

July 25, 2013

Environmental Politics in Texas 23rd District Survey Memo

To: League of Conservation Voters

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

The Keystone XL pipeline can generate support of the high 60's in public surveys, depending on how the question is worded (though proponents claim support in the 80's on television). Therefore, it is not surprising to find fairly initial broad support in this conservative-leaning, carbon friendly district. What is surprising is that relatively few voters hold Pete Gallego's vote against the pipeline against him and that when voters learn more about this issue, support swings dramatically to the point where a plurality of 23rd District voters come out against the pipeline by the end of the survey.

More broadly speaking, environmental issues can and should play a role in elevating public thinking here. It is a myth that south Texas—or even Texas as whole—is inherently hostile to the environmental issues. The state leads the country not only in carbon energy, but also in wind and other clean energy. In our work in Texas, we have found voters not only aware of the potential of clean energy, but also responsive to public figures willing to commit to its potential and the jobs it will create. The same is true for the 23rd District.

The pipeline issue plays out in a context of extremely competitive electoral, racially polarized politics in the 23rd District. In 2012, Gallego won this seat with 50 percent of the vote share and a margin of 9,000 voters. Because of both its geography and its demography, it is also one of the difficult districts in the country to communicate with effectively. Given its difficulty, the incumbent has done fairly well introducing himself to voters here. A fair number of voters recognize his commitment to their interests, to the environment, to veterans and to the middle class. In a part of the country where most public figures and groups are polarizing, Gallego generates the lowest level of criticism of any group or institution tested in this district.

But he also has work to do. One third (33 percent) cannot identify him and one in four (23 percent) cannot rate his work in office. In fact, these gaps in his profile are eerily similar to what defeated incumbent Quico Canseco faced a year ago. But, the research clearly shows that, framed correctly, the environment can play an important role raising the incumbent's profile in south Texas.

This memorandum is based on a survey of 401 likely 2014 voters in Texas' 23rd District. This survey was taken July 11-16, 2013 and carries a margin of error of +/- 4.90. It was commissioned by the League of Conservation Voters.

Main Findings

- **In an non-presidential year, the 23rd CD leans Republican.** Voters polarize along racial lines, to the degree with 69 percent of Anglo voters are Republican or Independent-lean Republican and 61 of Hispanic voters are Democratic or Democratic-leaning. In presidential election years, when Hispanic turnout is (relatively) strong, this math produces a fairly balanced district. In non-presidential years, when Hispanic turnout drops, this polarization produces a lean-Republican district. A 50 percent plurality describe their partisanship as either Republican or Independent-lean Republican. Just 41 percent are Democrats.
- **The mood in the district is mixed, as voters remain focused on jobs and the economy.** A 66 percent majority believe things the country are off on the wrong track, higher among Anglo voters and more conservative-leaning voters. The mood locally (“...in this part of Texas”) is more sanguine (51 percent right direction, 41 percent wrong track). Not unexpectedly, the leading issue here is jobs and the economy (36 percent). One in ten (11 percent) identify the environment as one of their most important issues. Part of our work here involves dispelling the stale fiction—not entirely shared by voters here—that responsible environmental stewardship is inimical to economic progress.
- **Twenty-third CD voters initially support the pipeline, but it does not create significant problems for Pete Gallego.** A 58 percent majority support allowing a Canadian oil company to build a pipeline transporting tar sands oil to the Gulf Coast. Another 34 percent oppose. In light of some national polling on this issue, this outcome is expected. However, only 35 percent of voters (43 percent of Anglo voters) are less likely to support Gallego because of his vote against the pipeline. Given some of the many other issues his opponents have in their quiver—Obamacare, immigration, etc.—this vote is not likely to play a lead role in the campaign against this incumbent.
- **The pipeline issue can be successfully argued in this conservative, Texas district.** After voters hear from both sides, support for the pipeline collapses to 45 percent favor, 48 percent oppose. Just 53 percent of Anglo voters conclude the survey supporting the pipeline, a majority to be sure, but significantly smaller than the Republican base in this district. The most powerful argument against the pipeline is nationalistic and addresses the fact that this foreign oil company would not be required to clean up an oil spill. This company’s shoddy record—30 spills in one year—proves nearly as compelling.
- **Pete Gallego does well, but this is a challenging district on two fronts.** In pure partisan terms, the district leans Republican, and the President does not improve the Democratic brand here. There are very few Anglo votes available to any Democrat. But this is also one of the difficult districts in the country to communicate with; even Senator Ted Cruz has some gaps in his profile. With that in mind, the Congressman’s scores on this survey 29 percent positive, 20 percent unfavorable; 42 percent favorable and just 36 percent negative job ratings represent a fairly strong starting point. Moreover, in assessing Gallego on series of specific attributions,

voters give his profile at least some texture. Specifically, a fair number recognize his commitment to veterans, to the middle class and jobs and to the environment.

