



Memorandum

To: Interested Parties

From: Celinda Lake, David Mermin, John Norris; *Lake Research Partners*

Re: The Working American Dream and the Working American Dream Agenda

This memo summarizes findings from a survey among non-supervisory workers.¹ It is the seventh in a series of surveys conducted on behalf of Change to Win to measure views on the economy, the role of government, the American Dream, and the action agenda favored by working Americans.

- ü **The American Dream remains a powerful frame to the American public. Working Americans define the American Dream as economic security including jobs that pay a living wage, quality health care, a secure retirement, and opportunity for the next generation to succeed.**
- ü **The Working American Dream Agenda is the key to a new progressive majority. Working Americans firmly reject the ideological frame that government should get out of the way. They want government to be a partner and invest in good jobs, health care, and educational opportunity**
- ü **Working Americans specifically blame corporate greed and its stranglehold on government for the decline of the American Dream and they want Congress—which they rate poorly—to take action on the American Dream Agenda.**
- ü **Working Americans give President Obama a strong favorable rating, and indicate a voting preference for Democratic**

¹ Lake Research Partners conducted this survey of 800 non-supervisory workers nationwide (May 19-28, 2009). The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.5%. 'Non-supervisory workers' are comprised of workers who are not: full-time students, nor retired persons, nor business owners or CEOs, company executives, managers, or professionals such as doctors or lawyers, but who are: either employed or looking for work, and earn \$100,000 per year or less

candidates in the 2010 election, but working Americans remain skeptical of both parties.

Key Findings

Working Americans believe the American Dream is still realistic, but also under attack.

Nearly two-thirds of working Americans (65%) believe the American Dream is a somewhat or very realistic goal for their family. However, this inherent optimism is being tested by great economic distress and anxiety. Stuningly, a majority (52%) believe it is at least somewhat likely that someone in their family will lose their health insurance in the next year—and even more (58%) think it is likely that someone in their family will lose their job. Additionally, two-thirds (65%) believe that with the way things are going now, it will be harder for the next generation to achieve the American Dream.

The Working American Dream Agenda is the foundation for a new progressive majority.

In rating two competing views [text below], working Americans agree that the American Dream is about economic security through good-paying jobs, affordable healthcare, and a secure retirement—with government working as a partner—over a definition of the American Dream as being free from government interference with too much taxation, spending, and regulation (59% agree with former, 31% agree with latter).

Text of Paired Statement

The American Dream is about having economic security for yourself and your family, and having the opportunity to succeed with hard work. It's about a good job, affordable healthcare, and a secure retirement. Government needs to be a partner helping create good jobs, provide affordable, quality healthcare, and investing in education and training.

59% agree (44% strongly)

The American Dream is about being free from government interference and excessive taxation so we can have the opportunity to start our own business, keep more of our money, and achieve individual success. When the government taxes, spends, and regulates too much, that just makes it even harder for people to own their own business, create jobs, or provide for their families.

31% agree (22% strongly)

In a paired statement choice [text below], more Americans believe we need to make government work for us and have it be part of the solution, rather than believe government is the problem and should get out of the way (66% agree with the former, 25% agree with the latter).

Government is now seen as a potential partner, not the enemy.

Text of Paired Statement

We need to reform government to make it work for us. Our government has to be part of the solution.

66% agree (52% strongly)

Government is the problem, not the solution.

25% agree (18% strongly)

Similarly, more working Americans believe the current crisis is a result of deregulation and lack of oversight, and that more oversight and enforcement is needed to hold corporate interests accountable than believe too much regulation interferes with the free market and growth of our economy (54% agree with the former, 37% agree with the latter).

Text of Paired Statement

Our current crisis was the result of deregulation and lack of corporate oversight that let greed run wild without common sense rules to protect us. We need government oversight and enforcement to hold big corporate interests and C.E.O's accountable.

