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Contact: Dan Cassino 973.896.7072 Peter Woolley 973.670.3239

Health Care Hangs Over Democrats: Kean Runs Even With Menendez

According to the most recent poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, support for President Obama and his health-care reform proposals has begun to rebound in New Jersey, even as a rematch with Tom Kean Jr. indicates trouble for Sen. Bob Menendez in early polling of the state's next scheduled Senate race.

After dropping below the 50% mark in January for the first time since he took office, Obama's approval numbers rebounded, with 53% of New Jersey voters now approving of his job performance, up 5 points. Nonetheless, over the past year the percentage of New Jersey voters saying that the country is on the right track has dropped 13 points, from 51% in March 2009 to 38% now, and the percent approving of the job Obama is doing has also dropped by 13 points, from 66% in March a year ago to 53% now.

"Some decline from the honeymoon period is expected, but this drop was steep," said Dan Cassino, a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson and a survey analyst for PublicMind. "He seems to be in a cycle where health-care politics are hurting his ratings and his lower ratings are a drag on health-care proposals."

The health-care reform proposal that has dominated the political dialogue since last year has gained a little ground among Garden State voters. Overall, 37% of respondents say that they will be better off if a bill passes, up 6 points from January. But 42% say that they will be personally worse off if the bill passes, including 4 in 5 Republicans, a figure essentially unchanged from January but up from 34% last July.

The question of reform fares better when voters are asked whether it would be good for the country rather than themselves. In this case 45% say that the country as a whole will be better off if the bill passed and 40% say the country will be worse off. Nonetheless, 40% say that they would advise their member of Congress to vote against it, 35% say they would counsel support, and 25% say they don't know.

"The fate of these health-care bills, like so many other major changes in the United States, is reflected in the views of independents," said Cassino. "Since the proposals were introduced, people on the fence have been more likely to come out against than for them, and that hasn't changed."

The decline in Democratic fortunes since January of last year bodes well for at least one potential challenger to the state's sitting senators. In early polling of the 2012 Senate race, Republican Tom Kean Jr. is in a statistical dead heat with incumbent Democrat Bob Menendez, 39% to 38%, with 17% undecided. Only 29% of voters have a "very" or "somewhat" favorable opinion of Menendez; 25% say that they have "very" or "somewhat" unfavorable views. Kean is viewed favorably by 28% of voters and only 11% have negative views of the former governor's son.

"In 2006, Menendez was able to turn around Kean's early lead by tying him to an unpopular Republican president and an unpopular war," said Cassino. "This time, he will have to campaign on his own record as a Democrat under a Democratic presidency."

Cassino added, "Menendez' support is affected by voters' perceptions of Washington politics and health care." When voters are asked about their support for the president and health care (US1-5) immediately before they are asked about their preferences for Senate in 2012, Menendez' trails Kean 35%-40%. In 2006, FDU pollsters used a similar tactic to measure how the Bush presidency and the war in Iraq were hurting Kean.

Voters were also asked about their choice if the election were between Menendez and Republican State Sen. Mike Doherty, who has attracted the attention of Tea Party conservatives for his stances against health-care reform and deficit spending. But only about 1 in 5 voters say that they've heard of the Warren County Republican, and he trails Menendez in the match-up, 27% to 40%. "When – or if – voters learn more about Doherty, we can expect these numbers to change a great deal," said Cassino.

Change is possible sooner rather than later if the ailing Sen. Frank Lautenberg retires or is unable to complete his term. When asked who should be appointed to replace him in such a circumstance, voters respond along party lines, with 42% saying that Republican Gov. Chris Christie should appoint a Democrat, and 32% saying that he should appoint a Republican. Forty-two percent of voters have a positive view of Lautenberg, up from 35% in January; 29% have a negative view of the senator, down from 38% in January.

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 are available 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

