

To: House Majority PAC

From: GBA Strategies

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WA-8 Baseline Survey Analysis

Democrats face a difficult test in the race for the open seat in Washington's Eighth Congressional District. Republican State Senator Dino Rossi enjoys unusually high name ID and a well-defined positive profile, not to mention a huge resource advantage and a clear path to the top position in the jungle primary. While the political environment in the district is favorable for Democrats, the three Democratic contenders – Jason Ritterer, Sharon Hader, and Kim Schrier – are all basically unknown at this stage and will need to expend all of their resources defining themselves and seeking to emerge along with Rossi from the primary. However, this research points to a clear message against Rossi that can help eliminate his initial advantage in the race. There is a clear role for outside groups to play here, stepping into the void left by the Democratic candidates battling against one another and creating a more favorable environment for the eventual Democratic nominee.

This memo highlights key findings and strategic considerations from a survey of 900 likely 2018 general election voters conducted April 18-22, 2018. The sample is subject to a +/- 3.3 percentage point margin of error, while each of the three split samples testing separate head-to-head scenarios against Jason Ritterer, Shannon Hader, and Kim Schrier is subject to a +/- 5.7 percentage point margin of error.

Key Findings

- **Democrats enjoy a favorable political environment.** The likely electorate leans Democratic with a +3 advantage in party identification (+4 with leaners) despite a 3-point Republican advantage in partisan scores, suggesting a significant gap between likely voters' historic performance and their current partisan preferences. The Democrat leads the generic vote by 6 points (48-42) and wins Independents by the same margin (42-36), due to a 16-point lead among Independent women that more than offsets a 4-point deficit among Independent men. While the Democratic base is solidly consolidated on this measure, there is some sign of weakness among liberal and moderate Republicans, who represent 11 percent of this electorate.

Voters are satisfied with the performance of Gov. Jay Inslee, with 52 percent giving him an excellent or good job performance rating. They are also happy with Rep. Dave Reichert, giving him a good personal favorability rating (42 favorable, 29 unfavorable) but a much more favorable job rating (54 excellent/good job).

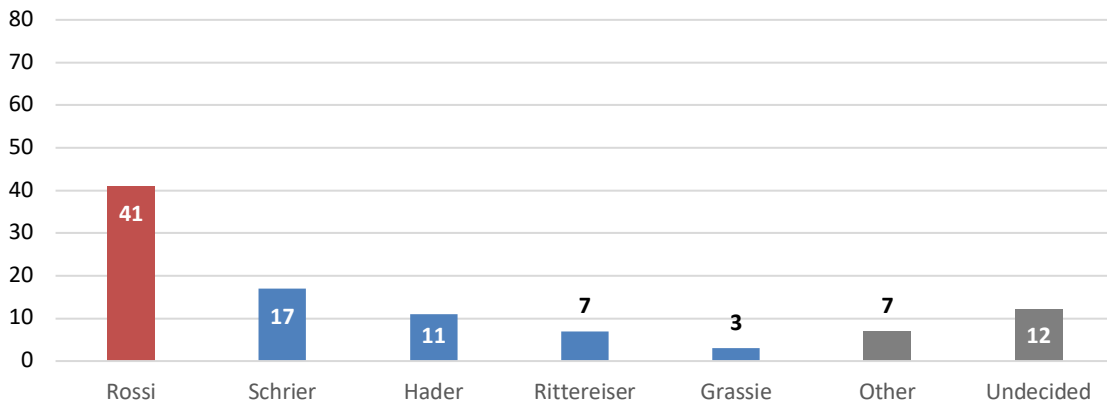
Trump, on the other hand, is seen very negatively with -18 net favorability (34 favorable, 53 unfavorable) and 47 percent of voters giving him a *very* unfavorable mark. His job approval is equally weak (41 excellent/good, 59 fair/poor). Most importantly, among Independents, Trump has a net -31 favorability and a -30 job approval rating.

