

Contact:

PATRICK MURRAY

732-263-5858 (office)

732-979-6769 (cell)

pdmurray@monmouth.edu

EMBARGOED to:

Sunday, March 9, 2008, 5:00 am

For more information:
Monmouth University Polling Institute

400 Cedar Avenue
West Long Branch, NJ 07764
www.monmouth.edu/polling

DEBT PLAN TAKES TOLL ON CORZINE'S JOB RATING

Poll finds no change in public opinion on financial restructuring proposal

Nearly two months after being unveiled, Governor Jon Corzine's plan to pay down state debt by raising tolls has not gained any new support among the New Jersey public. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* finds residents in agreement that the state's debt burden is a major problem, but most are unconvinced that the drastic action proposed by the governor is necessary. The poll also finds that Governor Corzine's town hall meetings have not been an unqualified success, and that views of his overall job performance have reached an all-time low.

In a Monmouth/Gannett poll that was released just one week after the governor announced the toll road plan in his January 8th State of the State address, 56% of the public were opposed, 15% supported it and 29% had no opinion. Two months and 13 town hall meetings later, absolutely nothing has changed. The current poll finds an identical 56% of New Jerseyans who oppose the plan to raise tolls about 50 percent every four years for 14 years in order to reduce state debt and fund transportation projects. Only 15% support it and 29% do not have an opinion.

Furthermore, the poll asked those who initially expressed no opinion in which direction they lean. After combining these results with those who register an initial reaction, the poll found that fully 74% of the public either oppose or lean toward opposing the plan, compared to only 22% who are inclined to support it.

The current poll also finds that just over half (54%) of state residents have read or heard about the series of town hall meetings Corzine held to explain his plan. According to the poll, these meetings do not appear to have had the effect the governor intended. Only 15% say they helped the governor's cause, 29% say they did more to hurt his cause, and 47% say they had no impact on moving public opinion of the toll road plan.

Although the public opposes the governor's proposal, they do take the state's debt burden seriously. Fully 77% of New Jerseyans say the amount of state indebtedness is a major problem. In fact, the public as a whole is dead-on in estimating the actual amount of state debt. The poll asked respondents to guess how much debt New Jersey currently carries. The average among all responses was \$31.6 billion – less than one billion shy of the actual mark.

Governor Corzine contends that tamping down debt payments which have ballooned since 2006 is more urgent than controlling other sources of spending growth. The public agrees with him to a point. Specifically, more New Jerseyans say – by a 47% to 31% margin – that growth in state debt is a bigger problem than growth in state worker pensions and benefits.

However, the public parts ways with the governor on the need to take drastic action now. More New Jerseyans prefer the state continue making regularly scheduled payments until the debt is retired (51%) than feel we should try to pay off a big chunk of the principal in order to lower the annual debt service (37%).

“The poll shows that the public acknowledges the scope of the problem. They just differ with Corzine on the solution,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

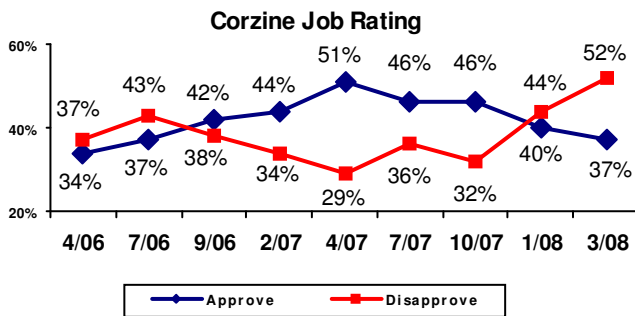
The governor has said he is willing to entertain alternatives to his plan and the poll asked New Jersey residents about three of these options. A slim majority of the public say they would favor a smaller toll increase that would double tolls over the next ten years in order to pay down state debt – 52% favor to 43% oppose. They are split over leasing operation of the state lottery – 42% favor to 40% oppose. And they are decidedly negative on increasing the gas tax by 18 cents over the next three years to pay down debt – only 17% favor to 82% oppose.

