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THE “SURGE” PLAN IS MET WITH STRONG OPPOSITION AMONG VOTERS

Voters Call for New Congress to Tackle War in Iraq in First 100 Hours

Despite generic support for Democratic presidential candidates, McCain still well-positioned against leading Democratic contenders

NEW YORK, January 18, 2007 – Following President Bush’s speech last week on his strategy for Iraq, the “surge” plan to send more troops to Iraq is met with strong opposition from the majority of registered voters. Close to six in ten (59%) oppose the plan, with Independents (58%) and Democratic identifiers (83%) expressing most displeasure with the strategy.

Voter opposition to the Bush plan is matched by their sense of urgency about the War. Opposition to the War continues to be named as the most important issue facing the country today (35%) as well as the top priority for the newly elected Congress in their first 100 hours on the job (34%). Healthcare (17%) and social security (13%) are also considered priorities, while stem cell research (22%) and tax cuts for corporations (30%) top the list of *lowest* priority issues for the new Congress.

The Diageo/*Hotline* Poll of 800 registered voters, conducted by Financial Dynamics from January 11-14, shows that Bush’s overall job rating is at 35% (down from 41% in November), the lowest on record by the Poll (May 2006 was the previous record, at 37%). Since November, Bush’s approval has dropped the most among Republicans, from 75% to 69%, followed by a 5% drop in approval among Independents (from 38% in November to 33% in January).

The new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi takes the gavel with higher name recognition and favorability ratings than she had in November, 2006. This month, just 16% report being unfamiliar with her, compared to 34% in November. Pelosi’s favorability rating has jumped 7 percentage points since November, from 29% to 36%. Pelosi’s favorability has increased across all parties, most notably with an 8% jump among Independents and 11% among Democrats. While voters report more approval than disapproval of Pelosi’s performance so far as Speaker of the House (36% approve; 23% disapprove), 40% are still reserving judgment.

"Voters are now looking to Pelosi to tackle some very big issues as the new Speaker of the House," says Chuck Todd, Editor in Chief of *The Hotline*. "Voters expect her and Congress to put the war in Iraq on the front burner, but they're also looking for healthcare and social security to be tackled in the first 100 days of the new Congress."

Overall Congressional job approval this month is up 4% since November (to 31%). Since November, Republicans’ approval of Congress dropped 11%, from 37% in November to 26% in January, while Democrats’ approval rose 18 points, from 21% in November to 39% in January.

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With the mid-term elections only two months behind us, the Diageo/*Hotline* Poll examined some likely presidential match-ups. In a generic presidential ballot test, registered voters report that if the election for U.S. president was held today, they would vote for the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate by an 18-point margin (44%-26%). This represents a significant boost for Democrats since last January (2006), when a generic Democratic presidential candidate had just a 7-point edge over a Republican candidate (37%-30%).

Although voters clearly lean Democratic in a generic ballot test, in six head-to-head match-ups between leading presidential contenders, Republican candidates, particularly Senator John McCain, have a consistent edge over their potential Democratic rivals. In the match-ups, Democratic Senator Barack Obama performs better than both Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator John Edwards.

- McCain garners more than 40% of the vote in match-ups against Clinton (48% to 39%), Obama (43% to 38%), and Edwards (45% to 35%).
- Giuliani also fares well against the Democratic contenders, outdistancing Clinton by 8 points (48% to 40%), Obama by 3 points (41% to 38%), and landing in a virtual dead-heat with Edwards (40% to 41%).

In the wake of Barack Obama's announcement this week that he is filing an exploratory committee as the first step in his presidential bid for the 2008 election, Obama has become better known. In November, 36% of voters said they hadn't heard of Obama, compared to only 22% this month. Two other potential presidential contenders – Republican Governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney, and Democratic Senator Christopher Dodd from Connecticut – are less known nationally, with 49% and 45% of voters saying they haven't heard of them, respectively.

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 January 11-14, 2007, among a random, nationally representative sample of 800 registered voters (margin of error +/- 3.5%), age 18 and older.

Complete results available at www.diageohotlinepoll.com

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