

## BOB INGLE: With Christie, image matters more than issues

Gov. Chris Christie continues to boggle the minds of people looking for easy answers. The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll added fuel. In it, 61 percent of registered voters view him favorably, while 28 percent see him unfavorably. Those are numbers a lot of incumbents would trade anything for, so what's the mystery?

Further down in the data, the poll shows registered voters don't like the way he has handled major issues. One of them is economy and jobs, where his approval is 42 percent. The other is taxes, where only 38 percent like the way he handled things. How can that be? It's because of his overall performance and his really high ranking among Republicans (90 percent) and people not affiliated with a party (68 percent). His ranking among Democrats has dropped a bit.

"Democrats have become less enamored of the governor, as is to be expected during a campaign," according to David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University. "But between the increasing support of independents and the fact that many Democrats remain on his side, Christie's favorability and job ratings continue to fly high."

Christie understands a basic fact about the electorate in New Jersey and elsewhere — we love a take-charge guy, even if he doesn't always succeed at what he takes on. We like a leader who says what he thinks, even if we disagree. His performance during Superstorm Sandy won him hordes of fans across the nation, but before that he was growing in popularity for standing up to public employee unions and media.

That's how he was able to oppose same-sex marriage, an issue most New Jerseyans supported, and still have high approval numbers. His predecessor, Jon Corzine, would have likely signed into law a same-sex marriage bill had the Legislature sent him one. Corzine, however, was seen as a guy who didn't seem to have strong feelings about anything. He was viewed as wishy-washy and guided by whichever group talked to him last.

When Christie ran for governor against Corzine, he made it clear where he stood on gay marriage. He opposed it and thought the voters should change the law if that's what they wanted. He never tried to be on both sides, he never tried to confuse the issue.

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