- **Voters react well to largely environmental, pro-Gallego messaging.** Voters find *all* of the pro-Gallego statements compelling. A 71 percent majority say the statement, “ Pete Gallego helped led a bi-partisan effort to cut taxes for small businesses that produce clean energy technology. This increase the number of good-paying middle class jobs here in Texas,” makes them feel more favorable to the incumbent. This is the *weakest* message tested. The most powerful arguments joins Gallego’s work with veterans—where he already has considerable credibility—with new, green energy jobs.

Strongest Gallego Statements:

Pete Gallego passed legislation giving wounded veterans in rural parts of the country access to transportation, so they can get the health care and treatment they need.

Pete Gallego helped veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq find good paying jobs in clean energy technology, energy efficiency and other advanced manufacturing sectors. This will assist veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country while also helping America regain its competitive edge in manufacturing

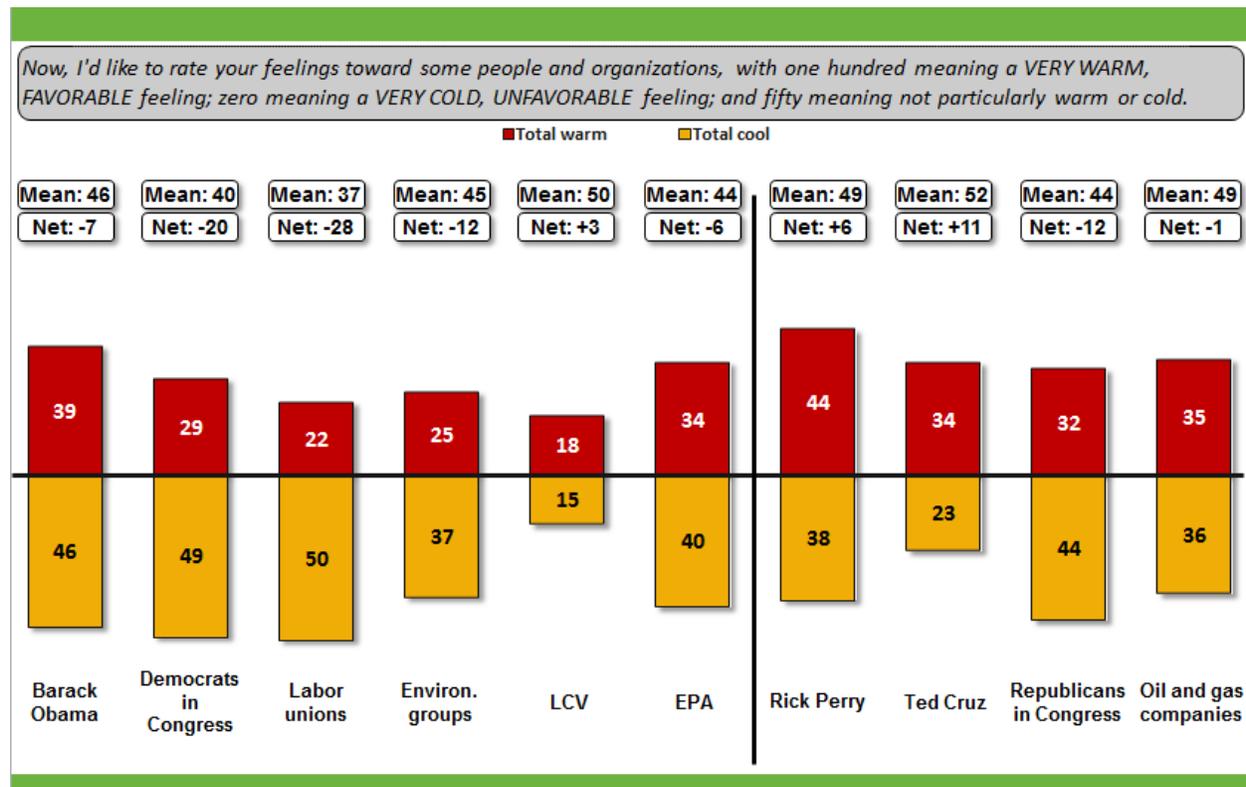
Pete Gallego supports a bi-partisan bill that requires the federal government to purchase green technologies that are made in America, boosting American jobs and improving our ability to compete against unfair trade practices from China

The Partisan Context of the Pipeline Debate in South Texas

The 23rd CD produces difficult partisan math for progressive candidates and causes, particularly in non-presidential election years. Nearly half (50 percent) of this electorate is Republican or lean Republican; just 41 percent are Democrats. Among Anglo voters, Democrats are outnumbered nearly three to one (68 percent Republican/Republican lean, 25 percent Democratic/Democratic lean). Unlike most other places around the country, there are no Democratic or even competitive subgroups in the Anglo community. Hispanic voters are nearly as polarized for the Democrats (61 percent Democratic or Democratic lean). Half (52 percent) also describe themselves as conservatives, including a plurality (42 percent conservative, 19 percent liberal) of Hispanic voters.