Since revenues from the governor's initial toll hike plan were supposed to be used for both debt reduction and transportation projects, the poll asked whether any of these three alternatives should be used to create a dedicated transportation fund. The poll came up with basically the same results as for debt reduction – 50% favor to 41% oppose doubling the tolls

over ten years, 34% favor to 44% oppose leasing the lottery, and 16% favor to 82% oppose raising the gas tax to fund transportation projects.

Governor Corzine’s Job Performance

While opposition to the toll road plan has changed little since Governor Corzine first announced it, his own job ratings have taken a steep dive since the beginning of the year. Currently, a majority (52%) of the New Jersey public disapprove of the job Jon Corzine is doing as governor. Only 37% approve and another 11% have no opinion. This marks the highest job disapproval rating for Governor Corzine recorded by the *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll*.



Republicans (67% disapprove to 22% approve) and independents (57% disapprove to 32% approve) are similar in their negative views of the governor’s job performance. The governor has a net positive rating only among his fellow Democrats (51% approve to 39% disapprove).

Jon Corzine is doing even worse among registered voters than he is with the general public as a whole. This is important as he looks toward a potential re-election bid next year. His current job rating among state voters stands at 34% approve to 55% disapprove. Less than six months ago, this stood at 47% approve to 34% disapprove (October 2007). After his State of the State address in January, this fell to 42% approve to 46% disapprove. Furthermore, a poll taken by Quinnipiac University in mid-February showed his job rating had declined to 37% approve to 52% disapprove among state voters.

“We saw public opinion of the governor take an immediate hit after his State of the State address. It continued to decline as he went on the road to sell his toll hike plan, and has dropped even further since he unveiled his budget,” said Murray. *[Note: The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll will release a poll on the budget plan tomorrow.]*

The state legislature fares no better than the governor in the public’s eyes. Currently, only 28% of New Jerseyans approve of the job the legislature is doing compared to 50% who disapprove. This is down from the October 2007 poll, when 33% approved to 41% who disapproved.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 805 New Jersey adults from March 4 to 6, 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 approve or disapprove of the job Jon Corzine is doing as governor?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	37%	34%	51%	51%	32%	22%
Disapprove	52%	55%	39%	39%	57%	67%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	11%	10%	10%	11%	11%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	805	719	86	261	302	210

TREND:	March 2008	January 2008	October 2007	July 2007	April 2007	February 2007	September 2006	July 2006	April 2006
Approve	37%	40%	46%	46%	51%	44%	42%	37%	34%
Disapprove	52%	44%	32%	36%	29%	34%	38%	43%	37%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	16%	22%	18%	20%	22%	20%	20%	29%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	805	804	801	800	804	801	800	802	803

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

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	28%	25%	47%	34%	27%	19%
Disapprove	50%	53%	32%	40%	54%	64%
(VOL) Don't know	22%	22%	21%	26%	19%	17%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	805	719	86	261	302	210

TREND:	March 2008	October 2007	February 2007
Approve	28%	33%	35%
Disapprove	50%	41%	40%
(VOL) Don't know	22%	26%	25%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	805	801	801

3. 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	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
A lot	53%	57%	31%	46%	57%	65%
A little	31%	29%	41%	35%	31%	25%
Nothing at all	14%	12%	25%	19%	11%	10%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

TREND:	March 2008	January 2008
A lot	53%	57%
A little	31%	30%
Nothing at all	14%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	n/a
Unwtd N	805	804

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

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID			AWARENESS OF PLAN		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lot	Little	None
Favor	15%	16%	8%	18%	16%	12%	15%	18%	10%
Oppose	56%	58%	47%	50%	56%	67%	70%	46%	32%
No opinion	29%	25%	45%	32%	28%	21%	14%	36%	58%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210	484	227	84

TREND:	March 2008	January 2008
Favor	15%	15%
Oppose	56%	56%
No opinion	29%	29%
Unwtd N	805	804

[TOLL PLAN SUPPORT WHEN "NO OPINION" RESPONDENTS ARE ASKED TO CHOOSE A POSITION:] If you had to choose, as of right now, do you more favor or oppose the idea?

