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## Special Election Edition

# The Midterms—Small Correction or Massive Seachange?

As Election Day draws closer, candidates on both sides of the aisle are in a fierce battle for control of Congress. Republicans are doing everything possible to rebound from the current scandal involving former Florida GOP Rep. Mark Foley, who resigned from Congress Sept. 29 after reports he sent sexually suggestive electronic messages to teen-age boys. Meanwhile, Democrats hope to capitalize on voters' disenchantment with the Republican Party. The interesting factor at play as we enter the final month before Election Day is the undecided voter – many are indicating they still have not made up their minds for whom to vote, and both sides are fearing they may be fed up with the whole mess and will instead stay home in droves.

### Measuring the "Foley factor"

The most recent interactive polling by Zogby International shows initial fallout from the Foley scandal may not have as great an impact as many initially thought – 87% said it is unlikely the Foley scandal will change their plans to vote.

Instead of keeping voters home, the scandal could end up driving some voters to the polls, our polling shows. 84% saying reports of Congressional corruption will make them more likely to vote while 13% have yet to make up their minds. The incident seems to resonate strongly with older voters, with 80% of those 70 or older saying they will be much more likely to vote this year. Nearly half of those polled (47%) said the Foley scandal would make them less likely to vote for a Republican, while 42% said it would make them less likely to vote for a Democrat.

## **Midterms (cont'd)**

Respondents gave no clear edge to either of the main parties on who would run Congress with more integrity – 41% favored Republicans and 42% favored Democrats. Just 7% favored independents and 11% were unsure. Despite the Foley scandal, Republicans still win out among 63% of frequent Wal-Mart shoppers and 66% of born-again Christians and 63% of NASCAR fans.

There is widespread suspicion across the country—about the way the Foley story developed—Slightly more than half of those polled (53%) said the release of the Foley information was timed to influence the upcoming election.

Older voters were much more likely to believe there was a political motive behind the release of the information than younger voters. It comes as no surprise that nearly nine out of 10 Republicans question the timing of the information's release, compared with 52% of independents and only 17% of Democrats.

Even as congressional scandals continue to generate headlines, voters affiliated with a political party said they are proud of their respective party (60%), and 56% said they are proud of their party's leaders. Nearly three out of four Republicans said they are proud of their party and its leaders, despite criticism levied against top Republicans such as House Speaker Dennis Hastert in the wake of the Foley scandal.

## **Democrats gaining ground**

Recent Zogby polling for Reuters shows Democrats ahead in 11 of the 15 districts currently held by Republicans. The Democratic edge includes leads in three open seats where well-known Republicans are on the way out – Illinois 6 – Henry Hyde, Colorado 7 – Bob Beauprez, and Ohio 18 – Bob Ney.

Meanwhile, seven Republican incumbents are trailing behind Democratic challengers – Chris Shays in Connecticut 4, Jim Gerlach in Pennsylvania 7, Mike Sodrel in Indiana 9, Chris Chocola in Indiana 2, Charles Taylor in North Carolina 11, Heather Wilson in New Mexico –1, and Thelma Drake in Virginia 2.

These numbers all spell good news for Democrats. But as the scope of the Foley scandal continues to grow, it could end up hurting both parties. With both sides on the attack as Election Day approaches, it is not so hard to believe that the Foley scandal won't be the last pre-election controversy we may see before Nov. 7.

## **Democrats hold leads for key House GOP seats**

Democrats hold leads in races for 11 out of 15 key Republican-held U.S. House seats, our recent package of Reuters/Zogby tracking polls shows. This sets the stage for a full-tilt battle for control of Congress, as the GOP House leadership faces fallout from the Foley scandal.

The Democratic edge includes leads in three of six seats where well-known Republicans are leaving Capitol Hill – some to retire, some to seek higher office and some because of scandal. The race for the Illinois seat occupied by GOP icon Henry Hyde, who is retiring after 22 years in the House, is led by Democrat Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq war vet, who holds a 43% to 38% lead over Republican Peter Roskar.

The series of telephone polls were conducted Sept. 25 to Oct. 2, and included at least 500 interviews in each of the 15 congressional districts tested. Each district poll carries a margin of error of +/- 4.5 percentage points.

The Republican is losing in the race to hold the Ohio seat held by Republican Bob Ney, the high-profile, once-powerful committee chairman who abandoned his reelection bid after recently pleading guilty to accepting money and gifts in an influence-peddling scandal.

**Midterms (cont'd)**

In that race, Democrat Zack Space leads Republican Joy Padgett, 45% to 36%. Padgett faces tough sledding in a state where the GOP has dominated for more than a decade but which has fallen on hard times because of scandals, including the Ney affair and another involving the administration of Gov. Bob Taft.

