

To: **Coalition for Auto Repair Equality (C.A.R.E.)**

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Re: Executive Summary & Analysis: National Survey of 800 Registered Voters

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## **Introduction & Methodology**

**the polling company™ inc.** and **Lake Research Partners** are pleased to present to the Coalition for Auto Repair Equality (C.A.R.E.) this analysis of findings from a recent telephone survey of 800 registered voters nationwide.

Interviews were conducted over three consecutive nights at a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility by telephone with live callers. The sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit Dial (RDD), where phone numbers were generated by a computer to ensure that every household in the nation had an equal chance to be called. Respondents were then screened to ensure they were registered to vote at their current address.

The survey was fielded May 16-18, 2006. The original instrument contained 20 questions, including 11 demographic inquiries.

The margin of error for the survey is  $\pm 3.5\%$  at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that the data obtained would not differ by any more than 3.5 percentage points in either direction had the entire population of registered voters nationwide been surveyed. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

## **“Right to Repair” Recap**

Government regulations require that all vehicles manufactured after 1996 be equipped with a computer system that alerts the owner of the vehicle to a mechanical problem. The computer system also helps automotive technicians diagnose and repair the problem.

Currently, only automobile manufacturers and their dealers have access to all the information stored in the vehicle’s computer about the mechanical problems, and the parts and repairs needed to fix them.

The United States House of Representatives is currently considering H.R. 2048, “*The Right to Repair Act*” which would require automobile manufacturers to share all vehicle repair information about mechanical problems and the parts needed to fix the problems with the owner of the vehicle, and the owner’s mechanic. As of April 26, 2006, the bill had 101 bi-partisan cosponsors.


# Analysis of Findings


## Overwhelming Support for Auto Repair Equality.


**By a margin of 4-to-1 (76%-19%), voters declared that important details and data about their automobiles should NOT be “privileged information,”** inaccessible to all but the vehicle’s manufacturer and dealer.


The three-quarters of voters who rejected this exclusive arrangement did so with intensity, some 64% of respondents “*strongly*” agreed that “automobile owners and the mechanics they choose” should also have access to the critical data about mechanical problems and necessary repairs stored in the vehicle’s computer system.

Clear majorities of every single major demographic group studied backed auto repair equality.

 Undeniable **tri-partisan agreement** emerged that auto owners and their mechanics should have access to the same information as auto makers and dealers: 79% of self-identified Democrats, 78% of Republicans, and 74% of Independents agreed.

 Voters who preferred to have their vehicles serviced by independent or private mechanics were a bit more likely than those who turned to a dealer for repairs to support equality (80%-74%).

 Higher income households (\$50,000+) were more likely than those with incomes less than \$50,000 to back freedom information with respect to auto repair (81%-74%).

 Geographically, South Atlantic<sup>1</sup> residents were among voters most apt to call for auto manufacturers to share information about mechanical problems (87%).

As you may know, government regulations require that all vehicles manufactured after 1996 be equipped with a computer system that alerts the owner of the vehicle to a mechanical problem. The computer system also helps automotive technicians diagnose and repair the problem.

Currently, only automobile manufacturers and their dealers have access to all the information stored in the vehicle’s computer about the mechanical problems, and the parts and repairs needed to fix the problem.

Which of the following comes closest to your own opinion: [ROTATED]

Person 1: Only automobile manufacturers and their dealers should have access to the information stored in the computer about mechanical problems and the parts and repairs needed to fix the problem.

Person 2: Automobile manufacturers and their dealers as well as automobile owners and the mechanics they choose, should have access to the information stored in the computer about mechanical problems and the parts and repairs needed to fix the problem.

**19% TOTAL AGREE PERSON 1 (NET)**

11% STRONGLY AGREE PERSON 1  
8% SOMEWHAT AGREE PERSON 1

**76% TOTAL AGREE PERSON 2 (NET)**


12% SOMEWHAT AGREE PERSON 2  
64% STRONGLY AGREE PERSON 2


1% NEITHER (VOLUNTEERED)  
1% BOTH (VOLUNTEERED)  
2% DO NOT KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)  
\* REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)

<sup>1</sup> South Atlantic region includes DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, and WV.

## “Right to Repair” Act Approved by a 9-to-1 Margin.

Voters demonstrated eye-popping support for a law requiring auto manufacturers to declassify “*vehicle repair information about mechanical problems*” and share it with the vehicle’s owner and chosen mechanic (84%-9%). The intensity of voters’ feelings on the topic was unequivocal, as seven-in-ten “*strongly*” backed such a bill.

 Voters of all three parties rallied behind a bill to require full disclosure of auto repair information. While more than eight-in-ten of each party voiced support for the bill, backing was slightly higher among self-identified Republicans (88%) and Democrats (86%), than Independents (81%).

 Respondents aged 35-44 (91%) and 55-64 (89%) and Hispanics (91%) were among those most likely to urge Congress to pass this law.

Would you support or oppose a bill in Congress that requires automobile manufacturers to share all vehicle repair information about mechanical problems and the parts needed to fix the problems with the owner of the vehicle, and the owner’s mechanic?

### **84% TOTAL SUPPORT (NET)**

69% STRONGLY SUPPORT  
15% SOMEWHAT SUPPORT

### **9% TOTAL OPPOSE (NET)**

3% SOMEWHAT OPPOSE  
6% STRONGLY OPPOSE  
  
2% NEITHER (VOLUNTEERED)  
\* BOTH (VOLUNTEERED)  
2% DEPENDS/NEED TO KNOW MORE (VOLUNTEERED)  
2% DO NOT KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)  
\* REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)

## “Right to Repair” Act Carries Considerable Political Currency.

In a sharply divided Congress amidst sometimes poisonous partisan cultures, the “Right to Repair” stands out as an opportunity for all members to curry favor with voters, nearly all of whom are auto owners or operators.

