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TAKING A TOLL ON NEW JERSEY

Initial public reaction negative to Corzine's toll road plan

After months of public speculation, Governor Corzine finally revealed his plan to restructure state debt and fund transportation projects by bonding future toll road revenues. And while the New Jersey public agrees with the governor that the state is in a fiscal crisis, the latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* finds that residents don't like a toll-based solution, nor do they accept the premise that Corzine can't do more to cut the state budget.

Only a week after unveiling the proposal, public awareness of the governor's toll road plan is very high. Nearly 6-in-10 (57%) New Jersey residents have heard a lot about it and 30% have heard a little. Only 13% of the public are totally in the dark about the governor's announcement.

Corzine has his work cut out for him if he intends to win over the hearts and minds of New Jersey residents. Only 15% say they support his plan to raise tolls about 50 percent every four years for 14 years in order to reduce state debt and fund transportation projects. A majority of 56% oppose this plan.

Another 29% of the public are withholding judgment for now. However, when the poll asked those with no opinion in which direction they lean, more said they were opposed. Combining these results with those who register an initial reaction finds that fully 70% of the public are at least somewhat opposed to the plan compared to only 24% who are inclined to support it.

Opposition to the plan is widespread among both Republicans (68%) and independents (57%), but the governor cannot even count on his fellow partisans for support. More Democrats oppose (48%) than favor (19%) this plan.

The New Jersey public also opposes adding a stretch of Route 440 between the Turnpike and Staten Island to the toll road network by a 49% to 13% margin, with 38% expressing no opinion on this aspect of the governor's plan.

"The governor has finally taken his so-called 'super-secret' toll road plan out for a test drive and the state's initial reaction is to put it back in the garage," commented Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Governor Corzine stated in his State of the State address that New Jersey is facing a "financial emergency." On that count, New Jersey is with him. Nearly all residents (89%) agree that the state budget is facing a serious fiscal crisis.

However, the governor departs from the prevailing public view when he contends that the state cannot cut spending enough to balance next year's budget. Specifically, the governor said that he will find between \$2 billion and \$2.5 billion in cuts which will still leave a \$1 billion hole. He said it will be impossible to make further cuts without hurting critical programs, and that the only options are raising either tolls or taxes.

About two-thirds (65%) of New Jersey residents part ways with the governor on this point, saying they do believe it is possible to find a further \$1 billion in spending cuts and waste reduction. Majorities of Republicans (77%), independents (69%) and Democrats (55%) alike believe that it is possible to find enough spending cuts to balance the budget without the toll plan.

Despite Corzine's assertion that "pigs will fly over the Statehouse before there's a realistic level of new taxes or spending cuts that can fix this mess," only 22% of the public agree that further spending cuts should be off the table

"One take-away message for the governor from this poll is that state government's performance over the past few years has done little to convince the typical New Jersey taxpayer that Trenton is not rampant with pork, flying or otherwise," Murray said.

Poll results show that the public does not have a high level of confidence in the governor's belt-tightening credentials. Only 17% of New Jerseyans say they have a lot of trust in Corzine's promise to freeze the current budget and prevent future deficit spending. Another

44% trust him a little on this claim, and 35% do not trust him at all when it comes to assurances of fiscal prudence.

Governor Corzine's pledge to freeze the state budget next year is seen by some as a potential "sweetener" to win over public support. However, among residents who now oppose the plan, only 14% say this promise makes them more likely to support the plan. Among those who express no opinion at this time, only 18% say this promise would sway them towards favoring the plan.

Requiring that all new state borrowing be approved by voters does only slightly better in generating support for the toll road plan. Among those opposed, only 25% say the voter-approval borrowing requirement makes them more likely to support the plan. Among those with no opinion, just 29% say this requirement would make them more favorable toward the plan.

The governor hopes to raise more than \$30 billion from this plan, with about half going to pay down the state debt and the remainder for transportation improvements. While most New Jerseyans oppose the plan itself, a majority (53%) feels that these types of dedicated uses are appropriate given the funding source. Another 35% say the money should go to other purposes. Putting more money into schools (20%) and reducing state taxes (17%) are the leading alternate uses for this revenue.

The poll also asked about current utilization of the state's toll roads – the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, and Atlantic City Expressway – and found that most state residents would be affected by the toll increases. A majority of New Jerseyans report driving the state's toll roads on a weekly basis, including 25% who do so at least 4 to 5 times a week and 26% who do so at least once a week. Another 22% travel toll roads at least once a month and 16% do so less often. Only 9% of all New Jersey residents report never driving on one of the state's toll roads.