Nancy Pelosi, Paul Ryan, and the NRA are divisive along the expected party lines, but only the NRA shows any likelihood of having an impact beyond the usual partisan lines, due to its weakness among younger voters, women, and voters in King County.

Finally, we see a significant enthusiasm gap in this electorate, with Democrats (58 percent) much more enthusiastic about casting their vote in the upcoming election than Republicans (51 percent) or Independents (47 percent). Among liberal Democrats, the number grows to 65 percent. Democrats lead the generic vote by 6 points overall, but by 15 points (55-40) among those who say they are enthusiastic about the election.

- Given this electorate, Rossi faces a much tougher road to victory in November.** In order to win this race, Rossi will need to stitch together a coalition that would include at least 10 percent of Democrats, a majority of Independents, and holding down the margin in King County (losing by single digits) while running it up in the rest of the district. The path for a Democratic victory is much simpler; our candidate needs to consolidate the Democratic base and win Independent women by more than he or she loses Independent men.
- Rossi well below 50 percent in primary, with undecideds leaning heavily Democratic.** As the only candidate with any real name recognition, it is not surprising that Rossi enjoys a large advantage in the primary vote, but his 41 percent support (42 percent among Independents) is well below the 50 percent threshold and shows Independent voters are still very open to alternatives. Among Democrats, Schrier begins with an advantage due to her advantage in name ID, especially among liberal Democrats.

Primary Vote

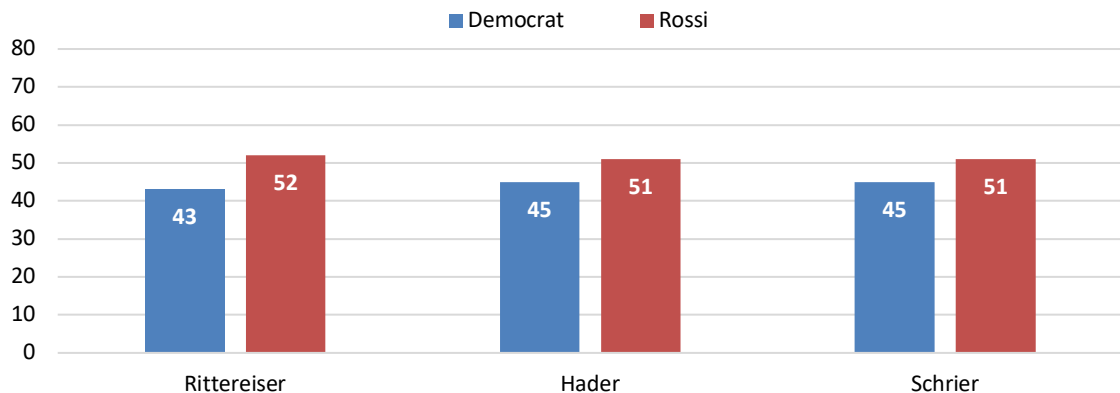


Primary Vote among key audiences (Democratic candidates only):

- All Democrats: Schrier 35, Hader 22, Rittereiser 12
- Liberal Democrats: Schrier 31, Hader 28, Rittereiser 9
- Moderate/Conservative Democrats: Schrier 36, Hader 17, Rittereiser 15
- Independents: Schrier 11, Hader 8, Rittereiser 7

- **Cantwell cruising in Senate race.** Incumbent Democratic Senator Maria Cantwell leads Republican challenger Joey Gibson by a wide margin in their general election match-up (57-40), establishing a strong top of the ticket for Democrats. Cantwell wins 57 percent of Independents, as well as 1-in-4 liberal or moderate Republicans.
- **Rossi hovers just above 50 percent threshold in initial vote match-ups with all three Democratic candidates.** Rossi’s support is strikingly consistent across head-to-head match-ups with all three (relatively unknown) Democrats, although Rittereiser performs slightly worse at this initial stage. In these initial votes, Rossi is able to pull together the winning coalition we outlined earlier. He enjoys 95 to 97 percent support among Republicans, 50 to 52 percent among Independents (55+ percent of Independent men), and 10 to 11 percent of Democrats. Geographically, Rossi runs up high enough numbers in Pierce County (57+ percent) and Chelan County (61+ percent) to keep him over the top given the small margin in King County, where he loses by just 5 points.

