

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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To: Interested Parties

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Another Look At Health Care

Progressive Opportunities in Revisiting Health Care Reform

As Democrats come together and map out strategies to reclaim the country, research shows they need to put those voters who put them in power in 2006 and 2008 in the center of the narrative. Specifically, unmarried women, people of color, and younger voters—the Rising American Electorate who collectively comprise a rapidly growing majority of the voting eligible population in this country—voted by nearly a 70 percent majority for Democrats in prior election years. In 2010, they pulled back. A rebuilt Democratic majority is all but impossible without their active participation.

The first opportunity is health care. Republicans ran on repeal. Their repeal vote on Wednesday is but the opening act on what will be a long-term project to destroy this legislation. Democrats and progressives did not invite this second debate, but they should welcome the platform. It is also a great opening to help reframe the current political debate in this country.

First, voters think the priority of this Congress should be addressing the problem of jobs and economic growth, not repealing health care. When asked the top priority for the new Congress, repealing health care came in fifth place at 17 percent. The economic recovery and jobs are the top priority by far – this is particularly true among unmarried women, people of color and younger voters, all of whom struggle disproportionately in this economy. The Republicans' beginning on a different track sends a powerful message about the Republicans and their priorities.

The focus on 'repeal' also sends a message. Republicans are determined to totally replace what they think is Obama's signature policy. They are sending a message that they are at war to reverse Obama's agenda. But almost three-quarters of voters want Congress to work together to find compromise solutions to the country's problems. Republicans are sending the opposite message, and thus, only one-third of voters approve of the job being done by the new Congress.

So, progressives have an opportunity to attack the fundamental priorities of the new Congress – not jobs – and to attack the tone of partisanship – repeal rather than working together to make progress.



Second, there is the health care debate itself. There is evidence in this survey suggesting that such a debate can strengthen, not weaken, the public's support for health care reform. Lost in the vitriol of the 2010 campaign was the fact that this legislation improves the lives of millions of Americans and provides critically needed protections to American families. These are protections, as we shall see, voters are loathe to surrender. The most powerful messages will underscore:

- Repeal would allow insurance companies to discriminate against women, using womanhood as a “pre-existing” condition.
- Repeal would stop critically needed protections and benefits for seniors that start this year, including a 50 percent reduction in the cost of prescription drugs for seniors.
- Repeal means families with pre-existing conditions will no longer be able to buy coverage, and allows insurance companies to drop people when they get sick.
- Repeal is the first stop in an extreme Republican agenda that seeks to protect tax cuts for big corporations over programs helping people cope with this economy, like unemployment extensions and job training for people trying to find work.

This debate can also have one other critical consequence. One of the most frustrating aspects of the health care fight in 2009 and 2010 was that so many voters who stood to benefit the most from health care reform only afforded the legislation tepid support. Among these groups are young people and unmarried women, voters who help make up the Rising American Electorate (RAE). These voters, along with people of color, drove progressive victories in 2006 and 2008. The number of unmarried women in the voting age population grew by more than 8 million since 2000. The number of married women in the voting age population actually shrank. In fact, the RAE as a group accounts for more than 80 percent of the growth in the population of citizens 18 and older. In 2010, parts of the RAE underperformed, delivering lower margins than was the case in 2008 and even 2006. The new health care debate—more sober, more civil, more focused on real impacts that this legislation has on their lives—can potentially reengage these voters and recommit them to their progressive political ideals.

There is much work to be done on healthcare reform in the coming weeks and months as Republicans attempt to take this legislation apart piece by piece. Some initial steps, however, are recommended in this analysis.

- While a majority of voters want to change the law, only one in four (28 percent) would repeal the law entirely, which is an explicit goal of the first bill the Republicans introduced to the new Congress. There are steps progressive can consider to improve the law, but more important will be holding Republicans accountable to repealing those parts of the law that continue to enjoy huge support.