As may be expected, regular toll road users are more opposed to Governor Corzine's toll road plan, but there is also little support among less frequent tollpayers. Specifically, 66% of weekly toll road drivers oppose the plan while only 13% favor it. Less frequent toll road drivers oppose the plan by a 48% to 17% margin. Even residents who never use New Jersey toll roads oppose (34%) rather than support (14%) the plan, although a majority (52%) has no opinion.

Significant toll increases could have a negative impact on local roads, according to the poll. If tolls more than double in the next five years or so, about half of weekly toll road drivers say they will seek out alternate routes for all (25%) or most (24%) of their current toll road trips. Another

22% will try to avoid toll roads for at least some of their current trips. Only 27% of weekly toll road users say they will not alter any of their current toll road use if the tolls go up significantly.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 804 New Jersey adults from January 9 to 13, 2008. 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 Gannett New Jersey 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.)

1. Do you agree or disagree that the state budget is currently in a serious fiscal crisis?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Agree	89%	89%	85%	85%	91%	90%	90%	89%	81%
Disagree	6%	5%	13%	6%	5%	6%	6%	4%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	6%	2%	9%	4%	4%	5%	7%	6%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	804	698	106	243	328	187	426	311	62

2. How much have you heard about the governor's plan to raise tolls about 50 percent every four years over the next 14 years in order to reduce state debt and fund transportation projects – a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
A lot	57%	57%	53%	55%	60%	58%	63%	52%	45%
A little	30%	31%	27%	32%	27%	30%	23%	37%	40%
Nothing at all	13%	12%	19%	14%	13%	12%	13%	11%	15%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	804	698	106	243	328	187	426	311	62

3. Based on what you have read or heard do you favor or oppose this plan, or do you have no opinion?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			AWARENESS OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lot	Little	None	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Favor	15%	16%	11%	19%	16%	9%	18%	11%	6%	13%	17%	14%
Oppose	56%	56%	54%	48%	57%	68%	64%	49%	36%	66%	48%	34%
No opinion	29%	28%	35%	33%	28%	23%	18%	39%	58%	21%	35%	52%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	804	698	106	243	328	187	473	245	75	426	311	62

- 3A. [ASKED OF THOSE WITH NO OPINION:] If you had to choose, as of right now, do you more favor or oppose the idea?

	Favor (from Q3)	No opinion, lean favor	Oppose (from Q3)	No opinion, lean oppose	No opinion
Support of plan (includes leaners) <i>Unwtd N = 804</i>	15%	9%	56%	14%	6%

[NOTE: QUESTION 4 WAS ASKED OF A RANDOM SUB-SAMPLE, moe=+/-4.6%]

4. This plan includes a provision that requires all new borrowing by the state to be approved by the voters. Does this make you more likely or less likely to support the plan or does it not change your opinion?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
More likely	31%	33%	24%	35%	31%	30%	59%	25%	29%	31%	32%	35%
Less likely	17%	19%	7%	15%	16%	22%	10%	22%	9%	19%	12%	23%
Does not change	47%	44%	66%	46%	48%	44%	28%	50%	52%	49%	46%	41%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	4%	2%	3%	6%	4%	2%	2%	10%	1%	9%	0%
Unwtd N	459	400	59	153	174	108	77	278	104	249	176	32

[NOTE: QUESTION 5 WAS ASKED OF A RANDOM SUB-SAMPLE, moe=+/-5.3%]

5. As part of this plan, the governor promises to freeze the state budget for next year. Does this make you more likely or less likely to support the plan or does it not change your opinion?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
More likely	21%	21%	20%	23%	20%	22%	51%	14%	18%	19%	18%	35%
Less likely	14%	16%	6%	8%	16%	14%	2%	22%	8%	20%	11%	4%
Does not change	60%	58%	71%	66%	59%	61%	46%	59%	66%	58%	64%	56%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	6%	3%	3%	5%	3%	1%	4%	8%	3%	7%	4%
Unwtd N	345	298	47	90	154	79	52	187	106	177	135	30

6. The plan will also add toll booths to a five mile stretch of Route 440 in Central Jersey between exit 10 of the New Jersey Turnpike and the Outerbridge Crossing into Staten Island. Do you favor or oppose adding tolls to this road, or do you have no opinion?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Favor	13%	12%	18%	14%	15%	8%	38%	7%	12%	12%	14%	11%
Oppose	49%	50%	44%	40%	53%	58%	21%	66%	32%	61%	38%	32%
(VOL) Don't know	38%	38%	39%	46%	32%	34%	42%	27%	57%	27%	48%	57%
Unwtd N	804	698	106	243	328	187	129	465	210	426	311	62