Initial Vote



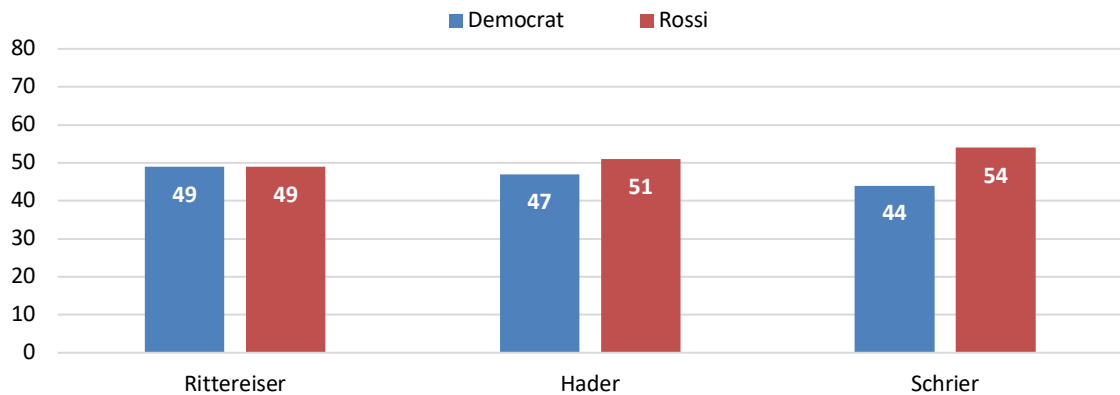
- **Rossi positive attributes consistent and surprisingly strong.** Rossi’s positive attributes are more strongly developed than negative attributes, and his success in achieving majority affirmation on a range of positive attributes underscores how unique he is as an open-seat candidate and the difficulty Democrats face in undermining him. Voters are inclined to take Rossi at his word, with 51 percent convinced he is “trustworthy” and another 51 convinced he “works with both parties to get things done.” His own self-described brand scores highest, as 53 percent believe he is “a fiscal conservative with a social conscience” while another 50 percent believe he “knows how to create jobs and economic growth.” Not only do these positive traits resonate consistently across parties – at 80+ percent among Republicans, 50+ percent among Independents, and 20+ percent among Democrats on all positive attributes except ‘shares your values’ – Independent women are much closer to Independent men on views of Rossi than they are on the generic vote or other anonymous partisan measures.
- **Rossi negative attributes are much less defined than we would hope, and the strongest among them don’t indict his fitness to lead.** Voters believe Rossi is a “career politician” (58 well/26 not well), but not to the extent that he is “too close to lobbyists and powerful special interests” (40 well/36 not well) or that he “uses his political position to benefit himself and his allies” (44 well/36 not well). In fact, only 56 percent of Democrats and 42 percent of Independents find the latter description accurate, and just 54 percent of Democrats and 37 percent of Independents are convinced he is too close to special interests. These results are particularly disappointing given the strength of his positive attributes and the extent to which these themes have played a central role in defeating Rossi in previous campaigns.

Similarly, while 53 percent believe supporting Trump’s policies and/or values describes him well, only 31 percent feel he is “too extreme,” indicating that a moderately positive view of Rossi can coexist in voters’ minds with knowledge that he supports Trump. His support for Trump does not disqualify him, even in the eyes of a number of strongly anti-Trump voters.

An age gap does persist on Rossi’s negative attributes that is much less apparent on his positives. Younger voters are less likely to connect Rossi to any of these negative traits; these voters have not been educated about Rossi to the same extent as older voters in the district through his past campaigns.

