

**Winning the Issues**  
**Messaging on Medicaid, the Supreme Court,**  
**Congressional Republicans, Speaker Ryan,**  
**President Obama, and the Economy**

**March 2016**

**OVERVIEW**

Presentation Testing conducted two mixed-gender focus groups with moderate Independents in Phoenix, AZ on March 1, 2016. One group was comprised of 11 Romney-voting moderate Independents, and the other was comprised of nine Obama-voting moderate Independents. All respondents had at least graduated from high school, and were age 22+.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- 1) Independents support letting governors require working-age, able-bodied adults on Medicaid to be required to either be working or be seeking a job**

During each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how strongly would you support letting governors require working-age, able-bodied adults<sup>1</sup> who have Medicaid to be required to either be working or be seeking a job<sup>2</sup>?*

	<b>Romney INDs</b>	<b>Obama INDs</b>	<b>AVG.</b>
<b>0=Not support at all to 10=Totally support</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>7.7</b>

- 2) Most Independents believe that we should limit the Medicaid program to the most vulnerable, rather than expanding it to include a larger population**

During each session, we asked:

<sup>1</sup> Romney-voting Independents believe that working-age, able-bodied adults should be working if they want to receive cheaper insurance or health care. It helps the economy and it reduces the burden on taxpayers.

<sup>2</sup> Romney-voting Independents believe that there needs to be responsibility with each of us and unfortunately, we are moving toward an entitlement society, which will harm our country financially if it continues. Obama-voting Independents agreed that working-age, able-bodied adults on Medicaid should be required to either be working or be seeking a job because it is a matter of fairness.

Research today shows that many low-income individuals may have a hard time finding a doctor that accepts Medicaid. Would you prefer Congress focus on building a strong Medicaid program that ensures access to care for those who are *the most vulnerable, such as low-income children/elderly and the disabled*,<sup>3</sup> OR a Medicaid program that *provides coverage to a larger population*<sup>4</sup> including able-bodied adults?

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1= Limit to most vulnerable	9	6	15
2= Include a larger population	2	3	5

3) **Obama-voting Independents were split as to whether it is fair that states tax health care providers just so they can receive more federal dollars for their Medicaid programs. Romney-voting Independents believe that is unfair.**

During each session, we asked:

*Today, a state is allowed to finance its portion of the Medicaid program by **taxing health care providers**<sup>5</sup>, and then turning around and spending the revenue it collects from providers on its program. **This spending is then matched by federal dollars**.<sup>6</sup> How fair is it to tax health care providers just so a state can receive **more federal dollars**<sup>7</sup> for its program?*

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Not at all fair to 10=Very fair	3.4	5.0	4.2

<sup>3</sup> Most Romney-voting Independents would prefer that Congress focus on building a strong Medicaid program that ensures access to care for those who are the most vulnerable because they need more help than able-bodied adults, who have more options.

<sup>4</sup> Obama-voting Independents who want to include a larger population in the Medicaid program told us that there are a lot of people who earn too much money to qualify for government subsidies for health care, but they do not earn enough to purchase health insurance through the ACA or their employer. Some in that group did not think that able-bodied adults should qualify for Medicaid. In their view, the Medicaid program should be limited to the most vulnerable, and there are too many people who want to be covered as able-bodied adults.

<sup>5</sup> Some Romney-voting Independents opposed the idea of taxing health care providers because that increases the cost of health care. They do not think that doctors—the health care providers—should be taxed when they are providing necessary services to help people. That may disincentivize doctors from treating Medicaid patients. Ultimately, those extra costs (in the form of taxes) will be passed on to consumers.

<sup>6</sup> Some Obama-voting Independents believe that states are unfairly benefitting from this dynamic because they are collecting money from one source (the health care providers) and then doubling that money with matching federal dollars.

<sup>7</sup> Some Romney-voting Independents wondered where the extra federal dollars would come from.

**4) Independents opposed expanding Medicaid if it means that their state has less money to spend on other state priorities like education, roads, and locking up criminals**

During each session, we asked:

*Research shows that increasing Medicaid spending is crowding out other state priorities<sup>8</sup> such as education, roads, and locking up criminals. How strongly would you support expanding Medicaid benefits in your state, if it meant your state had less money to spend on other state priorities like education, roads, and locking up criminals?*

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Not at all support expanding Medicaid to 10=Strongly support expanding Medicaid	3.1	3.3	3.2

**5) Almost all (18 of 20) Independents would trust state and local officials more than Federal officials to make changes to the Medicaid program that might impact them if they were to lose their job and had to go on Medicaid in their state**

During each session, we asked:

*Medicaid is a state-administered program that provides health coverage to low-income people. If you lost your job and had to go on Medicaid in your state, who would you trust more to make changes to the Medicaid program that might impact you, state and local officials who live in your state<sup>9</sup>, or Federal officials in Washington<sup>10</sup>?*

