

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Representative Ann Jones, State X House Democratic Committee

**FROM:** Lauer Johnson Research

**RE:** HD 50 Poll Results

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### 1.0 Introduction

This memo highlights the findings of a poll of likely voters in the 50<sup>th</sup> House District of State X. The poll was conducted from July 10-12, 2006 with a sample of 400 likely general election voters on behalf of Representative Ann Jones and the State X House Democratic Committee. The poll was derived from an updated list of registered voters in HD 50. Voters were screened to insure they were currently registered and likely to vote this November. The district was stratified into four regions and interview quotas were assigned to each based on NCEC expected vote in 2006. Sampling error for the poll is plus or minus 4.9%. Definitions of the regions and other less than obvious crosstab variables are included in the computer printout previously delivered. Appended to this memo are a set of graphic charts (which are referenced by chart number(s) in the text) and the topline questionnaire. Any questions about this report should be referred to Lauer Johnson Research.

### 2.0 Mood of the Electorate

House District 50 voters appear cautiously optimistic about the future. One-half (50%) say things are moving in the right direction, but one-third (33%) say they are going in the wrong direction. This is a change from 2004 when 42% of voters said things were on the wrong track and only 36% were optimistic. Republicans are the most positive in their outlook, while Democrats are more skeptical that things are improving. Men are also more upbeat than women.

### **3.0 Feeling Thermometer and Job Rating Scores**

In Chart 1, we see that Jones has significantly raised her profile since 2004. We will take a closer look at Jones's feeling thermometer score below, but her 73% recognition and 40% positive - 10% negative is a huge step in the right direction. Adams is currently lagging significantly in recognition (44%) and garners a weak 16% positive - 9% negative feeling thermometer score.

The lottery is well known and well liked in the district with universal recognition (91%) and a 50% positive - 21% negative feeling thermometer score. We will further explore the impact of Jones's lottery vote below, but it's worth noting its general acceptance in the district here.

Jack Abramoff has moderate recognition (55%) and an 8% positive - 26% negative feeling thermometer score. Despite this substantially net negative score, Abramoff is not a lightning rod in this district. The same goes for Bill Thomas. His 65% recognition and 15% positive - 23% negative score indicates voters are not highly engaged in the issues facing him.

Chart 2 shows a general dissatisfaction with elected leaders. Governor Johnson's 49% positive - 44% negative job rating and Representative Jones's 38% positive - 30% negative score top the chart, although both show some skepticism from voters. The State Legislature is not well received - with both the Republicans (33% positive - 49% negative) and the Democrats (30% - 49%) receiving troubling job ratings. George Bush (28% - 69%) has the lowest job rating we have seen in legislative districts throughout State X and every opportunity to tie Adams to Bush should be used.

#### ***3.1 Jones Ratings***

As noted above, Chart 3 shows that Jones has strengthened her profile significantly since October of 2004, increasing her recognition from 55% then to 73% now, while doubling her positive ratings (20% in 2004; 40% in 2006) and cutting her negatives in half (20% then; 10% now). This is an impressive change for a first term state legislator and puts Jones in a strong position to further increase her recognition and positives during the 2006 campaign. Jones's strongest area is the North (48% positive - 13% negative; 82% recognition), which represents 29% of the electorate. Jones also does well with registered Democrats (49% of the electorate), Blacks and pro-choice voters. Her feeling thermometer score lags in the East region, with pro-life voters and, most importantly, with the 15% of district voters who are Unaffiliated. She is notably stronger with women than with men in Chart 3.

Chart 4 details Jones's job rating as State Legislator. Jones is again strong in the North, with Blacks, pro-choice voters and Democrats. One troubling finding in Chart 4 is Jones's job rating with white voters, who comprise 81% of the district. Here she receives a divided 37% positive - 33% negative job rating score. Other subgroups affording Jones a weaker than average job rating include age 35-49 (37% positive - 35% negative), age 50-64 (37% - 34%) and U (31% - 26%), although 43% of Unaffiliateds are currently not sure.