- Progressives need to engage those voters who benefit the most from this legislation. There are 8.1 million unmarried women in the country lacking health care insurance. Nearly 30 percent of all the uninsured in this country are unmarried women. Yet, unmarried women's support of the health care reform is modest at best (just 45 percent would either expand the law or leave it as is). A majority of voters under 30 would repeal some of the law or repeal it entirely.
- On March 21, 2010, Speaker Nancy Pelosi argued that, "being a woman is not a pre-existing condition." Since then, the equity of the new law and the discrimination inherent in the old system has not been sufficiently developed as a frame for the bill. This theme remains very powerful, particularly among older, unmarried women, many of whom voted Republican in 2010.
- There needs to be more focus on what is in the law, specifically, what are the parts of the legislation that help people directly and that the Republicans would repeal. This is not a new suggestion. Others have attempted to reconcile the fact that key aspects of the law enjoy huge support while the totality of the legislation draws opposition. This is also a point in time when several key aspects of the law, such as prescription drug coverage for seniors, are coming online. As voters experience these benefits in their lives, their support for the legislation should deepen.
- Health care reform did not suddenly make insurance companies popular in this country. Tying repeal efforts to the insurance lobby and some of the abuses of the old system is the strongest overall framework tested in this survey.

The Road Back Begins with the RAE

Politically, this survey shows progressive improvements along a range of measures. The mood improves to 33 percent right direction, 58 percent wrong track, compared to 65 percent wrong track on Election Day. The President's approval ratings are up here and in other surveys from December. Favorability ratings for the Democrats improve, while we see little change for the Republicans. This movement is modest and may not hold, but it is a welcome change from political trends leading up to last November.

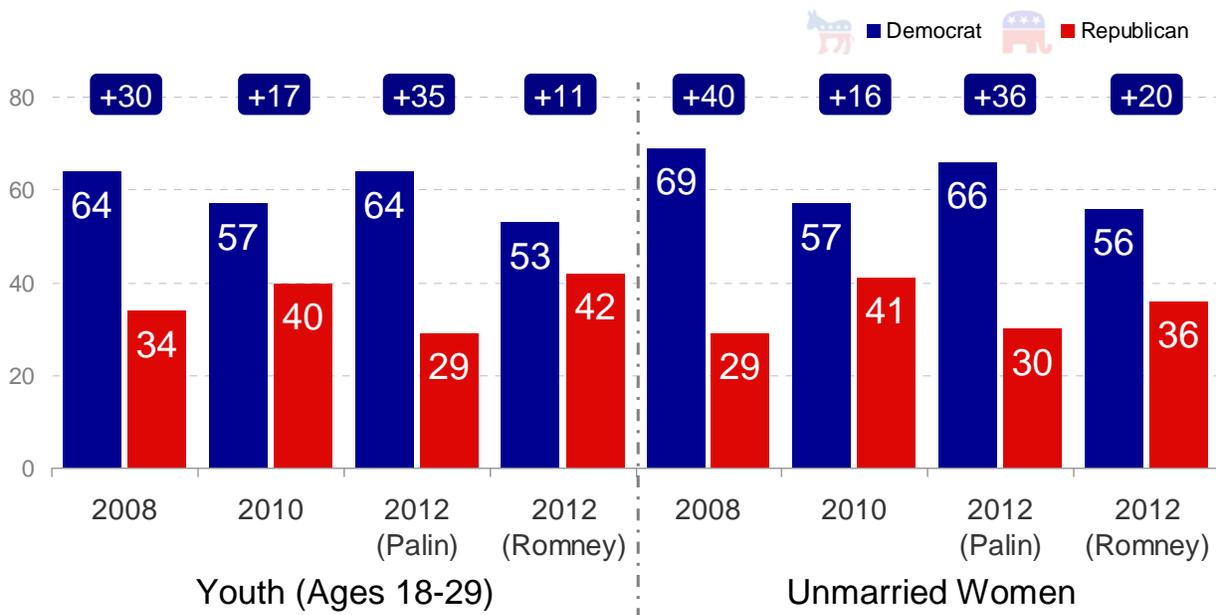
In some of that 2010 polling, we saw significant pull back among new base voters, such as younger voters and unmarried women, culminating in an election where Democratic margins dropped substantially compared to 2006 and 2008. In this survey, President Obama reclaims much of his 2008 support among RAE voters when facing Palin. An Obama-Romney trial heat, however, shows room for improvement. Moreover, Democrats at the congressional level do not improve from their overall showing in 2010.



There is much work to do reengaging RAE voters and the health care issue will play a key initial role.

