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Released:

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Please attribute this information to:

Monmouth University/

NJ Press Media Poll

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NEW JERSEY WANTS MORE FOCUS ON PROPERTY TAXES

Gov. Christie: good job, but concerned with political future

Governor Chris Christie's public job approval rating remains above 50 percent, but many New Jersey residents say he now may be more concerned with his own political future than with governing the state. The latest *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* also found that the public's priorities continue to be property taxes and jobs, higher than any other agenda item proposed by both the governor and legislature this year.

Currently, Governor Christie earns a 52% approve to 38% disapprove job rating among all Garden State residents. Among registered voters, his rating stands at 55% approve to 37% disapprove. This is basically unchanged from the ratings he received in our October 2011 poll.

For most of his tenure, the governor's public standing has been subject to a gender gap, with men more likely than women to approve of his job performance. This gap closed in our last poll, but there are signs it may be starting to widen again. Currently, 56% of men approve of Gov. Christie while 33% disapprove. Among women, approval stands at 48% and disapproval at 42%.

The state legislature's job rating is still upside down, but not by the margin it had been over the past few years. It currently stands at 35% approve to 39% disapprove. The approval number has not moved much over the past few months, but disapproval is the lowest reading since 2007, especially compared to April 2010 when disapproval topped out at 56%.

"Governor Christie's job rating remains strong as he enters the second half of his term. But with the national spotlight glaring and a re-election bid looming on the horizon, one question is whether he can avoid becoming preoccupied with his political future," said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

The poll asked state residents whether they feel the governor seems to be more concerned with his own political future or with governing the state of New Jersey. Nearly half (48%) say Chris Christie is more concerned about his political career while 39% say he is more focused on managing the state.

When asked to name, in their own words, the state’s most pressing issues right now, property taxes (42%) and jobs (42%) are the first things out of New Jerseyans’ mouths. Public schools (20%), general economic conditions (19%), and other taxes (15%) are named by no more than 1-in-5 residents. Other issues named by about 1-in-20 residents include the state budget (8%), crime (5%), and health care costs (5%). Compared to a *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* from October 2009, during the gubernatorial campaign, property taxes are named by the same number of people (42%), while jobs is now much more important than it was then (20%). Health care is named by far fewer New Jerseyans now than it was just over two years ago (18%).

The new year brought a slew of new proposals from Trenton to address problems in the state. The poll included a list of some key issues recently raised by the governor and legislators, asking residents to rate the importance of each on a scale from 1 to 10. Four proposals from both parties receive high ratings with about 4-in-10 residents giving the highest rating of “10”. These include reducing income taxes (average score=7.7) and reforming teacher tenure (7.4) which are issues championed by the governor. High priorities also include two Democrat agenda items – raising the minimum wage (7.6) and the millionaires’ tax (7.3). The poll did not ask a detailed question about this, but the public’s emphasis on both cutting income taxes and raising rates for the wealthiest suggests that residents may not want income tax rates cut across the board – and is something to follow as these proposals move forward.

New Jersey’s Pressing Issues <i>(rated on a 10 point scale)</i>		
<i>Tier 1:</i>	8.9	Reducing property taxes
<i>Tier 2:</i>	7.7	Reducing income taxes
	7.6	Increasing minimum wage
	7.4	Reforming teacher tenure
	7.3	Raising millionaires tax
<i>Tier 3:</i>	7.0	Reforming drug sentencing laws
	6.7	Restructuring higher education
<i>Tier 4:</i>	5.8	Expanding charter schools
	5.1	Same sex marriage

It is important to note, though, that none of these issues come close to property taxes in importance, which is rated a “10” by 63% of New Jerseyans, for an average score of 8.9. When asked specifically which tax cut should be a higher priority for Trenton, state residents overwhelmingly pick reducing property taxes (69%) over reducing income taxes (19%). Prioritizing property tax cuts is important for homeowners (75%) and renters (59%) alike.

