

Stockton Poll Shows Bell and Brown Tied in Competitive 2nd District State Senate race

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The state Senate race for the late Sen. Jim Whelan's seat in Legislative District 2 is a dead heat, according to a Stockton University Poll released today.

Democrat Colin Bell receives 46.5 percent, and Republican Chris Brown is at 46.2 percent with less than six weeks to go before the Nov. 7 election, according to the poll of 521 likely voters. The totals include poll respondents leaning toward one candidate or the other. Five percent are undecided, with 2 percent supporting an independent candidate or refusing to name a choice.

Brown, currently a state assemblyman in the Atlantic County district, holds an advantage in name recognition. Thirty-nine percent are not familiar or uncertain about their feelings for Brown, and 51 percent hold a favorable opinion. Bell, a former county freeholder, was appointed by Atlantic County Democrats to fill Whelan's seat in early September. Even so, he remains unfamiliar to 58 percent of LD2 voters, while 32 percent have a favorable opinion of him.

The Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy interviewed 521 likely voters in the 2nd District Sept. 23-28, 2017. Interviewers working from the Stockton University campus called landline and cell telephones. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.3 percentage points.

"The 2nd Legislative District is seen as one of the most competitive districts in the state of New Jersey, and the Senate race is living up to that billing," said Sharon Schulman, executive director of the Hughes Center.

John Froomjian, who manages the Stockton Polling Institute, said that Brown is showing more strength in the district than the rest of the GOP ticket.

In the LD2 state Assembly race, the Democratic team led by incumbent Vince Mazzeo is ahead of the Republican and independent candidates. Including voters leaning one way or another,

Mazzeo leads with 34 percent, followed by Democrat John Armato at 25 percent. Republican Vince Sera receives 17 percent, and GOP running mate Brenda Taube is at 16 percent. Two independent candidates, Heather Gordon and Mico Lucide of the Green Party, both have slightly more than 2 percent each, with about 5 percent undecided.

Mazzeo, with a 53 percent favorable rating, is the only candidate with significant name recognition in the district, according to the poll. Only 35 percent are unfamiliar with the incumbent candidate. Running mate Armato is unfamiliar to 62 percent. Republicans Sera and Taube are unfamiliar to at least 75 percent.

Other poll highlights include:

- In LD2, Democrat Phil Murphy leads Republican Kim Guadagno for governor 53 percent to 31 percent.
- Property taxes (23 percent) and taxes in general (17 percent) top voters' most important issue in the state elections.
- Asked for their feelings about the state takeover of Atlantic City government, 44 percent agree that they may not like the takeover but think it was necessary. Thirty-six percent fully oppose the takeover, while 11 percent support it.
- President Donald Trump's job performance rating (30 percent positive) tops Governor Chris Christie's (12 percent) within the legislative district. An endorsement from either official would not carry much weight, Schulman said, with half or more saying it would make them less likely to vote for that candidate.
- In a district that fronts the ocean and includes pinelands territory, 81 percent support a proposed constitutional amendment dedicating settlements of pollution lawsuits toward environmental cleanup and protection. Thirty-nine percent say the state spends too little on environmental protection, while 26 says it spends the right amount and 13 percent think too much is spent. One in five are unsure.
- A small majority of 53 percent support a bond question to borrow \$125 million for library construction and repairs. Forty-two percent oppose it.

See full poll results at: <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/polling-results-2017.html>

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 campus called both landlines and cell phones from Sept. 23-28, 2017. The poll was conducted with 521 adults who are likely voters in New Jersey's 2nd Legislative District. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.3 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 2nd District 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.