In Connecticut, moderate Republican Christopher Shays, who has worked hard to distance himself from the White House and the unpopular war in Iraq, still faces an uphill reelection battle. Right now, he trails Democratic challenger Diane Ferrell, 46% to 41%. Another 11% said they are unsure for whom to vote in that race.

While Iowa Republican Jim Nussle appears to be leaving his seat in safe GOP hands as he departs to run for governor, the same cannot be said for the Republican House seat of Bob Beauprez, who is leaving Washington to run for governor of Colorado

In that suburban Denver district, Democrat Ed Perlmutter leads Republican Rick O'Donnell, 45% to 34%.

The Democratic edge is such that their candidates lead in seven of the nine House districts that contain Republican advantages in party identification. In the other six House races polled recently by Reuters/Zogby, Democrats lead in four.

In other reliably GOP districts where incumbent Republicans are running for reelection, the Reuters/Zogby package of polling shows that this year they are trailing significantly. In usually conservative Indiana, Republican incumbent Mike Sodrel trails Democratic challenger Baron Hill, 46% to 38%. Just 39% said Sodrel deserves to be re-elected, while 45% in Indiana's 9th District said it is time for someone new. In Indiana's 2nd District, another Republican faces serious trouble: Incumbent Chris Chocola trails Democratic challenger Joe Donnelly, 49% to 39%.

The situation is much the same in the mountains of western North Carolina, where Republican-leaning voters in the 11th District give Democratic challenger Heath Shuler a 51% to 40% edge over eight-term incumbent Charles Taylor. Two years ago, Taylor won reelection with 55% of the vote.

"If these numbers hold there could be very good news for Democrats this year," Pollster John Zogby said. "Of these 15 Republican-held seats, Democrats lead in 11, while Republicans lead in 4. Nine of the 11 Democratic leads are by five points or more and of the nine Republican incumbents involved, 8 have negative re-elects -- all of which are under 40%. The formula for Democratic victory: in each case where Democrats lead, the candidates are winning near or above 80% of their own party vote and they are leading among independents. In other races I am following closely, there are reasons to see Democrats ahead in other Republican districts, as well. No predictions yet because there are still many undecided voters, but Republicans can breathe a sigh of relief that the election was not held the past few days. These polls were taken during what Queen Elizabeth would describe as 'weekendus horribilis' for the Republicans."

The Reuters/Zogby package of tracking polls did not include former Florida GOP Rep. Mark Foley's specific race and it did not include races where Democrats may be endangered. According to the Cook Political Report, there are roughly twice as many Republican seats as Democratic seats considered "toss-ups" this year.

**Dems Lead GOP Incumbents in Three Key Senate Races**

Democrats in U.S. Senate races across the country are leading their Republican opponents and appear poised to gain ground in next month's elections, but it remains unclear whether they will increase their numbers by the six seats required for them to take control of the chamber, our polling shows.

**Midterms (cont'd)**

Democrats lead in five of 10 battleground senate races surveyed, while Republicans lead in two, two are absolutely tied, and a famous independent leads in yet another.

Republicans are showing some strength in at least two states – Virginia and Ohio - where they had been having problems, complicating the takeover math for Democrats. In its current configuration, Republicans now hold a 55-44 seat edge in the Senate. There is one independent.

The surveys of Senate races were conducted from Sept. 25-Oct. 2, 2006, and included at least 600 live telephone interviews with likely voters in 10 states. The margin of error in each of the polls is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

Incumbent Virginia Sen. George Allen, who has suffered through some serious campaign missteps in recent weeks and days, is now making a comeback. Those problems had resulted in the loss of a big lead over Democratic challenger James Webb, but it now appears Allen is once again on solid ground. He leads Webb, 48% to 37%, with 13% yet undecided. Allen is the only Republican in the 10 Senate races featured in the Reuters/Zogby poll to hold a double-digit lead.

His GOP colleague in Missouri, Jim Talent, holds an ever-so-slight lead of 43% to 39% and remains in a dogfight with Democratic challenger Claire McCaskill, the state auditor. Talent's advantage comes in part from his ability to better hold his political base – he enjoys support from 86% of Republicans, while 79% of Democrats said they are backing McCaskill. But this race remains too close to call, which is typical of many recent statewide elections in Missouri.

Of the five seats in the Reuters/Zogby package in which Democrats lead, just three of them would be pick-ups -- if those leads hold. GOP incumbents in Rhode Island (Chaffee), Pennsylvania (Santorum), and Montana (Burns) face serious threats. Democrats lead in the race to fill an open Democratic seat from Maryland (Sen. Paul Sarbanes is retiring), and appointed Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey has surged ahead in his effort to keep his seat. Menendez had appeared to be on shaky ground for months in fending off Republican challenger Tom Kean Jr., but he appears to have found his stride, the Reuters/Zogby poll shows. He now leads Kean, 46% to 35%.