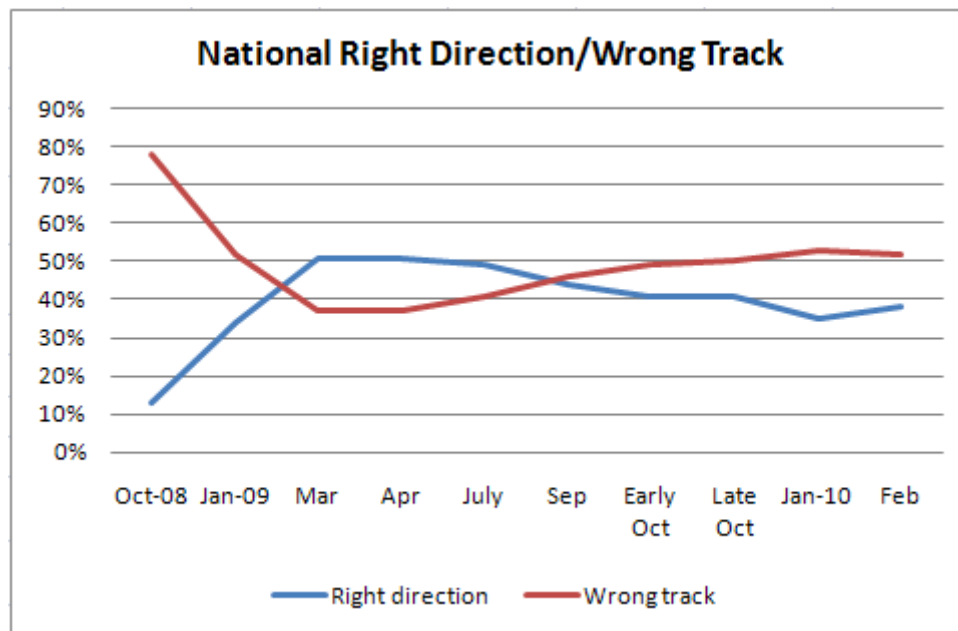
The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Feb. 23, 2010, through Mar. 1, 2010, using a randomly selected sample of 801 registered voters statewide. The margin of error for a sample of 801 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.5 percentage points. 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.

Instruction: AT RANDOM ASK ½ US SERIES HERE AND ½ BEFORE NJ7

US1: In your opinion, do you believe that the country is moving in the right direction or do you believe it has gotten off on the wrong track?						
	All	Men	Women	Dem	Ind	Rep.
Right direction	38	41	35	60	31	12
Wrong track	52	51	53	29	62	80
Unsure/Refused	10	8	11	11	8	7

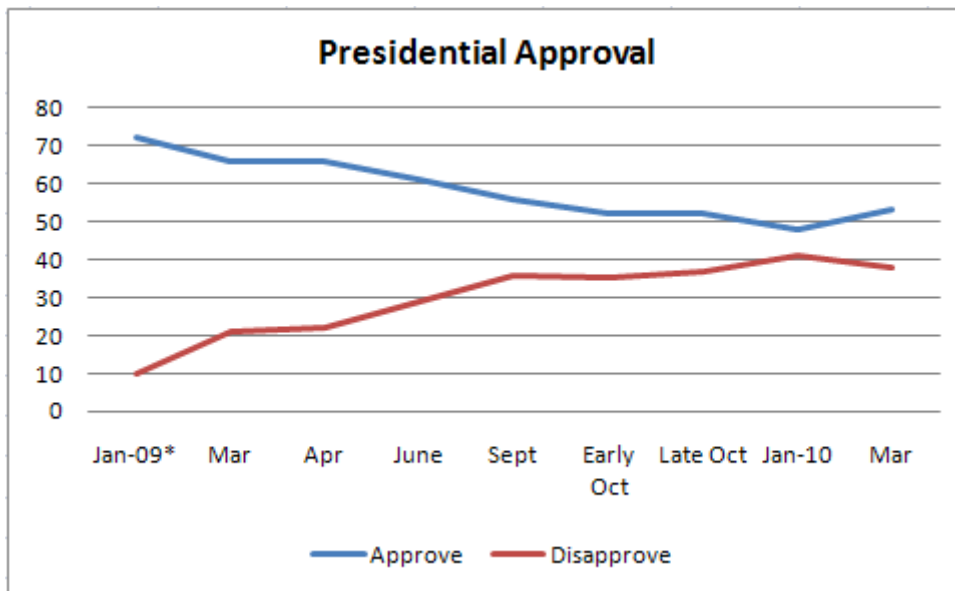
Right/wrong direction trend

	Jan 2010	Oct 30 2010	Oct 9 2010	Sep 2010	July 2010	Apr 2010	Mar 2010	Jan. 2009	Oct. 2008
Right direction	35%	41%	41%	44%	49%	51%	51%	34%	13%
Wrong track	53%	50%	49%	46%	41%	37%	37%	52%	78%
Unsure/Refused	12%	8%	9%	10%	11%	11%	12%	13%	9%



US2: In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?										
	All	Party					Age			
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Approve	53	81	53	15	52	54	61	60	50	45
Disapprove	38	10	33	77	40	36	29	34	41	43
Unsure	9	9	14	7	8	10	10	6	9	12

*January 2009 question asked how Obama was handling "his transition to the presidency."



*January 2009 question asked how Obama was handling "his transition to the presidency."

