

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 92

September 18, 2010

STATE OF THE NATION

1 in 5 children in the
U.S. lives in poverty

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PRESIDENT OBAMA

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THE CONGRESS

The Election is Over?

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OTHER ELECTIONS

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RESTAURANTS

New York
Two Harbors
Washington

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Cutting a bagel

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20.1% of children under the age of 18 in the United States were living in poverty in 2009 (14,807,000). That percentage grew from 18.5% of children who were so afflicted in 2008.

Even more troubling is the fact that in 2009, 24% of children 4 years of age and younger (5,056,000) were living in poverty. This is an increase from the 21.8% (4,457,000) who shared that fate in 2008.

The overall poverty rate in this country rose from 13.2% in 2008 to 14.3% in 2009. The total number of people in poverty grew from 39,800,000 in 2008 to 43,600,000 in 2009.

How is it possible that a country that can spend a billion dollars building a sports stadium and a trillion dollars fighting two wars will allow babies and children to go hungry?

WW has to wonder what would happen if half of the energy that is being spent on preserving tax breaks for the wealthy were devoted to addressing this extraordinary problem. [Source U.S. Census Bureau]

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Unemployment was at 9.6% in August ,with little prospect of any improvement between now and the election. When those who are unemployed are added to those who are underemployed, the number grows to 18.6%. [BLS;Gallup]

The country is in a recession, according to 82% of Americans, no change since 2009 when it was 84%. While 52% thought the economy was getting better a year ago, 61% now say that it is getting worse. [Gallup 9/10]

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Public opinion as to whether the country is headed in the right direction has not changed much since March.

	NBC/WSJ <u>RD/WT</u>	NYT/CBS <u>RD/WT</u>	WP/ABC <u>RD/WT</u>
September	----	33/60%	----
August (late)	30/61%	----	----
August (early)	32/58%	----	----

June	29/61%	32/60%	37/60%
March	33/59%	----	38/60%
February	----	33/62%	----
January 2010	34/54%	36/55%	37/62%
December 2009	33/55%	37/56%	----
September	39/48%	41/53%	----
June	42/46%	44/50%	47/50%
February 2009	41/44%	23/68%	31/67%

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When asked to volunteer what they believe is the most pressing problem facing the country, 32% of Americans say the “economy”. Another 28% separately say “jobs”. The next highest issues, at 3% each, are healthcare and the budget deficit. In June, 20% named the economy, 13% the gulf oil spill, and 5% cited health care. [NYT/CBS 9/10]

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In August –

38% believed the economy is in better shape now than it was 18 months ago. [AP/GfK 8/10]

64% believed that the economy still has a way to drop before it hits bottom. [WSJ/NBC 8/10]

Then in September -

81% rate the economy as bad and 30% think it is getting worse. [NYT/CBS 9/10]

92% describe the nation’s economy as poor (53%) or not so good (40%). 38% think it is getting worse. [WP/ABC 9/10]

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When it comes to the Federal government, 78% are dissatisfied with the way that it works. 22% have a positive view. [WP/ABC 9/10]

The increasing Federal debt causes 80% of Americans to be concerned about the financial future of their children and grandchildren. [AP/GfK 8/10]

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72% of Americans rely on network news, cable TV, newspapers, magazines, and radio as their primary source of political news and information. Only 14% rely on online blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and online political sites. [NBC/WSJ 8/10]

However, confidence in newspapers and TV news are at a 30 year low. Only 25% have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in newspapers, and an even lesser number, 22%, show the same level of confidence in TV news. [Gallup 8/10]

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The number of internet users, ages 50 and older, who engage in social networking, has grown from 22% to 42% in the last year. 47% of those 50-64 and 26% of those 65 and older now spend time on social network sites. This compares to 86% of those 18-29 who use these sites. Among those 30-49, 61% say they are engaged in social networking.

Twitter and similar services are growing, but have not come close to the massive use of Facebook and the like. 11% of those 50-64 use these tools. At that, it is still twice what it was a year ago.

