UF poll: Scott holds six-point advantage over Crist; Floridians have negative view of Affordable Care Act

Sept. 3, 2014

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — A new poll of registered voters in Florida by the University of Florida found that incumbent Republican Gov. Rick Scott holds a six-point advantage over Democratic nominee Charlie Crist, with 44 percent of likely voters favoring Scott and 38 percent favoring Crist.

The poll by UF’s Bob Graham Center for Public Service in collaboration with UF’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the Tampa Bay Times and Bay News 9 represents a significant swing in voter preference when compared with a poll released in February by the Graham Center and BEBR, which found Crist with a seven-point lead over Scott.

Asked about the shift in Scott’s favor, UF economist David Denslow said Floridians feel better about the economy and their own financial well-being, and that helps the incumbent.

Polling data supports that analysis. Seventy percent of voters believe a governor plays a significant role in the economy of the state. Moreover, approximately 49 percent believe the economy is recovering and an additional 25 percent believe that, while the economy has not yet recovered, it will soon.
“Being better off makes people like a sitting governor,” Denslow said. “In the consumer sentiment survey by BEBR, the index for Floridians' current financial situation compared to a year ago is up, from 63 in February 2014 to 73 in August 2014. That helps Scott.”

Crist also fared worse than Scott in the category of public trust. Forty-four percent of respondents said Scott can be trusted, while only 37 percent say Crist can be trusted.

“Charlie Crist has his work cut out for him,” said Dan Smith, a UF political scientist. “He has broad name recognition but lacks standing within the Democratic Party and has done little to rectify that. By contrast, he is facing a well-funded, disciplined and focused Republican opponent.”

Respondents were also asked their opinion about the Affordable Care Act also called Obamacare. Floridians expressed major reservations about the new health care law, with 37 percent wanting to repeal the law entirely and another 21 percent supporting major changes. Twenty-five percent support minor changes, while only 13 percent favor keeping the Affordable Care Act as is.

Paul Duncan, Malcom Randall Professor in the UF College of Public Health and Health Professions, said the findings are similar to other polls. “Significant numbers of respondents express a negative view of Obamacare, when the question is asked in general terms, but when the general question is followed by questions about specific parts of the law, strongly positive views typically emerge,” he said.

Voters were also asked their views on state Medicaid expansion, an increase in the minimum wage, federal immigration reform and a same-sex marriage ban.

- 37 percent preferred that Medicaid coverage in the state remain as it is, and 34 percent favored expanding Medicaid.
- 58 percent favored increasing the minimum wage and 25 percent opposed an increase;
- 53 percent supported federal immigration reform and 37 percent opposed; and
- 45 percent supported overturning a same-sex marriage ban, while 46 percent favored retaining the ban.

Results are based on data collected from 920 phone interviews of Florida registered voters, with 814 identified as likely voters, conducted between Aug. 27 and Aug. 31, with a 3.4 percent margin of error. The sample was selected from the Florida Voter File with phone numbers provided by a commercial vendor, including both landline and cell phone numbers. Results were weighted by age, party identification and media market, thus allowing the results to mirror the distribution of age groups, party identification, and media market in the Florida Voter File.

###