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NJ SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIE REFORM AGENDA

But Governor and legislature don't work well together

Many of Governor Chris Christie's reform proposals get the green light from Garden State residents. According to the latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll*, the public supports increasing state workers' health care premiums and eliminating double dipping, but opinion is divided on cutting pension benefits for current employees.

The governor has spent the past few weeks laying out an aggressive government reform agenda. Democrats in the legislature have already signaled opposition to some of his proposals. This comes as no surprise to most New Jerseyans.

Only 21% of state residents say that Governor Christie and the Democratic legislative leadership have been working well together. A majority (61%) say they have not been working together all that well. Among this latter group, most (54%) say both sides are equally to blame for this state of affairs, with the remainder slightly more likely to blame Christie (26%) than the Democrats (17%).

When it comes to reforming New Jersey government, about 1-in-3 New Jerseyans (32%) say they have *a lot* of trust in Chris Christie, outpacing the 1-in-7 who have *a lot* of trust for either legislative Democrats (14%) or Republicans (14%). Even mayors and town councils (20%) are relatively more likely than legislators to engender *a lot* of trust when it comes to reforming government. At the other end of the spectrum, about 3-in-10 residents say they have no trust at all in either Governor Christie (29%), legislative Democrats (29%), or legislative Republicans (36%). About 1-in-4 (26%) have no trust in their local elected officials.

“While the New Jersey public is not unquestioning in its support, the governor does have a credibility advantage over the legislature when it comes to reforming government,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

New Jerseyans say that the days when state government needed generous benefits to recruit a quality workforce are past. Specifically just 31% say that higher benefits are necessary, compared to 61% who say that government salaries are good enough to compete with private employers. The number who feel that extra benefits are not necessary has increased by 10 percentage points since 2005.

Furthermore, only 8% of New Jerseyans say that state government has been managing the costs of its pension system wisely. An overwhelming 78% say these costs are out of control, up sharply from 59% who felt the same five years ago.

Despite the pension system's current fiscal state, the public is conflicted on whether to cut benefits for current government workers – 46% say yes, while 46% disagree. Although state opinion is currently divided, it should be noted that two and a half years ago, fewer residents (39%) supported reducing pension benefits while a majority (54%) were opposed.

A majority opinion does emerge, though, when it comes to new employees. Fully 6-in-10 (61%) New Jerseyans say that newly hired government employees should be put into a 401k-like defined contribution plan rather than a pension. Just 27% disapprove of this idea. Approval for this idea is up by 9 percentage points since March 2008.

In another benefit area, the governor has proposed that state workers should pay 30 percent of their health care premiums. The poll results indicate that about half of the public is in general agreement with that premise. Specifically, 48% of New Jerseyans feel that state workers should pay about 25 percent or more of their health care premiums – up from 43% who said the same five years ago. Another 31% feel they should pay about 10 percent and 12% feel they should not have to pay anything for health care coverage.

The governor has also proposed eliminating all double-dipping. A sizable majority of New Jerseyans side with him on this, with 71% disapproving of anyone receiving two public salaries, even if both jobs are classified as part-time. Only 23% would continue this practice.

About 22% of New Jerseyans have been on the public payroll at some time in their lives. Among this group, 56% say that government salaries are good enough to recruit a quality workforce without added benefits; 71% agree that state workers should be restricted to holding only one public job; and 54% approve of putting new employees on a defined contributions retirement plan. However, only 40% say state workers should pay 25 percent or more of their health care premiums; and just 35% support reducing pension benefits for the current workforce.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* was conducted by telephone with 801 New Jersey adults from September 15 to 19, 2010. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.5 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published

by the New Jersey Press Media newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, and Home News Tribune).

DATA TABLES

The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

(* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

- In general, have Governor Christie and Democratic leaders in the legislature been working together well or not so well?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Well	21%	21%	20%	15%	23%	24%	21%	20%
Not so well	61%	62%	56%	70%	57%	56%	66%	60%
(VOL) Mixed/Depends	4%	4%	5%	3%	4%	6%	2%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	14%	13%	19%	12%	16%	14%	11%	15%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

[The following question was asked only of those who said "Not so well" to Q1, moe= ± 4.3%]

- Who is more to blame for this – Christie, the Democrats, or both equally?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Christie	26%	28%	6%	41%	19%	9%	38%	22%
Democrats	17%	16%	20%	5%	18%	35%	11%	19%
Both equally	54%	52%	71%	51%	59%	56%	47%	57%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%	3%	3%	5%	1%	4%	3%
Unwtd N	510	468	42	156	237	108	141	361

- How much do you trust [READ ITEM] when it comes to reforming New Jersey government – a lot, a little, or not at all? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

A. Governor Christie

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
A lot	32%	32%	29%	15%	35%	52%	32%	32%
A little	35%	34%	45%	37%	37%	31%	27%	38%
Not at all	29%	30%	17%	46%	23%	13%	37%	26%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	9%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