Six-in-ten (62%) U.S. voters would be more apt to support a Congressional candidate who favored requiring auto manufacturers to “share all vehicle repair information” with vehicle owners and their mechanics. By comparison, just 7% would be less likely to vote for that legislator, resulting in a net positive of 55-points.

And would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Congress if you knew he or she was in favor of requiring auto manufacturers to share all vehicle repair information about mechanical problems needed to fix the problems with the owner of the vehicle and the owner’s mechanic?

### **62% TOTAL MORE LIKELY (NET)**

36% MUCH MORE LIKELY  
26% SOMEWHAT MORE LIKELY

### **7% TOTAL LESS LIKELY (NET)**

3% SOMEWHAT LESS LIKELY  
4% MUCH LESS LIKELY

### **22% NO DIFFERENCE (VOLUNTEERED)**

5% DEPENDS/NEED TO KNOW MORE (VOLUNTEERED)  
2% DO NOT KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)  
1% REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)

The intensity was somewhat split among the 62% who said they would be more inclined to vote for this candidate: 36% would be “much more likely” to support this candidate, while 26% would be “somewhat” so. **Another 22% reported the candidate’s stance on this issue would make “no difference.”**

- 🚗 A “Right to Repair” candidate was especially popular among some voting blocs that are chased and courted by pols on both sides of the aisle, namely Blacks, Hispanics, those earning less than \$70,000 per year, and self-identified Independents.

As a stand-alone issue, auto repair equality may not be the single most important part of a candidate’s platform. However, it is a fitting way for a candidate to demonstrate commitment to a larger promise to prioritize consumer protection and his or her property rights. With gas prices (and tempers) expected to rise over the summer months, support for the “Right to Repair” Act is a simple way for lawmakers to prove to the electorate that they are in touch with the “kitchen table” concerns that impact their everyday lives without stepping into more controversial terrain.

## On The Road: Voters and their Vehicles.

- 🚗 Over half (56%) of all voters say they prefer to have their automobiles serviced or repaired at an “*independent repair shop or private mechanic*,” while a combined 36% take their vehicles to a dealership for service. **This suggests that a majority of voters do not currently have access (either personally, or through their auto repair specialist of choice) to important information about potential mechanical problems with their cars and trucks – something most of them probably do not realize.**
  - Low-income households (< \$30,000) and South Central residents were more likely than most to prefer private mechanics.
- 🚗 Seven-in-ten (71%) voters indicated that the rising price of gasoline has had a significant impact on their lives, compared to 28% who said it has had little or no impact.
  - Groups more likely than most to bemoan the higher cost of gas included 18-44 year olds, Blacks, those earning \$30,000-\$69,000, and parents.
- 🚗 The majority of voters (62%) spend between \$15 and \$59 on gas in the typical week, while 9% use less than \$15 worth and 24% use \$60 or more.
- 🚗 Higher gas prices have led to notable changes in behavior for many voters – 23% have bought or considered buying a smaller/more fuel efficient car, 12% have postponed the purchase of a new vehicle, 12% have cut back on other vehicle-related expenditures such as regular servicing or oil changes to compensate for the extra dollars devoted to gasoline, and another 10% have made repairs to their current vehicle for better fuel efficiency.

- The rising cost of fuel is also having a direct impact on the auto repair industry. A combined 34% of vehicle owning voters have made changes that will potentially lead to a higher need for quality car servicing – whether because voters are keeping their cars longer, not keeping up with regular auto maintenance, or getting extra tune-ups to ensure fuel efficiency.
- 🚗 The majority (57%) of voters own a vehicle that is not covered by any type of warranty, compared to a total of 36% who are still under the original factory warranty (27%) or an extended warranty (9%).
  - **Respondents whose automobiles were not under warranty were considerably more likely than those who were covered to rely on a private mechanic for car repairs and maintenance (69%-38%).**
- 🚗 Americans reported a wide range of spending on automobile maintenance and repair (not including gasoline). The majority spend less than \$500 per year on average (19% less than \$100; 19% \$100-\$249; 18% \$250-\$499), while fewer than one-in-five (18%) spend \$500-\$999 in the typical year. Another 14% of voters reported shelling out \$1,000 or more.
- 🚗 Vehicle maintenance and repair costs have held steady for the majority (55%) of voters over the last five years, while 34% report they are spending more now and only 6% are spending less.
  - Voters who prefer private auto mechanics were more likely than those who take their vehicles to the dealership for service to say the amount they spend on repairs and basic maintenance has *increased* over the past five years (37%-31%).

## In Conclusion

Voters overwhelmingly agree that important information held by newer automobile computer systems should not be accessible only by auto manufacturers and dealers. Vehicle owners and their mechanics have the right to know all the details about mechanical problems and the necessary repairs to get the automobile functioning safely and efficiently. **Considering a majority of voters currently do not get their cars and trucks serviced at an auto dealership, the need for equal and full disclosure is even more critical.**

Not only do voters support the generic concept of auto repair equality, but they are strongly behind a law requiring it. By a stunning margin, respondents approved of Congress passing the bill currently known as H.R. 2048, or “*The Right to Repair Act.*”

Congressional candidates in favor of *the Right to Repair Act* can look forward to definite backing from voters, a clear majority of who would be more likely to cast a ballot in such a candidate’s favor. Particularly in the face of rising fuel costs and what some perceive as comparable increased in the cost of automobile maintenance, a candidate who made his or her “for the little guy” position known to voters might enjoy a notable boost in support.