In 2008, Barack Obama won 70 percent of the vote among unmarried women and 66 percent among youth. His current showing in a trial heat against Sarah Palin shows him holding much of this vote. In an Obama-Romney trial heat, support for the President among younger voters and unmarried women falls well under 60 percent. Note that in 2004, John Kerry won 62 percent of unmarried women.

Obama holds margin against Palin; dips against Romney



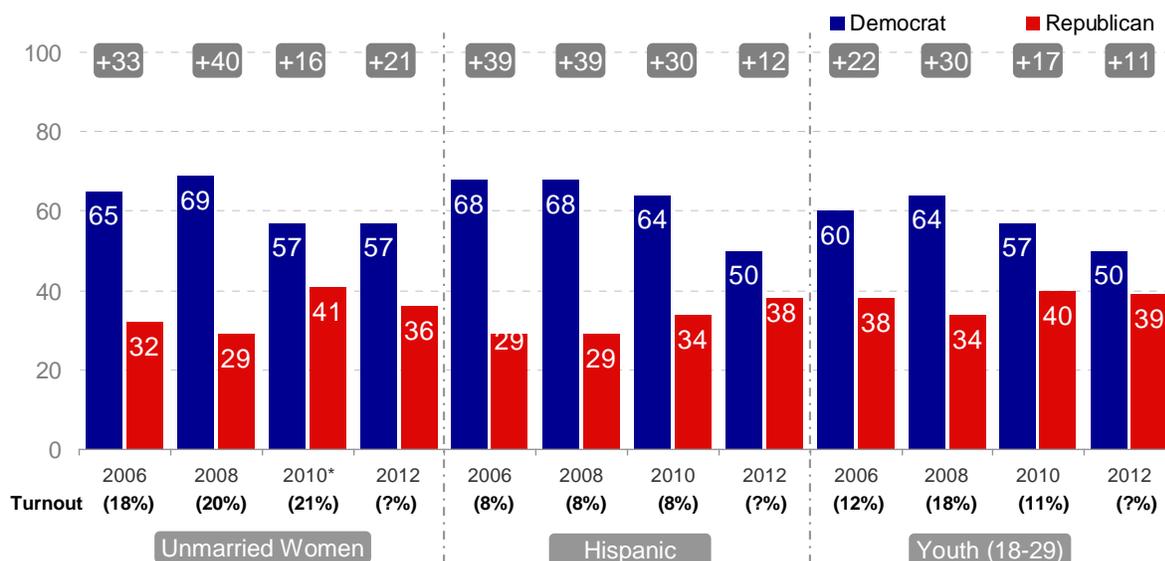
Huge differences emerge when looking at RAE and non-RAE voters; Obama leads Palin by 38 points among RAE voters and leads Romney by 25 points. In contrast, he trails by 16 points and 20 points, respectively, among non-RAE voters. Married women still give Obama an edge against Palin (45 percent Obama, 40 percent Palin), but prefer Romney by a 51 to 43 percent margin.

There is work to do in Congress as well. Currently, Democrats in named trial heats are coming close to what they achieved in 2010 among unmarried women. Support is down appreciably, however, among both youth and Hispanic voters.



Congressional support down among Hispanic and Young voters

Now let me ask you about the election for Congress. Did you vote for (DEMOCRATIC HOUSE CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE)?



*Note: 2010 unmarried women results reflect the findings of the combined WVVV/CAF/RR/DCOR post-election results, all other previous election figures come from Edison/Miftosky/CNN exit polls.

Democrats lost the House in 2010 for a number of reasons, not the least of which is a massive swing among non-college whites, white seniors and Independent voters. But problems among base supporters—in both the margin and, among some, in turnout as well—are part of this story. As progressives think through what it will take to take back the country, voters in the RAE need to be at the center of the new narrative. Getting these voters investing in health care reform will be a major step forward.

The disparity in outcomes in the two presidential trial heats tells an important story, not only among swing voters, but among RAE voters. These voters clearly reject the extremism of Sarah Palin. Women’s Voices, Women Vote first learned of unmarried women’s discomfort with Palin early in the 2008 presidential cycle when conducting focus groups among unmarried women reacting to her acceptance speech.