The partisan bias of the district is reinforced by voters’ reactions to the President, Democrats in Congress and a number of progressive groups, including environmental groups. It is also worth nothing, however, that Governor Perry also divides voters here, as do Republicans in Congress and oil and gas companies. Ted Cruz generates far from heroic numbers in this district and, like so many other federal politicians, struggles with name recognition.

Figure 1: Favorability



Despite the conservative bias of voters here, voters give the pipeline issue a fair hearing and arguments that advance environmental causes find traction among these voters.

The Mood of the Electorate

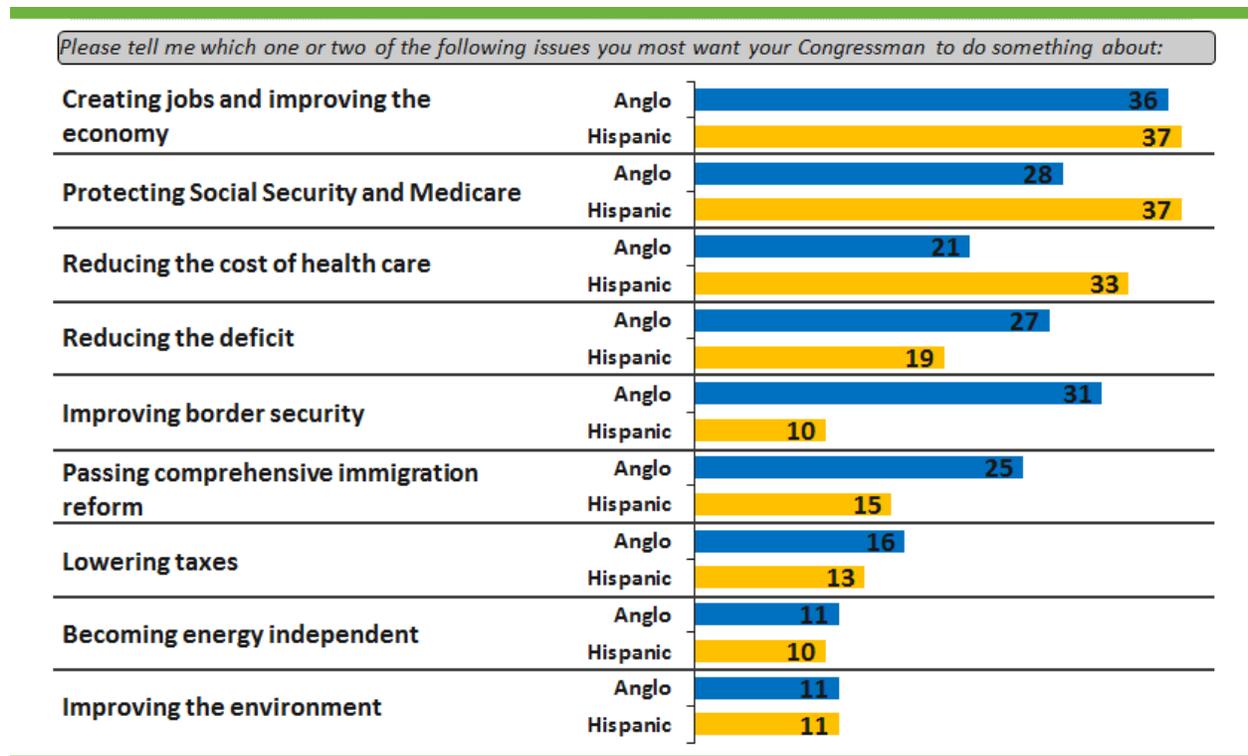
Voters judge the pipeline issue in a context where frustration with the direction of the country remain high. Despite the relatively high growth in Texas compared to other states in the country, and economic concerns remain paramount in voters' agenda. The mood locally, however, is significantly more optimistic.

A 66 percent majority of voters believe things in the country are off on the wrong track, just 26 percent believe things are headed in the right direction. As is the case everyone in the country, this measure involves a heavy partisan lens, as Anglo voters, specifically Anglo Republicans, are much angrier about the direction of the country (90 percent wrong track), than Hispanics (50 percent wrong track) or Democrats (56 percent right direction). Voters' perceptions of things in this part of Texas are far less toxic or politicized. A 51 percent majority of voters believe things are headed in the right direction. This jumps to 62 percent among Republican voters, but includes a fair number of Democrats (45 percent right direction, 48 percent wrong track) and Independents (45 percent right direction, 49 percent wrong track).

