

**New Models
Messaging on Speaker Paul Ryan,
a Potential Government Shutdown,
the Keystone XL Pipeline, and the Economy**

November 2015

OVERVIEW

Presentation Testing conducted two mixed-gender focus groups with moderate Independents in Deerfield, IL (suburban Chicago) on November 9, 2015. One group was comprised of 11 Romney-voting moderate Independents, and the other was comprised of 12 Obama-voting moderate Independents. All respondents had at least some college education, and were age 22+.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1) Most Romney-voting Independents knew that Paul Ryan had been elected Speaker of the House. A slight majority of Obama-voting Independents knew it.**

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

The current Speaker of the House of Representatives is...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=John Boehner	2	1	3
2=Kevin McCarthy	0	0	0
3=Paul Ryan	8	7	15
4=Mitch McConnell	0	0	0
5=Don't know	1	4	5

- 2) Romney-voting Independents viewed news that Paul Ryan had been elected Speaker of the House very positively. Obama-voting Independents were lukewarm.**

Romney-voting Independents remarked that Paul Ryan is the “right man for the job” because he is a “polished,” “professional,” and “brilliant” man who is very familiar with budgeting, and he has the “gravitas” to get House Republicans to work together. Also, they reacted positively to his focus on his family because he said that he would not be on-call all the time in his position as Speaker.

Obama-voting Independents conveyed a more mixed reaction. Some liked that he has Midwest values and that his election presents an opportunity for things to work differently in Congress. Others were troubled by his past policy positions and his reluctance to accept the job.

3) Independents cannot recall hearing Speaker Ryan say much since he was elected to the position, including on immigration

In the beginning of each session, we inquired:

If asked, could you name one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker of the House on October 29th?

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Yes	6	2	8
2=No	5	10	15

During each session, our conversation focused on what they have heard Paul Ryan say since he was elected Speaker.

During those conversations, only six of 23 respondents—four Romney-voting Independents and two Obama-voting Independents—could tell us what Ryan had said since becoming Speaker.

Romney-voting Independents remarked that they heard him say he wants bills to be discussed more thoroughly in committee, and that he would not try to pass immigration reform while President Obama is in office.

Obama-voting Independents mentioned that they heard him say he would not work on immigration reform with President Obama and that he would try to end the “squabbling” in Congress.

Overall, only four of 23 respondents, including one Obama-voting Independent, had heard Paul Ryan say since he became Speaker that he would not work on immigration reform with President Obama.

In the beginning of each session, we also asked:

On a scale from zero to 10, how satisfied are you with the job Paul Ryan has been doing so far as Speaker of the House?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total (avg.)
0=Totally dissatisfied to 10=Totally satisfied	6.5	4.9	5.7

With two-thirds of respondents (15 of 23) indicating that they could not tell us one thing that Paul Ryan has said or done since becoming Speaker, it appears that it is too soon for respondents to hold a strong opinion about Paul Ryan's performance in his new position.

4) The unwritten rule among House Republicans to not bring up bills for a full House vote without majority support from Republicans was largely unknown among Independents

Only two Romney-voting Independents and one Obama-voting Independent had ever heard of that unwritten rule. Significantly, none of the respondents in either group could recall former Speaker Boehner ever allowing a vote in the House that did not have majority Republican support. Independents believe that if Speaker Ryan were to try to pass bills without majority Republican support, that would mark a shift from how things have been done in the House in recent years.

5) Most Romney-voting Independents and all Obama-voting Independents would support Speaker Ryan's trying to pass bills without majority support from Republicans

Seven of 11 Romney-voting Independents described this as a "good idea." They argued that Speaker Ryan is the Speaker of the House and not the Speaker of the Republican Party, and that one never knows where a good idea is going to come from. Speaker Ryan's willingness to do this would be a "game-changer" and show his ability to think "outside the box," and that is what Congress needs right now because nothing is getting done. Those who disagreed asserted that as Speaker, he should have a firm role in setting the agenda, and if he really wants a bill to pass, it is his job as a leader to convince other Republicans to support him.

Obama-voting Independents said that all bills should be given a chance. When Democrats and Republicans stick together in opposing each other, nothing happens. They remarked that Democrats and Republicans in Congress used to work together.

6) Over the next year, Romney-voting Independents said that it is most important that Speaker Paul Ryan focus on tax reform and cutting spending to balance the budget. Obama-voting Independents would like to see Paul Ryan get House Republicans to compromise with Democrats and work on making college more affordable.

