

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006

MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2006

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

11:00 A.M. -12:15 P.M. OPENING PLENARY

SPEAKER:

**STAN GREENBERG,
CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER,
CO-FOUNDER OF DEMOCRACY CORPS**

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ROBERT BOROSAGE: And now let me introduce Stan Greenberg to take you through the study we did about whether this country is at a tipping point. Stan is the head of Greenberg Rosner Research, one of America's leading scholars of public opinion. He has elected heads of state now on five continents. For better or worse. (Laughter.) He is the co-founder of Democracy Corps, which has done extraordinary strategic memos over the last period of time that has helped progressives understand where Americans are and how to think about the political debate. It's a pleasure to introduce a friend, Stan Greenberg. (Applause.)

STAN GREENBERG: Thank you for all being here and for the work you do, and to Bob and the campaign for growing as the need has grown and the opportunity has grown. And this survey is very much a function of that moment.

We were involved, actually, before these meetings on a range of projects. But we stepped back at a point, as we watch the plummeting poll numbers of the president, and said, shouldn't we more than just revel? I know, you can revel. (Laughter.) And I'll give you, you know -- I'll give you grass to revel in. But shouldn't we just more than revel in their problems? And, indeed, think more deeply about the, you know, challenge we face.

I've written, along with James Carville, repeatedly and to the annoyance of many in Washington that the -- we've watched their collapse, but we have not watched our rise. We have not; in fact, I thought it would be almost automatic that as they fell there would be at least a turning to the alternative. Well, the data here doesn't support that. And our data has not supported that their fall is about a lot of things and our rise is more complicated.

In fact, this conference is very much about the direction that progressives and Democrats will take. And hopefully this survey will, you know, begin that discussion, and, indeed, this panel will begin that, you know, discussion.

The beginning question for us was have we reached -- not just them being in political trouble, but have we reached a tipping point? Is the conservative revolution in trouble? Has the country lost confidence -- not just in Bush and their overall direction, in their governance, have they lost confidence in their ideas? Have they lost confidence in their policies -- not just as they are executed, but in the underlying philosophy, the underlying values, the underlying world view that lies behind their policies? And, because of that pullback from that, not just President Bush, that we have laid the groundwork for bringing -- shattering and bringing an end to an era and making it possible, out of the rubble of that conservative era, to create progressive, Democratic one?

The answer to the first question, if you can remember the list -- the answer to the first question, which is the tipping point, is yes. It's very hard to look at this data without us saying that this isn't just about Bush and direction; this is about much more. And I'm going to, you know, underscore this on their policies and on their philosophy and world view. Let me -- actually, because of continuity, let me talk through the argument and then run through the data.

What we find here is a -- in some ways, it's almost like looking back to 1972, as I responded to a question in an earlier session. In 1972 the left began battling over a declining point of view as the conservatives became to develop a dominant, ascendant perspective on dealing with the country's problems. What we watch in this survey is not just that they're losing overall; they're losing the country as a whole and they're losing, and they've certainly lost us and the people in this room, but they've lost independents, they've lost moderates, they've lost the entire middle. And when you look at this survey, independents look like Democrats, independents look like -- moderates look like liberals on their perspective.

The conservatives are on a wholly different place. They may have a battle, you know, over whether Bush is the real conservative. They may have a battle over their ideas, but, you know what? It's a marginalized battle; it's a battle over a minority position. What's important for us to understand about where they are right now is that their world-view is a minority point of view, and the country as a whole is in a different place.

Now that is an immense opportunity for us if anybody had any idea what Democrats stood for. (Laughing and applause.) But I don't want to be facile about it. If this were simple, if simply their failure cradled our success, if the fact that they've crashed means that therefore we can rise out of the victory and to lead the country -- the problem is they have created a mess. As Bob has elaborated on, they have created a mess. As the country looks at what they've done, and they look at Katrina, and they look at Iraq, and they look at the Veterans Administration, and they look at the overreach of Schiavo, and they look at what's happened to the budget deficits and they think the country is in a fiscal mess and is, they look at the special interest politics, they don't believe the government at this point is capable of doing -- look at the prescription drug benefit -- they don't believe it's possible for the government to do, expand its social insurance, without doing it in a way that favors the special interests and does as little as possible for the beneficiaries.