On many, many measures on this survey, Anglo voters and Hispanic voters find themselves on opposite sides of an issue, public figure or argument. But their overall issue agenda has much

in common. Both communities identify jobs and the economy as their leading issue and in near-equal numbers. Both are concerned about the cost of health care and protection senior entitlements, though concern rises among Hispanic votes. Both communities identify lower taxes, energy independence and the environment in near-equal numbers. Of note, however, border security and comprehensive immigration reform are far more resonant among Anglo voters than in the Hispanic community.

Figure 2: Top issues by race



Support for building the pipeline runs higher among voters who identify jobs as one of their most important issues, despite the fact that this group is somewhat more Democratic than average. This is because of the promise this pipeline will deliver jobs, if not to this district, at least to the country. This outcome does not mean that the jobs issue trumps our argument or our involvement in this district. Permanent job creation from this project is vastly overstated by its advocates, but more broadly, we see no evidence in this survey that voters equal environmental protection with job reduction. Our most successful arguments are about both the environment and jobs.

Immigration

Some establishment conservatives have argued that by allowing comprehensive immigration reform, they will open themselves up to growing Hispanic vote in Texas and the country as a whole. They are wrong. The Hispanic agenda is far more diverse than immigration reform, as we see above. Conversely, some Tea Party and movement conservative voters believe acquiescing to immigration reform will alienate the party from their base. They are also wrong. Even among conservative Republicans, at least in this border district, we find diverse opinions on immigration reform. All of which to say, the political impact of this is sometimes overstated. The 23rd District supports immigration reform broadly, but there are diverse opinions throughout the subgroups here which mitigate its influence on the politics here.

Generically, 47 percent support the immigration bill proposed by the Gang of 8 providing comprehensive immigration reform, 34 percent oppose. A somewhat subdued 56 percent majority of Hispanic voters support this idea, just 28 percent strongly, as do 66 percent of Democratic voters. Anglo voters divide evenly (41 percent favor, 39 percent oppose). Voters were then read two arguments for and against this bill. This language increases the pro-reform margin by 10 points (to 56 percent favor, 33 percent oppose).

Figure 3: Initial support for immigration reform

Changing subjects, from what you know, do you favor or oppose the bill proposed by a group of four Democratic Senators and four Republican Senators providing comprehensive immigration reform?

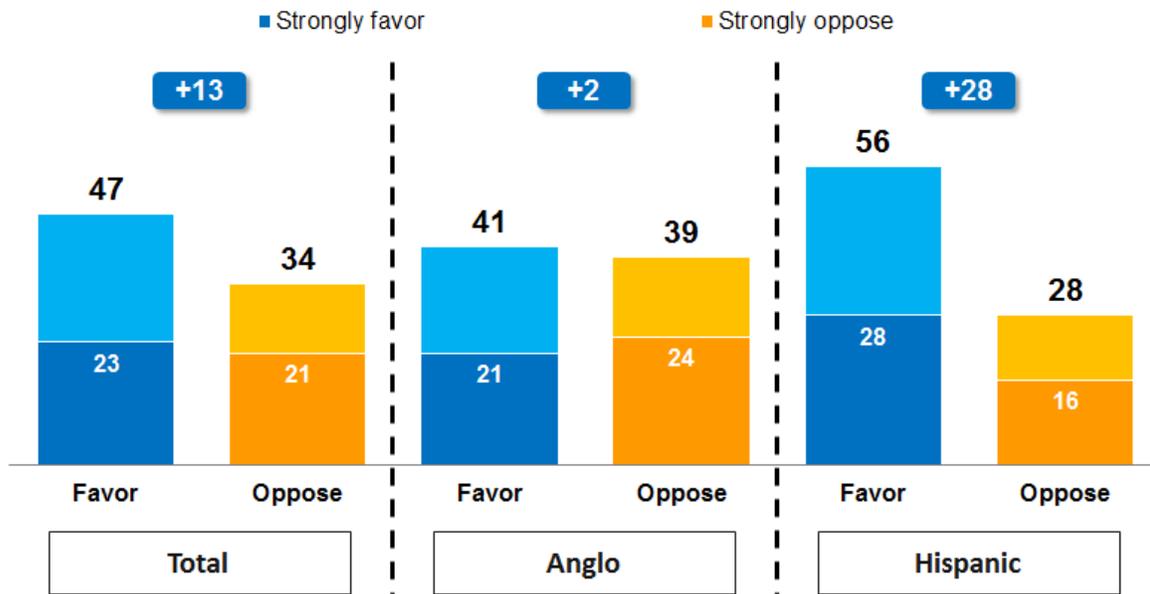
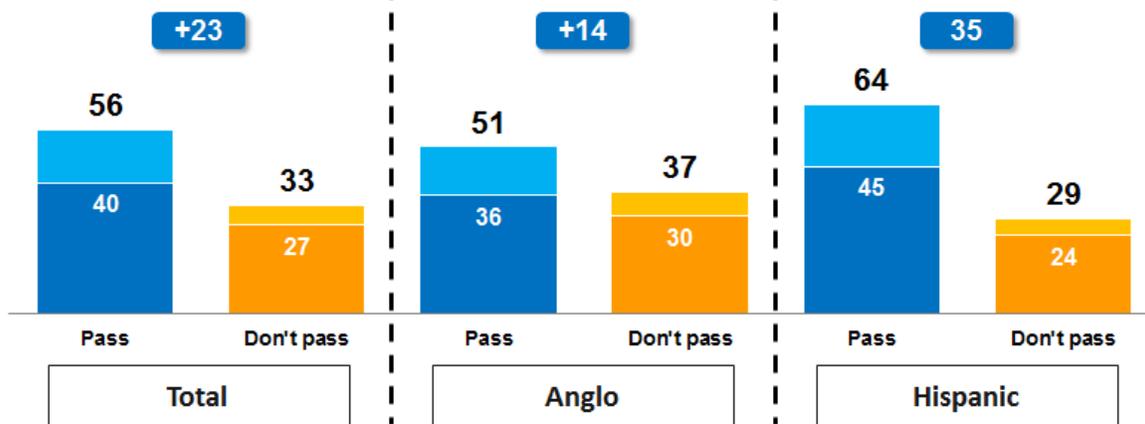


