

Political Insiders Poll



Politically, who benefits the most from Sen. Russell Feingold's proposal to censure President Bush?

■ Republicans (71 votes)

Democrats	4 percent
Republicans	62 percent
Feingold	27 percent
Feingold and Republicans (volunteered)	3 percent
Nobody (volunteered)	4 percent

■ Democrats benefit most

"Anytime we're even having a dialogue about censuring the president, it isn't good. As long as Feingold is doing it without support from his party, it's a win-win for the Democrats. It's being talked about, but it doesn't look like a witch hunt."

■ Republicans benefit most

"The Republican base needs to be fed some red meat, or they will stay at home and not vote. This Feingold silliness reminds them why they should still care."

"The censure is a gift from God to the GOP."

"It underscores why Democrats can't be trusted on security issues."

"The Democrats always latch on to issues like this and push it way over the line. They are like Wile E. Coyote running off the cliff and falling into the canyon over and over and over again."

"Feingold's talk of censure forces Democrats to take sides on surveillance of our enemies. The more light that is shed on the surveillance program, the more support it receives from the public."

"The Republicans benefit the most, because it awakens their base and brings the security issue into sharp relief. It splits the Democrats into the Dean surrender-first camp and the Hillary muscular-internationalism group."

"It gives us a chance to highlight what the Democratic alternative looks like."

"The better Feingold does and the more obsessed the Democratic Party looks, the more Republicans are helped."

■ Feingold benefits most

"He needed a wedge issue to raise funds from the Far Left in Hollywood and other places who feel Hillary sold out on the war."

"Quadrupled his national name ID in two days, and instantly becomes a darling of the 'loony Left.' "

"Feingold will be able to ask the rest of the field: 'Where were you when it was time to hold the president accountable?'"

"He has become 'King of the Blogs,' which helps him short-term, but the people who spit when they talk about the president won't ultimately elect the next one."

■ Democrats (65 votes)

Democrats	5 percent
Republicans	22 percent
Feingold	66 percent
Feingold and Republicans (volunteered)	3 percent
Nobody (volunteered)	5 percent

■ Democrats benefit most

"If the censure resolution was actually taken seriously and acted upon, presumably that attention could be a negative with independent and moderate voters. However, given that will not be the case, feeding raw meat to the Democratic partisans—the very activists needed come Election Day—will provide inspiration to their efforts."

■ Republicans benefit most

"It gave the Republicans some relief by temporarily shifting the debate off their gross incompetence."

"Too easy for the other side to demagogue on this issue."

"Feingold is trying to be the next Howard Dean, but he's more likely to end up as the next Dennis Kucinich."

"Certainly, Republicans benefit from making the headline 'Democrats go after Bush,' rather than Abramoff or Iraq."

■ Feingold benefits most

"This may be Feingold's breakout issue, setting himself apart from the pack. Having grabbed the spotlight, there is plenty of time for him to stretch his reach into other compelling areas."

"Depending on what happens over the next nine months, he may be able to ride this as Dean did the war. When Howard started, all the other candidates were critical. When Dean went in front in the polls, you had all of our weaklings start to question the war."

"Party activists will likely take a fresh look at Senator Feingold because of his willingness to give voice to their frustration."

"This is all about him running for president. Since he has no national financial base, he is trying to energize the left wing. It is outrageous that he did not give Senator Reid or anyone else the heads up—very selfish and stupid."

"In a crowded primary field, Feingold is moving to solidify the Kucinich and Dean constituencies for what could be a larger bloc of votes than any of the other seven or eight can carve out."

"He's running for president, and this kind of publicity/controversy is exactly what a long-shot candidate needs."

—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL

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- Rank the top three issues of the 2006 congressional midterm elections.

■ Republicans (71 votes)

	Points	First-place votes	Rank in October 2005
Iraq	161	46	(1)
Bush's performance	75	11	(4)
Economy	58	7	(2)
Federal spending	34	4	(6)
Immigration	23	1	(7)
Ethics	21	1	(5)
Energy prices	16	1	(3)
Health care	16	0	(8)
Democratic obstructionism	4	0	(9)

Volunteered: War on terror, 3 points; security, 2 points; public disdain for Washington, 1 point.

■ Iraq

"Republicans have a plan, and Democrats will be all over the map."

"Far and away—every other issue wilts in this topic's shadow."

"Looks like it will cut against the administration, but the white-flag caucus shouldn't bet the farm on it... A few good developments, like the capture of Zarqawi, and the issue could go to neutral."

