

## **PUBLIC EMPLOYEE PENSION SYSTEM IN A STATE OF CRISIS BUT NO CUTS TO BENEFITS; WHO GETS THE HEADACHE POST- CHRISTIE?**

A majority of Garden State voters believe the public employee pension system is in trouble, but few support reducing payouts in order to shore up the system's financial solvency. The most recent statewide poll of registered voters from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind finds that almost two thirds (61%) believe the state's pension system is, at the very least, experiencing serious problems, with a quarter (23%) who believe it's already in a state of crisis. Only 27 percent believe reduced payouts are the answer, as compared with almost two-thirds (63%) who believe the state needs to honor the promises it made to its workers.

"The governor believes reduced contributions to the system are preferable to higher taxes. If you follow the logic, eventually the demand will exceed the input. If and when that day comes, the public would not support cutting benefits to state workers," said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science at FDU. "While everyone seems to agree something needs to be done quickly, there is no easy answer in sight."

Those in public employee union households are the most supportive of honoring promises (85%), but a majority of voters with no connection to a public employee union member also want the government to make good on its promises rather than reduce payouts (56%). Democrats (73%), women (68%) and non-whites (73%) are also more likely than voters overall to favor fidelity over reforms that reduce benefits.

"Although some feel more strongly than others, no matter where you look you see a lack of support for reneging on promises made to workers," said Jenkins.

The same survey finds that public employee pension stories across the country are being followed closely by New Jersey voters. Seventy-eight percent say they are following the news about public employee pension systems and reforms to varying degrees, with almost a third (31%) who say they have heard or read "a great deal" about the issue.

As for who voters like among possible gubernatorial candidate in 2017 – and who will inherit the public employee pension system problems – two Democrats have the highest name recognition, with possible Republicans largely unknown to Garden State voters. Former Governor Richard Codey, a Democrat, is known by around 60 percent of voters, with a favorable/unfavorable ratio of more than two-

to-one. His numbers are largely unchanged from when PublicMind last asked about Codey in January 2013.

Behind him is Senate President Steve Sweeney. A majority (54%) have heard of him, with about equal numbers who evaluate him favorably (16%) and unfavorably (15%). A quarter (23%) remain unsure about Senator Sweeney. His numbers have improved a bit since January 2013, the last time voters were asked what they thought about the powerful senator from the south.

Rounding out the list of Democrats is Steven Fulop, mayor of Jersey City. Although he's frequently mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate, he remains largely unknown to New Jersey voters. Eighty-five percent say they've never heard of him.

As for Republicans, even the current lieutenant governor, Kim Guadagno, is unknown to most. Only a third (32%) say they have heard of Guadagno, with her favorables about even with her unfavorables. However, more know her today than they did a year ago (August 2013).

And finally, voters were asked about Assemblyman Jon Bramnick and Senator Jennifer Beck, two who have also been the subject of press speculation about their future ambitions. Both have stayed beneath the radar of most New Jersey voters, as Bramnick is known to only 14 percent of voters, and Beck familiar to 20 percent.

"Although Democrats do better among voters with name recognition than Republicans, the crop of possible Christie replacements is a blank slate to most voters. Before they can make a case for why they'd be good Drumthwacket tenants, many have to first let voters know they're here."

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 813 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from May 27 through June 1 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>*

*Radio actualities at 201.692.2846*

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## **Methodology**

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from May 27 through June 1 using a randomly selected sample of 813 registered voters who reside in New Jersey. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.4 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random

selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone voters interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

## Tables

<i>What about here in New Jersey? Does our public employee pension system have no problems, minor problems, serious problems, or is it in a crisis?</i>										
	All	PID			Gender		Race		Public employee household	
		Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Yes	No
No problems	<b>3%</b>	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	3
Minor problems	<b>18%</b>	17	19	18	18	17	18	18	16	18
Serious problems	<b>38%</b>	39	39	36	38	38	41	33	43	36
Crisis	<b>23%</b>	22	23	25	27	18	24	18	27	22
DK/Ref (vol)	<b>20%</b>	19	17	17	14	22	14	26	9	22

<i>Which of the following best describes what you believe about the public employee pension system, even if neither is perfect [ROTATE]: The state made promises to its workers that it can no longer keep and the state needs to reduce payouts OR The state made promises to its workers and it needs to honor those promises</i>										
	All	PID			Gender		Race		Public employee household	
		Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Yes	No
Honor promises	<b>63%</b>	73	65	51	59	68	59	73	85	56
Reduce payouts	<b>27%</b>	19	24	41	32	23	32	18	11	33
Both/neither (vol)	<b>3%</b>	2	7	2	3	4	3	3	2	4
DK/Ref (vol)	<b>6%</b>	5	4	6	5	6	6	7	1	8

