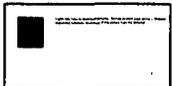


RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: sbwhoeop [redacted]
Sent: Monday, October 11, 2010 10:14 AM
To: H
Subject: Re: H: The Boehner poll. Sid

B6

This is the distilled, pure and utterly conventional wisdom of much of the DC political chattering class at this moment. The first two paragraphs are the most important, completely accurate in assessment, the rest twaddle:



Monday, Oct. 11, 2010

Why Obama Is Losing the Political War

By Mark Halperin

Barack Obama is being politically crushed in a vise. From above, by elite opinion about his competence. From below, by mass anger and anxiety over unemployment. And it is too late for him to do anything about this predicament until after November's elections.

With the exception of core Obama Administration loyalists, most politically engaged elites have reached the same conclusions: the White House is in over its head, isolated, insular, arrogant and clueless about how to get along with or persuade members of Congress, the media, the business community or working-class voters. This view is held by Fox News pundits, executives and anchors at the major old-media outlets, reporters who cover the White House, Democratic and Republican congressional leaders and governors, many Democratic business people and lawyers who raised big money for Obama in 2008, and even some members of the Administration just beyond the inner circle. (See Obama's troubled first year, issue by issue.)

On Friday, after the release of the latest bleak unemployment data — the last major jobs figures before the midterms — Obama said, "Putting the American people back to work, expanding opportunity, rebuilding the economic security of the middle class is the moral and national challenge of our time." But elites feel the President has failed to meet that challenge and are convinced he will be unable to do so in the remainder of his term. Moreover, there is a growing perception that Obama's decisions are causing harm — that businesses are being hurt by the Administration's legislation and that economic recovery is stalling because of the uncertainty surrounding energy policy, health care, deficits, housing, immigration and spending.

And that sentiment is spreading. Many members of the general public appear deeply skeptical of Obama's capacity to turn things around, especially, but not exclusively, those inclined to dislike him — Tea Partyers and John McCain voters, but also tens of millions of middle-class Americans, including quite a few who turned out for Obama in 2008. (See how some Americans are facing the prospect of long-term unemployment.)

The misery afflicting the country has no political affiliation. Listen to the voices from this striking TV ad for Rob Portman, the Republican former Congressman and Bush budget director who is running for Senate from Ohio. One woman at a Dayton career fair says starkly, "There are no jobs." A man announces plaintively and with obvious frustration, "I've been looking for a job now for 13 months." Events like this job fair are becoming the grim iconic gatherings of our time, the breadlines for the Obama years.

Most of Obama's private (and sometimes public) rebuttals to the voices slamming him on all sides are justified or spot on. He did inherit a lot of problems from the Bush Administration. He did act quickly in the initial weeks of his Administration to stave off a worldwide depression. His efforts at job creation have been obstructed by Republicans (even the proposals based on policies supported by the GOP in the past). His opponents haven't put forth specifics of their own, nor offered genuine compromise, while the media have allowed the right's activists and gabbers to run wild with criticism without furnishing legitimate alternative solutions. (See Barack Obama's top 10 sound bites.)

But Obama has exacerbated his political problems not just by failing to enact policies that would have actually turned the economy around, but also by authorizing a series of tactical moves intended to demonize Republicans and distract from the problems at hand. He has wasted time lambasting his foes when he should have been putting forth his agenda in a clear, optimistic fashion, defending the benefits of his key decisions during the past two years (health care and the Troubled Asset Relief Program, for example) and explaining what he would do with a re-elected Democratic majority to spur growth.