So when they look at -- it is a rational response coming out of this period to say that we're dealing with a government that's broke, doesn't work for the public interest; a government that, in fact, from area to area, proves incompetent, would we turn to that government, therefore, to address things we care about? So that the rubble created from their failures has increased the challenge for us in being able to rise out of that in order to capture the country.

Now, what we'll find in this survey is that the -- even through all that, the country is, in a whole range of areas, willing to move now, and move now, and with a more expansive government role in a whole range of areas. One of them includes trying to offset the balance between corporate and CEO influence in Washington versus ordinary people being able to have any influence. You'll see here, when it comes to the regulatory state, a government that can regulate on behalf of employees or consumers or the public interest, they will take the chance. Given what's happening, given the lack of balance that exists right now, they will trust even this government to try to regulate in a different way in order to serve the public interests, in order to help the consumers. So in a regulatory framework they are willing to move towards a more expansive government.

They also desperate for a government that will up for American interests in a global economy in which Americans are losing jobs and losing living standards. Now that doesn't always lead to what you would consider progressive policy options. But the dimension is real, and they are looking for the government to stand up for America. They think, in the trade context you'll see in this survey -- in the context of trade that they're not standing up for America's industries, they're not investing in the industries of the future, they're not empowering individuals to be able to succeed in this economy as living standards decline, and they probably would like them to have more control over the borders and deal with immigration in ways as American citizens could prosper and benefit. I'm not saying that's the policy we should be for but it is part of -- they want the government to -- America look passive at the expense of ordinary people. They want the government to play a more active role promoting American jobs and promoting American interests.

They also are open to the government acting boldly in areas where they think the private interests have fundamentally failed in areas that matter to people, and that starts with energy. They think that the -- in the energy field, right now, if we turn to the private sector, we turn to the oil companies, that we understand how they advance their interests; if we turn to the government in the current environment we're turning to a government that's controlled by the oil industry. And so that they are looking for almost anything as an alternative to this direction on energy, achieving energy independence, to adjust energy prices, and, whatever the skepticism they may have about government, they are very supportive of efforts, bold ones, including things like the Apollo Project to try to expand what we do to make America more energy secure.

They're willing to invest in education. You know, it's the one area where, despite all the concerns about spending that you'll see in this survey, they just think we have to get it right; they think there's no choice. They also have an experience with the local government gamble of being able to deliver education and with, in terms of college, the federal government being able to deliver on expanded opportunity. And they are, in the area of education, not willing to wait and put it off. So that even as we identify a series of areas, you know, where the public will become cautious on spending, they are looking -- in the aftermath of this failed conservative revolution, they are looking for a different way.

This survey tests signature policies of the right and signature policies of the left. And you'll see our policies are definitively more popular. They are policies that produce conclusions about America and about our politics which turn people to progressives, to Democrats, the question is, are we going to step up to present them? Let me quickly run through some of this data, the data available. This survey will be released in its entirety; the Powerpoint is available, and so I will probably go quickly over some pieces of this.

On the state of the conservative era, this is the question on whether the country is going in the right direction or on the wrong track, taking us back to the beginning of the Bush presidency. You're looking at a country where two-thirds of the country is angry and wants change, and I don't know where it ends. It's becoming almost universal that our current politics is unsustainable. When we look at independents and moderates, almost three-quarters of independents and moderates say the country is on the wrong track. Approving or disapproving Bush -- you don't need to see the numbers.

He was -- if you go back to February of 2005, he had more approval than disapproval. We now have a sustained, large majority disapproving. Discontent with the Iraq war I'm going to move past.

One thing I want to pause on because it says something about the mood coming out of the current era: we asked a question on whether how likely you are to vote, ten is that -- I'm sorry, how interested you are in politics, on the issues today. Ten is, you know, the highest level of interest. About fifty-five percent give it ten across the whole electorate.

I want you to look at the bar for -- amongst people who say the country is headed on the wrong track, fifty-eight percent say they have a ten interest. Amongst people -- right direction it's forty-seven percent. An eleven-point difference. The energy, the passion, the angers of the people who say the want change. So if you look across to the parties, the Democrats, you'll see on the end of that, fifty-eight percent or a ten on interest. Independents and Republicans are fifty-one. So across the country their voters are demoralized. People who want change, Democrats, people who voted for Kerry -- much higher level of interest and hopefully will be realized, at least in the short-term change that makes it possible for us to have the long-term change.

