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Dem Control of Congress In Doubt

Publisher's Note: The following is a regular monthly column for *MIRSnews.com* by Bernie **PORN**, president of the Lansing-based polling firm of EPIC/MRA.

With the passage of a new law in Arizona giving police and law enforcement officials the authority to ask people they stop to verify residency status, immigration has received a great deal of attention. The administration of President Barack **OBAMA** has initiated a lawsuit to prevent the Arizona law from going into effect, but public opinion polls on the issue of illegal immigration suggest that there are some mixed opinions on the issue and significant support for tougher laws, like the one passed in Arizona.

In June, an ABC News/*Washington Post* poll found that a 51 to 39 percent majority of adults nationwide disapprove of the way Obama is handling immigration issues, and a 75 to 23 percent majority said that they thought the United States "is not doing enough to keep illegal immigrants from coming into this country."

After hearing a description of the Arizona law, a 58 to 41 percent majority said they support the law. However, a 57 to 40 percent majority also said they support a program that would give illegal immigrants now living in the United States the right to live here legally if they pay a fine and meet other requirements. Moreover, a 52 percent majority said that immigration laws should be left to the federal government, with 46 percent saying that they think states should be allowed to make and enforce their own immigration laws.

In our May statewide Michigan survey, a 56 percent majority said that they thought illegal immigration is a problem in Michigan (26 percent said a major problem), while 24 percent said it was only a minor problem and 18 percent said it wasn't a problem at all.

Voters aligned with different political parties view this issue differently. A solid 64 percent of Republicans, 54 percent of Independent voters, and 47 percent of Democrats thought illegal immigration was a problem, but they did not think illegal immigration was holding back an economic recovery in Michigan.

In fact, a 62 percent majority said that illegal immigration is not having that much of an impact in Michigan, while 32 percent said that they thought illegal immigration was holding back an economic recovery. Thirty eight percent of Republicans, 35 percent of Independent voters and only 26 percent of Democrats said illegal immigration was holding back an economic recovery.

There is clearly solid support for a more active government role in beefing up enforcement. An 83 to 16 percent majority would support using National Guard troops to patrol the U.S. border with Mexico to prevent illegal immigration.

Energy, the Gulf Oil Spill and Oil Drilling

According to AP-GFK Poll, a 52 to 36 percent narrow majority approves of the way Obama is handling the energy issue, while a thin 40 to 37 percent plurality approves of the way he is handling gas prices, with 23 percent saying they neither approve nor disapprove of the job he has done handling on gas prices.

When asked about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, a 48 to 39 percent plurality said they disapprove of the job Obama has done handling the issue, with 13 percent saying neither. While Obama's performance in dealing with this environmental disaster has earned a somewhat negative grade from the public, it is nothing compared to the 81 to 14 percent negative rating that BP gets for the way it has handled the oil spill that was caused by the rig it was operating in the Gulf.

Twenty five percent of the American public says that the federal government's actions have made the situation worse, 18 percent say it made things better, while 56 percent say the actions of the federal government have had no real impact.

A 45 to 41 percent plurality favors increasing drilling for oil and gas in the coastal areas around the United States, which is down from the 50 to 38 percent bare majority of voters who favored drilling in May. While the public still favors drilling, the Obama administration wants to ban it for six months until rigs can be tested to make sure such a disaster cannot happen again, and the public also recognizes that the BP disaster will have a lasting impact.

An 89 percent majority said the Gulf region will feel the effects for a long time, and in a follow-up question, 40 percent said it could last more than 10 years, with another 23 percent saying it will last 5 to 10 years.

A 71 percent majority said in a *USA Today* poll that President Obama had not been tough enough in dealing with BP, while only 3 percent said he was too tough and 20 percent said he acted about right. And, a 59 percent majority said that BP should pay for all financial losses resulting from the oil spill, including the wages of workers out of work because of the oil spill, even if it drives the company out of business, while 38 percent said BP should pay for as much as it can afford while still remaining a viable company.

An 83 percent majority said they thought "the U.S. economy will be hurt," 79 percent said they thought "gas prices will increase for Americans," and 79 percent said "food prices will increase for Americans."

Why Democrats Could Lose Congress

After reviewing the results of a 1,200 sample survey of likely November voters in a Democracy Corps. poll of 60 Democratic-held and 10 Republican-held U.S. House districts, Democrats will indeed be lucky if they can avoid losing control of the U.S. House. For openers, the Republican Party mean score on a scale of zero to 100 in the 60 Democratic seats is 45.9 percent, while the Democratic Party score is 40.1, and Obama is 44.2 percent.

The Democratic incumbents who hold those 60 seats score a little higher at 46.6 percent, but the N.R.A. earns an even higher mean score of 58.6 percent, pro-life anti-abortion groups score 52.9 percent, the Tea Party movement scores 50.1 percent, while the new health care reform plan scores 34.6 percent and the "state of the economy" scores 32.5 percent.

Within those 60 seats, voters say the Republicans would do a better job than the Democrats by 24 points (52 to 29 percent) on dealing with "government spending," by 20 points (48 to 29 percent) on "the budget deficit," 19 points (52 to 33 percent) on "the economy," 19 points (50 to 31 percent) on "taxes," 6 points (44 to 38 percent) on "jobs and employment," and incredibly, by 6 points (43 to 37 percent), on a solidly traditional Democratic value of "being on your side."

Democrats hold only a 6 point advantage (33 to 27 percent) on being "willing to fight special interests," 5 point advantage (41 to 36 percent) on "standing up for Main Street, not Wall Street," only a 4 point advantage (35 to 31 percent) on being "willing to work with the other party," and a 3 point advantage (39 to 36 percent) on "understanding what people here feel."

To the extent that they know about these findings, Democrats have to be more than a little bit nervous about their prospects for retaining the U.S. House, but unless the mood of the electorate in these marginal seats improve for Democrats, they come up with a compelling positive narrative message describing what good things they have done, or they develop a compelling negative message which scares voters about the prospects of going back to GOP control, the November election could be an unpleasant experience for Democrats in what has the potential of being a repeat of 1994.