Rasmussen Reports
Monday, September 22, 2008

Only 28% Support Federal Bailout Plan

Most Americans are closely following news reports on the Bush Administration's federal bailout plan for the country's troubled economy, but just 28% support what has been proposed so far.

Over one-third of voters (37%) oppose the $700-billion plan, and nearly as many (35%) are undecided, according to a new Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey taken Sunday night. Details of the plan were made public on Saturday.

Investors, who account for 62% of the nation's voters, are evenly divided on their views of the plan: 36% favor it, and 36% oppose it. Twenty-eight percent (28%) are undecided.

Among non-investors, only 15% support the plan, while 41% oppose it. A plurality of non-investors (43%) are not sure yet what they think of it.

Adding weight to the large number of undecideds is the finding that 82% of Americans are following the bailout story, including 44% who say they are following it very closely. Sixty-five percent (65%) say they are at least somewhat confident they understand the reasons why the plan is being proposed.

The plan proposed by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson would give the Treasury Department the taxpayer-funded power to buy up to $700 billion in mortgage debt from private firms. Treasury would have no restrictions on it other than semiannual reports to Congress. The administration argues that this is a systematic plan to deal with the country's growing economic crisis, fueled by bad mortgages, as opposed to responding on a case-by-case basis. It was prompted by a series of high-profile bankruptcies and near-bankruptcies which sparked turmoil in the stock market.

Voters are fairly evenly divided on Paulson's performance to date. Thirty-eight percent (38%) have a favorable opinion of the Treasury secretary, while 41% view him unfavorably.

Congress hopes to approve the bailout plan this week and then recess to begin political campaigning. Democrats are already talking about growing the plan to pump more money into the economy, while Republicans, many of whom are wary of a taxpayer-backed plan of this historic magnitude, are expected to quietly go along with it because of their fears of a further economic downturn.

In a separate survey last week, only seven percent (7%) of voters thought the federal government should use taxpayer funds to keep a large financial institution solvent. Sixty-five percent (65%) said let the company file for bankruptcy. The numbers were generally the same across Republicans, Democrats and unaffiliated voters.

Both presidential campaigns have struggled with how to respond to the administration's plan, with Barack Obama's campaign largely stepping back to follow the lead of Democratic congressional leaders in Washington. John McCain has expressed concern about taxpayers backing a plan of this size and at a minimum has proposed a separate national agency to administer it.

Support and opposition to the bailout plan among likely McCain voters are evenly divided at 34% each. Among those who plan to vote for Obama, 39% oppose the plan, and 25% support it.

A survey taken last week before the bailout plan was announced found that neither presidential candidate had convinced a majority of voters that they know how to handle the country's growing economic problems.

Nationally, the race between Obama and McCain is very close in the Rasmussen daily Presidential Tracking Poll.

Men are following the economic issue slightly more closely than women and oppose the bailout 41% to 33%. Women are against the bailout by a 33% to 24% margin.

An earlier survey found that 60% believe the U.S. economy is not fundamentally sound and that voters are evenly divided on whether Congressional action will make things better or worse.