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Memo to Dems: Ignore the Polls

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 17, 2009 NCR Today

A spate of bad poll numbers has Democrats worried. The President?s approval rating has dropped. A survey of Indpendent voters showed them more likely to vote for a Republican in next year?s midterms than for a Democrat. And support for health care reform is also decreasing. What should the Democrats do about these polls? Ignore them and pass health care reform quickly.

Imagine for a moment what the current discussion about health care reform would look like if the economy had not gone into the tank last year. Government revenues would not be decreasing. Federal help for state and local government would not be needed on the large scale it is currently. More Americans would likely feel the country was moving in the right direction. When the economy tanks, especially when it tanks because of what amounts to a swindle by Wall Street, many Americans get angry at everyone and everything. And, they look to Washington for help and instead of talking about creating jobs, Congress seems to be mired in an interminable debate about health care.

Democrats need to remember that the economy is beginning to turn around. Republicans should be wary of warning that the sky is falling ? when it doesn?t fall, what will they say? Voters are fickle, especially about a President they are still getting to know. If the unemployment rate continues to drop, voters will come to see that the President?s policies are working. In this regard, they will only be half right. Turns out that the economy ebbs and flows in ways that a President is always somewhat powerless to control. But, just as Obama is getting blamed for the bad economy now, he is likely to reap the benefit when it turns around.

The most important thing the Democrats can do in the short-term is pass the health care bill and move on to more explicit economic proposals. We may not need another stimulus bill, but there are things the government can do to put people to work, especially labor-intensive infrastructure projects that we need to do anyway. And, the Democrats should increase education loans: Adding a bunch of college graduates to the workforce is not going to help the unemployment rate so they should be encouraged to get that Master?s degree now.

No matter what the Democrats do, they are likely to lose seats in next year?s midterm elections. That is what almost always happens. But, if the economy improves, especially the jobs picture, there will not be a tsunami against them. The anti-Obama groups are noisy but they are not ubiquitous.

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