"For Bush's numbers to improve, and hence for Republicans to be able to avoid significant losses in November, troop levels must be down and continuing to decline."

■ Bush's performance

"Every issue debated this year will be all about how well or how poorly Bush is handling it."

"If we Republicans are lucky, it will be about anything other than Bush's performance."

"The linkage will be to weariness with the leadership of George Bush, coupled with his clear failure on key issues where congressional Republicans evidenced nothing but constant support for the president."

"The president's slippage among Republicans is very troubling."

"As Bush's numbers continue to tank, Democrats will try and make this their No. 1 issue: Risky, however, since Bush's numbers at this point seem to have completely bottomed out—and stand to go up, at some point, one would hope."

"Swing voters are losing confidence that Republicans can 'steer the ship' even when they get the policy right. Exhibits A, B, & C? Postwar Iraq, Katrina, and the ports deal."

■ Economy

"It is the matter of 'working harder and getting nowhere'—unable to pay for college, retirements, and health care. That is the key ingredient."

"The economy, we hope. Didn't save the Democrats in '00 or the Tories in '97 or the Canadian Liberals this year."

"If the president gets a break on Iraq, more people may focus on the economic health of the country."

"Still the dominant domestic issue and the GOP's strongest argument. Republicans must find a way to get public attitudes

to mirror the economy's performance: There seems to be a disconnect between how well the economy is actually doing and how folks feel about it."

■ Federal spending

"Unless the GOP can make a breakthrough soon, they've lost their biggest advantage over the Democrats. They're less compassionate, and spend just as much."

"This issue embodies how Republicans have lost their way in the minds of conservatives."

"Spending is the issue GOP can use to rally its base. They should push for frequent budget-related votes and be prepared to take some heat for cutting back popular programs, but this is the issue the base cares most about. And it must be used to make clear the distinction between the parties."

■ Immigration

"I am continually amazed at how pervasive a concern this is even in states like Kentucky, where you would not expect it."

■ Ethics

"This will not be a fun year for incumbents."

■ Energy prices

"Prices will continue to climb. Winner for GOP if [there's] progress on reducing dependence on foreign oil. Loser for GOP if oil companies succeed in their plans to kill the president's plan for alternatives to oil."



A car bombing in Baghdad.

GETTY IMAGES/KHUZALE

■ Democrats

(65 votes)

	Points	First-place votes	Rank in October 2005
Iraq	147	34	(2)
Bush's performance	114	23	(1)
Economy	37	3	(4)
Ethics	30	3	(5)
Energy prices	24	0	(3)
Health care	20	2	(6)
Immigration	5	0	(8)
Federal spending	3	0	(7)

■ Iraq

"This issue is big enough that it will not be pushed aside. Both Democrats and Republicans will push it for different reasons."

"This is the primary issue that will cover this election: It symbolizes the Bush presidency—determined, misleading, arrogant, partisan, and incompetent."

"The Republicans will continue to push the Iraq war as a necessary battle in the war on terror, while Democrats likely will make the mistake of cowering and providing war critiques at the margins at most."

■ Bush's performance

"There is no way the Bush team and the congressional Republicans can avoid this midterm election being first and foremost a referendum on the president's overall performance."

"There is very little that he has touched that the public perceives has been successful, except for his reaction to 9/11."

"The question on the ballot is: Are we headed in the right direction with George Bush at the helm and do we need more people in Congress to support him, or [do we need to] turn the country in a different direction with a change in Congress?"

"Most off-year elections are, to a large extent, a referendum on the current administration. President Bush is, for better or worse, very entrenched in his positions and, thus, makes this even more of a referendum on his performance."

"Events are spinning out of control. All the moaning about the lack of a Democratic alternative—as if the Contract With America was the main reason that the GOP won the Congress in 1994—will

signify very little against the onslaught of Americans' disgust with the ineptitude and poor choices of the current administration."

"Overall, it appears that if the Democrats are successful in nationalizing the election, it will be about sending the message, 'Replace the dangerously incompetent Bush/Republicans.'"

■ Economy

"Despite what is generally good economic news from most published official reports, the public just ain't buying it. Too many people just are not confident enough about their own economic future to give the president political credit on the economy."

"The economy is always the yardstick people use to measure their personal success against overall direction of the country. And for this president, if the economy was viewed to be on a firmer track, his problems in Iraq would find some perspective."

"Look for the economy to increasingly become the focus of many voters as the house market cools and families begin to feel the pinch of falling real wages."

■ Ethics

"Democrats will proactively push this. While they will also push individual issues like health care and energy prices, this probably gives them a better way to frame a national election."