- **Rossi positive profile is strong and limits defections, except against Rittereiser.** At this stage in the survey, we split the sample into three equal splits (weighted on gender, region, and initial vote to ensure all three splits started from the same point) and introduced positive profiles for Rossi and the Democratic candidate assigned to each split. Rossi’s profile scores well on its own and helps him stand his ground in the ballot test. Schrier actually lost ground in the race with Rossi after voters heard her positive profile, while Hader made small gains; Rittereiser realized the greatest gains in the head-to-head match-up with Rossi.

Post-Profiles Vote



- Rittereiser begins as the weakest Democratic candidate with the most room to grow, but he not only closes the gap relative to the other two candidates, he surpasses them in this revote. His margin among Democrats grows a net 8 points, going from +76 to +84, and surges a net 21 points among Independents, from -15 to +6. After just the positive profiles for each candidate, he wins Independent women by 22 points and loses Independent men by just -7. As a result, he is the only candidate to pull Rossi below the 50 percent threshold in the head-to-head.
- Hader’s profile scores the lowest (61 percent convincing) but she still makes gains with Democrats (from +77 to +88) and Independent women (-2 to +4), but she remains at a 16-point deficit with Independent men.
 - Rittereiser’s profile is the highest scoring of the lot (73 percent convincing reason to vote for him, 33 percent *very* convincing), but regional dynamics are also at work: Rittereiser and Hader both maintain their previous margins in King County and gain similar amounts in Pierce, but Rittereiser is able to make double-digit gains in the East, where he has local roots, while Hader loses ground in that Republican-leaning area.
- Schrier makes no gains among Democrats, and her vote drops from -8 to -29 points among Independents. She also falls by 4 to 5 points in King, Pierce, and the East, with small gains in North King offset by larger losses in South King County.
- **Messaging against Rossi could not be more clear: the straight pocketbook hit.** The most damaging message against Rossi uses a middle class frame and holds him accountable on the minimum wage, paid family leave, and the harsh consequences of his budget. A second message with echoes of these themes in a national context also performs well.

- *Dino Rossi has consistently pushed policies that make it harder for middle class families to get ahead. He opposed minimum wage increases approved by Washington voters and voted against paid family leave for Washington workers. And his budget plan slashed education funding, increased college tuition, took health care away from forty-five thousand children, and raised taxes on nursing homes.*
 - 31 percent very serious doubts, 54 percent total serious doubts
 - 10 points stronger than any other message among those who shift over the course of the survey (48 very serious doubts)
 - #1 overall, #1 Independents, #1 with Cantwell/Rossi split voters
- *Rossi is consistently pushing for higher taxes on Washington families. He publicly defended the Republican tax bill that adds one and a half trillion dollars to the national debt and increases taxes on millions of middle-class Americans. The AARP also says health care premiums will go up by as much as fifteen hundred dollars next year for Americans aged fifty to sixty-four because of the plan.*
 - 29 percent very serious doubts, 56 percent total serious doubts
 - #2 with shifters, #2 with Cantwell/Rossi voters

When asked at the end of the survey in an open-end what their concerns are about Rossi, persuadable voters reinforce the importance of his positions on issues by citing these as their main concerns – most significantly, taxes. For the base, Trump and partisan attacks prove most effective:

- *Dino Rossi claims to be a moderate like Dave Reichert who will stand up for our values, but he served as a delegate for Donald Trump at the 2016 Republican National Convention and has consistently refused to stand up to Trump since then. Rossi has publicly championed policies like Trump's border wall, refused to challenge his repeated lies, and has already taken thousands of dollars from top officials in the Trump administration.*
 - 30 percent very serious doubts, 50 percent total serious doubts
 - #1 with Democrats and by a wide margin among Democratic women, but should only be directed at the base (counter-productive among Independent men)
- **Negatives against Democrats are unremarkable overall, don't move the needle much.** While we did not have extensive opposition research on any of the Democratic candidates, the most effective attacks against all three employ standard partisan rhetoric on Pelosi and impeachment. Being Pelosi's and DC liberals' handpicked candidate raises doubts at 51 percent for Ritterer and Hader and 44 percent for Schrier. Pitting local and rural communities against Schrier raises similar doubts – attacking her as a “liberal Seattle doctor” draws 42 percent serious doubts. This line of attack is less effective against Ritterer and Hader.