“New Jerseyans seem to agree that prioritizing cuts to the state’s highest in the nation property would benefit everyone, whether they directly pay those taxes or not,” said Murray.

Other items that have been proposed by the state’s political leaders, but are considered less important than property taxes by New Jersey residents include drug sentencing reforms (average score=7.0), state higher education restructuring (6.7), charter school expansion (5.8), and same sex marriage (5.1).

On the issue of same sex marriage, the *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* found that 52% of New Jerseyans now favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally while 34% are opposed. This is the first time that more than half of state residents express support using the current question wording. It also marks the first time that opposition has dipped below 40%. Moreover, residents who *strongly* favor legalizing same sex marriage now outnumber those who *strongly* oppose it by 32% to 25%. In a poll taken three years ago, it was the opposite (25% strongly favor to 30% strongly oppose).

The poll also asked residents to weigh in on the recent proposal to merge key units of the state’s higher education system. Most (57%) have no opinion on these plans. Of those that do, the proposed merger of Rutgers University and the UMDNJ medical school gets a thumbs up from 31% of state residents and a thumbs down from just 13%. Regionally, opinion is a similar 35% to 16% in the Route 1 Corridor counties of Mercer, Middlesex, and Union.

The idea to fold the Rutgers-Camden campus into Rowan University, on the other hand, produces a split decision – 20% of New Jerseyans say it is a good idea and 22% say it is a bad idea. Among those who would be most affected in the Delaware Valley counties of Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester, opposition to the merger is higher – 25% call it a good idea, but more, 36%, see it as a bad idea.

The *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* was conducted by telephone with 803 New Jersey adults from January 31 to February 4, 2012. 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.)

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Chris Christie is doing as governor? [*PROBE*: Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Strongly approve	24%	28%	9%	9%	26%	49%	27%	22%	12%	28%
Somewhat approve	28%	27%	32%	26%	29%	30%	29%	26%	20%	30%
Somewhat disapprove	11%	10%	14%	16%	9%	4%	8%	13%	13%	10%
Strongly disapprove	27%	27%	30%	40%	25%	12%	25%	29%	48%	21%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	9%	16%	8%	11%	4%	10%	11%	7%	11%

TREND: All adults	February 2012	October 2011	August 2011	May 2011	February 2011	September 2010	July 2010	April 2010	February 2010
Approve	52%	54%	48%	47%	47%	45%	44%	41%	33%
Disapprove	38%	38%	42%	49%	40%	38%	44%	44%	15%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	9%	9%	5%	12%	17%	12%	15%	52%
Unwtd N	803	817	802	807	801	801	801	804	803

TREND: Registered voters	February 2012	October 2011	August 2011	May 2011	February 2011	September 2010	July 2010	April 2010	February 2010
Approve	55%	55%	50%	46%	49%	44%	45%	42%	31%
Disapprove	37%	37%	41%	49%	41%	40%	43%	44%	15%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	8%	8%	5%	9%	16%	12%	13%	53%
Unwtd N	709	693	730	725	718	726	747	719	716

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the job the state legislature is doing?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Approve	35%	34%	42%	39%	31%	41%	36%	35%	27%	38%
Disapprove	39%	42%	23%	38%	43%	37%	42%	36%	53%	35%
(VOL) Don't know	26%	24%	35%	23%	26%	22%	22%	29%	19%	27%

TREND: All Adults	Feb. 2012	Oct. 2011	Aug. 2011	May 2011	Feb. 2011	July 2010	April 2010	Feb. 2010	July 2009	Feb. 2009	Sept. 2008	July 2008	April 2008	March 2008	Oct. 2007	Feb. 2007
Approve	35%	35%	35%	33%	30%	24%	20%	26%	30%	25%	29%	27%	29%	28%	33%	35%
Disapprove	39%	43%	47%	47%	44%	49%	56%	46%	47%	52%	47%	45%	53%	50%	41%	40%
(VOL) Don't know	26%	22%	19%	20%	26%	27%	24%	28%	23%	23%	23%	28%	18%	22%	26%	25%
Unwtd N	803	817	802	807	801	801	804	803	923	803	808	1004	803	805	801	801