Even with the adoption of these new tools, email is still the most popular with those over the age of 50. 92% of those 50-64 and 89% of the 65 and older crowd send or read email. 76% of the 50-64 year olds get news online, 42% of them on any given day. 62% of the over 65 group get news online; about a third of them do so on any given day. [Pew Research]

As of 2008, there were 133 million English language websites.
[Technorati.com]

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Wyoming (53%), Mississippi (53%), Utah (51%), and South Dakota (50%) are the most conservative States. While DC (42%), Rhode Island (32%), Connecticut (29%), and Vermont (29%) are the most liberal. [Gallup 8/10]

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In January 2010, 28% were positive about the Tea Party Movement, while 21% were negative. 31% had no opinion. Now, only 13% do not have an opinion; 30% have a positive opinion, while 34% have a negative opinion. This suggests that getting to know the Movement is not to come to love it. [NBC/WSJ 8/10]

There are other surveys that suggest there has been little change in attitudes about the Tea Party. The number who consider it favorably (31%), the number who agree with its positions (34%), and the number who consider themselves to be supporters (28%) have not really changed in the last 4 months. [AP/GfK 8/10]

However, there is no way of denying that the Tea Party is having an impact on the electoral process that was not anticipated at the beginning of this year.

There are a lot assumptions being made about whether they will have a significant impact in November. There are a good many folks that continue to give the Movement the back of its hand. That may be a mistake.

Whether or not you agree with the movement's point of view, no one can really predict the degree to which it will influence the election this fall.

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THE PRESIDENT

If one steps back and thinks about what has been accomplished during the first 21 months of the Obama administration, the list is quite impressive:

- Healthcare Reform
- Increased regulation of banks and financial institutions
- The largest economic stimulus package in history
- Rescue of 2 major U.S. auto manufacturers
- Setting a timetable for withdrawal of troops from Iraq
- And sticking to it
- Lifting restrictions on stem cell research
- Expanding children's health insurance
- Appointed the first Latina and the 4th woman to the Supreme Court

The list actually goes on and on. The irony is that most of the major accomplishments are not popular with the public.

- Increasing regulation of financial institutions receives 61% approval
- 52% disapprove the economic stimulus package
- 56% disapprove salvaging the auto makers
- 61% disapprove the rescue of banks and other financial Institutions

The initiative that took the most time and effort, reform of the healthcare system, is disapproved by 56%. [Gallup 9/10]

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40% think the country is worse off since Obama became President, as opposed to 31% who say the country is better off.

32% strongly relate to him while 27% do not relate to him.

40% are confident that the President has the right goals and Policies, while 38% are not at all confident.

65% say he has “fallen short” of changing business as usual in Washington.

67% say he has “fallen short” as relates to the budget deficit.

60% say he has “fallen short” on the economy.

29% find the President too anti-business, while 14% think he is too pro-business.

[NBC/WSJ 8/10]

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To this day, Obama is essentially not being blamed for the current economy. In fact, his administration ranks a poor fifth on a list of those who might be blamed. 37% still blame the Bush administration, while 21% blame Wall Street and financial institutions. Congress shows up next, at 11%, and 8% select “someone else”. The Obama administration comes in at 5%. [NYT/CBS 9/10]

The President’s approval rating has been below 50% since the middle of the year.

Obama overall job approval (App/Disapp)

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>
September 2010	----	----	46/52%
August 2010	47/48%	48/44% (CBS)	----
July 2010	----	44/44% (CBS)	50/47%

June 2010	45/48%	47/43%	----
March 2010	48/47%	49/41%	53/33%
February 2010	----	46/45%	51/46%
January 2010	48/43%	50/40%	53/44%
December 2009	47/46%	50/39%	50/46%
October	51/42%	----	57/40%
September	51/41%	56/33%	54/43%
August	51/40%	----	57/40%
July	53/40%	----	58/37%
June	56/34%	63/26%	65/31%
April	61/30%	66/24%	69/26%
February 2009	60/26%	62/15%	68/25%

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Below is how Obama job approval plays among various segments of the population, based on the August NBC/WSJ survey.

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Approve	44%	49%	55%	43%	48%	35%
Disapprove	51%	44%	39%	51%	48%	59%

	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Suburban</u>	<u>Rural</u>
Approve	82%	31%	12%	57%	41%	33%
Disapprove	13%	60%	84%	38%	53%	59%

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When matched against the approval ratings of the last 8 Presidents in late August/early September of the 2nd year of their initial terms in office, Obama continues in 6th place, just ahead of Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton. [Based on Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
Bush (I)	76	16-(September)
Kennedy	63	22-(September)
GW Bush (II)	66	29-(September)
Eisenhower	66	21-(September)
Nixon	57	30-(September)
<u>Obama</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>46</u> -(September)
Reagan	42	48-(September)

Carter	42	42-(September)
Clinton	39	54-(September)

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Personal feelings about the President have declined, although they remain more positive than negative

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
August 2010	46%	41%
June 2010	47%	40
March 2010	50%	38%
January 2010	52%	35%
December 2009	50%	30%
October	56%	33%
September	56%	33%
April	64%	23%
February	68%	19%
January 2009	66%	14% [NBC/WSJ]

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When it comes to the economy, Obama's job approval rating has not been in positive territory since the middle of 2009.

