

**To: Interested Parties**  
**From: One Wisconsin Now, Inc.**  
**Date: Friday, October 20, 2006**  
**Re: New Health Care Poll Part 4**

## **Poll Reveals Widespread Dissatisfaction with the Legislature on Health Care and Strong Support for Action**

A new poll conducted by One Wisconsin Now shows that voters are clearly dissatisfied with the state legislature's handling of health care issues and believe by a wide margin that Democratic legislators would do a better job than Republicans on the problem. The survey also finds that just three weeks before the election, Wisconsin voters narrowly prefer Democrats for the legislature, despite the current Republican majorities in both chambers. Undecided voters, swing voters and those who rate health care a top concern, all sharply disapprove of the legislature's handling of health care issues and believe Democrats would do a better job on the issue.



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As further evidence of the voters' concerns with the legislature's handling of health care issues, an overwhelming majority of voters respond that if they had the opportunity, they would vote for a referendum forcing the legislature to enact significant health care reform. The question asked whether voters would favor a referendum that would require the legislature to establish a plan that would reduce health care costs by 15% and guarantee access to universal, affordable health care coverage for all Wisconsin individuals and families by 2008. Similar questions on health care will be on the November ballot in the counties of Eau Claire, La Crosse, Jackson and Dunn, the cities of Racine, Manitowoc and Lodi and the villages of Coleman and Sauk City.

### **Views of Legislature's Handling of Health Care Issues**

By a decisive 50% to 33% margin, Wisconsin voters disapprove of how the state legislature is handling the issue of health care. Indicative of the degree of dissatisfaction is that more than five times as many voters give the legislature the lowest rating – “strongly disapprove” – as choose the top rating of “strongly approve.”

*Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Wisconsin state legislature has handled the issue of health care?*

Strongly Approve	4%
Somewhat Approve	29%
Somewhat Disapprove	28%
Strongly Disapprove	22%
[Don't Know]	18%

**TOTAL APPROVE 33%**  
**TOTAL DISAPPROVE 50%**

As with many of the questions in this survey, women are the most upset at the legislature's handling of health care (29% approve/52% disapprove), especially married women (25% approve/57% disapprove), Independent women (24% approve/62% disapprove), and working women (27% approve/55% disapprove). Voters in the Milwaukee media market (32% approve/45% disapprove) are slightly less negative than they are in the Green Bay market (34% approve/51% disapprove) and Madison market (30% approve/49% disapprove), and voters in the rest of the state outside the three major media markets are the most critical (34% approve/55% disapprove).



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The poll findings also suggest that health care issues could be crucial over the last few weeks of the campaign. Independent voters, who decide most close elections in Wisconsin, give the legislature very poor marks on health care (33% approve/54% disapprove). Voters who are currently undecided about which party to support in legislative races are also very dissatisfied with how the legislature is handling health care issues (23% approve/51% disapprove). In addition, the nearly half of the Wisconsin electorate who rate health care as one of the top two problems facing the state are extremely critical of the legislature's performance (24% approve/63% disapprove). These are the voters most likely to base their decisions on the candidates' positions on health care.

When voters are asked which party they think will do a better job in the legislature on health care issues, they pick the Democrats by a wide 17-point margin. Independent voters prefer Democrats to handle health care issue by a 20-point margin (43% to 23%). Voters who are undecided about which party to support in state legislative races favor the Democrats by a similar 20-point margin, although most are uncertain which party would do better or think there would not be a difference.

*Which party would do a better job in the state legislature at handling the issue of health care.*

Republicans	28%
Democrats	45%
(Equal)	4%
(Neither)	7%
(Don't Know)	17%

Voters in the Milwaukee and Green Bay media markets believe the Democrats would do a better job on health care by a 7-point margin, but voters in the Madison media market (+35) and the rest of the state outside the biggest three markets (+26) express much more confidence in the Democrats than in the Republicans.

## Vote for State Legislature

Just three weeks before Election Day, Democrats hold a narrow 3-point advantage in the generic party vote for state legislature. However, nearly one in five Wisconsin voters (19%) say that they are uncertain how they will vote. While a lead in the generic vote for a party in the minority is certainly a positive sign, translating that advantage to wins in individual districts is more difficult. This is particularly true as redistricting has made seats safer for incumbents and there are fewer competitive races with quality candidates running. The poll results may have more meaning in races for the State Senate where there are several hotly contested campaigns.