Throughout the year, we have been treated to Obama-led attacks on George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, Rush Limbaugh, Congressman Joe Barton (for his odd apology to BP), John Boehner (for seeking the speakership — or was it something about an ant?) and Fox News (for everything). Suitable Democratic targets in some cases, perhaps, but not worth the time of a busy Commander in Chief. In the past few days, we have witnessed the spectacle of the President himself and his top advisers wading into allegations that Republicans are attempting to buy the election using foreign money laundered through the Chamber of Commerce, combining with Karl Rove and his wealthy backers to fund a flood of negative television commercials. Not only is this issue convoluted and far-fetched, but it also distracts from the issues voters care about, frustrating political insiders and alienating struggling citizens (not that many are following such an offbeat story line). Feinting and gibing can't obscure those job numbers. (See the best viral campaign ads of 2010.)

The President and Democrats have passed many significant measures (the stimulus spending, the auto-company rescue, the health care law and the financial regulation effort) that someday may be seen as brave and bold, the foundation for a better economy. Obama and his closest aides certainly think that will happen. But the President was correct when he said Friday, "the only piece of economic news that folks still looking for work want to hear is, 'You're hired,'" and that's still not occurring for too many Americans.

The politically good news for Obama is that no matter what the outcome of the midterm elections, everything changes in January. Republicans will have a greater obligation, politically and morally, to help govern, rather than thwart and badger. The President will get a chance, in his State of the Union address and in his budget proposal, to show he is turning the page on the political horrors of 2010 for his party and the nation. But before then, Republicans are almost certainly going to demonstrate that you *can* beat something with nothing, especially when Americans seem to think that the Obama Administration hasn't much to offer either, except more of the same that isn't working.

- Find this article at:
- <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,2024718,00.html>

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-----Original Message-----

From: H <HDR22@clintonemail.com>

To: 'sbwhoeop [redacted]' <sbwhoeop [redacted]>

Sent: Sun, Oct 10, 2010 8:24 pm

Subject: Re: H: The Boehner poll. Sid

I gave to Bill who is trying to influence strategy.

----- Original Message -----

From: sbwhoeop [redacted] <sbwhoeop [redacted]>

To: H

Sent: Fri Oct 08 16:08:27 2010

Subject: H: The Boehner poll. Sid

The Huffington Post <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>> <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>>

Drew Westen <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/drew-westen/>>

Psychologist and neuroscientist; Emory University Professor

Posted: October 8, 2010 09:23 AM

B6

Bringing Up Boehner <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/drew-westen/post_1034_b_755497.html>

According to news reports, today Republican minority leader and Coppertone model John Boehner will give his "closing argument" to the American people on why they should throw out the Democrats and kill the Obama-Pelosi-Reid "job-killing agenda." He will be returning to his working class roots, speaking at a piping manufacturing plant, an unusual venue these days for a man who is seen much more frequently at gatherings of Wall Street executives with open checkbooks and the males-only country club where he works on his tan when not making the rounds at other clubs with industry lobbyists.

Either the Speaker-to-be is following the model of Michael Steele and free-lancing, or Karl Rove and the Republicans believe it is safe or even advantageous to bring him out in public after the White House made an effort to put Boehner's face on what a Republican majority might look like, with the president invoking his name eight times in one speech.

I have to admit that at the time I was agnostic as to whether it made sense to try to brand him at this late date, as Boehner has minimal name recognition among voters. But the White House was no doubt responding to three realities. First, Boehner is an unknown to most Americans, which means that, unlike most Republicans in the news, he has not been well branded by the GOP -- which means for once Democrats might actually brand someone or something first rather than playing catch-up. Second, Boehner would indeed be the highest-ranking Republican were the GOP to assume control over the House (other than of course Karl Rove, who is now directing traffic on the right side of the street in Washington again). And third, a concrete face is always better than an abstraction when telling a story, and other than perhaps Sarah Palin, who Republicans could alternately accept and decline as the leader of their party, Boehner's tanned visage and history as errand-boy for virtually every major corporate special interest in his two decades in Washington (including his stint as the Marlboro Man, handing out tobacco lobby campaign checks to his fellow Republicans on the floor of the House) made him a potential counter-villain to the Republican's bogeywoman, Nancy Pelosi.