### ***3.2 Adams Ratings***

Adams begins this race with a 44% recognition level and a 16% positive - 9% negative feeling thermometer score (see Chart 5). It is important to remember, however, that Jones began the 2004 race with a 17% positive - 2% negative feeling thermometer score and 30% recognition and was able to knock off a three term incumbent. Adams has a small base in the North, which is also Jones's area of strength and with no college men. Women under age 50 give Adams an 18% positive - 19% negative score and he has 53% recognition with this subgroup. Adams is unknown to Unaffiliateds, a key target for the Jones campaign.

### **4.0 The Trial Heat for State Representative**

In the generic trial heat for State Representative (see Chart 6), the vote totals closely match the district's party registration. Registration is 49% D, 36% R and 15% U. In the generic match-up, the vote is 47% Democrat, 33% Republican and 20% Undecided. The Democrats have widened their margin of victory in this generic pairing from a slim 5-point lead in 2004 to a more significant 14-point lead now. Democratic strongholds include Blacks (76% Dem. - 12% Rep.), women under age 50 (53% - 33%), no college women (54% - 33%), single women (56% - 28%) and voters age 18-34 (64% - 22%). The race is much closer in East (41% Dem. - 36% Rep.), age 65 and over (40% - 35%), whites (41% - 38%) and men age 50 and over (38% - 38%). Fully 38% of unaffiliated voters are undecided on the generic trial heat.

Jones's base is quickly evident in Chart 7. These targets for turnout include pro-choice voters (65% Jones - 16% Adams), Blacks (77% - 19%), registered Democrats (73% - 9%), voters under age 50, and unmarried voters. Jones makes notable gains with voters in the West (+10%), voters age 35-49 (+9%), liberal/moderate swing voters (+9%) and women under age 50 (+9%). These subgroups, coupled with the 81% of the electorate which is white and the highly undecided Unaffiliateds (37% undecided) and liberal/moderate swing voters (41% undecided), are targets for persuasion.

## 5.0 Issue Priorities

On the issues front, education (37%) has moved ahead of the economy and jobs (31%) as the top priority in the district, although the two remain the key issues facing the district (see Chart 8). Health care, on the other hand, has gone from a top priority (32%) in 2004 to a second tier priority at 15% this year. Move to Jones voters are much more concerned about education than the economy. Women under age 50 are extremely concerned about both issues. Nearly one-half (45%) voice concern about education and 38% select the economy as a top concern. College women are also highly concerned about education (46%), while men under age 50 (38%) worry about the economy and jobs. Illegal immigration (11%) and gas prices (10%) are new to voters' radar screens and while they are not top priorities, Jones's efforts to cap the gas tax are extremely well received. Despite ethics scandals at the national and state level, a meager 7% of voters say ethics and corruption is their top concern. The environment (4%) is also not a top priority and likely contributes to the low ranking Jones's efforts to protect the environment receive in Chart 13.

HD 50 voters are evenly divided on a death penalty moratorium (45% - 41%). Jones's efforts to reform the death penalty are met with lukewarm reaction in Chart 13 and those findings, coupled with the division we see in Chart 9 lead us to recommend that the Jones campaign forgo this issue in favor of focusing on education and the economy – especially since 55% of our target Move to Jones voters say the present system is fair. The only exception might be to target this issue in communications with African-American voters, who favor a moratorium by a 59% - 23% margin.

In Chart 10, a plurality of voters (44%) support charter schools, while 50% oppose vouchers. Although a majority oppose vouchers, we have seen far stronger opposition in other districts across State X and the country. In Chart 15 below, Adams is not particularly vulnerable for his desire to give lottery money to charter schools. In a campaign when Jones can focus on her vote to raise teacher pay, her ongoing efforts to improve early childhood education and her work to allow kids to carry their asthma and allergy medicines to school, we would advise staying away from the charter school/school voucher/lottery issue, in favor of these overwhelmingly popular and less controversial education initiatives.

