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(Partial Listing)

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Rhode Island State and Federal Legislators Differ In Political Courage

Great Divide Ranch, MT—Project Vote Smart released the 2008 Rhode Island Political Courage Test results today for the Rhode Island general election candidates. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of congressional candidates and fifteen percent (15%) of state legislative candidates were willing to reveal their positions on the issues that are of top concern to Rhode Island voters through the Political Courage Test. The Test covers such issues as budget, taxes, environment and energy, health care, immigration, and international issues.

A ten year national study of candidates' willingness to expose their positions on the issues was completed in 2006. The study revealed that since 1996, when 72% of congressional candidates were willing to answer issue questions, they have become less and less likely to expose their positions through the Test, with a national average of only 48% for the 2006 election cycle. Moreover, in 2006, only 26% of incumbents responded to the Test. The Rhode Island congressional return rate has gone up and down over the years, but this year currently 23 percentage points below its highest ever in 2000. In addition, none of the congressional incumbents this year were willing to return the Test.

The Political Courage Test asks all candidates one central question: "Are you willing to tell citizens your positions on the issues you will most likely face on their behalf?" Candidates who reply "yes" to that question are presented with several issue categories in which they are asked to indicate support for given principles or reply using their own language entirely. In addition, candidates may leave up to 30% of the issue areas blank.

The Political Courage Test is just one of several resources available on Project Vote Smart's website (votesmart.org). Also available are campaign finance data, biographical information, voting records, special interest groups' ratings, candidate speeches and public statements, and contact information on close to 40,000 candidates and elected officials at the presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, state legislative and local levels.

Since 2000, Project Vote Smart has found that party leaders and consultants from both major parties are advising candidates not to respond to the Test for two primary reasons: it will limit the candidates' ability to control their campaign messages, and it will expose them to opposition research.

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Richard Kimball, president of Project Vote Smart responds to this cynical attitude. “While Project Vote Smart doesn't need the candidates' cooperation to get the goods on them, the public is always interested in finding out which of their candidates have enough courage to expose themselves to their opponents in order to help voters. One campaign consultant told us, ‘Our campaign only answers issue questions if they come with a campaign contribution or endorsement.’”

The Political Courage Test has been created, designed, and drafted by more than 200 of the nation’s most prominent journalists, political scientists, and leaders of the major and third political parties.

The results of each candidate’s Political Courage Test may be obtained from:

- The toll-free Voter’s Research Hotline (1-888-VOTE-SMART)
- The Vote Smart Web site (www.votesmart.org)

Project Vote Smart is a national research organization founded by national leaders such as Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, Michael Dukakis and Newt Gingrich. It is funded entirely through foundation grants and the individual contributions of 45,000 members.

Following are the results of the 2008 Rhode Island Political Courage Test.