Obama job approval/disapproval on the economy

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>Wash Post/ABC</u>
September 2010	---	41/51%	41/47%
August 2010	44/52%	----	----
July 2010	----	----	43/54%
June 2010	48/50%	45/48%	50/49%
March 2010	47/50%	45/45%	45/52%
February 2010	----	42/52%	45/53%
January 2010	43/49%	46/48%	47/52%
December 2009	42/51%	47/43%	46/52%
October	47/46%	54/38%	50/48%
June	51/38%	57/35%	56/41%
February 2009	56/31%	55/24%	60/34%

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Here is how Obama is rated on his handling of the Federal budget deficit.

Approve/Disapprove

September 2010	39/58%	
July 2010	40/56%	
March	43/52%	
February	40/45%	
January 2010	38/56%	
December 2009	37/56%	
October	45/51%	
September	39/55%	
August	41/53%	
July	43/49%	
June	48/48%	
April 2009	51/43%	[WP/ABC]

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There is no doubt that the President is an extraordinary speaker. He can move an audience, especially an audience that is in the room with him. But the President rarely speaks directly to his largest audience, the American public at large, those people who are never in the room, the people (like WW) that only see and hear him through the magic of TV or the internet.

Because the President relies on tele-prompters on almost every public occasion, he constantly looks to his left and to his right. Rarely does he look straight ahead. The only time he has looked “me” in the eye is on his weekly Saturday video commentary from the Oval Office and his two primetime Oval Office addresses. The reason he looks me in the eye on those occasions is because the tele-prompter is straight ahead, under the lens of the TV camera.

Look me in the eye Mr. President.

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GOVERNORS

Ordinarily WW does not follow governors' races. However, with reapportionment on the table in 2011-12, control of governors' offices is particularly important.

Here is a summary of the current status of the 37 gubernatorial races to be decided in November, as reported by the Cook Political Report. [Selection of toss-ups as leaning one way or the other is by WW]

	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Republican</u>
Current	26	24
	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Republican</u>
Not up in 2010	7	6
Safe in 2010	3	6
Lean in 2010	4	3
Sub total	14	20
Toss Ups that		
Lean D or R	3	7
Sub total	17	27
Toss Ups	6	

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THE CONGRESS

Is the 2010 Congressional election effectively over?

The die is cast and, with a few exceptions, many, if not most, competitive races in the Senate and House are decided. There is a flood, and it seems to be rolling over the Democrats. Only if there is a sudden increase in interest in the election by Democratic voters will the anticipated outcome be modified.

It is not that the Republicans are so popular. In fact, the Republican Party is less popular than the Democratic Party. In the August NBC/WSJ survey the Democratic Party is rated positively by 33% of respondents, while 44% rate it negatively. The Republican Party is in worse shape, 24% rate it positively and 46% negatively.

In the most recent Gallup report on Party identification, more Americans identify themselves as being Democrats or leaning Democrat, by 44% to 41%, than as Republicans. This is a slight improvement from Gallup's August survey, which found equal numbers (42%) identifying with each of the Parties.

However, even this latest finding represents a significant drop in the number claiming a Democratic Party affiliation, as well as the spread between the two Parties. The following are the poll's findings over the last 21 months.

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	
January 2009	52%	35%	D+17
September 2009	47	38	D+9
January 2010	45	40	D+5
August 2010	42	42	--
September 2010	44	41	D+3

Democrats are more trusted than Republicans to do a "better job of coping with the problems the nation faces over the next few years," by 40% to 37%.

By 45%-42% Americans think Democrats most represent their values, and by 48%-39% they think Democrats are more concerned with the needs of people like themselves. [WP/ABC 9/10]

Americans trust the Democrat Party more than the Republican party to handle the economy and health care by small margins. They trust the Republican Party over the Democrat Party to handle immigration, Afghanistan, the budget deficit, and taxes by similar margins. [WP/ABC 9/10]

However, the Democrats are the Party in power, and its Congressional members are being held accountable for the fact that life is not going well for so many people.

Only 33% of registered voters say their Member of Congress should be re-elected. 59% say that most Republicans in Congress should not be re-elected, while 58% say the same thing about most Democrats in Congress.