"This is the issue that continues to eat away at both Bush's and the Republicans' integrity and ability to get things done. 'Time for a change' is starting to really take hold."

■ Energy

"Have you seen those prices at the pump shoot up in recent days? If somebody in Washington doesn't pay attention, incumbents in the ruling party will pay in November."

■ Health care

"It is amazing how voters in Ohio are very focused on health care in a way we have not seen in the past. Huge cost-shifting has also shifted voters' view on health care. It is no longer simply about the uninsured, but a family issue that affects most families."

■ Immigration

"Most Americans, even those who are pro-immigration, know the system is broken. The problem is that there is no easy answer, either practically or politically."

—JAMES A. BARNES AND PETER BELL

National Journal Insiders

■ The 166 participants in *National Journal's* Political Insiders Poll were selected because of their campaign experience, insider knowledge, and ties to key voting blocs. This week, a first-place vote counted three points, a second-place vote counted two points, and a third-place vote counted one point.

■ **GOP Insiders** Dan Allen, Stan Anderson, Gary Andres, Rich Ashooh, Brett Bader, Mitch Bainwol, Gary Bauer, David Beckwith, Wayne Berman, Charlie Black, Kirk Blalock, Jeff Boeyink, Jeff Buley, Luke Byars, Nick Calio, Jim Cicconi, Jake Corman, Greg Crist, Diane Crookham-Johnson, Rick Davis, Mike Dennehy, Ken Duberstein, Steve Duprey, Debi Durham, Frank Fahrenkopf, Don Fierce, Alex Gage, David Girard-diCarlo, Bill Greener, Lanny Griffith, Janet Mullins Grissom, Doug Gross, Steve Hart, Ralph Hellmann, Chris Henick, Clark Judge, David Kensinger, Bruce Keough, Bob Kjellander, Ed Kutler, Chris Lacivita, Jim Lake, Chuck Larson, Steve Lombardo, Joel Maiola, Mary Matalin, Dan Mattoon, Bill McInturff, Mark McKinnon, Kyle McSlarrow, Jim Merrill, Mike Murphy, Terry Nelson, Neil Newhouse, David Norcross, Ziad Ojakli, Jack Oliver, Tony Perkins, Van B. Poole, Tom Rath, Scott Reed, David Rehr, Steve Roberts, David Roederer, Ed Rogers, Dan Schnur, Russ Schriefer, Rich Schwarm, Rick Shelby, Don Sipple, Javier Soto, Fred Steeper, Eric Tanenblatt, Heath Thompson, Jay Timmons, Warren Tompkins, Dirk van Dongen, Jan van Lohuizen, Dick Wadhams, John Weaver, Dave Winston, and Ginny Wolfe.

■ **Democratic Insiders** Karen Ackerman, David Axelrod, Dave Beattie, Andy Bechhoefer, Mike Berman, Donna Brazile, Mark Brewer, Ed Bruley, George Bruno, Deb Callahan, Bonnie Campbell, Bill Carrick, Tony Coelho, Jim Craig, Jerry Crawford, Jim Demers, Tad Devine, Monica Dixon, Tom Donilon, Anita Dunn, Steve Elmendorf, Eric Eve, Vic Fazio, Scott Ferson, Tina Flournoy, Don Foley, Don Fowler, Gina Glantz, Steve Gleason, Joe Grandmaison, Anna Greenberg, Stan Greenberg, Pat Griffin, Michael Gronstal, Marcia Hale, Paul Harstad, Laura Hartigan, Harold Ickes, Marcus Jadotte, Steve Jarding, Jim Jordan, Gale Kaufman, Shar Knutson, Kam Kuwata, Celinda Lake, David Lang, Sylvia Larsen, Jeff Link, Bill Lynch, Steve Marchand, Jim Margolis, Paul Maslin, Terry McAuliffe, Caroline McCauley, Gerald McEntee, Mark Mellman, John Merrigan, Steve Murphy, David Nassar, Marcia Nichols, John Norris, Tom Ochs, Tom O'Donnell, Jeffrey Peck, Debora Pignatelli, John Podesta, Bruce Reed, Steve Ricchetti, Susan Rice, Will Robinson, Steve Rosenthal, John Ryan, Wendy Sherman, Erik Smith, Doug Sosnik, Karl Struble, Sarah Swisher, Eric Tabor, Jeffrey Trammell, Ed Turlington, Mike Veon, Rick Wiener, Bridgette Williams, and JoDee Winterhof.