- **After both sets of negatives, only Rittereiser moves to a small lead while Hader draws even and Schrier returns to where she started, with Rossi still over 50 percent.** By the end of the survey, Rossi trails Rittereiser by a small margin (50-46), draws even with Hader (48-48), and holds a 5-point lead over Schrier.

| MATCH-UP | Initial Vote | Post-Profile Vote | Post-Message Vote |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Rittereiser – Rossi | 43 – 52 | 49 – 49 | 50 – 46 |
| Hader – Rossi | 45 – 51 | 47 – 51 | 48 – 48 |
| Schrier – Rossi | 45 – 51 | 44 – 54 | 46 – 51 |

- In his match-up, Rittereiser establishes a small lead by further consolidating Democratic women (from +82 post-profile vote to +92 post-final vote) and locks in his gains with Independent women (+22 to +26), while maintaining a single-digit deficit with Independent men (-7 to -8).
- Hader’s gains come predominantly among Independent women (+4 post-profile vote to +19 post-final vote), but she fails to make corresponding gains with Independent men (-16 to -15).
- Schrier reduces Rossi’s advantage in their match-up, but she still trails by double digits among Independent men (-18 post-final vote) and Independent women (-10), while being much weaker in her Democratic base (+76 final vote).

**A note on the Democratic primary – This poll was designed to simulate side-by-side comparisons of the three leading Democratic candidates and to provide guidance on how the race might differ in each scenario. It was not an exhaustive test of each candidate’s positive and negative messaging.

Based on the political environment and clear anti-Rossi message guidance revealed in this survey, we believe all three Democratic candidates can win in November. This poll suggests Jason Rittereiser’s unique profile and appeal in the eastern portions of the district make him the strongest general election candidate, while Kim Schrier’s less effective profile, relative weakness among Independent voters, and vulnerability to some traditional partisan and ‘Seattle liberal’ attacks make her the least viable November candidate. Shannon Hader shows an ability to consolidate Democrats and appeal to many key audiences, especially Independent women, but does not show a similar appeal among Independent men.

Recommendations

1. **Start to define Rossi now, before he can take aim at the Democratic nominee.** After the primary election in August, Rossi will have a massive resource advantage, superior name ID, and a solid partisan base behind him. The eventual Democratic nominee will have a depleted bank account and will likely have sustained some bruising attacks in the late stages of the campaign. Our role should be to ensure Rossi can't press his advantage at that time by attacking him early, softening his undeniably strong personal profile and undermining his credibility as a moderate voice, a change agent, and a champion of the middle class.
2. **We recommend centering the message on middle class pocketbook concerns and Rossi's record or position on issues that will affect local families.** The two messages and accompanying proof points that best tell this story are:
 - ✓ *Dino Rossi has consistently pushed policies that make it harder for middle class families to get ahead. He opposed minimum wage increases approved by Washington voters and voted against paid family leave for Washington workers. And his budget plan slashed education funding, increased college tuition, took health care away from forty-five thousand children, and raised taxes on nursing homes.*
 - ✓ *Rossi is consistently pushing for higher taxes on Washington families. He publicly defended the Republican tax bill that adds one and a half trillion dollars to the national debt and increases taxes on millions of middle-class Americans. The AARP also says health care premiums will go up by as much as fifteen hundred dollars next year for Americans aged fifty to sixty-four because of the plan.*
3. **Target persuadable voters from the outset.** We should trust the Democratic candidates to tell their own stories in a way that helps them consolidate the partisan base and instead focus on persuadable Independent and weak Republican voters. Those who moved toward support for the Democratic candidates over the course of the survey were disproportionately younger and non-college women (59% women, 30% women under 50, 36% non-college women) and located in suburban King County. Looking specifically at the Rittereiser split – the only one to show the Democrat winning at the end – it is also clear that Democrats must make gains in the less populous eastern parts of the district, targeting similar demographics in those areas.