighting.

	Iraq	Afghanistan
<b>Democrats</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Republicans</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>57%</b>

Wash Post/ABC News Poll, July 7-11

# Tough Districts, Tough Votes

House Democrats Running in Districts Carried by McCain\*

Safe Dem            Likely Dem            Lean Dem            Toss-Up            Lean GOP            Likely GOP						\$            +            I''            [ \$ ]				McCain % '08            Member % '08	
Representative	District	CQ	Rothen	Cook	Sabato	Stimulus	Health Care	Cap-and-Trade	Financial Reform	McCain % '08	Member % '08
<b>Bobby Bright</b>	AL-2					NO	NO	NO	NO	63%	50%
Mike Ross	AR-4					\$	NO	NO	NO	58%	86%
Ann Kirkpatrick	AZ-1					\$	+	NO	NO	54%	56%
Harry Mitchell	AZ-5					\$	+	NO	NO	51%	53%
Gabrielle Giffords	AZ-8					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	52%	55%
John Salazar	CO-3					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	50%	62%
<b>Betsy Markey</b>	CO-4					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	50%	56%
Allen Boyd	FL-2					NO	+	I''	[ \$ ]	54%	62%
Suzanne Kosmas	FL-24					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	51%	57%
Jim Marshall	GA-8					\$	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	56%	57%
Walt Minnick	ID-1					NO	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	62%	51%
Baron Hill	IN-9					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	50%	58%
Ben Chandler	KY-6					\$	NO	I''	NO	55%	65%
<b>Frank Kratovil</b>	MD-1					NO	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	59%	49%
Collin Peterson	MN-7					NO	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	50%	72%
Ike Skelton	MO-4					\$	NO	I''	NO	60%	66%
Travis Childers#	MS-1					\$	NO	NO	NO	62%	55%
Gene Taylor	MS-4					NO	NO	NO	DNV	67%	75%
Mike McIntyre	NC-7					\$	NO	NO	NO	52%	69%
Heath Schuler	NC-11					NO	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	52%	62%
<b>Earl Pomeroy</b>	ND-AL					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	53%	62%
Harry Teague	NM-2					\$	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	50%	56%
Michael McMahon	NY-13					\$	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	51%	61%
Charlie Wilson	OH-6					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	50%	62%
John Boccieri	OH-16					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	50%	55%
<b>Zack Space</b>	OH-18					\$	NO	I''	[ \$ ]	53%	60%
Dan Boren	OK-2					\$	NO	NO	NO	66%	70%
Kathy Dahlkemper	PA-3					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	49%	51%
Jason Altmire	PA-4					\$	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	55%	56%
Christopher Carney	PA-10					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	54%	56%
Mark Critz##	PA-12					N/A	N/A	N/A	NO	49%	53%†
Tim Holden	PA-17					\$	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	51%	64%
John Spratt	SC-5					\$	+	I''	[ \$ ]	53%	62%
Stephanie Herseth Sandlin	SD-AL					\$	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	53%	68%
Lincoln Davis	TN-4					\$	NO	NO	NO	64%	59%
Chet Edwards	TX-17					\$	NO	NO	NO	67%	53%
Jim Matheson	UT-2					\$	NO	NO	[ \$ ]	58%	63%
<b>Tom Perriello</b>	VA-5					\$	+	I''	NO	51%	50%
Rick Boucher	VA-9					\$	NO	I''	NO	59%	97%
Nick Rahall	WV-3					\$	+	NO	[ \$ ]	56%	67%

First elected in 2006

First Elected in 2008

\* Chart does not include nine McCain districts held by Democrats not running for re-election.

# Elected in special election on May 13, 2008; ## Elected in special election on May 18, 2010

† Vote total from special election

Races Handicapped by: **Congressional Quarterly**; **The Rothenberg Political Report**; **The Cook Political Report**; and **Sabato Crystal Ball**.

All Race Ratings Updated as of July 22, 2010.