Figure 4: Support for legislation after balanced argument

Please tell me which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view when it comes to this issue, even if neither one is exactly right.

This bill strengthens border security by bringing more resources, improving technology on the border and concentrating on the most serious threats. It provides a humane way to deal with the 11 million immigrants who are here illegally by giving them a path to citizenship, but also requiring they pass a background check and wait in line behind everybody who played by the rules. We should pass this legislation.

This bill provides amnesty to 11 million illegal immigrants, fails to secure the border and provides federal benefits to illegal immigrants that will cost trillions of dollars over time. There are 20 million Americans looking for work and this bill will make it harder for them to find a job. This bill provides immediate amnesty and then waits five years before enforcement measures kick in. We should not pass this legislation.



This issue divides opinion through the electorate. A 64 percent majority of Hispanic voters end up in favor of reform, 29 percent oppose. Among older Hispanics, support drops to 59 percent. The Anglo community also supports reform (51 to 37 percent in favor). Support grows to 58 percent among Anglo voters under age 50, but even among Anglo Republicans, 45 percent support change, just 44 percent oppose.

Opinion Shifts on the Keystone XL Pipeline

Initially, Texas 23rd District voters support the Keystone XL pipeline, including a plurality of Hispanic voters. But views on this issue are fluid. After hearing arguments on both sides, voters dramatically change their position—a net shift of 27 points—to the point where a plurality of voters end up opposing the pipeline. Even in a conservative, carbon friendly state, this issue can be successful litigated in the court of public opinion.

A 58 percent majority of voters claim to be familiar with this issue (just 16 percent very familiar, however). At first, 58 percent support a Canadian oil company building a pipeline to transport tar sands oil from Canada to an international shipping port on the Gulf Coast; just 34 percent oppose. Democrats mount some resistance (37 percent favor, 57 percent oppose), as do liberals (32 percent, 57 percent), but even here one in three support.

After voters hear three arguments on both sides, however, 48 percent come out opposed the pipeline, just 45 percent approving. With this magnitude of change, support for the pipeline drops throughout the electorate, but what is interesting is support falls among more conservatives voters in the Anglo community and more Democratic-leaning voters in the Hispanic community. We also see more change among older Anglos and Anglo men.