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1= Trust state and local officials more	9	9	18
2= Trust Federal officials more	2	0	2

<sup>8</sup> Romney-voting Independents believe that there is a lot of waste and fraud in Medicaid, and they do not want to crowd out other state priorities. Obama-voting Independents believe that we need to focus on other state priorities, including education, and doing so could reduce the need for people to depend on Medicaid in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Most Romney-voting Independents would trust state and local officials more because they are closer to what is going on, and they could make changes more easily than the federal government. Also, respondents said governors of each state want to keep their constituents happy, implying that governors would be more likely to respond to their needs. Obama-voting Independents told us that state officials are more familiar with local needs, which would allow them to make better decisions. Also, they believe that they have more of a voice in their state and how it is run compared to how government is run at the federal level.

<sup>10</sup> One Romney-voting Independent expressed distrust in the governor of Arizona, Doug Ducey.

- 6) **The Republicans’ strongest argument about the current Supreme Court vacancy was: “The American people deserve to have their voices heard in this decision, and they will get that opportunity in the November election.”**

During each session, we asked respondents to evaluate some statements about the vacancy on the Supreme Court left by the death of Justice Scalia for how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each one, on a scale from zero to 10. Zero means they totally disagreed, and 10 means they totally agreed.

The Republicans’ argument that Independents agreed with the most was:

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
The American people deserve to have their voices heard in this decision, and they will get that opportunity in the November election.	8.5	5.9	7.2

NOTE: The full list of statements appears at the end of the document.

- 7) **The Republicans’ weakest argument about the current Supreme Court vacancy was: “A lame-duck President should not be making a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court.”**

The Republicans’ argument that Independents agreed with the least was:

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
A lame-duck President should not be making a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court.	7.5	5.7	6.6

- 8) **When Romney-voting Independents think about what Donald Trump stands for and separately, what the majority of Congressional Republicans stand for, they believe that the policy position on which they are the most in sync is getting rid of Obamacare. Obama-voting Independents believe that the policy position on which they are the most in sync is immigration, including building the wall and increasing the standards for admittance to the U.S.**

During each session, we conducted an exercise where we asked respondents to think about what Donald Trump stands for and separately, what the majority of Congressional Republicans stand for. Then, we asked them as a group to compile a list of the policy positions that they think Donald Trump and the majority of Congressional Republicans hold in common. Next, we asked

respondents to vote on the one issue on which they think Donald Trump and the Republicans in Congress are the most in sync.

Romney-voting Independents compiled the following list (with their top choice in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- Fiscal responsibility--not raise taxes (1)
- Using taxpayer money appropriately
- Securing our borders (3)
- Rejecting Syrian refugees
- Rejecting illegal immigrants
- **Getting rid of Obamacare (6)**
- Supporting Israel
- Less government
- More jobs (1)
- Putting more money into education
- Going after ISIS and destroying it
- Rebuilding our armed forces

Obama-voting Independents offered the following list (with their top choice in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- **Immigration: Build the wall/increase the standards for admittance (7)**
- Promoting the free market
- Lower taxes
- National security—fight ISIS (2)
- Unequalize taxes between small and large business

**9) When Obama-voting Independents think about what Donald Trump stands for and separately, what the majority of Congressional Republicans stand for, they believe that the policy position on which they are the least in sync is health care. Romney-voting Independents believe that the policy position on which they are the least in sync is what to do with the illegals here now.**

During each session, we conducted a second exercise where we asked respondents to again think about what Donald Trump stands for and separately, what the majority of Congressional Republicans stand for. This time, we asked respondents to compile a list of the policy positions where they think Donald Trump and the majority of Congressional Republicans are far apart. Next, we asked respondents to vote on the one issue on which they think Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress are the least in sync.

Romney-voting Independents compiled the following list (with their top choice in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- Property rights/eminant domain (1)
- Secure the border
- Make Mexicans pay for the wall

- Foreign policy (Congress is diplomatic, Trump’s not) (3)
- **What to do with the illegals here now (5)**
- View of women (2)
- Gun rights

Obama-voting Independents offered the following list (with their top choice in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- Dealing with Muslims (1)
- **Health care (5)**
- Dealing with China (3)
- Dealing with Russia and Syria

**10) More than four months into his Speakership, half of Independents (10 of 20) who had at least graduated from high school still did not know that Paul Ryan is the Speaker of the House of Representatives**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*The current Speaker of the House of Representatives is...*

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=John Boehner	0	0	0
2=Kevin McCarthy	0	0	0
3=Paul Ryan	7	3	10
4=Mitch McConnell	2	1	3
5=Don’t know	2	5	7

