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PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL RATINGS FALL BACK TO EARTH

The sky-high approval ratings that President Obama enjoyed during the first months of his presidency have settled back to earth as the public perceives his administration to have taken ownership of the economy and he struggles to enact controversial policy initiatives.

After peaking at an average of 66 percent approval in mid-February, Obama's approval ratings slipped to an average of 51 percent as of mid-August with 44 percent now disapproving of his performance in office. Such numbers comport to newly released Gallup, NBC News and Pew Research Center polls. In addition to increasing dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the economy, the public has soured on two of the President's top legislative agenda items, the "cap and trade" climate change bill and health care reform.

Should these two pieces of legislation collapse beneath their own weight, it is possible that Congress, looking for legislative successes, could turn to the highway bill to provide an additional economic boost. While it is increasingly unlikely that Congress will be able to pass a surface transportation bill prior to the Sept. 30 expiration of SAFETEA-LU and have it on the President's desk for him to sign, the failure of Congress to pass bills to address global warming or health care may make a short-term extension followed by multi-year reauthorization more feasible.

Not only would Congress be helping to address the economic problems still facing the country by approving a robust highway reauthorization, also it would be moving the nation's surface transportation infrastructure into the 21st Century. NSSGA encourages members of Congress quickly to enact reauthorization so that businesses will have the economic certainty essential to sound capital investment and human resource decisions.

THE 2010 POLITICAL LANDSCAPE ONE YEAR OUT

A year can translate into many lifetimes in politics. That being said, what happens today starts to shape the political landscape candidates will be forced to navigate between now and Election Day 2010.

All 435 members of the House of Representatives (as of today 256 Democrats, 178 Republicans and one vacancy) as well as 36 senators, 18 Democrats and 18 Republicans, will be up in 2010. As a result of two consecutive drubbings of Republicans at the polls and President Obama plucking Democrat senators for his administration, this will be the first election in several cycles that Republicans have a more target-rich environment than Democrats.

Veteran political analyst Charlie Cook, in reviewing the president's current polls, stated:

“These data confirm anecdotal evidence, and our own view, that the situation this summer has slipped completely out of control for President Obama and Congressional Democrats. Today, **The Cook Political Report's Congressional election model, based on individual races, is pointing toward a net Democratic loss of between six and 12 seats, but our sense, factoring in macro-political dynamics is that this is far too low.”**

Cook, citing a new Gallup poll that shows Congress' job disapproval at 70 percent among independents, pointed to what he called “an eerie sense of déjà vu” and the sense that Democratic losses in the House in 2010 could go higher than 20 seats. At present, Cook lists 23 Democrat-held seats as Lean or Toss Up versus only 10 Republican seats in those categories. In fact, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has placed 42 of their House members on what they call their “Frontline” list to protect their incumbents, which roughly corresponds to the 49 Democratic House seats where voters in those districts give a majority of votes to John McCain for President in 2008.

The Senate offers a similar picture at this point in time. While Democrat opportunities to pick up Republican seats in states such as Missouri, New Hampshire and Ohio exist, their candidates have yet to catch fire while their GOP counterparts are taking full advantage of the Democratic Party's current woes. Republicans also are fielding strong candidates in traditionally blue states such as California, Connecticut, Delaware and Illinois. Again, keeping in mind that today's polls are but a snapshot in time, even Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Nev.) appears to have an uphill reelection battle with recent surveys showing his approval ratings below 40 percent, historically a bad omen, and trailing two different GOP challengers.

NSSGA's ROCKPAC strives to find and support the best candidates, regardless of party, who will advance the causes of the aggregates industry. If you have a candidate that you would like ROCKPAC to consider supporting, please contact NSSGA's Government Affairs Division.

SPECTER SWITCHES AGAIN -- THIS TIME ON CARD CHECK

Immediately following his party switch this past spring, Sen Arlen Specter (D-Pa.) said he would not support the Employee Free Choice Act (a.k.a. card check) this Congress nor would he cast the deciding vote to cut off debate on the bill, citing the economic recession. Since that time, Specter has backtracked, stating that he would be open to a compromise on the legislation. Negotiations continue on developing an EFCA compromise that can achieve the 60 votes needed to end debate and proceed to a final vote on the measure. Then on Aug. 14, Specter went even further and proclaimed that he will indeed vote to cut off debate on card check if a compromise is introduced.

Since his initial statements earlier this year, Specter has drawn a 2010 primary opponent in Rep. Joe Sestak (D-Pa.) who is running to Specter's left and questioning the recent Democrat convert's commitment to his new party. Specter's announcement on card check, made at a Pittsburgh conference of liberal activists, is viewed as part of an effort to shore up his new base of support in advance of the Democrat primary being held next April.

NSSGA opposes efforts to pass any form of EFCA and is a member of the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace that is seeking to protect the rights of American workers to continue to utilize the secret ballot and negotiate their contracts without federal interference.

The CDW has launched an [online toolkit](#) to help you wage the battle against card check. The toolkit includes a press release unveiling a new web ad, sample letters, draft op-eds and letters to the editor, handouts and print advertising.

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND NSSGA'S FALL FLY-IN

Don't wait until the last minute! [Register now](#) for NSSGA's Fall Fly-In! On Tuesday, Sept. 22, Mike Davis, Acting Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health / MSHA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations, will speak to fly-in participants prior to a welcoming reception. The fly-in and congressional visits will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 23. The fly-in is conveniently based at the Hyatt Regency-Washington on Capitol Hill. Registration is only \$175 per person. **The room block deadline is Sept. 1**, so make your reservations today by calling 800-233-1234. Please be sure to indicate that you are part of the "NSSGA Fly-In" room block so as to receive the special discounted rate of \$294 per night (plus taxes.)

With the current highway bill set to expire at the end of September, concerns about aggressive MSHA enforcement, and proposals to vastly expand the Clean Water Act, overhaul the health care system and impose card check for organizing unions working their way through Congress, there has never been a more important time for you to come to Washington and make your voices heard.