US3: Do you think you (and your family living there) will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?														
	All	Age				Party			Race					
		18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Non-White	Jan	Oct	Aug	Jul
Yes, better	37	60	35	39	31	62	31	8	28	64	31	33	33	35
No, worse	42	35	42	44	45	16	35	80	55	10	45	44	46	34
Don't Know	20	5	24	18	24	22	35	12	17	25	24	23	21	31

US4: Regardless of how it impacts you, do you think the country will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?												
	All	Age				Party			Race			
		18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Non-White	Jan	Oct
Yes, better	45	63	45	47	39	71	41	13	36	71	41%	43%
No, worse	40	31	40	41	44	15	33	77	52	12	45%	40%
Don't Know	15	6	16	13	17	14	26	10	13	16	14%	16%

US5: Would you advise your member of Congress to vote for or against a health care reform bill, or do you not have an opinion?												
	All	Age				Party			Race			
		18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Non-White	Jan	Oct
For	35	34	35	38	32	59	35	6	27	55	34%	37%
Against	40	28	39	40	44	13	35	77	52	9	44%	37%
Don't Know/Ref.	25	37	26	21	24	28	30	17	21	35	22%	26%

US6: If elections for U.S. Congress were being held TODAY, would you vote for the [Republican Party's candidate] or the [Democratic Party's candidate] for Congress in your district?" If "other" or "unsure": "As of TODAY, do you LEAN more to the [Republican] or the [Democrat]?"									
ROTATE		Age				Party			
	All	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	Jan-10
Republican	34	31	36	35	34	4	15	81	38%
Lean Republican	5	0	3	7	7	0	9	10	8%
Democrat	39	61	41	35	33	76	11	1	36%
Lean Democrat	8	3	9	10	8	13	9	1	8%
Other	2	0	2	2	3	1	12	1	2%
Unsure	12	6	9	11	14	5	44	6	8%

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]? Would that be very or somewhat?

	Haven't heard of	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Unsure/ No Opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable
Bob Menendez (all)	17	8	21	28	13	12
<i>Republicans only</i>	14	2	13	27	20	24
<i>Independents only</i>	20	3	17	33	12	15
<i>Democrats only</i>	18	15	29	27	8	3
<i>Jan. 2010</i>	17%	7%	21%	27%	15%	13%
<i>Jan. 2009</i>	17%	9%	20%	30%	13%	11%

	Haven't heard of	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Unsure/ No Opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable
Frank Lautenberg (all)	10	14	28	20	14	15
<i>Republicans only</i>	7	4	21	16	23	30
<i>Independents only</i>	5	9	28	30	11	17
<i>Democrats only</i>	13	24	33	19	7	3
<i>Jan. 2010</i>	8%	12%	23%	19%	20%	18%
<i>Jan. 2009</i>	8%	13%	30%	19%	14%	16%

	Haven't heard of	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Unsure/ No Opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable
Tom Kean, Jr (all)	27	8	20	34	7	4
<i>Republicans only</i>	24	13	28	31	4	1
<i>Independents only</i>	22	5	20	43	5	6
<i>Democrats only</i>	31	5	15	34	11	5

	Haven't heard of	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Unsure/ No Opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable
Mike Doherty (all)	79	1	5	13	1	1
<i>Republicans only</i>	74	1	6	17	1	0
<i>Independents only</i>	79	1	2	14	2	2
<i>Democrats only</i>	82	1	4	10	2	1

NJ7. If Democratic Senator Frank Lautenberg were to retire before the end of his term, would you prefer the Governor appoint another Democrat in his place, or would you prefer he appoint a Republican?								
		Party			Age			
<i>Rotate</i>	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Democrat	42	77	25	5	53	47	41	36
Republican	32	5	17	74	27	30	34	36
Neither/Independent	11	8	29	9	10	10	12	11
Don't Know	14	10	30	12	11	13	13	16

NJ8a. In two years, Senator Bob Menendez will be up for re-election. I know it's early, but if the election were held today, would you vote for....								
		Party			Age			
<i>Rotate</i>	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Bob Menendez, the Democrat	38	70	14	5	59	34	37	35
Tom Kean, Jr., the Republican	39	11	33	79	19	39	42	42
Neither/Someone Else	6	4	19	4	4	8	2	8
Don't Know	17	15	35	12	18	18	18	15

NJ8b. In two years, Senator Bob Menendez will be up for re-election. I know it's early, but if the election were held today, would you vote for....								
		Party			Age			
<i>Rotate</i>	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Bob Menendez, the Democrat	40	71	14	9	64	40	37	36
Mike Doherty, the Republican	27	5	18	59	14	24	31	30
Neither/Someone Else	8	4	20	8	4	13	5	7
Don't Know	25	20	49	23	18	23	26	26

	unprimed	primed*	change
Menendez	40%	35%	-5
Kean	38%	40%	+2
Neither/	6%	7%	+1
Don't know	17%	18%	+1
N=	402	399	

	unprimed	primed*	change
Menendez	43%	37%	-6
Doherty	25%	29%	+4
Neither/	8%	8%	0
Don't know	25%	26%	+1
N=	402	399	

*Respondents were asked US1-5 in closer proximity to being asked about their Senate preferences.

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