I remained agnostic until this week, when colleagues at Media Matters Action Network and I conducted a national messaging survey <<http://cloudfront.mediamattersaction.org/static/images/pdf/BrandingBoehner.pdf>> with 1,000 registered voters, selected to match the demographics of the voting and likely voting populations. The goal was to see how effectively we could speak with voters about Boehner as not only the symbol and standard-bearer for the GOP but also the water-boy for corporate America. (The results were surprisingly similar whether we looked at registered voters or likely voters, although as others have described, precisely how to determine who is a "likely voter" in this election is as much art as science, and the point of good messaging at this point is actually to change the dynamics of likely voting, not just to reflect them.)

As detailed in a memo published in Politico, what we found was clear: Boehner is a target well worth defining, who readily stands for precisely what Americans perceive to be the reasons they would have to hold their noses to vote for Congressional Republicans (perhaps the only group left who poll worse than Congressional Democrats with swing voters). We tested both paragraph-length narratives and single-sentence language designed to capture the essence of those narratives, and in each case, we tested them against the toughest opposition language we could test them against: the words of Boehner, Cantor, Limbaugh and others combined in defining the "Obama-Pelosi-Reid" agenda.

What we found, in brief, is that we could beat a tough GOP narrative about the

"job-killing" socialists in the White House and Congress by 15 to 20 points with two narratives starring Boehner in the leading role (with best supporting bad actor going in one of the narratives to Karl Rove and his corporate allies), and we could win with over 15 different sentence-long descriptions of "what's the matter with Boehner" with margins ranging from 10 to 60 points against a tough conservative attack on the Obama-Pelosi-Reid axis of conservative evil. The narratives that most moved likely voters -- including swing voters, who preferred them by double-digits over tough Republican rhetoric -- made clear whose voices Boehner would be speaking for as Speaker (e.g., the Wall Street executives he convened to try to block Wall Street reform). They harnessed the same populist anger at the hijacking of Washington by corporate special interests that has enlivened the tea partiers and is palpable across the political spectrum, and they focused on the extremism of the party Boehner would Speak for. A narrative that brought Karl Rove into the picture was slightly more polarizing with swing voters but slightly more powerful with likely Democratic voters.

In some ways what was most surprising was the success of the single-line statements of what we need in a Speaker and who John Boehner really speaks for (although these single-line statements came after the narratives, and likely reflect the power of branding, even over the course of a brief online encounter with voters). They ranged from relatively lofty and aspirational (e.g., "We need a Speaker who is also a listener, who can hear the voices of ordinary Americans" -- a theme colleagues and I found highly resonant across the political spectrum in message testing on the role of money in politics) -- to the harder-edged (e.g., "The Speaker of the House is a heartbeat away from the Presidency. Unfortunately, we know where John Boehner's heart is, and it isn't with the middle class," or "John Boehner understands deficits. He's spent nearly 20 years in Washington creating them.")

If there's a message in this message research, it is at once short-term and long-term. In the short run, if Democrats want to hang onto their seats in November, they would do well to define this election in terms of the middle class and small business versus the billionaires and big corporations that are hijacking our democracy; to use Boehner as a poster child for the party whose primary commitment is to the latter and whose tan is a testament to that commitment; and to avoid giving voters reason to regret their vote if they give it to Democrats again this time, by supporting the things they say they stand for and avoiding that golden mean between the public interest and the special interests that finance campaigns on both sides of the aisle.

In the longer run, branding matters. One of the biggest strategic and messaging mistakes of the last two years was the failure of Democrats to brand their opponents while their opponents were busy branding them -- and in particular the failure to brand the Bush Recession as the natural consequence of failed Republican economic principles. Two years ago, that was a virtually uncontested political proposition, as the voters made clear in handing Democrats the White House and supermajorities in both the House and Senate. Today, the public is split down the middle as to who caused the recession.

Reality doesn't brand itself. Hopefully it won't take a debacle in November and another 10 million jobs lost for reality to unveil itself again for a brief political moment and for progressives to have a second bite at the apple.

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