**11) Overall, Independents were slightly dissatisfied with the job that Paul Ryan has been doing so far as Speaker of the House**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how satisfied are you with the job Paul Ryan has been doing so far as Speaker of the House?*

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
0=Totally dissatisfied to 10=Totally satisfied	5.0	4.1	4.6

**12) Independents were split along ideological lines about how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the job that Barack Obama has been doing as President. Obama-voting Independents were fairly satisfied with his job performance while Romney-voting Independents were very dissatisfied.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*On a scale from zero to 10, how satisfied are you with the job Barack Obama has been doing as President?*

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
<b>0=Totally dissatisfied to 10=Totally satisfied</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>4.4</b>

**13) Obama-voting Independents viewed the direction of the U.S. economy more positively compared to one year ago than did Romney-voting Independents**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*Compared to one year ago, is the U.S. economy...*

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
<b>1=getting much worse</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2=getting somewhat worse</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3=staying as is</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4=getting somewhat better</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5=getting much better</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

We asked respondents in each session who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting at least somewhat better or at least somewhat worse what evidence they have for their belief.

Romney-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better cited:

- Gas prices are lower
- Unemployment is lower
- One respondent works in an auto body repair shop and she has seen an increase in people having their cars repaired and they are better able to afford their deductibles
- The real estate market is improving
- More businesses are opening

Obama-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better cited:

- Gas prices are down
- More jobs are available
- The real estate market is getting better
- Wages are slightly higher

Romney-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse or much worse cited:

- The stock market has declined
- The unemployment rate is higher than what the government reports (some unemployed people are not counted)
- There was no cost-of-living-adjustment for Social Security this year
- Real income has gone down for most families
- Oil production is down, which reduces the amount of taxes that we collect for infrastructure spending
- The cost of health insurance is still increasing
- One respondent has not been receiving raises at work
- Riots related to race issues in Missouri and elsewhere are having negative economic consequences

Obama-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse cited:

- We have high levels of debt, both the national debt and our personal debts
- The stock market is down
- Stores are closing and/or going out of business (e.g. Sears, Kohl's, OfficeMax, and Sports Authority), leading to job losses
- Sales from the Christmas shopping season were poor

**14) Almost two-thirds (seven of 11) of Romney-voting Independents believe that the unemployment rate in the U.S. one year from today will increase from its current level of 4.9% to between 5% and 8%, which suggests a more negative outlook for jobs overall. Obama-voting Independents were split, with five indicating that the unemployment rate in the U.S. one year from today will remain under 5%, and four saying that it will increase to between 5% and 6%.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

*The unemployment rate in the U.S. now stands at 4.9%. A year from today, do you expect it to be...*

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
1=Under 5%	4	5	9

2=Between 5% and 6%	5	4	9
3=Between 6% and 7%	1	0	1
4=Between 7% and 8%	1	0	1
5=Between 8% and 9%	0	0	0
6=Between 9% and 10%	0	0	0
7=Above 10%	0	0	0

## ADDENDUM

During each session, we asked respondents to evaluate some statements about the vacancy on the Supreme Court left by the death of Justice Scalia for how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each one, on a scale from zero to 10. Zero means they totally disagreed, and 10 means they totally agreed.

The statements in red text are the GOP messaging on the issue, and the statements in blue text are the Democrats' messaging.

The following chart shows each of the 10 statements, in descending order, from the one that garnered the most agreement to the least agreement, on average:

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	AVG.
Republican Senators are placing electoral politics over doing their job.	6.9	7.6	7.3
The American people deserve to have their voices heard in this decision, and they will get that opportunity in the November election.	8.5	5.9	7.2
Republicans like to demand that we need to "follow the Constitution." But if they don't even schedule a hearing for a Supreme Court nominee, they will be abdicating their constitutional responsibilities.	6.4	8.0	7.2
The next President, whether he or she is a Republican or a Democrat, should make this important nomination to the Supreme Court.	8.0	5.8	6.9
Americans should have a voice in who will be the next Supreme Court nominee.	7.5	6.2	6.9
Obama has spent the last seven years making unconstitutional, overreaching regulations to drive his agenda against the will of the people's representatives in Congress. Knowing the only way Obama's legacy can be upheld is through the courts, Senate	9.7	3.9	6.8

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Republicans should not let Obama takeover the Supreme Court as well.

The do-nothing Republican majority in the Senate should not get paid if they don't bother to meet with Obama's eventual Supreme Court nominee and hold hearings.	5.8	7.6	6.7
A lame-duck President should not be making a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court.	7.5	5.7	6.6
By refusing to give President Obama's Supreme Court nominee a meeting, a hearing, or a vote, Republicans are abandoning the oath of office they swore when they became United States Senators.	4.8	6.6	5.7
Americans got their voice when President Obama won a second four-year term that ends January 20, 2017.	3.9	6.6	5.3

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