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Senate incumbent leads in Eagleton poll

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By Aleksi Tzatzev / Senior Staff Writer | 0 comments

U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., holds a commanding early lead over State Sen. Joe Kyrillos, R-13., a new Rutgers-Eagleton poll found.

Forty-four percent of registered voters said they supported Menendez, while only 22 percent said they would vote for Kyrillos, according to the poll.

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What the poll also found was that few voters had even heard of Kyrillos. Eighty percent of voters are indifferent toward the Republican candidate — 50 percent have no opinion and 30 percent are unsure about him.

“Menendez’s favorability numbers crept up slightly early last year, but for an incumbent, he has a very low profile,” said David Redlawsk, the poll director. “Kyrillos, however, is completely unknown at this point, a huge advantage for Menendez. ... Menendez starts off in a good position.”

Redlawsk, a professor in the Department of Political Science, also said it is common for state legislators such as Kyrillos to be well-known in one part of the state but not in another.

Disregarding the individual candidate, the poll also found 45 percent of registered N.J. voters would vote for a Democrat while only 28 percent would vote Republican.

“It’s actually common,” Redlawsk said. “Any challenger

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would have difficulties beating an incumbent, because they have a built-in advantage, and that is certainly true in New Jersey for Democratic incumbents.”

He said even though the state is led by a Republican governor in the face of Gov. Chris Christie, voters are still predominantly Democrat.

But Kyrillos’ problem spans beyond the issue of incumbents’ advantages, the poll found.

Even among Republican voters, he is virtually unknown. The poll found only 12 percent have a favorable opinion of Kyrillos, 4 percent unfavorable and 84 percent are indifferent.

“Ultimately the job of any campaign is to make the candidate known,” Redlawsk said. “It takes time, it takes money, and there certainly is time. The question is the money.”

Following the release of the Rutgers-Eagleton poll, Chapin Fay, Kyrillos’ campaign manager came out with a statement targeting Menendez’s previous election to Congress.

“With gas prices 50 percent higher than when Bob Menendez was elected to the Senate and unemployment skyrocketing from 4.7 percent to 8.3 percent, it’s no surprise Bob Menendez continues to struggle in the polls,” according to the release.

Fay also said in the release that Menendez’s ratings do not show any major advantage for him in the future.

“His favorable/unfavorable rating is an anemic 37-24, and he is 44 percent on the ballot, which is Jon Corzine territory,” according to the release. “When voters learn how Joe Kyrillos helped Governor Christie turn New Jersey around, they will support his effort to do the same in Washington.”

University students seemed to support the poll’s findings indicating the nonexistent public image of Kyrillos.

“I can’t really say I know much about [Menendez’s opponent],” said Haresh Kapadia, a Rutgers Business School first-year student. “I’d rather know more about the candidates.”

Kapadia said a good way of reaching voters and students in particular would be visiting the University itself and educating voters on the issues and policies.

He said name recognition sometimes was enough to make up a voter’s mind about their choice of candidate. In the case of this November’s election, Kapadia said he would most likely vote Democrat because he knew more about the candidate.

Eric Lee-Schalow, a School of Arts and Sciences junior, said it is an issue when people vote for a candidate solely based on name recognition.

“If they are going for the name, then they are clearly happy with the [incumbent’s] job, but when people aren’t happy with the politicians, they research and try to find other alternatives,” Lee-Schalow said.

While there is the possibility of students searching for a candidate’s name and policies online, candidates themselves should reach out to voters, he said.

“If a politician wants to make an impression, he has to reach out and ask the people, ‘What would you like to see change?’ rather than having the people try to get in contact with them and always being hung up,” Lee-Schalow said. “Essentially, they are going to need the ... votes.”

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