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## Competitive Race in California's 26<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**To:** Interested Parties

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The tide is turning in California's 26<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, according to voters in this inland Los Angeles and San Bernardino County district. While Republican David Dreier has won by comfortable margins every two years since 1980, a new survey of 400 likely voters<sup>1</sup> shows the time is ripe for change and voters are seriously considering choosing a Democrat to represent them in Congress.

Positive indicators for Russ Warner, the Democratic challenger in this district, include:

- Nearly four out of five voters (78 percent) say the country is off on the wrong track.
- Barack Obama is in a statistical tie with John McCain in the district (44 percent to 47 percent).
- Nearly two-thirds of voters (63 percent) disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as president, with half of all voters (50 percent) strongly disapproving.
- Despite David Dreier's long tenure in Congress, voters have a divided opinion of him. An equal number have a negative opinion of Dreier (32 percent) as have a positive opinion of him (32 percent).
- By several measures, Dreier fails to reach the 50-percent threshold for support, as a majority of voters do not approve of the job he is doing and are not currently voting for him.
  - Only 45 percent of voters say they approve of the job Dreier is doing as Congressman, while 33 percent disapprove
  - Warner is within striking distance of Dreier, as the 28-year incumbent draws only 49 percent of the vote and Warner wins 37 percent – despite the fact that Warner is not yet well known by voters.
- After hearing balanced statements about each of the candidates, Democrat Russ Warner pulls into a statistical tie with Dreier (44 percent to 47 percent).

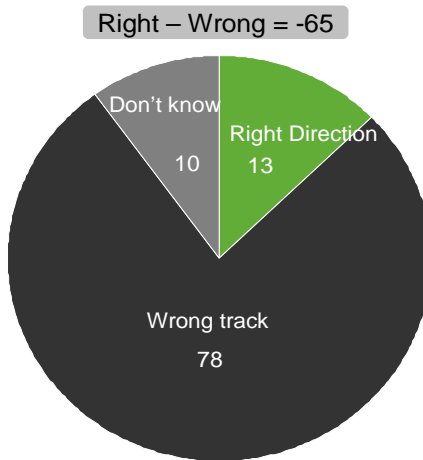
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<sup>1</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research designed and administered a telephone survey of 400 voters in California's 26<sup>th</sup> Congressional District from July 15-16, 2008. These voters were determined likely to vote in November 2008 based on their past voting history. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 4.9 percent.

## Voters Want To Change Direction

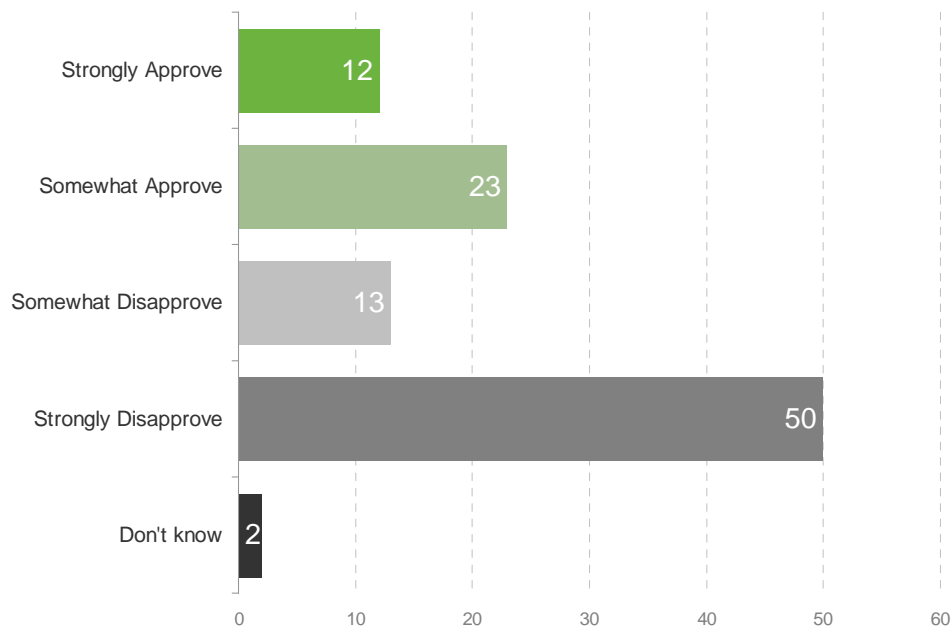
Despite the relative affluence of this district, voters here are concerned about the direction of the country and unhappy with Republican political leadership. Six times as many voters feel the country is off on the wrong track as feel the country is going in the right direction.