When you look at -- you know what, I'm going to go -- I'm not going to dwell on these findings. We looked at attitudes towards progressives and liberals and conservatives; it's all interesting -- we're going to write a memo -- (scattered laughter) -- which I'm sure you will all get. The one thing I just want to -- I just want to, you know -- if you look at the word liberal, it's not great. Conservative is a more popular, you know, term. And liberal is defined by our old politics. You know, we need a term, like progressive, which will be defined. What you'll notice here is that many fewer people know what progressive is, can give a rating of what progressive is. So part of what we need to do here is define our politics, which is reflected in this survey.

The Democratic Party -- this is a percentage giving a favorable or unfavorable response: it's evenly split. So in this period where Republicans have come into so much difficulty, there is no evidence yet reflected here the Democrats have begun to gain or move up.

All right, let me go the dimensions. And I'm going to do enough of these just to underscore the main points I was making. They are asked to choose between -- which they agree with more, a set of paired statements: America should promote the principle of a strong community because we are all in this together, or America should encourage individualism and self-reliance. By twenty points, people choose community over individualism and self-reliance. Could not be a more important, underlying principle, I think, on what we're trying to do and our premise for what we need to do to make for a good society and what they believe about how you achieve a good society. This is a world-view, not about policies; it's about world-view. It's a twenty-point difference where they are in the country, between where they are and where the country is.

Whether government regulation protects -- whether government regulation of business and corporations is necessary to protect the public or whether it frequently does more harm than good: by twenty points people say that regulation of corporations is necessary to protect the public. So looking at the market and looking at freeing up those - - freeing those individuals, and freeing them from government regulation is not where the country is. It's not their world view.

If you look at that over time, just to show you what -- you know, that over time that we've now, you know, reached a point where the very large majority compared to where it was historically -- whether government should be promoting scientific inquiry and personal freedom and let individuals make up their own moral choices, or government should promote morality and restrict abortion and limit science where it violates the sanctity of life, which is Bush's words. By thirty-three points people are for a more detached role for government and morality.

Whether our security is best produced by -- depends on building strong ties with other nations, or whether it's -- our security comes, bottom line, from our own military strength. Fifty-four percent say multilateralism is the best way to achieve security rather than military. Could not -- again, given Iraq policy and the whole way they have chosen to fight terrorism in the post 9/11 world is undermined in this survey. Their world view does not have majority support in the country. It's a minority view in the country. If you look at that over time, the most important point to make is that in the post-9/11 world, right afterwards, the country was fairly evenly split on this question and at various points along the way evenly split. But since Bush's election in this second term, it is virtually a norm now that multilateralism is the way we achieve security, not by American going it alone with its own military.

Now, there are a range of dimensions I would underscore here in which there is uncertainty. I've talked about regulation, I've talked about market and private interest, I've talked about, I've talked about government promotion of morality, I'm talking about

multilateralism. We also asked about whether freedom depends today on security, in important things, such as health care and retirement, or on choice on important things in health care and retirement. That comes out fairly evenly, in fact they have the edge on that, which says that, as we think about our solutions we should understand that people probably want both security and choice. But it's not -- this is an area where they're trying to fashion their policies around choice, in which they're not necessarily running up against a hostile public.

And then the last thing, last dimension, which surprised us, but it has also led us to this conclusion about the rubble that's come out of the failure of the conservative revolution: America is most successful when government helps expand opportunities, it's a government-activist on expanding opportunity and create rising prosperity for all, not just a few, or America is more successful when we have a limited government that keeps taxes low so that businesses and individuals can prosper. They win that argument, which says to me that when we get to the spending side of this, it's more complicated. People are for a government that changes the rules. They know the balance is wrong, they think they can trust this government to change the rules. There are areas where they want the government to act, including education, including energy. But they look at this government, and whether they want it to be expansive in social areas, and this will be reflected in health care, when we get to our signature policies. People are uncertain, given what has happened in the conservative era.

This slide here just simply underscores that when you look at world view, the independents on almost all these questions look like the Democrats and progressives, not like Republicans; that is, the -- it's not -- what's happened here is not a shift in the country, but what's happened is the Republicans and the conservatives are on their own, with a distinct world view but a minority world view. And the independents are not contested.