Given the high salience afforded the economy and jobs in Chart 8, it is not surprising that a majority (58%) of HD 50 voters support tax incentives to bring businesses to State X (see Chart 11). Given Jones's opposition to such incentives, we recommend shifting the focus away from a debate on tax

incentives and to Jones's vote to raise the minimum wage and to provide small businesses tax relief to help them pay for health insurance for their employees.

With regard to gay marriage, 43% of district voters support amending the State X constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman and 50% oppose an amendment (see Chart 12). Many of the campaign's targets – women under age 50 (36% support - 58% oppose), North (35% - 58%), younger voters and college women (39% - 56%) are most opposed to an amendment. Nonetheless, the sensitivity and overall divisiveness of the issue make it one to approach with the utmost caution, if at all. In Chart 13 below, Jones's legislation to provide gay partners of state employees with the opportunity to receive benefits makes 37% of voters more likely to support Jones, 26% less likely to do so and makes no difference to 30%. Conversely, including sexual orientation in hate crime laws makes a more substantial 53% of all voters and 66% of Move to Jones voters more likely to vote for Jones. If the campaign chooses to highlight Representative Jones's efforts for equal rights for gays and lesbians, the hate crime legislation would be the issue on which to focus.

## **6.0 Jones Strengths and Weaknesses**

Many of the Jones attributes listed in Chart 13 have been mentioned above, but to recap, voters are most receptive to her efforts to cap the gas tax (67% more likely), to raise minimum wage (67%), to increase teacher pay (66%) and her support for early childhood education (64%).

Although the ethics issue is not a top priority of voters, Jones's efforts to pass the strictest ethics reform legislation in State X is popular (64% more likely) and will likely show her commitment to curbing the insider deals and cutting down on corruption in Wilson. Her refusal to accept special interest or party money is not as popular (58%), but nicely underscores her commitment to cleaning up state government.

With illegal immigration becoming an important issue throughout State X, it is not surprising that Jones is somewhat vulnerable for her support for giving in-state tuition to children of illegal immigrants (44% less likely) in Chart 14. Although this is not the high level of animosity we have seen on this issue in some other house districts, it is noteworthy that 63% of Move to Jones voters find this issue troubling. The other potential vulnerability tested – the out of touch argument – is not highly troubling to voters.

## **7.0 Adams Vulnerabilities**

While Jones's biggest vulnerability makes 44% of all voters less likely to vote for her, Adams' vulnerability hits the 60% level on two issues (see Chart 15). First, his affiliation with Americans for Tax Reform makes 60% of all voters and fully 80% of Move to Jones voters less likely to support Adams. Secondly, on the all-important jobs/economy issue, Adams' opening of a manufacturing facility in China troubles 60% of all voters and 72% of Movers. Although the Adams-Bush connection is slightly lower rated (55% less likely), given the high negativity toward the President, it is still worth linking the two whenever possible. As noted above, we recommend avoiding the Adams take on the lottery issue altogether, if possible.

## **8.0 Summary**

The issues climate is advantageous for Representative Jones. Her efforts on education and the economy, coupled with Adams' vulnerability for sending jobs overseas, give her a strong opportunity to address voters' top concerns, while showing that her opponent is unqualified to do so. Since 2004, Jones has raised her profile significantly, but voters in Armstrong County are skeptical about elected officials as a whole, and we must make sure that voters continue to know Ann Jones as an individual legislator by continuing to raise her recognition throughout the district. The head-to-head match-up with Adams is a good start, but Jones has yet to break the all-important 50% barrier and must target Unaffiliated and swing voters, whites, women under age 50 and the West region to bring them into her camp, and get a high turnout from African-Americans, registered Democrats, younger voters and unmarried voters.