# AMERICANS' TOP PRIORITIES FOR CONGRESS THROUGH THE END OF THE YEAR

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### **SUMMARY**

When asked how important each of ten domestic issues being widely discussed in Washington should be for Congress, the top priorities for Republicans are to revisit repealing and replacing Obamacare (53%) and reduce the budget deficit and government spending (36%). The top priorities for Democrats are to take action to lower prescription drug prices (51%) and continue the investigation of Russian involvement in the 2016 election (44%).

The poll, conducted during Hurricane Harvey, did not include choices on federal storm relief priorities.

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As shown in Table 1, of significance for the Republican majority in Congress is the fact that their core constituency ranks continuing the ACA battle for new legislation a substantially higher priority (53% saying an 'extremely important priority') than Congress lowering federal taxes on individuals and businesses (34%). This latter goal is currently the top priority of President Trump and Republican Congressional leadership, but not of Republicans in general.

"The big question raised for Republicans here," says Robert Blendon, co-director of the poll and Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, "is are they going to pay attention to how much higher a priority their own constituency places on once again pushing for an ACA substitute, or are they going to ignore it and focus nearly exclusively on the lower priority tax cut issues? For Democrats in Congress, the question is whether they are going to respond to their constituents' top priority by focusing on legislation to lower drug prices this Congressional session."

The poll points to the difficulties of reaching any consensus today in polarized Washington, DC. It is illustrated by the fact the top two priorities for the general public as a whole are addressing high prescription drug prices (40%), and raising the federal minimum wage (33%). Lowering federal taxes is seen as a substantially lower priority by the public as a whole than these other domestic issues, though it is the highest stated priority for President Trump.

The lowest ranked Congressional priority issues for the general public (among ten choices) are building a wall along the Mexican border (11%), limiting future immigration into the U.S. (14%), and increasing spending on national defense (17%). However, each of these ranks substantially higher among Republicans – 33% for increasing national defense spending, 28% for building a wall along the Mexican border, and 27% for limiting immigration into the U.S.

The poll results reveal how far apart current Congressional actions are from the priorities of the general public. If their actions were reflective of the public's top domestic issues, Congress would instead focus on enacting legislation to lower prescription drug prices and raise the federal minimum wage.

Table 1: Americans' Top Priorities for Congress Through the End of the Year, by Party Identification

|   | % saying extremely important priority |     |     |     |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Critical Domestic Issues  | Total                                 | Rep | Dem | Ind |
| Taking action to lower prescription drug prices   | 40                                    | 30  | 51  | 36  |
| Raising the current \$7.25 an hour federal minimum wage   | 33                                    | 14  | 42  | 29  |
| Reducing the budget deficit and overall federal spending  | 30                                    | 36  | 29  | 30  |
| Taking action to repeal and replace the<br>Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA<br>or Obamacare | 26                                    | 53  | 18  | 21  |
| Increasing spending to improve the nation's roads, bridges, airports, and other infrastructure        | 24                                    | 18  | 29  | 24  |
| Investigating Russia's involvement in the 2016 U.S. election  | 23                                    | 10  | 44  | 18  |
| Reducing federal taxes on individuals and businesses  | 20                                    | 34  | 11  | 22  |
| Increasing spending on national defense   | 17                                    | 33  | 15  | 12  |
| Limiting immigration into the U.S.  | 14                                    | 27  | 10  | 13  |
| Building a wall along the Mexican border to help stop illegal immigration into the U.S.               | 11                                    | 28  | 6   | 6   |

 $POLITICO/Harvard\ T.H.\ Chan\ School\ of\ Public\ Health,\ Americans'\ Top\ Priorities\ for\ Congress\ Through\ the\ End\ of\ the\ Year,\ August\ 30-September\ 3,\ 2017.\ Base:\ U.S.\ adults.$ 

### **METHODOLOGY**

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Richard L. Menschel Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. Harvard research team also included John M. Benson, Logan S. Casey, and Justin M. Sayde.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,016 randomly selected adults, ages 18 and older, via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was August 30 – September 3, 2017. The data were weighted to reflect the demographics of the national adult population as described by the U.S. Census.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. Results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole U.S. adult population had been interviewed. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.8$  percentage points. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is  $\pm 5.3$  percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.