During each session, we conducted a whiteboard exercise where we asked:

What are the most important things that you would like to see Paul Ryan do in the next year, as Speaker?

Romney-voting Independents compiled the following list (with their top two choices in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- **Tax reform (8)**
- Welfare reform (1)
- Stop corporate inversions (2)
- Cuts to Obamacare (4)
- Increase Social Security (1)
- **Cut spending—balance the budget (5)**
- Pension reform for federal employees (0)
- Campaign finance reform, relating to PACs (1)

Obama-voting Independents offered the following list (with their top two choices in **bold** and the number of votes in parentheses):

- Pass clean bills only (1)
- Get Republicans to compromise among themselves (2)
- **Get Republicans to compromise with Democrats (9)**
- Pass budget bills without conditions (0)
- Go back to requiring a simple majority to pass bills (1)
- Fix The Affordable Care Act to make it more affordable (3)
- **Make college affordable (5)**
- Student loan forgiveness (0)
- Review Common Core standards (0)
- Gun control (2)
- Tax breaks for the middle class (1)

7) Independents were generally skeptical that a government shutdown would occur this December

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

How likely do you think it is that there will be another government shutdown this December, like there was a couple of years ago?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total (avg.)
0=Not at all likely to 10=Very likely	4.0	3.1	3.6

We asked respondents who scored this question near the average why they did so.

Romney-voting Independents remarked that government shutdowns have occurred in the past, but they doubted it would happen this December because it would look bad for both parties. It is in their interest to come up with a solution to avoid a government shutdown.

Obama-voting Independents told us that the election is coming up in 2016, and no one wants to be the “bad guy” and get blamed for shutting down the government. Also, they mentioned that it would send a bad message if the problems of the past were to lead to another government shutdown under a newly elected Speaker.

8) Romney-voting Independents would blame Democrats in Congress slightly more if a government shutdown were to occur. Obama-voting Independents would blame Republicans in Congress slightly more if that were to happen.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

If there were another government shutdown this December, who would you blame and to what degree?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total (avg.)
0=Democrats in Congress entirely to 10=Republicans in Congress entirely	4.6	6.1	5.4

We asked respondents who scored this question near the average why they did so.

Romney-voting Independents told us that Democrats in Congress do not want to come together to work with Republicans on anything. They argued that the American people put Republicans in charge because they want certain things, and Congress should act on what the people want. Otherwise, they are not being heard and represented.

Obama-voting Independents argued that because Republicans have majorities in both houses, they would be responsible if a government shutdown were to occur. In their view, both parties would be responsible, but Republicans have a track record of instigating government shutdowns, so they would shoulder more of the blame.

9) Overall, two-thirds of Independents (15 of 23) had heard about a plan by some Republicans in Congress to shut down the government over de-funding Planned Parenthood, but they had not heard about a plan by some Republicans in Congress to shut down the government over the Iran nuclear deal or Obamacare

During each session, we asked respondents if they had heard about any plans by some Republicans in Congress to shut down the government over three issues: de-funding Planned Parenthood, the Iran nuclear deal, and Obamacare.

Two-thirds (15 of 23) had heard about a plan by some Republicans in Congress to shut down the government over de-funding Planned Parenthood—eight Romney-voting Independents and seven Obama-voting Independents.

Only one of 23 respondents overall, an Obama-voting Independent, had heard about a plan by some Republicans in Congress to shut down the government over the Iran nuclear deal.

None of the respondents had heard about a plan to shut down the government over Obamacare.

Independents indicated that shutting down the government as leverage to get one's way on a specific policy is not a good way to govern—and none could think of any policy agenda for which it is worth shutting down the government, including de-funding Planned Parenthood, the Iran nuclear deal, or Obamacare. Obama-voting Independents mentioned that they view that style of governing as a “threat,” and they believe that we should focus on achieving compromise.

10) Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents (16 of 23) were aware that President Obama decided not to allow the Keystone XL Pipeline to go forward

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

True or False: President Obama decided to allow the Keystone XL Pipeline to go forward.

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=True	1	1	2
2=False	9	7	16
3=Don't know	1	4	5

We asked respondents what they heard President Obama say about the decision, if anything.