TREND: Registered Voters	Feb. 2012	Oct. 2011	Aug. 2011	May 2011	Feb. 2011	July 2010	April 2010	Feb. 2010	July 2009	Feb. 2009	Sept. 2008	July 2008	April 2008	March 2008	Oct. 2007	Feb. 2007
Approve	34%	33%	35%	32%	29%	25%	19%	24%	31%	23%	29%	27%	28%	25%	32%	34%
Disapprove	42%	45%	48%	48%	45%	49%	57%	49%	48%	55%	50%	47%	55%	53%	43%	42%
(VOL) Don't know	24%	22%	17%	20%	26%	26%	24%	27%	22%	22%	21%	26%	17%	22%	25%	23%
Unwtd N	709	693	730	725	718	747	719	716	792	721	709	889	720	719	688	681

3. In your opinion, what are the most important one or two issues facing the state of New Jersey right now? [LIST WAS NOT READ] [Note: Results add to more than 100% because multiple responses were accepted]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Property taxes	42%	44%	33%	42%	43%	45%	45%	39%	37%	43%
Income tax	8%	8%	7%	8%	7%	10%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Sales tax	4%	3%	7%	2%	4%	6%	6%	2%	4%	4%
Other tax, general taxes	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%	6%	4%	2%	4%	3%
Jobs	42%	41%	45%	45%	38%	39%	40%	44%	41%	42%
The economy/downturn	19%	20%	16%	14%	23%	20%	20%	18%	27%	17%
State budget, govt spending	8%	9%	7%	6%	10%	10%	9%	8%	11%	8%
Education/public schools	20%	19%	21%	26%	19%	12%	18%	21%	15%	21%
Higher education	3%	3%	1%	5%	2%	1%	3%	2%	3%	3%
Same-sex marriage	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Transportation	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Environment	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Health insurance, care	5%	4%	11%	7%	3%	4%	2%	8%	6%	5%
Crime, guns, drugs	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%	2%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Public pensions/benefits	2%	2%	0%	1%	2%	3%	1%	2%	3%	1%
Housing	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Illegal immigration	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Auto insurance	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Other	6%	5%	8%	4%	6%	8%	7%	4%	6%	6%
No answer	4%	3%	11%	3%	3%	7%	3%	5%	3%	5%

4. I'm going to read you some issues that are currently being talked about by New Jersey leaders. For each one please, tell me how important it is for the state to deal with right now, using a scale from 1 to 10. One means it is not at all important and ten means it is extremely important. Remember, you may use any number from 1 to 10. How important is it for the state to deal with [READ ITEM]? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

	Not at all important <<< >>>> Extremely Important					Don't know	Average
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10			
Reducing property taxes	2%	8%	25%	63%	1%	8.9	
Reducing income taxes	8%	20%	32%	39%	1%	7.7	
Increasing the minimum wage	9%	20%	29%	41%	1%	7.6	
Reforming the teacher tenure system	11%	19%	32%	35%	3%	7.4	
Raising taxes on millionaires	17%	16%	24%	42%	1%	7.3	
Reforming drug sentencing laws	11%	26%	30%	27%	5%	7.0	
Restructuring the state's universities and medical schools	14%	28%	28%	24%	6%	6.7	
Expanding charter schools	21%	33%	25%	16%	5%	5.8	
Same sex marriage	39%	20%	17%	21%	3%	5.1	

Overall importance (average)	TOTAL	PARTY ID		
		Dem	Ind	Rep
Reducing property taxes	8.9	8.9	8.9	9.0
Reducing income taxes	7.7	7.4	7.8	7.8
Increasing the minimum wage	7.6	8.3	7.5	6.4
Reforming the teacher tenure system	7.4	7.2	7.3	7.6
Raising taxes on millionaires	7.3	8.6	7.1	5.4
Reforming drug sentencing laws	7.0	7.2	6.9	6.7
Restructuring the state's universities and medical schools	6.7	7.1	6.6	6.0
Expanding charter schools	5.8	6.0	5.8	5.5
Same sex marriage	5.1	5.7	4.9	4.5

