UF poll: Floridians interested in governor's race; Crist leads Scott by seven points

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. — A poll of registered voters in Florida by the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida in collaboration with UF’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research revealed high interest in Florida’s governor’s race, with 95 percent of likely voters reporting either “a great deal of interest” (66 percent) or “a fair amount of interest” (29 percent).

“For months now, political analysts have been describing Florida’s 2014 governor’s race as the top race in the nation. The only question has been whether Floridians are as interested in the race as national election forecasters are,” Susan MacManus, political science professor at the University of South Florida, said. “Now we know they are, and it’s only February.”

The poll also found that 47 percent of likely voters would vote for Democratic candidate Charlie Crist if the election were held today, while 40 percent would vote for Republican incumbent Rick Scott. In a matchup with U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, 46 percent would vote for Nelson, a Democrat, and 42 percent would vote for Scott.

In a race against former state Sen. Nan Rich, 41 percent would vote for Scott and 36 percent would vote for Rich, a Democrat.
Sixty-three percent of respondents approved of Crist’s tenure as governor, and 27 percent expressed disapproval. When asked about Scott’s performance, 45 percent expressed approval, and 46 percent expressed disapproval.

The poll also asked respondents about their opinions on the candidates’ qualifications. Notable results include:

- 55 percent believe Crist is honest and ethical; 51 percent believe the same for Scott.
- 53 percent believe Crist understands the problems of people like them; 39 percent believe that Scott does.
- 53 percent believe Crist knows how to improve Florida’s economy; 52 percent believe Scott does.

Survey results are based on data collected from 1,006 telephone surveys of registered voters conducted between Jan. 27 and Feb. 1, with a 3 percent margin of error.

The center is tracking public opinion on the current field of gubernatorial candidates and issues that will be considered by the Florida Legislature during its 2014 session.

Polling results on legislative issues to be released in late February will include:
- allowing Las Vegas-style casinos for gambling;
- expanding Medicaid;
- implementing a state sales tax for Internet retail;
- allowing undocumented students to receive in-state tuition at Florida’s public colleges and universities.

Results also will include approval numbers for the Florida Legislature and public opinion on the Affordable Care Act.

“We are closely following the horse race for governor and the critical issues to be debated in Tallahassee,” said Emma Humphries, assistant in citizenship at the Bob Graham Center. “We believe it’s important to get a pulse on Floridians, and the center is well positioned to do so.”

The Bob Graham Center for Public Service is a community of students, scholars and politically engaged citizens, devoted to enhanced citizenship; the training of current and future public and civic leaders who can identify problems and spearhead change; and the development of policy on issues of importance to Florida, the United States and the global community. This survey was developed and analyzed by the center under the advice and consultation of Geoff Garin of Hart Research Associates and Kristen Soltis Anderson of The Winston Group.