Disapproval of the job being done by the Congress is one subject on which most polls seem to agree. The Real Clear Politics average for August was 73% disapprove – 22% Approve.

Additionally, if you are unhappy with President Obama, one of the ways in which you can specifically express your feelings is by voting against Democrat candidates for Congress.

When they hear about the major accomplishments of the administration and the Congress they do not see how these actions will make their lives better now. In fact they think some of those “accomplishments” are antithetical to what they see as their best interests.

The 2008 election was set up as a “choice” election. Democrats were chosen to continue control of the Congress and to take control of the White House. Voters seem to be coming to the conclusion that they made the wrong choices in 2008, and they are planning to try and rectify their “mistake” in 2010.

There is no doubt that the Democrats will lose seats in the Senate and the House in November; the question is how many?

Those who follow the races most thoroughly (not including the various Party political committees) seem confident that the Democrats will retain control of the Senate, with a narrow 52-53 seat margin, including the two independents.

There are predictions about the future control of the House available around every corner. Some of opinions are worth more than others. But among those who have some credibility, the number of likely Democrat losses ranges from 37 to 60. The two public prognosticators with whom WW is most comfortable are Charlie Cook, who is now predicting a 40 seat Democratic loss, and Stu Rothenberg, who is suggesting a 37-42 seat Republican pickup.

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With Labor Day behind us, it is hard to see what might happen that would boost the fate of endangered Democrat incumbents.

The primary season has not been kind to incumbents. 7 of them have lost primary contests. Among the 4 Republicans are two Senators (Bennett –UT, Murkowski -Alaska) and 2 House members (Griffith –AL 5th and Inglis – SC 4th). The 3 Democrats include 1 Senator (Specter – PA) and 2 House members (Kilpatrick – MI 13th and Mollohan – WV 1st).

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U.S. SENATE

The Senate landscape continues to change. The number of Safe Democrat seats has dropped from 8 to 7, while the number of Safe GOP seats has jumped from 13 to 14. There continue to be 12 seats rated as Toss Ups.

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Since the first issue of WW in this cycle, April 2009, the number of Senate seats that are Solid or Leaning Democrat has dropped from 15 to 8. The number of Solid or Leaning Republican seats has grown from 15 to 18 and back to 17. The number of Toss-up seats has grown from 7 to 12.

	<u>Solid D</u>	<u>Lean D</u>	<u>T-up</u>	<u>Lean R</u>	<u>Solid R</u>
September 2010	7	1	12	3	14
July 2010	8	1	12	3	13
June 2010	7	2	9	6	12
March 2010	7	3	8	6	12
November 2009	10	4	10	3	11
August 2009	9	6	7	3	12
June 2009	9	7	6	3	12
April 2009	9	6	7	4	11

Of the 12 Toss-Up races, 1 leans Democrat, 6 lean to the GOP and 5 are even.

THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats	57
Republicans	41
Independents	2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 37 Senate elections (19 Democratic incumbents, 18 Republican incumbents) look to me at this time (underlining reflects retirement). (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. incumbent in office) [*Gillibrand]

Safe	Leaning		Leaning	Safe
<u>Democrat(7)</u>	<u>Democrat(2)</u>	<u>Toss-Up(12)</u>	<u>Republican(3)</u>	<u>Republican(13)</u>
Hawaii	Connecticut	California	Arkansas	Alabama
Maryland	Delaware	Colorado	Louisiana	Alaska
New York(A)		Florida	No. Carolina	Arizona
New York(B)*		Illinois		Georgia
Oregon		Kentucky		Idaho
Vermont		<u>Missouri</u>		Indiana
West Virginia		Nevada		Iowa
		<u>New Hampsh.</u>		<u>Kansas</u>
		<u>Ohio</u>		No. Dakota
		<u>Pennsylvania</u>		Oklahoma
		Washington		So. Carolina
		Wisconsin		So. Dakota
				Utah

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2010	39	22	2
Safe in 2010	7	13	0
Leaning in 2010	2	3	0
Total	48	38	2

Toss-ups	12 (5R/7D)
	Even 5
	Lean GOP 6
	Lean Dem 1

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Following her victory in Delaware, most everyone on both sides of the political aisle have written off Christine O'Donnell's prospects in the general election. There is much to speak for that position. O'Donnell has said some pretty "interesting" things in her past life, and there are hints that she is not the most responsible person in her personal life.

However, this is not an ordinary year, and if it looks to the voters of Delaware that she is being picked on unnecessarily, and if she spends her time talking about the things they care about....just about anything might be possible.

