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A Humorous View of Survey Questions

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A humorist's view of survey questions

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From: Teresa Garcia

Subject: a humorist's view of survey questions

As I was getting materials ready for my survey methods course, I found this clipping I had tucked away. I thought this would be as an amusing follow-up to the Worst Survey in The World thread.

I've copied this with no permission whatsoever...)

Guess what? The survey says just what we planned for it to

(a column by Mike Kelley, Austin American Statesman, January 18, 1995)

Democrats in Congress, so we are told, need all the help they can get just now. This survey form lying on my desk would appear to be evidence of that.

It is from the Democratic National Committee, and the cover letter says that President Clinton "needs the opinions of committed Americans such as you to help forge a legislative plan to deal with the new Republican Congress..."

Fine. First the Republicans put out a contract on us and now the Democrats want me to be a party to a forgery. So, things are running about normal.

The questionnaire wherein I get to offer my opinions starts out straightforward enough. "How do you rate President Clinton's performance in reducing the deficit and growing our nation's economy?" I'm allowed to grade him from excellent to poor on that one.

Then, the questions warm to their task and a bit of froth is evident around the lips. The italics here are mine. "Do you support or oppose Republican efforts to make **huge increases** in the current defense budget?" "Do you favor or oppose Republican plans to make **huge cuts in entitlement** spending, including **reductions in Medicare** and federal employee retirement programs?"

And toward the end, this questionnaire is down on its knees begging to know whether you could possibly not find favor with the president's moderate economic policies that in two years have cut the deficit almost in half and so forth and so on.

In other words, it's loaded to get the answers they want. This questionnaire is hardly unique in that respect. Most of the mail-out jobs I've seen are the same. And of course, they'll get some fair- to-middling numbers in terms of what they want and they can wave those around and say "More than 73 percent of respondents say they favor" whatever it is.

But what I've never understood is why, as long as they're being obvious about rigging the results, you would settle for just good numbers instead of going for great ones. They could do it. They have the technology. For example:

1. Congressional Republicans are supporting a balanced-budget amendment that would utterly bankrupt 50 states and the 300 largest cities in this country, forcing them to cut off all public services and defaulting on any bonds issued since 1965 while at the same time raising state and local taxes by an estimated 880 percent

and requiring the United States to humble itself before the world by pleading for loans from Cuba and North Korea.
Do you favor or oppose this?

2. The president's plan for universal health coverage would not cost anybody a cent and would include all health costs from conception to really nice frames for obituaries yet would ensure that doctors and nurses and hospital and especially insurance companies make at least twice what they do now and most experts agree there would probably be enough left over to have a Canadian come in and clean your home twice a week. The Republican plan is to have Jesse Helms sit naked on the back of your neck while you are face down in a vat of congealed lard.
Which do you prefer?

3. President Clinton wants tax measures to make the most obscenely wealthy fat cats -- and here we are talking about those with rivers of goose grease dribbling down their flabby jowls and who have to decide which of their private yachts to sail through the Aegean on a given Tuesday -- pay their fair share to get the crushing burden off the backs of hard-working, middle-class Americans. Republicans want to take the children of average families who can't afford a solid-gold Ivy League education and make them indentured slaves in stinking, soul-shattering sweatshops, where the last drop of blood can be wrung from their labor for the profit of the corrupt, bloated plutocrats. Which would you rather see?

As I say, if it's the really great numbers you want, this is how to get them. Now is no time for half-measures.

Hope you enjoyed this as much as I did!

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Verbosity leads to unclear, inarticulate things.
-- Former Vice President Dan Quayle

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