The On-Going Challenge of Health Care Reform

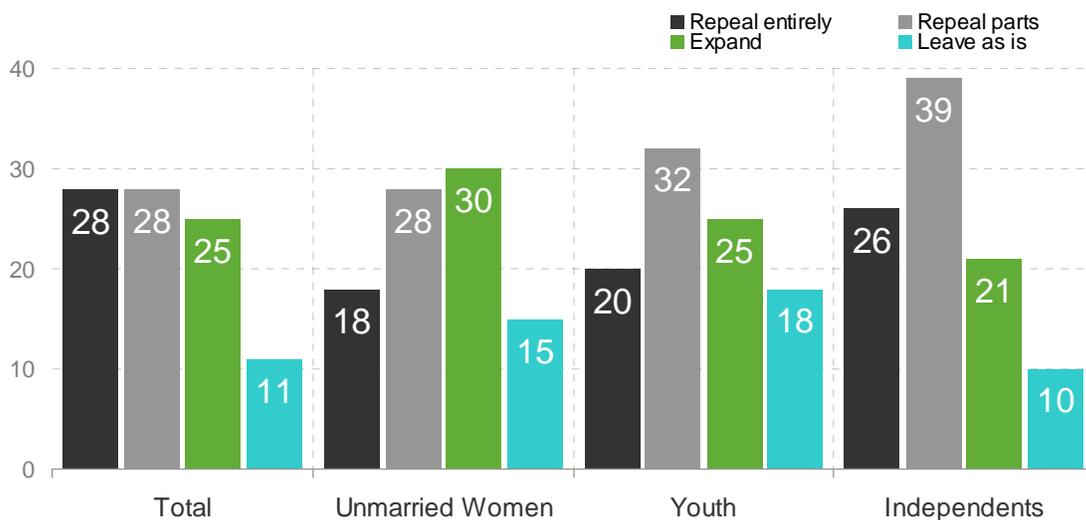
Only one in four voters would repeal the health care law entirely. Among voters who voted for Obama, but voted Republican in 2010, just 14 percent favor complete repeal. This is a key point -- voters are not willing to let go of everything this law represents.

Progressives need to be tactical as well as thematic. First, there are parts of this bill that are extremely popular (see below) and voters are aware enough of those parts already that nearly three-quarters oppose the stated purposes of the first bill introduced by the Republican Congress. These parts need to be the face of the repeal. Second, on balance, Republicans were not elected to repeal health care reform, but to revive the economy. Their first bill is the first example of their misreading of the 2010 election results.

We should not underestimate the political challenges of this issue. A significant 56 percent majority would change the law, either by repealing the bill entirely (28 percent) or repealing parts of the bill (28 percent). Another 36 percent would leave the bill as it is (25 percent) or expand it (11 percent). Independent voters, who broke overwhelmingly for the Republicans in 2010, favor change by a 2:1 margin (63 percent to 29 percent). While unmarried woman support the legislation in much higher numbers than married women, their support lacks enthusiasm or conviction. The problem is substantially worse among young people.

Lack of enthusiasm in health care support

As you may know, the first bill proposed by the new Republican Congress attempts to repeal the new health care reform law passed last year. So do you want your member of Congress to vote to repeal the new health care law entirely, repeal parts of the new law, expand it or leave it as is?