Here is something to ponder. If Charlie Crist (running as an Independent) wins the Senate race in Florida, with whom will he caucus? In the short run, it would seem logical that he would caucus with the Democrats. He is disappointed with the Republicans in Florida, and it is generally better to be part of the majority than the minority.

On the other hand, if after he is elected, he looks beyond the current Senate, to the 2012 Senate elections he may decide he is better off caucusing with the Republicans from the outset. In 2012, 23 Democrat incumbents are on the ballot, as opposed to 9 Republicans. If he decides to go with the Democrats, he might find himself in the minority two years later.

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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There is no question that the Democrats will lose a large number of House seats in the coming election. Theoretically, a 39-seat shift will give the Republicans control. However, there is general agreement that the Republicans will probably lose 3 or 4 of the seats they currently hold. If that occurs, the magic number is 42 or 43.

The generic ballot question is considered to be significant when it comes to predicting House elections, but not Senate elections.

The poll that surveys most often on this question is Gallup. For the week of August 23-29 it showed the Republicans winning by 10 points, 51% - 41%. This was the highest spread that Gallup had found for either Party in its history.

In its survey conducted from August 30-September 5, Gallup found an even 46%-46% split on its generic ballot. It has to make you wonder whether something wasn't a little wacky with one or the other of these surveys. But fear not, in its most recent survey conducted September 6-12, Gallup reported a 5-point Republican advantage, 48%-43%. That makes everything perfectly clear.

There are often differences in result if the question is asked of likely voters rather than registered voters. Especially in a mid-term election, the number and

nature of the voters who will actually come out on election day is dramatically different. An example of this difference shows up in the last WP/ABC survey (8/30-9/2). Registered voters said they would vote Republican by 47%-45%. Likely voters went Republican 53% to 40%.

A second example is the September 10-14 NYT/CBS survey. Among all adults the Democrats are up +4 percentage points. Among likely voters, the Republicans are up +2 percentage points.

In the surveys noted below the question is asked of registered voters, unless otherwise noted.

Set out below are results from a series of surveys conducted since early summer.

<u>Survey</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>R/D</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Gallup	7/10-12/09	44/50	D+6
PEW	8/20-27/09	44/45	D+1
ABC/WP	2/4-8/10	48/45	R+3
Gallup	3/1-7	44/47	D+3
Gallup	5/21-6/6	46/46	0
ABC/WP	6/3-6	44/47	D+3
PEW	6/16-20	45/45	0
Fox	6/29-30	42/40	R+2
Gallup	6/28-7/3	46/44	R+2
CNN/OR	7/16-29	49/44	R+5
Fox	7/27-28	47/36	R+11
Gallup	8/9-15	50/43	R+7
AP/GfK	8/11-16	49/45	R+4
Gallup	8/23-29	51/41	R+10
USAToday/Gallup	8/27-30	49/43	R+6
ABC/WP RV	8/30-9/2	47/45	R+2
ABC/WP LV	8/30-9/2	53/40	R+13
Gallup RV	8/30-9/5	46/46 ---	
Fox	9/1-2	46/37	R+9
CNN/OR	9/1-2	52/45	R+7
Gallup RV	9/6-12	48/43	R+5
NYT/CBS	9/10-14	36/40	D+4
NYT/CBS LV	9/10-14	40/38	R+2

The NBC/WSJ survey puts the question slightly differently than most of the others: it asks respondents for their preference for the outcome of the coming Congressional elections. Therefore, its results for this summer are listed separately. So far this year, it is questioning registered vs. likely voters.

NBC/WSJ	6/10	45/43	R+2
NBC/WSJ	8/10(early)	42/43	D+1
NBC/WSJ	8/10(late)	43/43	0

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For at least the last 30 years the incumbent President's Party has not gained seats in a mid-term election.

One of the indicators of how many seats a President's Party will lose is the President's approval rating leading up to the election in the Gallup survey. Other apparent indicators, at least since 1994, are the Wrong Track number in the NBC/WSJ survey (ex: are things in the country on the wrong track) and the disapproval of Congress number in the ABC/WP survey.

Here is what the numbers looked like in late August and early September of the election years listed below.