5. Which do you think should be a higher priority for state government: reducing the state income tax or reducing property taxes? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Reducing the state income tax	19%	19%	20%	24%	13%	18%	16%	22%	28%	17%
Reducing property taxes	69%	70%	63%	61%	78%	70%	75%	63%	65%	70%
(VOL) Both equally	10%	10%	7%	13%	9%	7%	8%	11%	6%	11%
(VOL) Neither	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
(VOL) Don't Know	2%	0%	8%	1%	0%	4%	0%	3%	0%	2%

6. Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally? [PROBE: Do you favor/oppose it strongly or somewhat?]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Strongly favor	32%	31%	34%	40%	32%	17%	27%	36%	37%	30%
Somewhat favor	20%	20%	17%	16%	23%	22%	20%	19%	19%	20%
Somewhat oppose	9%	9%	8%	8%	9%	11%	8%	9%	5%	10%
Strongly oppose	25%	24%	26%	18%	23%	39%	28%	22%	22%	26%
(VOL) Don't Know	15%	15%	16%	18%	13%	11%	16%	14%	17%	15%

TREND:	February 2012	February 2009	October 2007*	June 2006*	September 2003*
Favor	52%	48%	48%	50%	43%
Oppose	34%	43%	45%	44%	50%
(VOL) Don't know	15%	10%	8%	6%	7%
Unwtd N	803	402	1002	803	802

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

7. Do you think Chris Christie is more concerned with governing the state of New Jersey OR more concerned about his own political future? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Governing the state of NJ	39%	42%	28%	22%	41%	65%	42%	37%	29%	43%
His own political future	48%	47%	52%	68%	45%	22%	45%	51%	61%	44%
(VOL) Both equally	6%	6%	4%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%	6%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	7%	5%	15%	5%	6%	9%	6%	7%	4%	7%

8. Do you think merging the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey into Rutgers University is a good idea or bad idea, or do you have no opinion on this?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Good idea	31%	30%	32%	32%	33%	30%	29%	32%	26%	33%
Bad idea	13%	14%	7%	16%	11%	14%	11%	15%	18%	11%
No opinion	56%	55%	61%	51%	56%	56%	59%	53%	56%	55%
(VOL) Refused	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%

9. Do you think taking the Rutgers Camden campus and merging it into Rowan University is a good idea or bad idea, or do you have no opinion on this?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Good idea	20%	20%	23%	20%	20%	23%	21%	19%	20%	21%
Bad idea	22%	22%	20%	26%	21%	18%	20%	24%	29%	20%
No opinion	57%	57%	57%	54%	59%	57%	58%	56%	49%	59%
(VOL) Refused	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	1%	0%

The *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on January 31 to February 4, 2012 with a statewide random sample of 803 adult residents, including 641 contacted on a landline telephone and 162 on a cell phone. Sampling and 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.

<i>POLL DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>			
36% Dem	49% Male	29% 18-34	63% White
22% Rep	51% Female	39% 35-54	12% Black
42% Ind		32% 55+	15% Hispanic
			9% Asian/Other
<i>Registered Voter Sample (weighted)</i>			
36% Dem	49% Male	24% 18-34	69% White
23% Rep	51% Female	40% 35-54	12% Black
41% Ind		35% 55+	12% Hispanic
			7% Asian/Other

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		MARGIN OF ERROR			GENDER		PUBLIC WORKER	
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Yes	No
Unweighted N	803	709	94	263	282	202	405	398	212	582
moe	3.5%	3.7%	10.1%	6.1%	5.8%	6.9%	4.9%	4.9%	6.7%	4.1%

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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