*When it comes to voting for candidates for the state legislature, are you more likely to vote for: (ROTATE) the Democratic candidate OR the Republican candidate?*



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Democrat	38%
(Lean Democrat)	3%
Republican	34%
(Lean Republican)	4%
(Depends/Mixed)	11%
(Undecided)	8%

**TOTAL DEMOCRAT 42%**  
**TOTAL REPUBLICAN 39%**

The poll results suggest that the legislative elections, just like the governor's race, are sharply polarized on partisan grounds. Democratic and Republican voters support their own parties' candidates by wide margins. In the legislative races, Independent voters split evenly between the two parties (35% Democratic/36% Republican), unlike in the governor's race where Doyle has a 9-point edge among Independents.

Democrats have a huge advantage in the Madison media market (+32) and lead in the parts of the state outside the three biggest media markets (+9). Republicans are ahead in the Milwaukee media market (+9) and in the Green Bay market (+5). The gender gap is even larger in the legislative elections than the governor's race as women prefer Democratic candidates by 17 points and men back the Republicans by 11, a total gap of 28 points.

Turnout may also be a key factor for Democrats in legislative races. They lead by 1-point in the generic voter preference among voters who say they will definitely go to the polls in November, but they hold an 11-point advantage among those who respond that they will probably vote.

## Support for Health Care Referendum

The poll also asked voters how they would vote if their community had a referendum question on the ballot in November that would ask whether the legislature should be required to pass significant health care reform that would guarantee universal coverage

and reduce health care costs. By a wide 75% to 17% margin, Wisconsin voters respond that they would back such a proposal if it were on their ballot, as it is in several places across the state.

Support for the referendum is strong across all geographic, demographic and political subgroups of the electorate. Support is highest in the western half of the state (Madison, LaCrosse/Eau Claire, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Duluth/Superior media markets) where it is favored by an 81% to 11% margin. In Northeastern Wisconsin (Green Bay and Wausau markets), it is supported by a 73% to 18% majority. In the Milwaukee media market, 71% favor the referendum and 21% oppose.

*As you may know, in a number of communities across Wisconsin there will also be an advisory referendum on health care on the ballot in November. The question on the ballot is: **Should the Wisconsin Legislature establish a plan that will reduce health care costs by at least 15% and guarantee access to universal, affordable health care coverage for all Wisconsin individuals and families by 2008?***

*If this question were on your ballot in November, would you vote in favor of it or against it? (IF UNDECIDED) If you had to decide today, would you be more likely to vote for it or against it?*

Favor	70%
(Lean Favor)	5%
Against	15%
(Lean Against)	2%
(Undecided)	8%

**TOTAL FAVOR 75%**  
**TOTAL OPPOSE 17%**

Women overwhelmingly back the call for more action (82% favor/10% oppose), but men also favor it by almost three-to-one margins (68% favor/24% oppose). The nearly half of the electorate who believe health care is one of the top two problems facing the state are almost unanimous in their support of the referendum (90% favor/4% oppose). Democrats (87% favor/5% oppose) and Independents (79% favor/15% oppose) strongly support the referendum, and only a third of Republicans oppose it (57% favor/34% oppose). Voters who are undecided in the legislative races favor the referendum by a wide 73% to 15% margin.

*Methodology. The survey was conducted for One Wisconsin Now by Abacus Associates, a national survey research firm. Telephone interviewing was conducted October 9-12 with 708 likely Wisconsin voters. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.8% for the entire sample, and larger for subgroups.*



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**One Wisconsin Now, Inc. (OWN)** is a non-partisan and independent progressive public policy advocacy organization (§ 501(c)(4)). One Wisconsin Now operates exclusively for the benefit of Wisconsin citizens uniting research, policy, message, communications and networking activities of organizations that are dedicated to a progressive public policy agenda in Wisconsin. We work to find solutions to the challenges Wisconsin citizens face everyday and develop public policy proposals that reflect our shared Wisconsin values – Community, Opportunity, Shared Responsibility, Fairness and Freedom.

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