On the question of whether America prospers when corporations compete with fair regulation to protect employers and consumers, seventy-nine percent of Democrats say that, seventy-one percent of independents. It's only forty-eight percent of Republicans. So that we are -- independents are with us.

Now, we tested a range of progressive signature policies, and I'm going to summarize them and not try to present them all, but let me highlight the ones that were strongest. We're running trade deficits, outsourcing jobs, while new jobs in America have lower wages and fewer benefits. We need a new strategy that reduces our import of foreign oil, enforces labor rights, environmental protection, and trade accords, provides tax credits for companies that create jobs in the U.S., and invests in new American industries. So a proactive -- it's not just a trade policy, it's a proactive policy to create American jobs in a global economy is the strongest policy we have, with almost half the country strongly supporting it. This is more likely to support a candidate who holds this position. Seventy-percent either much more -- are either much more or somewhat more likely to support.

The second is on universal education, which includes pre-school and university. The third was trying to, equalizing the workplace so that not just CEOs get -- whatever benefits CEOs get workers get, and providing workers with the same access to retirement and health care benefits that their CEOs do.

Repeal the Bush tax cuts and invest in health care education, transportation, new energy, change the priorities of the -- you know, of the country. An energy policy that revitalizes the American economy, not very strong. Multilateralism rather than unilateralism, and then health care, which is strong, but is the weakest of the signature policies that we have, which I think comes because of a lack of confidence in government, questions about the fiscal health of the country and our ability to do it given what they've now experienced in this period. I mean, given the prescription drug benefit experience, why would you think this government would be able to do a change to universal health insurance? So how we get there, we can't abandon the -- this is a signature policy of progressives and Democrats, has to be. (Applause.) But how we get there, we have to understand, is being shaped by what they have done to undermine the confidence in government.

I'm not going to go through their policies except to say that they are, you know that they are, when you read them, they reflect the kind of choices, you know, they will have. Health care costs are rising, we can address this and keep them under control, by passing health savings accounts that give patients more control over their health care spending, encourage responsible expenditures, we should limit frivolous lawsuits and doctors. I just want to give you a sense that this reflects the kind of approach that they bring. When you look overall at their policies you will see that they are much lower than our policies. Only energy -- and that's only because energy includes alternative energy and hydrogen as part of this Republican policy, because the president does talk about it, even if he doesn't spend on it. (Laughter.)

More importantly, though, is what is the take-away from this? When they hear the signature policies offered by the left and the signature policies offered by the right, what is the take-away? First of all, when you look at the overall policies, you'll see that, that our policies have just much higher level of support across the board. But we also ask people what words, when you think about -- now having heard what these people want to do -- the progressives and Democrats and then of the conservatives and Republicans -- when you hear what they want to do, which of these words describes what they want to do, and they could choose two words.

When you look at the positive word, what you see is, first of all, the Democrats have an advantage; that is, they do better on every positive word. And the one in which they have the biggest advantage is modern, so when people think about all the things we want to do, they come away more with the concept of, you know, of modern. But also, shares your values -- that's the -- you know, highest as well.

When you look at the negatives, the biggest take-away from them is that it's more of the same and out of touch -- more of the same and out of touch, so that when they --

when the country hears what they want to do, they pull back even from where they are now. And what happens in the end is that you get a gain in support for Democratic – I think beginning, it was nine points – said that they turn to the Democrats for ideas, at the end it was eleven. And we when we look -- and when we look at the whole range of dimensions, world-view dimensions, virtually all of them move toward a progressive side.

I end it here on community, because, you know, we emphasized it at the beginning on the question of what, what, what is best for America, a principle of strong community or the principle of individualism and self-reliance. By twenty points, people turned to community at the beginning of the survey. After hearing where we want to go, by twenty-five points people turned to community as something they want to see. What that says here is that the country, faced with their failures, wants to turn to political movements, political forces, parties, candidates who offer progressive direction that reflect the desire for community, reflect the desire to change the balance of power in favor of the ordinary individual away from corporate power, and come away from thinking that as a more modern, relevant party, not an out-of-touch, more-of-the-same party. And the question is, can we take it to the next stage? Thank you. (Applause.)

(End of remarks.)