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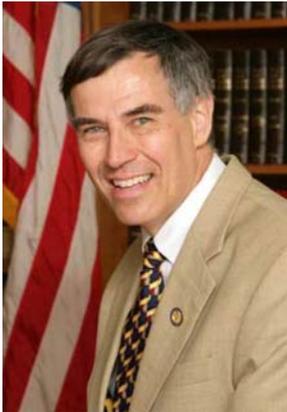
Poll: Booker Heavy Favorite Among Democrats For Senate Seat

Newark mayor benefits from name-recognition, Rutgers-Eagleton survey finds.

Posted by Paul Milo, June 20, 2013 at 01:21 am

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Newark Mayor Cory Booker's high public profile appears to have contributed to a strong lead over his rivals for U.S. Senate, according to a Rutgers University -Eagleton poll released Monday.

Booker announced Saturday he seeks to fill the unexpired term of Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg, who died last week. Gov. Chris Christie called for a primary election Aug. 13 to be followed by a general election Oct. 16. The current Senate term expires in January 2015.

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Booker will run in the primary against Sheila Oliver, an Essex County Democrat and Speaker of the state Assembly, as well as two members of Congress, Rush Holt and Frank Pallone. Oliver, who filed her candidacy shortly before the deadline Monday, was not included in the polling.

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The poll, conducted June 3-9, asked registered Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents who they would vote for in the primary.

Holt, who represents Princeton, Trenton and other parts of Central Jersey, received support from just 8 percent of respondents. Pallone, a 24-year veteran of the House whose district includes a dozen communities in Middlesex and Monmouth counties, fared only slightly better, with 9 percent saying they would vote for him.

Meanwhile, Booker—who has been mayor of the state's largest city since 2006—left much of the field in the dust, with 55 percent of poll respondents saying he had their vote. That result is consistent with polling earlier this year showing Booker getting at least half the vote in a matchup against Holt and Pallone.

The poll also revealed Booker is far better known than the two members of Congress. One-third of respondents did not know who Booker is or had no opinion about him. The similar figures for Pallone and Holt, however, were 71 and 72 percent, respectively.

Booker, who for years has cultivated an image as a charismatic, hands-on mayor, has about 1.4 million Twitter followers and has appeared repeatedly on national television, including on the Rachel Maddow Show and [The Tonight Show](#).

Although a Booker victory seems inevitable to many—South Jersey political powerbroker George Norcross [said he was endorsing the 44-year-old Bergen County native because "he's going to win"](#)—the poll's director cautions that the unusual nature of this primary could still make it a horse-race.

"Even with Oliver in the race, Booker is currently the odds-on favorite," said David Redlawsk, a professor of political science at Rutgers. "Booker has the most visible statewide profile by far among the Democrats running, and name recognition is critical in such a short campaign. At the same time, we surveyed registered voters, and special election turnout is notoriously difficult to predict. We shouldn't write anyone off just yet."

No polling was done for the Republican primary. Only one candidate, Steve Lonegan, the conservative former mayor of Bogota in Bergen County, [had announced his intention to run when polling began](#). By the deadline Monday, Lonegan and Allieta Eck, a Somerset County physician, had filed their paperwork with election officials.

If history is any guide, however, Eck or Lonegan would face an uphill battle in the October election: New Jersey voters have not sent a Republican to the Senate since 1972.

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