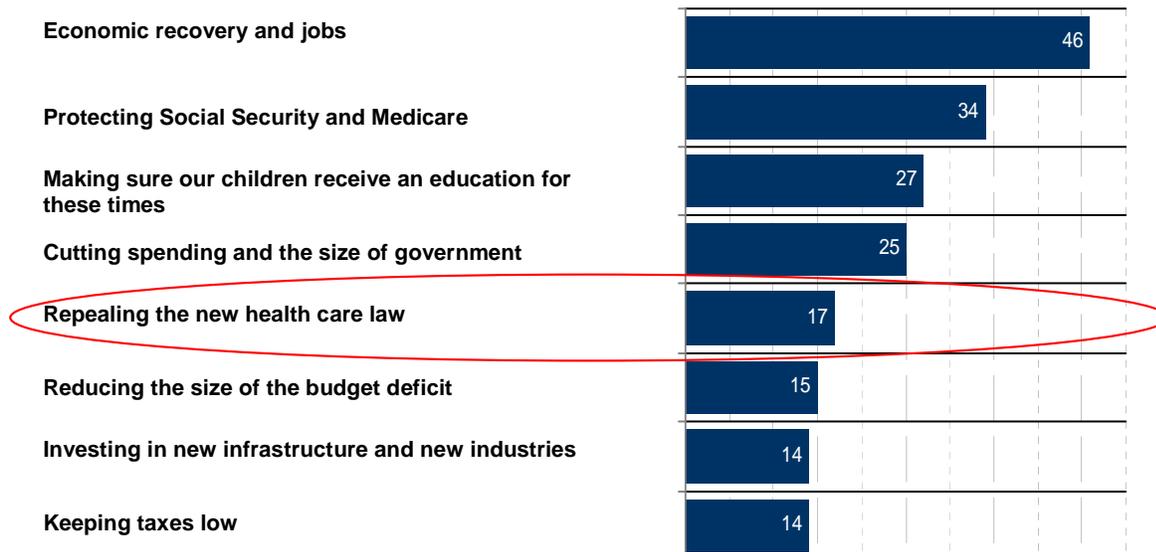




Even so, the economy, not health care repeal, is the top agenda item. Just as in 2009 and 2010, when health care reform was not the leading priority; in 2011 health care repeal is not a key priority either. Indeed, only 17 percent of voters identify repeal as the leading priority of the new Congress, 13 percent among Independent voters, 15 percent among voters who would repeal only parts of the law. Among voters in the RAE, just 15 percent identify repeal as their top priority, compared to 46 percent who focus on jobs and the economy.

Economic recovery and jobs, not health care, the priority

Which TWO of the following do you think are the most important economic problems facing the country right now?



Who Said Anything About Repeal?

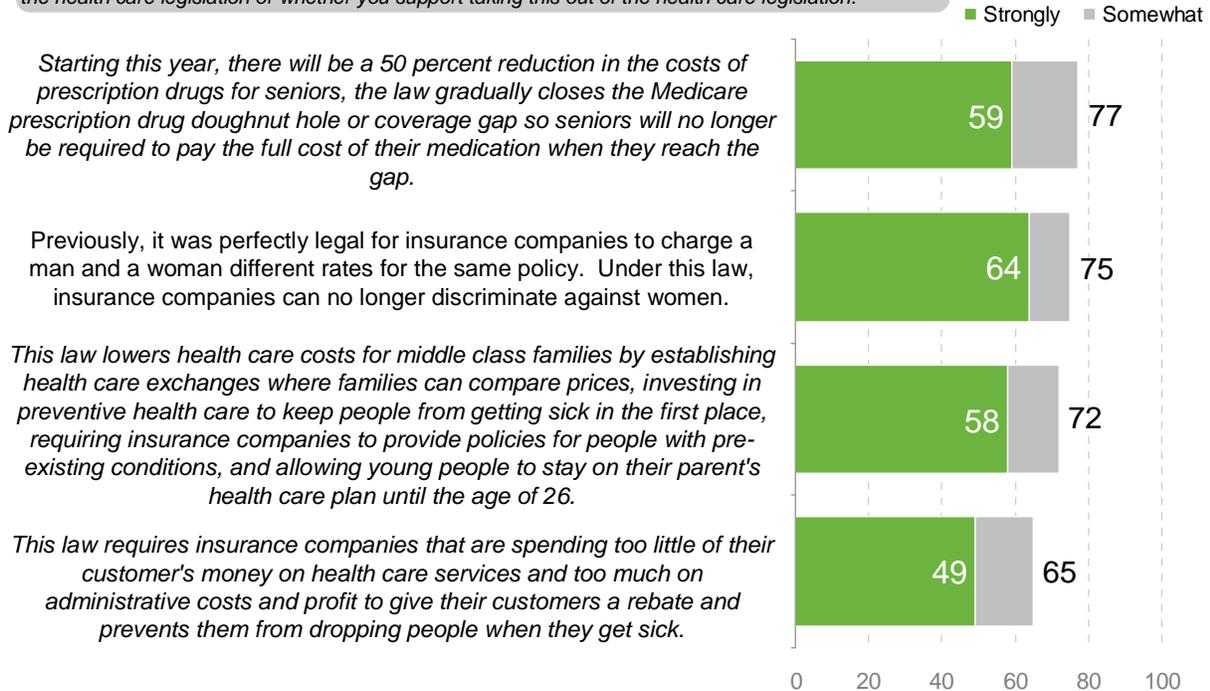
It has long been true that health care reform has never equaled the sum of its parts. Many aspects of the bill generate huge levels of support; in addition to key issues of providing coverage to people with pre-existing conditions and protecting people from losing coverage when they get sick, two other items in particular enjoy broad support. First, Obama’s health care reform law puts in an end to the gender-discrimination of the previous system. Unmarried women, who can not rely on a spouse’s insurance, in particular fight to keep this part of the bill, but it is also important to all American women. Second, voters favor the protections afforded seniors in the bill. Seniors voted 58 to 42 percent for the Republican House candidates in 2010, after supporting Democrats by a four-point margin in 2008, due in no small measure to third party pounding of Medicare cuts in the health care package.¹ As the new benefits come on line, seniors will hopefully conclude that what they heard and what is real in their lives are two different things.