7. The governor hopes to raise \$30 billion through this plan. About half will go to pay down the state debt and half will be dedicated to road and bridge improvements and other transportation projects. Do you feel that this is an appropriate use for the new revenue or should it be used for other purposes?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Appropriate use	53%	54%	45%	56%	60%	38%	85%	44%	52%	48%	58%	56%
Other purposes	35%	34%	41%	35%	31%	42%	12%	40%	37%	39%	28%	39%
(VOL) Both	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	5%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	10%	6%	6%	17%	0%	11%	8%	9%	9%	5%
Unwtd N	804	698	106	243	328	187	129	465	210	426	311	62

8. What should it be used for? [MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED, COLUMNS ADD TO MORE THAN 100%]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Reduce property taxes	10%	8%	19%	10%	9%	11%	8%	12%	8%	12%	8%	7%
Reduce state income taxes	3%	3%	6%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	1%	5%	1%	0%
Reduce state sales tax	4%	4%	6%	3%	3%	6%	0%	6%	1%	5%	3%	2%
Pay down state debt	3%	3%	6%	3%	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	1%
Transportation	5%	4%	9%	4%	4%	9%	3%	6%	4%	6%	4%	4%
Fund schools/education	20%	20%	23%	25%	19%	19%	9%	21%	24%	22%	17%	21%
Health care	3%	2%	4%	2%	2%	5%	0%	4%	2%	3%	1%	6%
Other	4%	4%	2%	5%	3%	1%	0%	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	12%	12%	11%	8%	9%	20%	0%	15%	12%	13%	12%	8%
GOV's USE APPROPRIATE (from Q7)	53%	54%	45%	56%	60%	38%	85%	44%	52%	48%	58%	56%
Unwtd N	804	698	106	243	328	187	129	465	210	426	311	62

9. The governor has proposed cutting \$2.5 billion in current state spending but says that that will still leave a \$1 billion deficit. He says that it will be impossible to make any further cuts without hurting critical programs and that the only options the state has are raising either tolls or taxes. Do you agree with the governor's view OR do you think it is possible to find an additional \$1 billion through further reductions in spending and waste?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
Agree with Governor	22%	23%	19%	32%	20%	10%	45%	12%	30%	19%	24%	32%
Possible to cut more	65%	64%	71%	55%	69%	77%	46%	76%	53%	71%	61%	52%
(VOL) Don't know	13%	14%	10%	14%	12%	13%	9%	12%	17%	10%	16%	16%
Unwtd N	804	698	106	243	328	187	129	465	210	426	311	62

10. How much do you trust Governor Corzine when he says that he will freeze the current budget and not allow deficit spending in future budgets – a lot, a little, or not at all?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			OPINION OF PLAN			USE OF TOLL ROADS		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Favor	Oppose	No opinion	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
A lot	17%	18%	10%	19%	18%	12%	37%	13%	15%	17%	16%	19%
A little	44%	44%	45%	50%	42%	38%	46%	40%	52%	40%	52%	42%
Not at all	35%	34%	43%	25%	38%	45%	14%	44%	28%	41%	27%	34%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	4%	2%	6%	1%	5%	3%	3%	6%	2%	5%	5%
Unwtd N	804	698	106	243	328	187	129	465	210	426	311	62

11. How often do you drive on a New Jersey toll road, that is the Turnpike, Parkway, or A.C. Expressway – at least 4 or 5 days a week, at least once a week, at least once a month, less often, or never?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
At least 4-5 days a week	25%	25%	29%	25%	25%	29%
At least once a week	26%	23%	37%	22%	29%	28%
At least once a month	22%	24%	14%	21%	23%	20%
Less often	16%	18%	9%	18%	15%	14%
Never	9%	9%	11%	14%	8%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	804	<i>698</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>243</i>	<i>328</i>	<i>187</i>

12. [ASKED OF WEEKLY TOLL ROAD USERS ONLY:] Think about the trips you now use toll roads for. If tolls more than double in the next five years or so, will you avoid the toll roads by using local roads for all, most, some, or none of those trips?

	TOTAL	USE OF TOLL ROADS	
		At least 4-5 days a week	At least once a week
All	25%	27%	22%
Most	24%	22%	25%
Some	22%	22%	22%
None	27%	27%	27%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	3%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	426	<i>198</i>	<i>228</i>

The *Monmouth University/Gannett NJ Poll* was conducted and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews were collected by Braun Research on January 9-13, 2008 with a statewide random sample of 804 adult residents. 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.

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 which affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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