

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.

Could the Splinter Parties Doom Romney?

☒ According to the esteemed Rasmussen poll, President Obama did indeed get a slight upward bump in the wake of the Democratic National Convention last week at Charlotte, NC. Rasmussen focuses its polling heavily on the crucial battleground states, where the presidential race is considered more or less a toss-up, and in some of them Obama has made gains since the previous polls were taken.

In both Virginia and Ohio, which previous Rasmussen polls had shown to be tied, Obama now enjoys leads of 1 percentage point each. In Florida, where Obama previously was behind by 2 percentage points, he is now said to be ahead by that same amount.

Among the freshest polls, only the one taken in Missouri showed a favorable trend for Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Obama had moved 1 percentage point ahead of Romney after the Todd Akin “legitimate rape” gaffe, but now Romney is ahead by 3 percent, although he is still a bit short of where he was before Akin, the Republican nominee for the Senate in Missouri, put his foot in his mouth.

Rasmussen still hasn't done any polling in 29 of the 50 states (or is it 57?), but one can hardly find fault with that, because many states are so lopsidedly Democratic or Republican that polling there would be of no practical value. Of the 21 states where polling has been done, 19 show Obama performing worse than he did in 2008.

From this we can confidently conclude that Obama would do worse if the election were held today than he did in 2008, when he won 53.7 percent of the votes cast for him and his Republican opponent, John McCain.

But how much worse? Obviously, he can do worse than he did last time and still win the election.

My own manipulation of the Rasmussen figures – I will spare you the boring details – indicates that today Obama could expect to win anywhere from 50.1 percent to 50.6 percent of the popular vote awarded to the Democratic and Republican parties. As we saw in 2000, winning more popular votes than your opponent doesn't necessarily ensure victory in the electoral college, but still Obama's lead is something to be reckoned with.

With the margin between Obama and Romney so small, this could be one election in which the splinter parties make a decisive difference in the result. Generally, when Rasmussen conducts its polls in a given state, it finds that about 3 or 4 percent of the voters prefer neither Obama nor Romney, but some other candidate. Sometimes, as in Virginia, the splinter parties get considerably less support; in others, such as New Mexico, they get considerably more.

I regret to say that the presence of splinter parties in the race could hurt Romney more than Obama. Gary Johnson, the Libertarian party candidate, and Virgil Goode, the Constitution party candidate, whose supporters probably would have been more likely to vote for Romney than Obama, are reportedly outdrawing Jill Stein, the Green party candidate, whose supporters generally consist of disaffected Democrats.

ABC News recently came out with a report suggesting that Goode, a former Republican congressman from Virginia, could siphon off just enough GOP voters to give that hotly contested state's 13 precious electoral votes to Obama.

Before you panic, bear in mind that the latest Rasmussen polls evidently do not reflect the public's reaction to Obama's hopelessly inept handling of the new Middle East crisis. He has shown once again that he has no business conducting our foreign affairs, no business serving as commander-in-chief of

the United States – in short, no business being President.

However, if the voters let Obama's demonstrated incompetence just wash off their backs – as many of them seem inclined to do – then we may have to brace ourselves for a very sorry election result, one that augurs ill for the democratic process.

The Mystery Continues – A Tale of Two Polls

✘ This is a tale of two brand new polls. If you think you're confused now, wait till you read this.

One poll, of registered voters, was conducted by the Wall Street Journal and NBC News. It shows President Obama with a lead of six points over Mitt Romney, 49 to 43 percent nationwide. Last month the president led by only three percentage points.

Good news for President Obama.

The other poll, of likely voters, was conducted by Rasmussen Reports. It shows Romney ahead by three percentage points, 47 to 44.

Good news for Romney.

According to Rasmussen, 64 percent of those polled say they think government should cut spending to jump start the economy, a position more in tune with Romney than the president. Only 21 percent favor more government spending.

Rasmussen also reports that, "The data clearly shows why the

president's 'you didn't build that' comments have created such a furor. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of voters believe that small business owners work harder than others. Seventy-two percent (72%) believe those who start businesses are primarily responsible for the success or failure of their own business. Most also believe that entrepreneurs create more jobs than either government programs or big business."

Back to the WSJ/NBC News Poll: Only 27 percent of voters think the economy will improve over the next year.

Very bad news for Barack Obama; potentially very good news for Mitt Romney.

And according to the Web site DC Decoder, "That's down eight points from last month. And that level of economic pessimism is very dangerous for an incumbent. In fact, it seems almost incredible – the political equivalent of defying gravity – for Obama to have gained ground in the horse race even as Americans' views on the economy have grown increasingly, alarmingly, sour.

"The question is whether Obama can continue to defy gravity like this all the way to November. Given the strikingly strong levels of dislike for Romney – who trails Obama by 20 points on likability in the poll – the president may still be able to stay on top. But we can't imagine it will continue to be this easy."

Rasmussen also has some interesting numbers regarding Electoral College votes.

He says Romney has 167 in the "safe" category; 3 in the "likely category" and 21 "leaning" to Romney. That adds up to 191 electoral votes.

President Obama has 180 in the "safe" category; 27 in the "likely" category; and 40 "leaning" in his direction. That comes to 247.

One hundred electoral votes are too close to call. It takes 270 to win.

Anyone who thinks either candidate is going to blow the other guy away isn't paying attention.

What I find troubling is that the election will come down to those who are still undecided. You know, the people who will get plenty of face time on television telling us how torn they are. Be assured that no journalist will report an indisputable fact: that these undecided will never be confused with anyone smart.

Do they say to themselves, "Let's see, on the one hand we have one of the most liberal politicians in ages running for re-election – someone I don't believe is doing much to help the economy. On the other hand, we have a businessman who I think will do a better job handling the economy and putting people back to work but I don't really like him. My oh my, who should I vote for?"

If you like Obama, fine. If you like Romney, fine. But anyone who can't decide between two very different candidates at this late date should not be allowed to vote.