*Generally speaking, do you think that things in the country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?*



Additionally, while two-out of three voters in this traditionally Republican district disapprove of the job being done by President Bush, fully half *strongly* disapprove of the president's job performance. This is particularly interesting, as Bush won this district with comfortable margins in both elections, 53-44 in 2000 and 55-44 in 2004 – despite the Democratic candidate winning statewide by double digits.

*Please tell me if you approve or disapprove of how George W. Bush is handling his job as president?*



The shifting landscape in the district is clearly related to President George W. Bush's unpopularity. Barack Obama has capitalized on this opportunity and is in a statistical tie with John McCain (44 percent to 47 percent), and there are opportunities for Democrats lower down the ticket.

Democratic candidates in California's 26<sup>th</sup> Congressional District will not have to distance themselves from their presidential candidate this year. In fact, **Barack Obama and John McCain share exactly the same favorability ratings: 46 percent favorable and 36 percent unfavorable for both men.** This is a remarkable finding for a Democratic presidential candidate in this district.

## Dreier is Vulnerable

While incumbent Congressman David Dreier is not quite as unpopular as President Bush, two-thirds of voters also have not developed favorable opinions of Dreier. One out of three voters (32 percent) views Dreier favorably, while an equal number (32 percent) views him unfavorably. Dreier's favorability ratings are remarkably low for an incumbent who was first elected nearly 30 years ago.

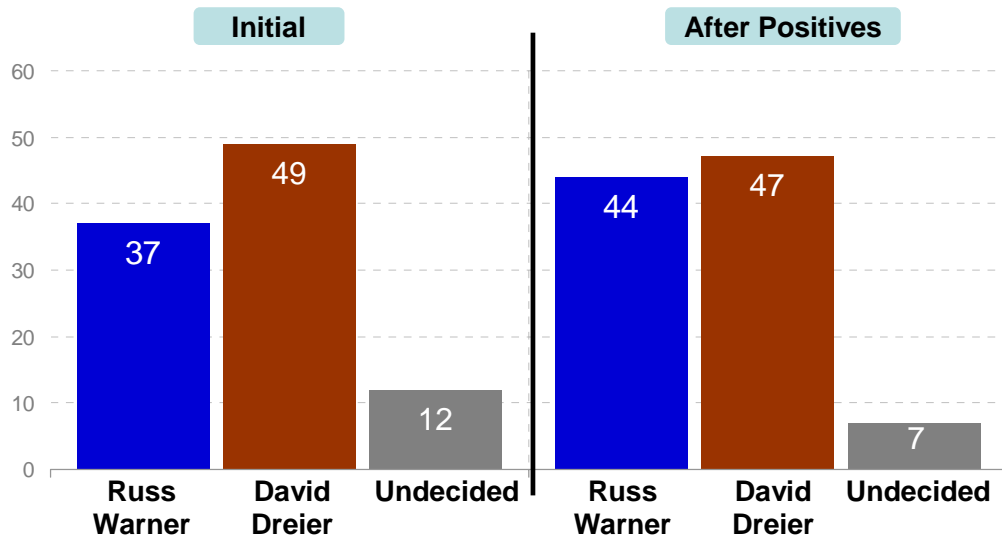
These findings are reflected in the percentage of voters who say they will vote to re-elect Dreier against a relatively unknown opponent. Dreier wins less than half of all voters in the initial ask of a Dreier-Warner matchup, winning 49 percent to 37 percent. Notably, independent voters support Warner 49 percent to 32 percent for Dreier, even though Warner is not well known.

## The Vote: This District is in Play

Given the historic Republican leanings of California's 26<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, it is no surprise that Dreier starts with a lead in an initial congressional match-up. However, once voters hear positive biographies of both Dreier and Democratic challenger Russ Warner, the race draws to a dead heat. Initially down by 12 points, Warner closes to within three points in the re-vote. **Combined with the unfavorable environment for incumbent Republicans, Russ Warner has the profile to make this race competitive and defeat David Dreier.**

### Vote for Congress: Russ Warner Trails Initially, but Pulls Nearly Even After Biographies of Both Candidates

*If the election for U.S. Congress were held today and the candidates were David Dreier, the Republican, and Russ Warner, the Democrat, for whom would you vote?*



Once voters hear about Warner's background as a small businessman and father of an Iraq-war veteran – and his message of change – Warner closes the gap and draws into a statistical tie with the incumbent. This is an impressive performance given the nature of the district and the fact that Warner starts off the race relatively unknown.

This movement indicates that, with the resources to introduce himself to voters, Russ Warner is a competitive candidate with the opportunity to win this seat in November.