Two other seats are dead-even ties, including the open-seat contest in Tennessee, where two seasoned candidates are battling to fill the seat of Republican Bill Frist, the Senate majority leader who is retiring. Democrat Harold Ford and Republican Bob Corker are tied at 40% each, with 17% undecided. In another slugfest in Ohio, incumbent Republican Mike DeWine has moved back into a 41%-41% tie with Democratic challenger Sherrod Brown, a congressman from the Akron area.

Although DeWine is now seen more positively by Ohioans, many more of them believe it is time for someone new than think DeWine deserves reelection. DeWine's biggest problem is with his base – just 70% of Republicans say they support him in this race, a disaffection stemming from his membership in the so-called “Gang of 14” senators who became a powerful force during the confirmation process for federal judges. In contrast, Brown is supported by 77% of Democrats.

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**Midterms (cont'd)**

In Connecticut, Democrat-turned-independent Joe Lieberman has rebuilt a big lead over Ned Lamont, the man who beat him in the Democratic Party primary election this summer.

Lieberman had led by a substantial margin just after his primary defeat, but then took a dive and recently bottomed out. Clearly, he has now begun to surge again. Lamont continues to lead among Democrats, but by only a 51% to 40% margin. Meanwhile, Lieberman has otherwise taken on the political standing of a Republican - among members of the GOP, Lieberman wins 64% support, compared to 15% for Lamont. The actual Republican in the race, lowly Alan Schlesinger, wins just 12% of his own party's support, and just 4% overall.

“Conventional wisdom has suggested throughout this year that Democrats would have a better chance of taking control of the U.S. House than of winning back the Senate,” Zogby said.

“While today's results seem to confirm the conventional wisdom, several of these races are too close to call for either side. However, Democrats still have real opportunities in Ohio, where only 31% feel DeWine deserves to be reelected; in Pennsylvania, where only 33% say incumbent Rick Santorum deserves to be reelected; in Montana, where 36% say incumbent Republican Conrad Burns deserves to be re-elected; and in Rhode Island, where just 39% say incumbent Republican Lincoln Chaffee deserves to be reelected. Even in Virginia, where the electorate is split, 45% to 45%, on whether Allen deserves to be re-elected, he holds a solid lead.”

**Undecideds may have the final word**

As we said in the beginning, this year's election may be decided by a significant number of voters who have had enough of political turmoil and choose to stay home election day. Only time will tell if the fallout from the Foley scandal will cause voters to stay home or motivate them to head to the polls. If many voters who usually head out to the polls are so discouraged with Congress they would rather send a message by staying home, which ever party comes out on top will have a lot of work to do to restore the voters' faith.

“There are way too many undecideds in these races, compared to a typical congressional election year,” Zogby said. “But given the political landscape, Democrats ought to be driving a truck through these roads of opportunity, but that's not the case just yet. The question is, will the Democrats reach the finish line in victory or will their truck run out of gas?”

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## No easy solution to U.S. oil issues

As Americans celebrate falling prices at the pump, many wonder what the future holds for gasoline and oil prices – and what the U.S. government should do about it.

A majority of Americans are concerned about the nation's heavy oil use – and, some would say, waste—but there are differences over what should be done and what role the government should play in easing oil concerns, new interactive polling done for Zogby's Real America newsletter shows.

Slightly more than half (54%) favor a hands-off approach by the U.S. government, allowing oil prices to self-regulate, with a majority (58%) showing support for reducing oil imports from the Middle East. While 69% of those polled were against decreasing environmental and safety regulations governing oil refineries, two out of three don't believe the U.S. has enough refineries to meet the nation's current energy needs, the poll shows. More than three quarters (79%) favor drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, but those polled were less supportive of proposed drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, with nearly half (49%) in favor of drilling there.

### Most Americans Think We Should Share More

More than half of those polled—58%—believe that, while America has one of the world's most important economies, it should balance its oil consumption to make sure other countries have enough to meet their oil needs without shortages or price spikes. One in four believe America's economy is the most important and should continue to use as much oil as it needs to keep growing.

As you might have guessed, the question elicits very different responses from Democrats and Republicans. The vast majority of Democrats (73%) said they believe the U.S. should balance its use of oil and 17% said the nation's oil consumption should be reduced to spare more for other nations trying to grow their economies. Nearly half (48%) of Republicans favor the U.S. using as much oil as it needs compared with 43% favoring a more balanced approach. As for independents, 57% favored balancing oil consumption while 25% believe the U.S. should continue to use as much oil as it needs.