■ **Figure 5: Change in support for pipeline after arguments**

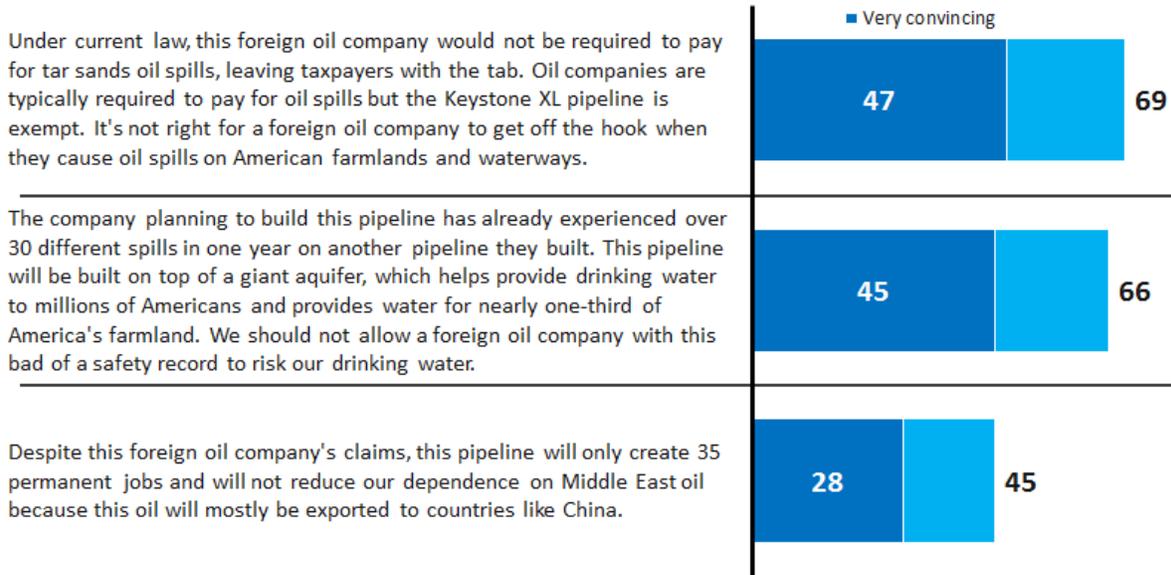
	Initial support	Support after arguments	Net change
Total	58-34	45-48	-27
Anglo	65-28	53-39	-23
Anglo Republican	77-18	62-28	-25
Anglo 50 and over	71-23	55-37	-30
Anglo men	76-20	61-34	-29
Anglo post high school	71-21	53-33	-31
Hispanic	47-45	33-63	-32
Hispanic Democrats	39-53	18-78	-46
Hispanic, HS or less	55-42	34-60	-39

Messaging Keystone

Two arguments work well driving down support for Keystone, and they are arguably connected. The most powerful argument makes the point that this foreign oil company would not be required to pay for spilling oil on American soil, unlike domestic oil companies. The other argument makes the point that, given the track record of this oil company, such a spill is fairly likely.

Figure 6: Arguments against the pipeline

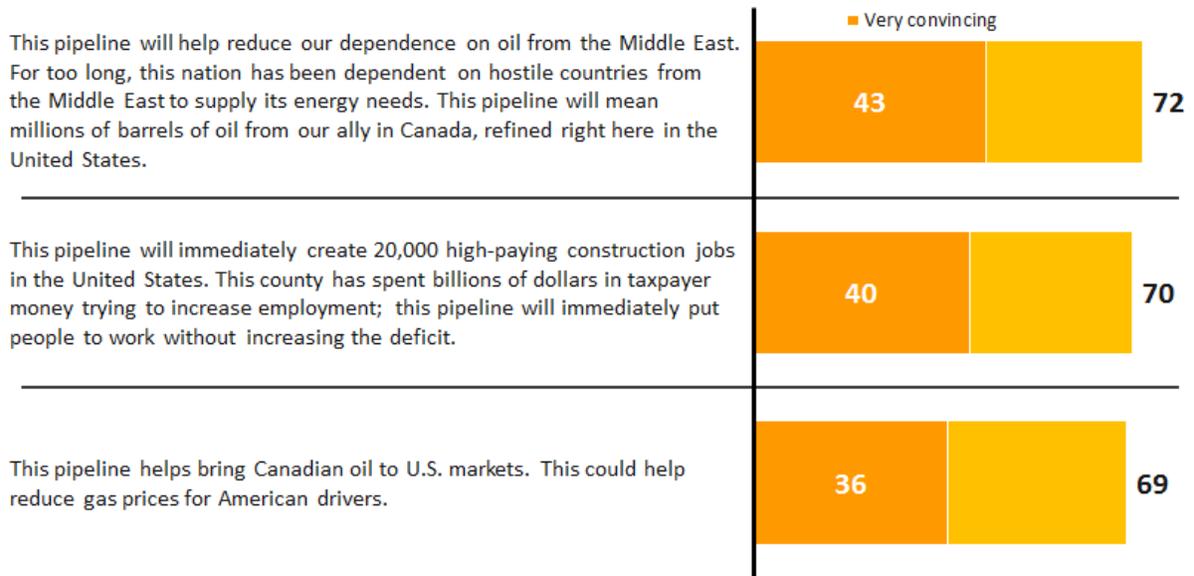
Now let me read you I am going read some statements made by people who oppose allowing the Keystone XL pipeline project to go forward at this time. After each one I read, please tell me if you find it a very convincing reason to oppose allowing this pipeline to go forward at this time, a somewhat convincing reason, a not very convincing reason or a not at all convincing reason.



The case for the pipeline is also compelling, if also disingenuous. Jobs and ridding the country of its dependence on foreign oil drive the case for the pipeline. The progressive push back on these claims does not have much traction (see argument above) and we would avoid “he said/she said” debate over the economic and energy impact of this project. That is not our frame. Rather, it needs to be about allowing a foreign oil company with a shoddy record to escape accountability in case of a spill.