	Pres Job Approval	Wrong Track	Job Disapproval of Congress	Seats lost
Carter 1978	49%	--	--	-15 seats
Reagan 1982	42%	--	--	-20 seats
Reagan 1986	63%	--	--	- 5 seats
Bush I 1990	54%	40%	63%	- 8 seats
Clinton 1994	41%	57%	70%	-54 seats
Clinton 1998	65%	35%	44%	- 5 seats
Bush II 2002	62%	43%	43%	- 8 seats
Bush II 2006	37%	54%	55%	-30 seats
Obama 2010	45%			

The number of seats that the Cook Political Report rates as solidly Democrat has dropped by 43 seats since April 2009, from 197 to 154. The total number of solidly Republican seats has grown from 139 to 161. The number of Toss-Ups has grown from 5-45 seats. Of the current Toss-Ups, 42 are currently held by Democrats. This is an increase of 38 since April 2009 and an increase of 12 since July 2010.

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>9/6/10</u>	
Solid Dem	197	154	(-43)
Likely Dem	36	25	(-11)
Lean Dem	19	30	(+11)
TOTAL Dem	252	209	(-43)
TOTAL GOP	178	181	(+ 3)
Lean GOP	4	6	(+ 2)
Likely GOP	35	14	(-21)
Solid GOP	139	161	(+22)

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The fact that there are more than 100 conservative candidates on the ballot likely works for the Democrats. These folks are more likely to siphon votes away from the Republicans.

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 256
Republicans 179

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>12/16/09</u>	<u>3/31/10</u>	<u>7/24/10</u>	<u>9/6/10</u>
TOTAL Dem	252	242	227	221	209
Solid Dem	197	174	162	154	154
Likely Dem	36	45	35	34	25
Lean Dem	19	23	30	33	30
Toss-up	5	19	27	33	45
D	4	16	25	30	42
R	1	3	2	3	3
Lean GOP	4	8	7	7	6
Likely GOP	35	15	14	13	14
Solid GOP	139	151	160	161	161
TOTAL GOP	178	174	181	181	181

[As always, thanks to the “Cook Political Report,” which is the best when it comes to analysis of Congressional races (as well as other electoral matters)].

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THIS AND THAT

The words “race car” spelled backwards spell “race car.” The word “eat” is the only word that, if you take the first letter and move it to the last, spells the past tense, “ate.”

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On June 27, 1967, there was one, and now there are 2,149,510 of them. The reference is to ATM machines. The most northerly ATM is located at Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway; the most southerly at McMurdo Station, Antarctica; the highest in Nagehu County, Tibet; the lowest at Eiu Bokek on the Dead Sea, in a grocery store.

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For the first time, in the 2008-09 academic year, more women (28,962) than men (28,469) earned doctorates. While male faculty members on average earn about \$17,000 per year more than women faculty members, starting salaries for beginning faculty are roughly gender equal.

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Approval of labor unions is at 52%, up a bit from the historical low point of 48% a year ago. [Gallup 8/10]

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More people know the name of the Commander of US forces in Afghanistan (55%) than the name of the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court (28%),

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RESTAURANTS

Note: I was asked the other day why I never suggest that a restaurant is not very good. As I think I noted many years ago, I only write about restaurants that I enjoyed either for the cuisine or accommodation.

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MAS (farmhouse)
39 Downing Street
New York, New York 10014
212-255-1790
Fax 212-255-0279
info@masfarmhouse.com

Susie, Jimmy, Debbie, and I came here for dinner after an evening of theater – “Bloody Andrew Jackson.”

As you enter, there is a small area to the left where you can sit to have a drink, probably a waiting area for those whose tables are not yet available. There is a bar to the right.

The main dining area seats about 50 people. There is a banquet that runs along the front wall of the dining area; it continues along the long side wall of the restaurant, and then continues along a part of the back wall of the dining area. There are a series of two-person tables that can be put together for larger parties. We had a great table in the far back corner of the dining area, which allowed us to sit on 3 sides of a table.

On the other long wall of the dining area is a community table with 5 chairs on each side. The walls are dark and dimly lit. The floors are of wood. There is a private dining room behind near the end of the bar.

One of the interesting options of the restaurant is to allow its patrons to order half portions of two entrees.

Susie started with a Salad of Local Green Asparagus and Mizuna with a Pickled Ramp Vinaigrette, Ricotta Dressed with Tarragon and Pink Pepperworms. She then had a half-portion of Ravioli of Goat Cheese, Parsley and Lemon Zest, Roasted Baby Beets and Sugar Snap Peas with a Roasted Garlic Foam, and a half order of Roasted Wild Striped Bass, Ramps Sautéed with Smoked Shiitake, Carrot-Coriander Puree and Fiddlehead Ferns. For dessert she selected Wild Huckleberry-Hazelnut Tart, Huckleberry Ice Cream and Honey Crème Fraiche.

