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Public Backs Governor, Pension Reforms

A majority (52%) of New Jersey voters approve of the way Gov. Chris Christie is handling his job so far, according to the most recent poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™. This compares to 21% who disapprove and 28% who have mixed opinions, are unsure or are withholding judgment. Republicans approve of the governor 74%-7%, a ratio of 10-to-one. Democrats split with 38% approving, 33% disapproving and 30% mixed or unsure. Independents approve 43%-17%.

Voters in the public pension system, however, give the governor thumbs down, with 35% approving of the new governor and 46% disapproving. And while 39% of all voters rate the governor's performance so far as "good" or "excellent," including one in four Democrats (26%), one in five active and retired public employees (21%) agree. Likewise, while 13% of all voters say the governor's performance is poor, including one in five Democrats (20%), a third of public employees (33%) rate the governor as poor.

"No surprise there," said Peter Woolley, a political scientist and director of the poll. "Public employees are on the defensive. But there is a wider range of opinion among public servants than their interest group leaders let on."

Both the public and public employees back several proposals for reform of the public pension system - though the general public's support is much stronger than that of public employees. For example, 78% of voters agree that all public employees, including teachers, should contribute some of their salary toward their health care benefits, while public employees split with 51% agreeing and 45% disagreeing. Meanwhile, 69% of all voters say the state should cap payouts at retirement for unused vacation time, and 64% of public employees agree. Similarly, 69% of voters say payouts for unused sick leave at retirement should be capped, and 56% of public employees agree.

Asked if the state should repeal a 9 % increase in benefits enacted in 2001, voters agree by 46% to 35%, but 52% of public employees disagree and only 26% agree. On the other hand, when asked if the state should cap salaries for top public jobs at \$200,000 per year, more than three-of-four voters agree (77%), and public employees agree more emphatically (84%).

Voters remain convinced that cutting spending rather than raising taxes is the way to resolve the state's budget woes. Two-thirds (66%) say the state should hold the line on spending, even if many programs are reduced: Just one-in-five says (21%) the state should raise taxes if necessary to support programs.

Close to half, 47%, say they have a favorable opinion of Christie, against 25% who have an unfavorable opinion and 25% who say they're not sure. Three-quarters of Republicans (75%) say they have a favorable opinion of Christie, while just 29% of Democrats say their opinion of the Republican governor is favorable. Among independents, 39% have a favorable opinion of the new governor, 21% have an unfavorable opinion and 39% are mixed in their opinion or unsure.

A third of all voters (32%) say the state is moving in the right direction, while 49% say it's on the wrong track.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 801 registered voters statewide was conducted by telephone from Feb 23, 2010, through March 1, 2010, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actualities at 201.692.2846 For more information, please call 201.692.7032*

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Feb. 23, 2010, through Mar. 1, 2010, using a randomly selected sample of 801 registered voters statewide. The margin of error for a sample of 801 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.5 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 professionally trained interviewers use a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Results are mathematically weighted to match known demographics.

Question: Now, turning to New Jersey... In your opinion, do you think things in New Jersey are moving in the right direction or do you think the state has gotten off on the wrong track?

	All	Party			Ideology			Christie Jan. 2010	Corzine March 2006
		D	I	R	Lib	Mod	Cons		
Right direction	32%	23	30	43	29	27	43	27%	47%
Wrong track	49%	55	55	38	53	51	42	55%	16%
Unsure/mixed	20%	21	15	18	18	22	15	18%	38%

Question: Have you heard of [rotate list]? If you haven't just tell me. [If yes, ask:] Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of ...? Would that be very or somewhat?

	Haven't heard of	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Unsure/ no opinion	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Chris Christie (all)	2%	19%	28%	25%	10%	15%
<i>Republicans only</i>	1	39	36	16	5	4
<i>Independents only</i>	1	15	24	39	7	14
<i>Democrats only</i>	4	7	22	28	15	25
Previous Surveys...						
<i>Christie 1/12/10</i>	3%	16%	29%	28%	14%	9%
<i>Christie 10/30/09</i>	1%	17%	24%	14%	20%	24%
<i>Christie 09/09</i>	3%	15%	23%	25%	17%	18%
<i>Christie 07/09</i>	13%	10%	24%	28%	14%	11%
<i>Christie 04/09</i>	38%	14%	17%	20%	8%	4%
<i>Christie 03/09</i>	43%	12%	18%	22%	4%	2%
<i>Christie 01/09</i>	56%	11%	12%	15%	4%	2%
<i>Christie 09/08</i>	60%	2%	3%	14%	11%	9%

Job performance, current

Question: How would you rate the job Chris Christie is doing as governor... [READ]?

	All	Party			Public Employee	
		Dem	Ind	Rep	No	Yes
Excellent	8%	2	4	16	9	4
Good	31%	24	33	41	34	17
Only fair	26%	32	19	22	26	30
Poor	13%	20	14	5	10	33
unsure (vol)	21%	22	30	16	22	17

Approve/disapprove, Current

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of way Chris Christie is handling his job as governor?

	All	Party			Public Employee		All			
		Dem	Ind	Rep	No	yes	Jan. 2010	Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	52%	38	43	74	56	35	48%	33	48	67
Disapprove	21%	33	17	7	15	46	13%	21	10	5
Mixed/unsure	28%	30	40	20	29	20	38%	46	42	29

Question: Now let me ask about New Jersey's budget... In order to balance the budget, some people say.... Others say to balance the budget.... Which position comes closest to your view?								
[Rotate list]	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Jan. 2010	2009	2006	2005
... the state should hold the line on spending even if many programs are reduced	66%	53	72	81	70%	72%	67%	63%
...the state should raise taxes if necessary and continue to support state programs	21%	32	9	12	17%	19%	21%	26%
Unsure/mixed [vol]	13%	14	20	8	13%	9%	11%	12%

Question: To help resolve the state's budget problems a number of proposals have been made to change the rules about the pension system for all public employees--including state, county, municipal, and teachers. For each of these proposals tell me whether you agree or disagree:							
rotate	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Public Employee		
					no	yes	
...require all public employees, including teachers, to contribute some of their salary toward their health care benefits;							
Agree	78%	72	84	84	84	51	
Disagree	19%	25	12	15	14	45	
Unsure/mixed	3%	3	4	2	3	4	
...put a cap on payouts at retirement for un-used vacation time.							
Agree	69%	60	78	77	69	64	
Disagree	28%	36	18	20	27	35	
Unsure/mixed	4%	3	4	3	4	1	
....put a cap on payouts at retirement for un-used sick leave							
Agree	69%	62	76	78	72	56	
Disagree	26%	33	18	19	23	41	
Unsure/mixed	4%	5	7	3	5	3	
...repeal a 9 percent increase in benefits that was enacted in 2001.							
Agree	46%	40	47	55	52	26	
Disagree	35%	42	33	28	31	52	
Unsure/mixed	18%	18	20	17	17	22	
...cap salaries for top public employees at \$200,000							
Agree	77%	76	77	79	76	84	
Disagree	17%	21	10	14	17	12	
Unsure/mixed	6%	4	13	6	7	4	

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