54% agree (40% strongly)

Too much government regulation interferes with the proper functioning of the free market. We need across the board tax cuts and less regulation to let the free market function to create jobs and grow our economy.

37% agree (25% strongly)

For working Americans, the American Dream continues to be defined as having a job that pays to support a family, opportunities for your children, affordable, quality health care you can count on, being treated with respect at work, and a secure retirement. Each of these elements make up the cornerstones of the American Dream for working Americans.

<i>Text of Cornerstone Items</i>	<i>Rate "10" and "10-6"</i>
Having a job that pays enough to support a family	75% (95%)
Being able to ensure your children have the opportunity to succeed	70% (94%)
Having affordable quality health care that you can depend on	65% (95%)
Being treated with respect for the work you do	64% (94%)
Having a secure and dignified retirement	62% (92%)

**Items rated on a 10-point scale where 10 means it is an extremely important part of the American Dream for you, and 0 means it is not important at all.*

The American Dream Agenda for working Americans includes cracking down on corporations that outsource, ensuring tax fairness, providing for affordable, quality healthcare, and creating jobs through green manufacturing and infrastructure projects

<i>Text of Action Agenda Items</i>	<i>Rate "10" and "10-6"</i>
Use trade agreements and the tax code to crack down on the corporations who are moving millions of good paying middle class jobs overseas, leaving us with low paying service jobs	48% (83%)
Create a more progressive tax system that is fair to workers and makes billionaires pay their fair share in taxes	48% (81%)
Strong enforcement of the laws to prevent discrimination and ensure that women and minorities get equal pay and have equal opportunity	47% (83%)
Enact health care reform to guarantee every American access to quality, affordable health care giving the choice of a private plan or a public health insurance plan	46% (80%)
End the tax loophole that lets Wall Street hedge fund managers be taxed at a lower rate than the rest of us	45% (75%)
Require large employers that don't offer health coverage to their employees to contribute a percentage of their payroll toward the cost of their employee's health care	41% (82%)
Create green manufacturing jobs in renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, geothermal, and biomass	41% (82%)
Create jobs working on infrastructure projects such as improving mass transit, repairing bridges and roads	40% (85%)

**Items rated on a 10-point scale where 10 means it would be a very effective step the President and Congress could take to help restore the economy and the American Dream and 0 means it would not be effective at all.*

Working Americans believe the time to act on these issues is now.

In a paired statement choice [text below], by over a two to one ratio, more working Americans believe the time to act is now on issues like the economy, health care, energy, and education than believe we should not be spending billions until the economy has stabilized (62% agree with the former, 30% agree with the latter).

<i>Text of Paired Statement</i>
<p>The time to act on health care, energy, and education is now. When we don't take action these problems get worse and cost much more. We need to act now to stabilize our economy, create new renewable energy jobs, and make sure working Americans can afford quality education and health care.</p> <p><i>62% agree (47% strongly)</i></p>
<p>We should not spend billions on major reforms in areas like health care, energy, and education unless we first stabilize the economy and can keep spending low.</p> <p><i>30% agree (23% strongly)</i></p>

Taking action on this agenda is necessary to winning over the emerging progressive majority among working Americans.

President Obama (65% favorable, 26% unfavorable) is hugely popular and Democrats in Congress (49% favorable, 38% unfavorable) are much more popular to working Americans than Republicans in Congress (32% favorable, 52% unfavorable) or corporate CEOs (17% favorable, 64% unfavorable).

Working Americans indicate they are inclined to vote for congressional Democratic candidates in 2010 (46% for a generic Democratic candidate, 27% for a generic Republican candidate, 24% undecided)—and congressional Democrats receive a higher job approval rating than congressional Republicans. However, only 30% of working Americans rate congressional Democrats as excellent or good. Only action can transform the potential majority into an actual progressive electoral majority.

For more information on this survey, contact Celinda Lake or David Mermin at Lake Research Partners (202-776-9066).