Debbie started with a half-portion of the Ravioli, and then a similar portion of the Pacific Halibut Crushed with Sea Scallops in a Saffron-Cockle Broth, Braised Spring Onions, Fava Beans and a Spring Onion Fondue. She also savored the Huckleberry Tart.

Wild Nettle Soup with a Parmesan Foam and a Stew of Hen of the Woods Mushrooms was the appetizer choice of Jim. He followed that with Roasted Long Island Duck Breast with Mustard Greens and Farro Baby Turnips Glazed with Olives and Rosemary, Turnip Green Puree and a half portion of the Bass. His dessert – a Hazelnut-Milk Chocolate Mousse over Cocoa Streusel, Salted Caramel Ice Cream & Chocolate Ganache.

I started with Duck Rillettes with Moutarde Violette and Toasted Brioche, Rhubarb Compote, Field Mache and Dick Crackling Salad. Then, breaking with my usual practice of avoiding beef, I picked Braised Beef Short Ribs and Escargot Glazed and Orange and Parsley, Wild nettle Risotto and Baby Carrots. I was glad I made the exception. They were perfect. The restaurant was not comfortable with the idea that I would only have one entrée, while each of the others were having two, so they brought me a tasting of another entrée, but I do not recall what it was. I finished with Poached Rhubarb over White Chocolate Ganache, Rhubarb Sorbet with a Pistachio Sablee.

The service was very good. I was particularly taken with the fact that our serving person was not comfortable with me having one less course than my companions.

The menu changes daily, and although I do not know what time each day's menu is posted online, it is likely that you can take a look at the menu before you decide whether you want to eat at the restaurant that day.

The men's room is tiny. It reminded me of Quince, in its old location in San Francisco. It is very dim. There is a white ceramic commode and a very small white ceramic washbasin. Next to the washbasin is a small stand and over it a mirror. There is a pile of towels. The walls are dark blue.

Reservations are generally required.

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VANILLA BEAN CAFE
812 Seventh Avenue (Highway 61)
Two Harbors, Minnesota 55616
218-834-3714
218-834-2219 Fax
www.TheVanillaBean.com

We decided to have breakfast at the Vanilla Bean because it opened at 7:00 a.m. and was a 10 minute ride from the resort at which we were staying. When we arrived at 7:30 a.m. there were 3 other people in the dining room. By 8:00 a.m. every chair was filled, with people ranging in age from pre-teen to their 70s.

Debbie started with a cup of excellent vanilla bean coffee, while I enjoyed a perfectly done hot chocolate.

The cafe is famous for its oven-baked omelets. The omelets are round, baked in metal pans, and are about 8 inches across and about an inch high. I have never seen nor eaten anything like it except, perhaps, for a deep dish pizza. Of the hundreds (thousands?) of omelets I have eaten nothing comes close.

Debbie ordered the White Pine omelet, with a side of well-done bacon and toast. The stuffings included mushrooms, artichokes, mozzarella, provolone, Asiago and Parmesan cheeses.

I opted for the Thunder Bay omelet, with a side of well-done bacon. The stuffings included ham, cheddar-jack cheese and mushrooms.

There is a firm "crust" around the circumference.

One option that grabbed my attention before I chose the omelet was the Scandinavian Breakfast: golden grilled slices of caramel pecan bread-pudding dazzled with burnt sugar caramel sauce. It comes with ham, bacon or sausage.

If you end up going for lunch rather than breakfast, there is a wide range of sandwiches. The one that I would order first is the Cranberry Club: smoked turkey, sliced ham, bacon, cucumber, tomato, field greens, with cran-mayo on toasted cranberry bread.

Dinner is also served.

There are 37 seats in the dining room: 6 booths on two walls of the restaurant that seat 24. There are 3 tables in the middle of the room that will seat up to 12, and a table that seats only one person.

There is a private dining room that seats up to 28 people.

The restroom is pretty "plain vanilla." There is a white ceramic commode and an accompanying washbasin with a mirror over it. The walls are painted a dull yellow and the floor is covered with large grey tiles. There is a sign above the

washbasin that states "Please be careful hot water is very hot." The room is clean, but there is a slight musty odor.

By the way, there is a sign on the wall of the dining room that says "Save your fork."

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There are two other treats within a block of the Vanilla Bean. Literally attached to the Vanilla Bean is a Bridgeman's ice cream store. Growing up in Duluth, Bridgemans was the most popular ice cream parlor. There were two of them.