### Politico/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll

## Americans' Top Priorities for Congress Through the End of the Year

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **August 30 – September 3, 2017**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,016 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is ±3.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For questions asked of half-samples, the margin of error is ±5.3 percentage points. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting <a href="https://www.ssrs.com">www.ssrs.com</a>.

PO-01. The country faces a number of critical domestic issues. Here is a list of some things Congress could work on during the rest of the year, keeping in mind that Congress can work on only a few of these issues at a time. For each one, please tell me if you think it SHOULD BE a priority, or SHOULD NOT BE a priority. (If a priority) And should *[insert item]* be an extremely important, very important, or only somewhat important priority?

### (Asked of half-sample A; n=517)

a. Taking action to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 26    | 53  | 18  | 21  |
| Very important priority          | 20    | 26  | 9   | 25  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 10    | 5   | 10  | 10  |
| Should not be a priority         | 40    | 16  | 60  | 38  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 4     | -   | 3   | 6   |

### (Asked of half-sample A; n=517)

b. Increasing spending to improve the nation's roads, bridges, airports, and other infrastructure

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 24    | 18  | 29  | 24  |
| Very important priority          | 37    | 34  | 37  | 40  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 17    | 26  | 19  | 10  |
| Should not be a priority         | 20    | 21  | 14  | 23  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 2     | 1   | 1   | 3   |

### (Asked of half-sample A; n=517)

c. Reducing federal taxes on individuals and businesses

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 20    | 34  | 11  | 22  |
| Very important priority          | 24    | 28  | 19  | 24  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 18    | 15  | 14  | 24  |
| Should not be a priority         | 33    | 20  | 51  | 24  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 5     | 3   | 5   | 6   |

### (Asked of half-sample A; n=517)

d. Raising the current \$7.25 an hour federal minimum wage

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 33    | 14  | 42  | 29  |
| Very important priority          | 26    | 16  | 35  | 26  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 9     | 11  | 10  | 8   |
| Should not be a priority         | 29    | 55  | 12  | 35  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 3     | 4   | 1   | 2   |

### (Asked of half-sample A; n=517)

e. Building a wall along the Mexican border to help stop illegal immigration

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 11    | 28  | 6   | 6   |
| Very important priority          | 9     | 22  | 3   | 8   |
| Only somewhat important priority | 9     | 17  | 4   | 8   |
| Should not be a priority         | 67    | 31  | 87  | 75  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 4     | 2   | *   | 3   |

### (Asked of half-sample B; n=499)

f. Limiting immigration into the U.S.

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 14    | 27  | 10  | 13  |
| Very important priority          | 17    | 21  | 11  | 17  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 10    | 12  | 8   | 11  |
| Should not be a priority         | 55    | 37  | 68  | 53  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 4     | 3   | 3   | 6   |

### (Asked of half-sample B; n=499)

g. Reducing the budget deficit and overall federal spending

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 30    | 36  | 29  | 30  |
| Very important priority          | 33    | 46  | 20  | 36  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 15    | 11  | 18  | 13  |
| Should not be a priority         | 19    | 7   | 29  | 18  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 3     | -   | 4   | 3   |

### (Asked of half-sample B; n=499)

h. Increasing spending on national defense

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 17    | 33  | 15  | 12  |
| Very important priority          | 25    | 35  | 16  | 26  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 13    | 13  | 9   | 15  |
| Should not be a priority         | 42    | 17  | 56  | 43  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 3     | 2   | 4   | 4   |

### (Asked of half-sample B; n=499)

i. Taking action to lower prescription drug prices

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 40    | 30  | 51  | 36  |
| Very important priority          | 31    | 34  | 30  | 32  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 13    | 12  | 7   | 20  |
| Should not be a priority         | 14    | 24  | 12  | 10  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 2     | -   | *   | 2   |

### (Asked of half-sample B; n=499)

j. Investigating Russia's involvement in the 2016 U.S. election

|                                  | Total | Rep | Dem | Ind |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely important priority     | 23    | 10  | 44  | 18  |
| Very important priority          | 13    | 1   | 21  | 12  |
| Only somewhat important priority | 10    | 9   | 8   | 10  |
| Should not be a priority         | 51    | 79  | 26  | 56  |
| Don't know/Refused               | 3     | 1   | 1   | 4   |