Figure 7: Arguments for the pipeline

Let me tell you more about this issue. I am going read some statements made by people who support allowing the Keystone XL pipeline project to go forward at this time. After each one I read, please tell me if you find it a very convincing reason to support allowing this pipeline to go forward at this time, a somewhat convincing reason, a not very convincing reason or a not at all convincing reason.



The Impact of the Keystone Issue

The impact on Pete Gallego’s vote against the Keystone Pipeline is modest from the outset. After voters hear the messaging back and forth on the project, the net impact is inconsequential. After first learning Gallego voted against legislation that would have allowed the pipeline to go forward, 35 percent describe themselves as less likely to support Gallego, just 21 percent much less likely. Another 23 percent are more likely and 40 percent plurality say it makes no difference. Even among pipeline supporters, just 34 percent are much less likely to support the Congressman because of this vote. Among voters who identify jobs as their most important issue, this number falls to 22 percent.

After voters learn about this issue, the net impact is almost zero: 30 percent more likely to support Gallego, 29 percent less likely to support Gallego, 38 percent no difference.

By any measure, this Congressman’s vote against this project was courageous. There are few districts in the country where oil and gas companies are not hated; voters in this district divide evenly (35 percent favorable, 36 percent unfavorable). But this vote is very unlikely to define the case Gallego’s opponents make against him next fall. It simply does not have that much traction, even before the successful case against the project is made. We are armed with

messages that can effectively push back against Keystone attack, but we also enjoy the opportunity to move on to other issues and messaging.

A New Congressman's Introduction

In the summer of 2012, after serving 18 months and run in three two district-wide elections, Quico Canseco was unknown to one in three voters in the 23rd District. The fault did not lie entirely with Canseco. This is the largest district in Texas, spread over four media markets and even within the Hispanic and Anglo communities, subject to huge diversity and cultural and economic interests. In short, this is a difficult district to raise a political profile. In that context, Pete Gallego's current starting point among 23rd District voters is solid. Obviously, many, many voters here do not know him. But job ratings are decent and he enjoys a fairly textured and politically compelling brand among voters who do know him.

All that said, there is much work to do, particularly in a district and in an election year where voters are unlikely to give a Democrat the benefit of the doubt and some carefully messaged off-year outreach from an independent group will go a long way.

Two-thirds (67 percent) identify the name Pete Gallego. Of these, 29 percent respond favorably, just 20 percent are critical. Gallego carries the lowest negative rating of any public figure or political institution tested on this survey. Not unexpectedly, Gallego is better known (71 percent recognition) and better liked (39 percent favorable, 19 percent unfavorable) in the Hispanic community. Within the Hispanic community, he fares better among women and better educated voters. Bexar County Hispanics are one of the few groups fairly critical of Gallego (28 percent favorable, 30 percent unfavorable), but out sample size here is very limited. Anglo voters are both less familiar (60 percent recognition) and, inevitably given their partisanship, less favorable toward the incumbent (21 percent positive, 22 percent negative). It is worth noting that Barack Obama generates a 60 percent negative among Anglo voters here.

Gallego's job ratings—where we identify him as a Congressman—are more descriptive, as 42 percent respond favorably, 36 percent are critical and 23 percent not sure. Gallego reaches majority positives among Hispanic voters (51 percent positive, 37 percent negative), but divides the Anglo community (35 percent, 34 percent). He fares better among Anglo voters under age 50 (38 percent, 26 percent) and Anglo women (37 percent, 31 percent).

We also asked voters to rate the Congressman on a series of attributes. A fair number of voters do not know this incumbent, but despite that fact, a brand with some texture and detail emerges. A majority of voters applaud his work with and for veterans, something that can be leveraged to apply to other issues (see below). Voters deliver relatively strong marks on being for the middle class, on your side and jobs, as well as fighting for the environment. Numbers run more mixed on immigration issues and energy, but even here Gallego enjoys net positive ratings.