All of the ice creams are excellent, but there is a particular sundae, called the Lala Palooza, that is very good. It was so large that it was usually shared by two or more people. If you finished it on your own, you were given a certificate suitable for framing. On one occasion, I ate two Lala Palooza's in one sitting. It was a store record for a long time.

The other treat, just a block away, was a Dairy Queen. There is nothing like a large Dairy Queen in a cup covered with hot fudge.

How to Get There From D.C.

By Plane: Delta Airlines from D.C. to Minneapolis, transfer to Delta connection for trip to Duluth. Rent car and drive one hour. If you take the 6:47 a.m. plane from National Airport, you can get to the Vanilla bean in time for a 12:30 p.m. lunch.

By Automobile: Drive 1195 miles, 20 hours

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SIROC Restaurant
915 15th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
223-627-2200
Fax 202-628-2234
www.sirocrestaurant.com
info@sirocrestaurant.com

Dinner at Siroc was Florence's idea. She had become something approaching a regular. Peter came along to chaperone. It was a great choice.

The restaurant is bright and cheery (quite a change from the previous restaurant in that location) and has been open from something over a year.

There is inside seating for 63 people at tables of 2, 3, 4 and 5. Another 30 seats are available outside when the weather permits. While the tables are not all that far apart, the acoustics of the restaurant are such that the diners at each table can have a private conversation, even though it is a bit noisy.

It was restaurant week and there were two menu's available, a fixed price menu and the regular menu. Florence and Peter opted for the restaurant week menu and I selected from the regular menu.

Florence started with the Maryland Crab Cake served with Sautéed Local White Corn, Baby Clams and Heirloom Tomatoes with a Caper Aioli. For her entrée she chose the Filet of Sea Bream on a Zucchini Puree with Local Red Fingerling Potatoes, Yellow Oyster Mushrooms and a Caviar Sauce. For dessert Florence went with Crepe filled with Milk Chocolate Mousse and crushed Pistachios served with a Blackberry Sauce.

Peter opted for the Caesar Salad of Baby Romaine and Treviso Radicchio served with Roasted Shrimp, White Anchovies and Roasted Garlic Focaccia Croutons. His main course was Lamb Shank Braised with local Tomatoes and Red Onions, served with Cannellini Beans and Patty Pan Squash. Peter gave me a piece of his lamb; it was melt-in-the-mouth. He topped off his meal with the Crepe, as well.

I started with a Composed Tower of Avocado, Mango and Roasted Shrimp with Basil Oil and Smoked Prosciutto. It was a terrific combination of tastes. Next I selected the Roasted Whole Branzino served with Sautéed Spicy Spinach and Red Potatoes Roasted with Lemon Zest. It was filleted, but the skin is left on and it is served at what was the whole fish without the bone. It too was cooked perfectly. For dessert I had a Bosc Pear poached in Red Wine with Ginger. It is usually served with Mascarpone Gelato.

Our server was Claire. She was friendly, helpful and attentive. A college student. Chef/co-owner Martin Lackovic recognized Florence as having been there several times before, and stopped at our table for a chat. He noted that he is opening a second restaurant later this year at 21st and P, across from the Palomar Hotel and the Starbucks where I sometimes stop on my way to work.

The men's room has two separate rooms. The anteroom has a white ceramic washbasin with an appropriate mirror. The floor is covered with large tan tiles and the walls with a slightly darker fabric wallpaper. The commode is in a separate room, with a full wooden wall and locking door. It has the same floor tiles, but the walls are painted a related tan color. It is quite fresh.

Siroc's web page says that it "happily will seat walk-ins at any time;" however, it has become quite popular, and I would highly recommend making a reservation to sure of getting in.

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Since I ate my first bagel, slicing it in half has been a pretty routine act. I slice it laterally through the middle and do my best to avoid slicing the hand that is holding the bagel. Recently I acquired a bagel slicing device. It is danger-free.

Now I have learned that I have been cutting my bagel the wrong way. Instead of cutting it with a knife, the "better" way is to cut it through by plunging a fork laterally, repeatedly through the bagel until it has been split as if sliced in the more traditional way. (A 4-tine fork works better than a 3-tine fork.)

So what is the advantage? After you toast it, instead of a flat surface on which to put warm butter, cream cheese or peanut butter, the spread soaks into the bagel along hundreds of little peaks.

Try it.

Mike

Suite 500
2100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-728-1100
mberman@dubersteingroup.com