

## Offering Stability to the Middle Class

### A Strategy for Getting to Yes on Health Care Reform

**Our polling found Americans favor health care reform by a 64-34% margin, but there is a difference between “supporting” reform and “wanting” it. We must move Americans and particularly the middle class from passive supporters to active advocates of reform. This can only be done by making a genuine offer to the middle class that articulates “what’s in it for them.” The answer: “stability.”**

“Stability” beat the Luntz<sup>†</sup> anti-reform message 61-34% and fared better than other pro-reform messages tested.<sup>\*\*</sup> It also fared best among critical demographics – Independents, the middle class, those currently insured, Whites, and White churchgoers.

The stability frame works, in part, because it directly addresses the anxieties of the middle class and offers them a direct and deliverable benefit from reform. By a 29-60% margin, Americans currently believe the prime beneficiaries of reform will be other people, not them. That is because for the last 35 years, the health reform debate has focused almost exclusively on covering the uninsured – and that often does not directly apply to the middle class. For the middle class, instability – in terms of price, coverage, and changing plans – shapes their impressions of the current system. 42% of Americans have lost their coverage in the past five years, the majority of them involuntarily.

#### What does “stability” mean for the middle class?

- Stable coverage that can’t be taken away through life’s ups and downs.
- Stable costs that won’t eat away at your paycheck and won’t put coverage out of reach.
- Stable quality so you get the treatment you need, when you need it, and from the doctor you choose.

#### Defining the Opposition – No plan because they are out of touch.

While the middle class was uncertain of the benefits of reform, they were sure about the costs associated with failure. 88% said if reform fails, health care costs would rise. More than half thought premiums could rise to where they could not afford coverage. Two-fifths of those currently insured worried that they could lose coverage within the next five years. Voters felt Republicans had “no real plan” on health care and were generally “out of touch.” Democrats were seen as “defenders of the middle class.” In winning the health care debate, it is essential that reformers articulate the consequences of failure and identify those who want reform to fail. What does failure mean? More instability for the middle class.

- Costs. Your premiums will rise. Your salary will stagnate. You will pay more and receive less.
- Coverage. Your coverage will become more uncertain, and spells without coverage will become more common.
- Quality: It’ll be harder to see the doctors you choose to see. More of your health care decisions will be made by someone else. More services will be denied.

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<sup>†</sup>The Luntz message: Health care reform would lead to Washington bureaucrats rationing health care, making people stand in line, and denying treatment like they do in countries with national health care. It would also raise taxes and add a trillion to the federal debt.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Benenson Strategy Group, May 27 – June 2, 2009, 1,200 person survey.