■ **Figure 8: Gallego attributes (percent saying describes well)**

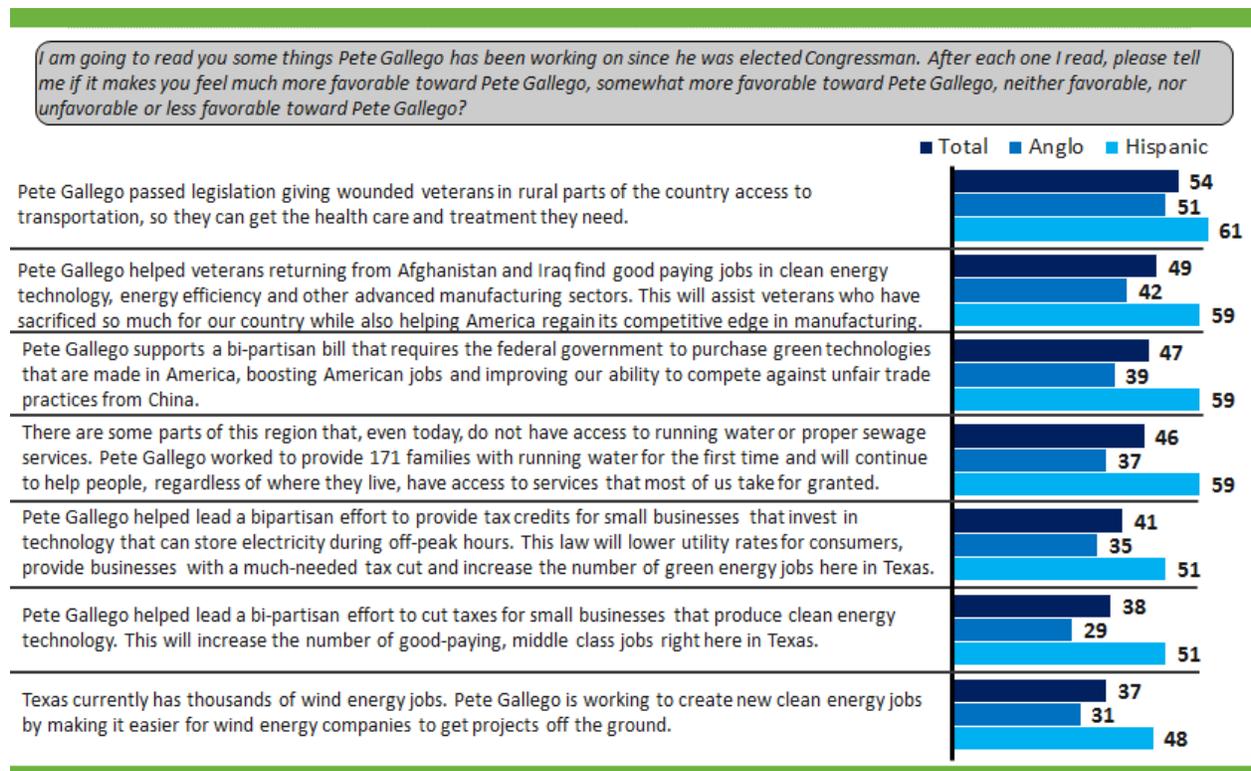
	Total	Anglo	Hispanic
Supports our military and veterans	55	47	65
For the middle class	47	40	58
On your side	45	35	60
Working to create jobs and improve the economy	44	36	54
Protecting the environment	43	40	47
In touch and accessible	41	36	49
Working to improve border security	38	30	50
Represents your views on immigration	37	25	54
Represents your views on energy and gas issues	34	28	41

Two things are particularly impressive about this profile. The first is that unlike so many other politicians tested here, from Perry to Obama, Pete Gallego does not polarize voters along racial lines. His standing is more mixed among Anglo voters, but that is to be expected given their 61 percent Republican bias. The second thing is that the standing he has earned on military and veteran issues as well as core middle issues. The military is a critical piece of the social, economic and cultural fabric of this part of the country. What is less edifying, but not unexpected in this far-flung district, is his inability to introduce himself to more voters. Fortunately, messaging emerges that allow this incumbent to leverage his strengths—his commitment to veterans and the middle class—to introduce himself to more voters, and in a fashion that also pushes back against the myth that responsible environmental stewardship is hostile to jobs and the economy.

Outreach

Every argument tested for Pete Gallego finds traction among 23rd District voters, including Republican leaning Anglo voters. But the most successful arguments build on Gallego's already strong reputation for working with veterans to make a larger point and the economy and the environment.

Figure 9: Gallego positives



Without question, there is room and considerable interest for advertising touting Gallego’s work finding green jobs for veterans. An impressive 49 percent are much more favorably disposed to the Congressman after hearing about his work in this area, including 46 percent of white women and 49 percent of white seniors. Voters are nearly equally impressed with his bi-partisan work to make sure green technology purchased by the federal government is American-made. It is also interesting, however, that arguments about delivering water to families who do not have access to running water has so much traction, particularly to the Hispanic community outside of Bexar County. There are very few districts in the country where such an argument is even relevant, let alone has traction. This is one of them.

Conclusion

Pete Gallego’s vote against the pipeline took courage in a district where his 2012 opponent ran advertising attesting to his commitment to the oil and gas industry. But this vote is far from fatal and, when litigated in the court of public opinion, produces a divided electorate. More important long term is 23rd District voters understanding that environmental protection and good jobs are not mortal enemies, and their reaction to arguments promoting green jobs for veterans and green technology made in America. Given the need for this incumbent to increase his name recognition in this far-flung district, advertising along these lines can play a critical role elevating public awareness of Gallego’s work on their behalf and environmental issues in general.