Romney-voting Independents heard the President say that the Keystone XL Pipeline would not create the estimated number of jobs that proponents have been claiming, and the jobs created would be temporary. Also, they heard the President say that building the pipeline would not cause the price for oil to go down, and the pipeline would destroy the environment.

Obama-voting Independents heard President Obama say that he had given the issue very long and careful consideration, and he determined that the Keystone XL Pipeline would do more harm than good. In his view, it would harm the environment, and it would not create as many jobs as proponents argue. Also, they heard that this project would not reduce our dependency on foreign oil.

11) Romney-voting Independents viewed the President's decision to not allow the Keystone XL Pipeline to proceed unfavorably. Obama-voting Independents had more of a mixed reaction.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

On Friday, President Obama announced that he would not allow the Keystone XL Pipeline to proceed. On a scale from zero to 10, how favorably or unfavorably do you view that decision?

	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total (avg.)
0=Not at all favorably to 10=Very favorably	2.6	5.3	4.0

We asked respondents who scored this question near the group average why they did so.

Romney-voting Independents voiced their concern that this decision maintains our dependency on foreign oil. Also, they believe that the jobs created from building the Keystone XL Pipeline would be worth it. They suggested that we are placing too much emphasis on the environmental factors related to the project rather than focusing on the economic benefits. They mentioned that studies have shown that this project’s impact on the environment would not be that bad. They contended that the oil would still be transported, and it would be safer to do so through a pipeline rather than through rail, which they argued has more accidents.

Obama-voting Independents had more of a mixed reaction. They mentioned that the Keystone XL Pipeline would help the economy by creating jobs, citing the recent economic growth in North Dakota as a success story. However, they expressed some concern about the environmental impact of such a project, and they indicated that we have reached a point where we should be looking for cleaner energy sources to move beyond oil.

12) Obama-voting Independents were more optimistic than Romney-voting Independents about the direction of the U.S. economy, with eight saying that it is getting somewhat or much better, two indicating that it is staying as is, and two saying that it is getting somewhat worse. Among Romney-voting Independents, one said that the economy is getting somewhat better, three indicated that it is staying as is, and seven said that it is getting somewhat worse or much worse vs. one year ago.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

Compared to one year ago, is the U.S. economy...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=getting much worse	1	0	1
2=getting somewhat worse	6	2	8
3=staying as is	3	2	5
4=getting somewhat better	1	7	8
5=getting much better	0	1	1

We asked respondents in each session who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting at least somewhat worse or at least somewhat better what evidence they have for their belief.

The only Romney-voting Independent who believes that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better or much better cited:

- The unemployment rate is down to 5%
- Job creation is exceeding expectations
- Housing starts have increased
- The stock market is steadily going up

Obama-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat better or much better cited:

- The real estate market is improving—more housing starts and construction projects
- The unemployment rate has come down
- Companies are reporting higher profits
- More jobs are available, including those of higher quality
- The stock market is improving

Romney-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse or much worse cited:

- Costs of living have increased
- The stock market is down, negatively impacting retirement savings
- The federal government is understating the real rate of unemployment—if the unemployment rate is so low, we would be seeing positive results in other areas of the economy
- The housing market is stagnant
- The middle class is struggling
- Taxes are increasing
- The jobs that are being created are low-paying

Obama-voting Independents who believe that compared to one year ago, the U.S. economy is getting somewhat worse or much worse cited:

- Companies are consolidating
- People are losing jobs
- A lot of people are losing their homes to short sales and foreclosures
- Computers are eliminating jobs
- Young college graduates are experiencing difficulty with finding jobs
- Homelessness is increasing

13) Overall, Independents suggested that they were somewhat pessimistic about the direction of the unemployment rate in the U.S. While a slight majority of Independents (13 of 23) expect the unemployment rate to remain in the 5% to 6%

range one year from today, slightly more than one-third of Independents (eight of 23) expect the unemployment rate to increase from its current level of 5.0% to between 6% and 9%. Only two of 23 Independents expect the rate to drop below 5% one year from today.

In the beginning of each session, we asked:

The unemployment rate in the U.S. now stands at 5.0%. A year from today, do you expect it to be...

Answer choices	Romney INDs	Obama INDs	Total
1=Under 5%	0	2	2
2=Between 5% and 6%	5	8	13
3=Between 6% and 7%	3	2	5
4=Between 7% and 8%	2	0	2
5=Between 8% and 9%	1	0	1
6=Between 9% and 10%	0	0	0
7=Above 10%	0	0	0