



Lake Snell Perry Mermin Meadow Gotoff Ulibarri



Memorandum

To: Interested Parties

From: Celinda Lake, David Mermin, Mark McKinnon, & Drew Westen

Re: Nationwide Polling on Fair Elections Policy

Date: July 8, 2010

Nationwide polling conducted on behalf of the Fair Elections coalition shows **broad and strong bipartisan support for a reformed campaign finance system that would reduce the role of big money in U.S. Senate and House races. Strong messaging for this proposal, centered on themes of accountability, fairness, and making sure voters are heard, beats a strong opposition message by wide margins.**

- **A neutral description of the Fair Elections system has a very high level of support (63%) that is consistently strong across major demographic groups.** After hearing its basic provisions, two-thirds of likely 2010 general election voters support Fair Elections (63% total support, 39% strong support) with only 23% opposed and 15% undecided. Support is high across party lines (74% support among Democrats, 60% among independents, 53% among Republicans) and regionally (66% in the Northeast, 62% in the Midwest, 61% in the South, 64% in the West).

Text of Proposal: *Now I'm going to read you a description of a specific proposal that would change the way federal election campaigns are funded. The goal is to reduce the impact of special interest money on Congress.*

Under this plan, candidates for Congress could run for office without raising large campaign contributions. Instead, they would collect a large number of small contributions from their home state in order to qualify for a limited amount of funding for their campaigns. They would be prohibited from taking any contributions over one hundred dollars from anyone, but would still be allowed to take small contributions. Contributions of a hundred dollars or less from their home state would be matched on a four-to-one basis, up to a strict limit, from a Fair Elections Fund, which would be financed by assessing a fee on big corporations receiving the largest government contracts.

- **Support is driven by a strong sense that we must change the way our elections are currently financed.** Just under three-fourths of voters believe we need to change the way our elections are financed (51% major changes, 21% some changes).
- **Voters who are undecided on their vote for the U.S. House this fall favor the Fair Elections policy by almost a three-to-one margin.** Overall, the poll shows a close contest on the generic congressional ballot (38% Democratic candidate, 36% Republican candidate, 26% undecided). These undecided voters favor the Fair Elections proposal 60% to 21%, suggesting that support can provide candidates a powerful edge among undecided voters.
- **The best messages in favor of the policy speak more to voters’ values than specifics about the bill.** The strongest values include accountability, having the voters’ voices heard, and fairness to ordinary Americans over the lobbyists and special interests (see text of top messages and rating below). Each of these messages tested significantly higher than an opposition message.¹

Text of Positive Messages

[Of, By, For] *It’s time we return to government of, by, and for the people, not government of, bought, and paid for by special interests. If big businesses want to invest in our government, let them pay their fair share of taxes rather than paying for politicians who’ll write them special tax breaks. Right now, the biggest corporations in America pay a smaller percent of income tax than the average working family, and they even get special bonuses for outsourcing American jobs. Since the crisis on Wall Street less than two years ago, the banks have spent nearly a million dollars a day lobbying in Washington—while taxpayers have been bailing them out. The job of Wall Street bankers is to get a good return on their investment, and unfortunately, they’ve taken those skills to Washington. It’s time we replaced corporate-funded elections with fair elections. We need to put elections back in the hands of ordinary Americans. Our leaders should work for us, not their corporate sponsors.*

80% Convincing (48% very convincing), 19% Not Convincing (12% not at all convincing)

[Accountable] *As long as politicians are accountable to the corporations and lobbyists who finance their campaigns, they’re never going to be accountable to the people who elected them. It’s time ordinary Americans had their voices heard. Our elected officials should be concerned with solving OUR problems and addressing OUR concerns, not those of special interests who can afford to pay for special treatment. It’s time we take our government back, with elections that are fair to ordinary Americans, where candidates for Congress only get funding if they share the values and concerns of the people back home. And let big corporations pay their fair share for what we all deserve—fair, clean elections that put American voters back in the driver’s seat—instead of*

¹ Text of Opposition Message: This proposal is just welfare for politicians. It will take taxpayers’ money and give it to any candidate to pay for their bumper-stickers, salaries for family members, and negative television ads. Think about it for a minute. Instead of spending our tax dollars for education, jobs, or public safety, these incumbent politicians want to put that money into their own campaign bank accounts and rig the game for themselves. We know what will happen because similar efforts have been tried and failed. Extreme candidates on the left and the right who have no chance of winning will come out of the woodwork. They’ll run for office and spout their views – ones that we may find offensive – all with government funding. It’s simply un-American to have the federal government fund private political speech. And it will do no good. Money in politics is just like water running down a hill – the special interests will always find a way around whatever laws are passed. Why would we waste tax dollars on something that will never work. **61% Doubts (32% serious doubts), 34% No Doubts (19% no doubts at all)**

paying for high-priced lobbyists. It's time we take the "for sale" sign off our government, so that it works for working and middle class Americans.

77% Convincing (48% very convincing), 20% Not Convincing (13% not at all convincing)

[Rotten Barrel] *The problem with our political system isn't so much that individual members of Congress are corrupt but that the system is corrupt. Sure, there are bad apples in the barrel, but the real problem is that the barrel is rotten. No matter how honest you are, when your ability to get elected depends on collecting millions of dollars from special interests, there's no way you can be objective. And having to spend so much time fund-raising just discourages good people from running and prevents those who do get elected from doing what we sent them there to do: solve the problems of everyday Americans. It's time our elected officials started listening to the voices of everyday Americans, not their corporate sponsors. The only way that's going to happen is if we clean up our elections, and do it now.*

79% Convincing (47% very convincing), 19% Not Convincing (12% not at all convincing)

[Working Americans] *It's time we had a government that worked for working Americans, not for big corporations and their lobbyists. How many disasters does it take to decide it's time to fix our broken government? We now know that the agency responsible for monitoring offshore oil drilling was owned and operated by the oil companies. BP was even allowed to fill out safety inspection reports on the rig that blew up in the Gulf in pencil so regulators could just trace over them in pen. We know that Wall Street regulators looked the other way when they saw the rampant fraud and recklessness that cost so many people their homes and jobs. There's one common denominator—money—and there's one common solution: end legalized bribery dressed up as campaign contributions from big business. Let the people of a state decide who they want to run for Congress with small contributions, and let some of those big corporations that have been paying for politicians pay instead for fair elections and government that works for a change.*

75% Convincing (43% very convincing), 20% Not Convincing (12% not at all convincing)