¹ Based on CNN exit surveys in 2008 and 2010.



Prescriptions for seniors and gender equality favored pieces

I am going to read you some specific reforms in the health care reform law passed by Congress and signed into law. For each one I read, please tell me whether you support keeping this reform as part of the health care legislation or whether you support taking this out of the health care legislation.



After voters hear some of what is in the bill, and hear a small battery of Republican opposition arguments, they move against repeal (18 percent toward reform, 11 percent toward repeal). Voters who only hear Republican messaging set against Democratic messaging do not show the same movement in favor of the health care reform (10 percent toward reform, 13 percent toward repeal).

Message Focus on Insurance and Broader Agenda

Republican themes focusing on the cost of health care legislation, its constitutionality, and its alleged impact on job growth remain very powerful. Democratic arguments, however, are also powerful. The two more successful pro-reform themes tie repeal efforts to the insurance industry and tie repeal efforts to a broader—and unpopular—Republican agenda. The insurance theme works particularly well among RAE drop-off voters; these voters voted in 2008 and say they will vote in 2012, but did not vote in 2010. Their absence played a key role in the Democratic loss of the House.



Democratic messaging results among all voters

<i>Now let me read you some statements that Democrats have made about the health care reform law. After each statement please tell me whether it makes you MUCH LESS LIKELY to support the repeal of this law, SOMEWHAT LESS LIKELY, JUST A LITTLE LESS LIKELY, NO LESS LIKELY or MORE LIKELY to support repealing this law.</i>	Much Less Likely	Total Less Likely
This law cracks down on insurance companies and puts families and doctors back in charge of their health care choices. It limits excessive profits by insurance companies, prevents insurance companies from dropping people when they get sick and regulates increases in insurance rates.	25	48
Attempts to repeal health care are another example of Republicans putting the interests of big corporations ahead of the interests of average people. Rather than protecting people from insurance company abuse and huge rate increases, they are more interested in protecting excessive profits of insurance companies.	25	46
The Republican attempt to repeal health care is the first step in an extreme Republican agenda that seeks protects tax cuts for big corporations, end protections for the environment and restrict a woman's right to choose, while pushing massive cuts in programs that are helping people cope with this economy, like unemployment extensions and job training programs for people looking for find work.	24	46



Democratic messaging results among RAE drop-off voters

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This law cracks down on insurance companies and puts families and doctors back in charge of their health care choices. It limits excessive profits by insurance companies, prevents insurance companies from dropping people when they get sick and regulates increases in insurance rates.	33	64
The Republican attempt to repeal health care is the first step in an extreme Republican agenda that seeks protects tax cuts for big corporations, end protections for the environment and restrict a woman's right to choose, while pushing massive cuts in programs that are helping people cope with this economy, like unemployment extensions and job training programs for people looking for find work.	21	57
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Conclusion

The road back is long, particularly at the congressional level. Saving health care reform represents the first challenge, but also the first opportunity. Progressives need to invest in those voters who stand to benefit the most from this law. It has not happened yet and the consequences of that failure were apparent in the 2010 electoral returns. They also need to use this issue to build a broader case against the new Republican majority. Voters are rightly suspicious of Republican motives and commitment to average people. As is seen in other analysis, they pull back from Republican spending reductions and hostility toward middle class interests. Health care reform is a major part of this narrative.