B. Democrats in the legislature

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
A lot	14%	15%	13%	35%	4%	2%	15%	14%
A little	53%	52%	59%	54%	56%	47%	59%	51%
Not at all	29%	30%	19%	9%	34%	50%	24%	30%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	9%	2%	6%	2%	3%	4%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

C. Republicans in the legislature

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
A lot	14%	13%	17%	3%	11%	36%	11%	15%
A little	46%	45%	50%	41%	50%	45%	39%	47%
Not at all	36%	37%	27%	53%	33%	16%	47%	33%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	4%	6%	3%	7%	2%	3%	5%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

D. Your local mayor and council

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
A lot	20%	21%	17%	20%	19%	24%	19%	20%
A little	49%	49%	53%	57%	46%	44%	51%	49%
Not at all	26%	26%	24%	19%	29%	27%	27%	25%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	4%	7%	4%	5%	5%	3%	5%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

4. Do you approve or disapprove of a person holding two paid government jobs, even if both jobs are classified as part-time?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Approve	23%	23%	22%	29%	20%	19%	25%	22%
Disapprove	71%	71%	68%	65%	73%	75%	71%	71%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	6%	10%	6%	7%	6%	4%	7%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

5. How much of their health care premiums do you think New Jersey government employees should pay – nothing, about 10 percent, about 25 percent, about half, or more?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Nothing	12%	12%	11%	18%	9%	8%	17%	11%
About 10 percent	31%	31%	29%	32%	31%	28%	35%	30%
About 25 percent	25%	26%	20%	23%	26%	28%	20%	26%
About half	18%	17%	24%	14%	20%	19%	16%	18%
More	5%	5%	3%	4%	3%	7%	4%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	10%	13%	9%	10%	10%	9%	10%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

TREND:	September 2010	September 2005*
Nothing	12%	13%
About 10 percent	31%	37%
About 25 percent	25%	26%
About half	18%	15%
More	5%	2%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	6%
Unwtd N	801	800

* Question wording in September 2005 poll was: "Currently most public employees pay little for the cost of their health benefits as long as they participate in a managed care plan. How much of their health care premiums do you think public employees should pay – nothing, about 10 percent, about 25 percent, about half, or more?"

6. Which of the following statement comes closer to your view – State and local governments need to give their employees higher benefits than workers in the private sector in order to attract and retain talented people in public service - OR - The salaries paid by government agencies in New Jersey are competitive with the private sector and there is no need to give public workers more benefits than they would probably get in the private sector?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Gov't needs to give higher benefits	31%	30%	40%	42%	23%	30%	37%	30%
No need for higher benefits	61%	62%	52%	53%	67%	62%	56%	62%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	8%	8%	5%	10%	8%	7%	8%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

TREND:	September 2010	September 2005
Gov't needs to give higher benefits	31%	39%
No need for higher benefits	61%	51%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	10%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	800

7. Do you think that the state of New Jersey is managing the costs of its pension system wisely or have the costs gotten out of control?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Managing wisely	8%	8%	10%	11%	8%	4%	7%	8%
Costs out of control	78%	79%	75%	75%	80%	82%	79%	78%
(VOL) Don't know	14%	13%	15%	15%	12%	14%	14%	13%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

TREND:	September 2010	September 2005
Managing wisely	8%	13%
Costs out of control	78%	59%
(VOL) Don't know	14%	28%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	800

8. Do you approve or disapprove of reducing pension benefits for current government workers?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Approve	46%	46%	44%	40%	47%	54%	35%	50%
Disapprove	46%	47%	41%	55%	45%	36%	59%	42%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	6%	15%	5%	8%	10%	6%	8%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

TREND:	September 2010	March 2008*
Approve	46%	39%
Disapprove	46%	54%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	8%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	489

* Question wording in March 2008 poll was: "Now, I'm going to read you some other proposals to reduce the state budget. Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of each. Reducing pensions for government workers"

9. Do you approve or disapprove of having all newly hired government employees use a 401-k plan rather than receive a set pension when they retire?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Yes	No
Approve	61%	61%	60%	53%	62%	73%	54%	64%
Disapprove	27%	27%	30%	36%	25%	18%	37%	25%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	12%	10%	11%	13%	9%	10%	12%
Unwtd N	801	726	75	223	382	177	203	581

TREND:	September 2010	March 2008*
Approve	61%	52%
Disapprove	27%	37%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	11%
Unwtd N	801	316

* Question wording in March 2008 poll was: "Now, I'm going to read you some other proposals to reduce the state budget. Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of each. Having all newly hired government employees use a 401-k plan rather than receive a set pension when they retire"

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on September 15-19, 2010 with a statewide random sample of 801 adult residents. Sampling and live telephone interviewing services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

POLL DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)			
35% Dem	48% Male	27% 18-34	68% White
43% Ind	52% Female	40% 35-54	13% Black
22% Rep		33% 55+	12% Hispanic
			7% Asian/Other

It is the Monmouth University Polling Institute's policy to conduct surveys of all adult New Jersey residents, including voters and non-voters, on issues that affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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