Memorandum

To: Interested Parties  
From: Celinda Lake, David Mermin, Zach Young; Lake Research Partners  
Subject: Results of Spring 2009 Focus Groups on Immigration  
Date: June 1, 2009

Focus groups conducted by Lake Research Partners\(^1\) show a public that is ready for comprehensive immigration reform. Though immigration is a lower priority than the economy, voters strongly agree that the system is broken and needs to be fixed. Voters are in a problem solving frame of mind, and they strongly support immigration reforms that would require illegal immigrants to register, pay taxes, learn English, pass a criminal background check, and apply for citizenship with no advantage over those currently applying legally.

- **The best word to describe the general mood of the country and of focus group participants is “anxious.”** The economic climate is really taking a toll on people, and nobody feels completely secure. Participants express fears about job loss, mortgage payments, and general expenses like gas and groceries. They are angry at Wall Street, and the seemingly endless string of bailouts has touched a nerve.

- **Though the immigration issue does interact with the economy, focus group participants do not blame the economic crisis on legal or illegal immigration.** When asked where they direct their anger, participants are most likely to name corporations, Wall Street CEOs, and a general lack of accountability.

\(^1\) Lake Research Partners conducted six focus groups in Kansas City, MO, Atlanta, GA, and Phoenix, AZ. The groups occurred on March 3, 5, and 16 respectively.
• The economy and all the other urgent problems currently facing the country have put voters into a more solution oriented frame of mind, continuing their receptiveness to comprehensive immigration reform. Unlike earlier this decade, cultural anxiety and the need to “punish lawbreakers” is not the dominant mood on the immigration issue. Instead, voters are much more interested in common sense solutions that fix a system which they see overwhelmingly as broken. There is no appetite for mass deportation nor for enforcement-only policies among swing voters.

• The tested proposal for comprehensive immigration reform receives very strong support across focus groups. Participants view it as a practical, common sense solution. Participants liked that it sets up an orderly process and that immigrants who go through the system are showing a commitment to becoming Americans. Voters like the combination of requirements of having undocumented immigrants register, work, pay taxes, learn English, and get in line to apply for citizenship. Voter criticisms were largely constructive, such as arguing that it may not be realistic in this economy to require people to have a current job. They are also more likely to single out certain provisions as too harsh rather than too lenient.