Support of plan (includes leaners)	Favor (from Q4)	Lean favor	Oppose (from Q4)	Lean oppose	No opinion	(n)
March 2008	15%	7%	56%	18%	4%	805
January 2008	15%	9%	56%	14%	6%	804

5. Did you read or hear anything about the town hall meetings Corzine held throughout the state to explain his toll road plan?

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes	54%	58%	35%	47%	55%	66%
No	45%	42%	61%	52%	44%	34%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%	0%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

[ASKED OF THOSE AWARE OF GOVERNOR'S TOWN HALL MEETINGS: moe=+/-4.4%]

6. Do you think these meetings did more to help or hurt the governor's cause, or did they make no difference?

Among those aware of town hall meetings:	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Helped	15%	15%	14%	19%	11%	12%
Hurt	29%	30%	21%	29%	26%	35%
Made no difference	47%	46%	57%	40%	53%	48%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	9%	12%	10%	5%
Unwtd N	502	465	37	144	193	147

7. Do you think the amount of debt the state has right now is a major problem, minor problem, or not really a problem?

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Major problem	77%	81%	57%	77%	80%	78%
Minor problem	14%	12%	21%	13%	13%	14%
Not really a problem	6%	4%	16%	5%	5%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	6%	5%	2%	2%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

8. Which do you think is a bigger problem for the state: growth in state debt or growth in pensions and benefits for state workers?

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
State debt	47%	48%	45%	51%	45%	49%
Pensions and benefits	31%	30%	35%	32%	34%	30%
(VOL) Both equally	12%	12%	11%	8%	14%	12%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	10%	10%	10%	8%	9%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

9. Which comes closer to your view: we should continue to make debt payments as scheduled until the debt is paid off - or - we should try to pay off a big chunk of the debt now in order to reduce the amount of our annual debt payments?

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Make payments as scheduled	51%	52%	46%	52%	51%	54%
Pay off chunk of debt now	37%	38%	32%	37%	38%	37%
(VOL) Don't know	12%	10%	22%	11%	11%	10%
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

[NOTE: The following question was asked of a random sub-sample: moe=+/-4.4%]

10. In order to **pay down state debt**, would you favor or oppose the following?

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know	(n)
A smaller toll increase that would double tolls over the next ten years	52%	43%	4%	(489)
Increasing the gas tax by 18 cents a gallon over the next three years	17%	82%	2%	(489)
Leasing operation of the state lottery	42%	40%	18%	(489)

[NOTE: The following question was asked of a random sub-sample: moe=+/-5.5%]

11. In order to **create a dedicated fund for transportation projects**, would you favor or oppose the following?

	Favor	Oppose	Don't know	(n)
A smaller toll increase that would double tolls over the next ten years	50%	41%	9%	(316)
Increasing the gas tax by 18 cents a gallon over the next three years	16%	82%	2%	(316)
Leasing operation of the state lottery	34%	44%	22%	(316)

12. For this question, I'm just looking for a guess off the top of your head. How much debt does the state have right now (in dollars)?

	TOTAL	REG VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Under \$1 billion	20%	19%	29%	21%	23%	15%
\$1 to 19 billion	27%	28%	23%	31%	23%	27%
\$20 billion or more	21%	23%	14%	17%	24%	26%
(VOL) Don't know	31%	31%	34%	31%	30%	31%
AVERAGE ESTIMATE (in billions)	\$31.6	\$34.4	\$12.5	\$30.5	\$32.0	\$29.9
Unwtd N	805	719	86	261	302	210

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 March 4-6, 2008 with a statewide random sample of 805 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.

###