<i>Now let me ask you about the state pension system. Across the country some states have had serious financial trouble with their public employee pension systems. How much have you heard or read about this?</i>										
	All	PID			Gender		Race		Public employee household	
		Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Yes	No
A great deal	<b>31%</b>	29	33	35	38	25	33	24	47	26
Some	<b>32%</b>	34	25	33	31	32	33	29	33	31
Just a little	<b>15%</b>	13	18	15	14	16	14	16	10	17
Nothing at all	<b>22%</b>	2	24	18	18	27	19	31	10	26

<i>Now I'm going ask about some people. If you haven't heard of one of them, just say so. Have you heard of ... [ROTATE LIST]? Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of... [MATCH ROTATION]?</i>												
Steve Sweeney	<b>Haven't heard of</b>			<b>Favorable</b>			<b>Unfavorable</b>			<b>Unsure</b>		
	<b>46%</b>			<b>16%</b>			<b>15%</b>			<b>23%</b>		
	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	45	44	47	18	13	15	11	17	19	26	27	19
Steven Fulop	56% (Jan '13)			11% (Jan '13)			17% (Jan '13)			16% (Jan '13)		
	<b>85%</b>			<b>6%</b>			<b>2%</b>			<b>7%</b>		
	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	82	85	89	8	4	3	3	0	2	7	11	5
Richard Codey	<b>41%</b>			<b>27%</b>			<b>10%</b>			<b>22%</b>		
	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	45	37	36	29	34	24	6	12	15	20	17	25
	45% (Jan '13)			31% (Jan '13)			10% (Jan '13)			15% (Jan '13)		
Kim Guadagno	<b>68%</b>			<b>11%</b>			<b>10%</b>			<b>10%</b>		
	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	69	66	66	8	8	18	15	10	5	8	15	11
	75% (Aug '13)			9% (Aug '13)			4% (Aug '13)			12% (Aug '13)		
Jon Bramnick	<b>86%</b>			<b>4%</b>			<b>3%</b>			<b>7%</b>		
	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	86	90	84	2	6	6	3	2	4	9	2	6
	<b>80%</b>			<b>5%</b>			<b>4%</b>			<b>11%</b>		
Jennifer Beck	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>	<i>Dem</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>Repub</i>
	80	82	80	5	5	7	3	5	5	12	9	9

### Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 and US2 withheld for future release

NJ1 and NJ2 released June 3, 2014

NJ3 withheld for future release

NJ4 *Now I'm going ask about some people. If you haven't heard of one of them, just say so. Have you heard of ... [ROTATE LIST]? Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of... [MATCH ROTATION]?*

NJ4a Steve Sweeney

NJ4b Steven Fulop

NJ4c Richard Codey

NJ4d Jon Bramnick

NJ4e Kim Guadagno

NJ4f Jennifer Beck

N4a *Have you heard of [INSERT]?*

1 Yes

2 No (Skip to next name)

NJ4b. *Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of [INSERT]?*

1 Favorable

2 Unfavorable

8 Don't Know (vol) (skip to next name)

BG1 through BG5 released June 3, 2014

TAX1 and TAX2 withheld for future release

*PENS1            Now let me ask you about the state pension system. Across the country some states have had serious financial trouble with their public employee pension systems. How much have you heard or read about this?*

- 1            A great deal*
- 2            Some*
- 3            Just a little*
- 4            None at all*

*PENS2            What about here in New Jersey? Does our public employee pension system have no problems, minor problems, serious problems, or is it in a crisis?*

- 1            No problems*
- 2            Minor problems*
- 3            Serious problems*
- 4            It's in a crisis*
- 8            DK/Refused (vol)*

*PENS3            Which of the following best describes what you believe about the public employee pension system, even if neither is perfect [ROTATE]:*

- 1            The state made promises to its workers and it needs to honor those promises*
- 2            The state made promises to its workers that it can no longer keep and the state needs to reduce payouts*
- 8            Both/neither (vol)*
- 9            DK/Refused (vol)*

#### Sample Characteristics

		<b>Registered voters N = 813; MoE = +/- 3.4</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%
<b>Age</b>	<i>18-34</i>	23%
	<i>35-59</i>	45%
	<i>60+</i>	29%
	<i>Refused</i>	2%
<b>Race</b>	<i>White</i>	65%
	<i>African American</i>	12%
	<i>Hispanic</i>	13%
	<i>Asian</i>	3%
	<i>Other/Refused</i>	6%
<b>Union household</b>	<i>Self</i>	14%
	<i>Someone else</i>	10%
	<i>No</i>	74%
	<i>DK/Refused</i>	1%
<b>Party (with leaners)</b>	<i>Dem</i>	47%
	<i>Ind/DK/Refused</i>	19%
	<i>Repub</i>	33%