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QuickTakes!

The U.S. Senate Race in NJ is a Statistical Dead Heat, According to Stockton University Poll

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The race for a U.S. Senate seat in New Jersey is a statistical dead heat, with incumbent Democrat Bob Menendez leading Republican challenger Bob Hugin by two percentage points, according to a Stockton University poll released today.

Sen. Menendez leads with 45 percent to Mr. Hugin's 43 percent five weeks before the Nov. 6 election, according to poll numbers of likely voters who say they lean toward one candidate or the other. Libertarian Murray Sabrin pulls 3 percent, while other candidates and undecided voters total 8 percent.

Sen. Menendez, who was reprimanded by a Senate ethics panel after corruption charges were dismissed following a mistrial, is viewed unfavorably by 54 percent, with 30 percent having favorable views and 6 percent unsure.

Mr. Hugin is viewed favorably by 34 percent and unfavorably by 21 percent, although 43 percent are not familiar with him. Only 10 percent are unfamiliar with Menendez.

The Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University interviewed 531 adult New Jersey residents who were screened as likely voters. Live interviewers working from the Stockton campus called landline and cell phones Sept. 19-27, 2018. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.5 percentage points.

"With a two-point lead falling within the poll's margin of error, the Senate race at this point is up for grabs," said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the Hughes Center.

"Bob Hugin has been attacking Sen. Menendez on ethics with a heavy advertising campaign. However, with so many voters still unfamiliar with the Republican, Menendez will likely try to define his challenger in negative terms," Dr. Klein said.

Fifty-nine percent of voters say the corruption charges against Sen. Menendez are an extremely important or significant factor in their vote. But, 51 percent also say a claim by

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opponents that Mr. Hugin profited off an expensive cancer drug, when he was CEO of a pharmaceutical company is an extremely important or significant factor in their votes.

Mr. Hugin is receiving 88 percent of Republican support and just 3 percent from Democrats. Sen. Menendez is receiving 80 percent of Democrat support, but 69 percent from Republicans. Independents are supporting Mr. Hugin over Sen. Menendez by a 4-to-3 margin.

One issue for Sen. Menendez: 14 percent of Democrats are undecided or say they will vote for a candidate other than Mr. Hugin or Mr. Sabrin. A challenge for the incumbent is to convince those Democrats to back their party's candidate.

One trend at work in the Garden State is strong opposition to Republican President Donald Trump, who is graded as doing a poor or fair job by 64 percent, said John Froomjian, senior research associate at the Hughes Center.

Asked to name their most important issue in this election, one in five named either Trump (6 percent), making Democrats the majority party in Congress (91 percent), or control of Congress (4 percent, with the majority favoring Democrats). Four percent say keeping a GOP majority in Washington is their top issue.

Taxes are identified as the top issue by 13 percent with income taxes identified by another 6 percent. Six percent identify health care and immigration and 5 percent identify restoring integrity in Washington.

When asked specifically about health care, 75 percent say it is an extremely important or significant factor in deciding how they will vote. A slim majority of 52 percent oppose moves the president has taken to undercut Obamacare, including cutting subsidies to insurance companies, eliminating individual mandate penalties and refusing to defend the ACA's constitutionality in court. Thirty-one percent favor those moves, and 14 percent don't know enough to have an opinion.

Eighty-seven percent support the rule prohibiting insurance companies from denying coverage or charging more because of pre-existing conditions. Twelve percent say the rule on pre-existing conditions should be eliminated, and 9 percent don't think it matters.

Finally, 41 percent say New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy is doing an excellent or good job, with 27 percent rating him as fair and 25 percent as poor.

Complete results and video of Hughes Center Executive Director Mike Klein speaking about the results are at Stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling.

Methodology

The poll was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. Live interviewers on the Stockton University 531 adult New Jersey residents who were screened as likely voters. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.25 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets. Data are weighted based on United States Census Bureau demographics for the state of New Jersey population.

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.stockton.edu/hughescenter) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter> and can be followed on Twitter [@hughescenter](https://twitter.com/hughescenter).