Respondents were also divided on the role they believed the U.S. government should play in the nation's energy industry to manage the supply of oil, gas and related products as well as electrical energy, natural gas and coal.

### The Slippery Slope of Government Price Controls on Oil

More than half of respondents (54%) said the U.S. government should allow oil prices to fluctuate based on the world market and global events, while 39% think the government should do more to keep oil prices low to benefit consumers. Sixty-nine percent of Republicans polled said the government should let oil prices fluctuate, compared with 38% of Democrats and 54% of independents. Nearly half of Democrats polled (49%) said the government should keep oil prices low, compared with 24 percent of Republicans and 37% of independents.

Concerns that many Americans waste too much oil translated into an over-inflated perception of how large a slice of the world's oil pie is used by the U.S., the poll showed.

Forty percent of those polled said they estimate America uses 25% of the world's oil supply, and 80% said they think America uses between 25% and 75% of the world's oil supply. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the U.S. uses 25% of the world's oil supply.

## Most Think The U.S. Consumes Too Much Oil

While respondents differed on how much oil they think America uses, nearly three out of four (71%) believe America uses too much oil and 22% think America's oil use is about right. A partisan breakdown shows an overwhelming majority of Democrats (92%) believe the U.S. uses too much oil, compared with about half (49%) of Republicans and 70% of independents.

Three out of four of those polled believe America wastes too much oil and 45% hold that belief strongly. Ninety-four percent of Democrats believe the U.S. wastes too much oil, compared with 55% of Republicans and 76% of independents.

Americans who love to take their large, gas-guzzling vehicles out for a drive as often as possible take the blame for the country's oil waste according to those polled, with 38 percent saying Americans drive cars that are too large and 22 percent saying Americans drive their cars too much. Forty percent of those who live in large cities cited driving large cars as the biggest waste of oil, compared with 32% of respondents who live in rural areas.

### Racing to Conclusions About Oil Use

It's no surprise that those figures dropped for auto-loving NASCAR fans, with only 27% blaming big vehicles for the nation's oil problems and 19% concerned about too much driving. Nearly a quarter of NASCAR fans polled said America doesn't waste that much oil at all.

The political implications of importing oil from the Middle East continues to be a major concern, with over half of those polled in favor of backing off imports from that part of the world. The majority of respondents (58%) believe the U.S. should sharply reduce its import of oil from Middle Eastern nations because they are more likely to support groups who oppose the U.S., while 23% said the U.S. should continue its current level of oil importation because the U.S. purchase of oil has nothing to do with political or military conflicts in the region.

Cutting back on Middle East oil imports could mean having to look closer to home to meet the nation's appetite for oil. While 66% of those polled don't believe the U.S. has enough oil refineries to meet its gasoline, heating oil and diesel needs, 57% are opposed to the U.S. government subsidizing the construction of new oil refineries.

When it comes to increasing U.S. production of oil, more than half (55%) of respondents said they are not in favor of the government decreasing environmental regulations governing oil refineries. Nearly three out of four (74%) would be against the U.S. government decreasing safety regulations for oil refineries and 69% oppose the decrease of both environmental and safety regulations at oil refineries.

More than three quarters of those polled (79%) said they would support developing a new, large oil field recently discovered in the Gulf of Mexico and 71% said they support drilling for oil off the coastlines of America. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they would be more likely to support drilling for oil off the American coastline if they knew the offshore oil rigs would be so far away they could not be seen by people standing along the shoreline.

Respondents were split when it came to drilling on America's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, with 49% in favor of the drilling and 46% against.

If given a choice to drill in one area, 57% of those polled would drill in the Gulf of Mexico and 18% would drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.



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**Oil (cont'd)**

Nearly half (49%) of respondents said the recent oil discovery in the Gulf of Mexico means efforts should be made to drill there and ANWR to make sure America has a long-term flow of affordable oil. For 36% of respondents, the recent Gulf of Mexico oil discovery means there is no longer for America to explore drilling in ANWR.

Americans are all too aware of how energy price spikes and shortages in recent years have translated into higher costs at the pump and increasing energy bills. Twenty-eight percent of those polled blamed increases in worldwide demand for oil and other energy services as the top reason for troubles in the domestic oil industry. Other factors included failure of government oversight of the industry (17%), increases in tensions and conflicts around the globe (16%) and concerns that government regulation has stymied growth to keep up with demand (14%).

While slightly more than half (52%) of responders said the Bush administration's close ties to the oil industry were hurting consumers when it came to gasoline prices, one in five said the ties were helping consumers. Among Democrats polled, 91% said Bush's oil ties hurt consumers, compared to 12% of Republicans and 53% of independents. Forty percent of Republicans polled said Bush's oil ties help consumers, compared to 3% of Democrats and 17% of independents.

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