

New Poll: Nation on Wrong Track ... So Which Party Gets the Blame?

☒ I read an interesting letter in the Wall Street Journal the other day. It came from George in Seattle and was critical to how the president is scaring everybody over supposed “cuts” in spending brought on by sequester. Here’s what George writes:

“Can you imagine the private sector responding the way this administration is, with a 5% cutback that isn’t a real cutback? Imagine Hilton Hotels telling its customers that the beds might not be made. Imagine Hertz saying there would be hour-and-a-half waits at the counter or General Electric postponing locomotive deliveries. This is a reflection of how dumb the administration really thinks we are.”

I was with George right up until that last sentence. Yes, he’s right that the Obama administration thinks the American people are not too bright. But it’s not just that the president and his team *think* we’re dumb. We *are* dumb. (Not you and me of course.)

I’m reminded of how clueless the American people can be by a couple of new polls. An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll shows that 59% of us think the country is moving in the wrong direction; only 32 percent think we’re moving in the right direction. When asked how the president is handling the economy, 44 percent approve, 51 percent disapprove.

When a vast majority of the American people think we’re heading the wrong way and believe the president isn’t handling the economy well, that’s very bad news for the people in charge. Except when it isn’t.

The same poll tells us that 50 percent of the American people approve of the job President Obama is doing. According to Rasmussen, 51 percent approve. (A Gallup poll just out has slightly different numbers: only 46 percent approve of the job President Obama is doing and the same number disapprove.)

So let's see if I have this straight: about 6 out of 10 Americans think we're heading south, more than half don't like the way the president is taking care of the economy ... and still half the country or a little more approves of the job the president is doing. Granted, 50 percent isn't great, but it's not all that bad either.

Rasmussen also reports that consumer confidence has hit its lowest point since last November. This should also be bad news for the president and Democrats in general. But it isn't.

According to the NBC/WSJ poll, Americans prefer Democrats when it comes to looking out for the middle class, for handling health care, and for dealing with Medicare and Social Security. Voters even prefer Democrats on taxes ... and think the Democratic Party is doing a better job with the economy, but only by a 32% to 30% margin.

Republicans win when asked which party can better deal with the federal deficit and control government spending and ensuring a strong national defense.

So the folks think Republicans are better at controlling federal spending and getting the deficit under control ... but numerous polls say they will blame Republicans for cutting too much if sequester – a fancy word to describe mandatory cuts in federal spending – brings on hardship. Get it? Voters think spending is out of control so they'll blame the party that wants to cut spending ... for cutting spending. Brilliant!

Why the contradictions? Because likeability counts ... and a lot of Americans just plain like the president and they just

plain don't like Republicans.

Republicans scare the American people. Republicans come off as intolerant. Republicans (thankfully, very, very few) say stupid things about "legitimate rape" and how "even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen." And too often they come across as anti-science dolts who believe dinosaurs roamed the earth side by side with humans and that the planet is only about 6,000 years old. Calling Sandra Fluke a "slut" and continuing to believe Barack Obama was born in Kenya or on Saturn or whatever the latest theory is, doesn't help either.

Republicans have better ideas about how to get the country moving, but they have a terrible public relations problem. They need an image makeover. They need to at least seem modern. They need to put a welcome sign outside a big tent. Most of all, they need an attractive, charismatic leader – a front man or woman to make their case so that ordinary Americans get it – a leader who won't be afraid to condemn the screwballs on the right as well as the left.

Otherwise, in 2014, even if a majority of Americans still think we're on the wrong track ... it won't matter. Voters will go to the polls and elect Democrats anyway – the same Democrats who proudly tell us "We don't have a spending problem" ... which, let's not forget, is something the voters don't believe. Don't feel bad if you're confused.

And if these tax-and tax-and tax-and-spend-and spend-and spend Democrats win the House and keep the Senate ... these will look like the good old days.