



The Perricone Group



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 23, 2009

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Can Candidates for Michigan Governor Shake Negative Perceptions?

LANSING, Mich. — All political candidates have unpleasant characteristics or histories that can cost them an election. With the race for the Michigan governor's seat just less than one year away, The Rossman Group, The Perricone Group and Denno-Noor Research sought to find out just how much the potential gubernatorial candidates' negative characteristics will weigh on their chances for office.

“We took what we're hearing on the street and in the hallways at the capitol and asked Michigan voters just how much these negative characteristics about the candidates will affect their decision at the ballot box,” said Denno-Noor Research President Dennis Denno. “It looks like each of the candidates will have their work cut out for them.”

The survey asked the following question: *Governor Jennifer Granholm will be unable to run for re-election in 2010 due to term limits. I would like to read you some characteristics about the potential gubernatorial candidates and please tell me if each characteristic would make you more or less likely to vote for them for governor.*

The most damaging characteristic surveyed is associated with Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox, who has been accused of covering up a criminal investigation of former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. Ninety-two percent of those surveyed indicated they would be less likely to vote for a candidate associated with a Kwame Kilpatrick scandal.

“The rumor of Mike Cox covering up of an investigation into the events that took place at an alleged Manoogian Mansion party held by former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick has been in the news for six years now and doesn't look to be going away anytime soon,” said Rossman-Group CEO Kelly

Rossman-McKinney. “Cox and his team will need to figure out how to address this issue if they are going to have a chance at taking the Governor’s office. But even if he answers that question sufficiently for voters, 69 percent would still have a problem with his admitted, and very public extra-marital affair while serving as Michigan AG.”

The next most damaging characteristic goes to Ann Arbor businessman Rick Snyder who has been accused of sending American jobs to China during his tenure as CEO of Gateway. According to the survey, 84 percent of Michigan voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate who has sent jobs overseas.

Among potential Democratic candidates, Michigan Speaker of the House Andy Dillon (who has not announced his candidacy) should be cautious about being tied closely to the state’s budget trouble. More than three-fourths (76 percent) of those surveyed said that being a legislative leader responsible for the state’s budget mess and government shutdown would make them less likely to vote for that candidate.

Comparatively, the main negative trait attached to Lieutenant Gov. John Cherry – his association with Gov. Granholm’s record – scores slightly better on the negative issue scale with 62 percent of respondents indicating they would be less likely to vote for a candidate with this characteristic.

Lieutenant Gov. Cherry also has the trait that respondents indicated was least off-putting – being a career politician. Less than half of those surveyed (45 percent) indicated that they would be less likely to vote for a career politician. Oakland County Sheriff and Republican gubernatorial candidate Mike Bouchard is also considered a career politician.

“All candidates will be talking about the same basic things – jobs, the economy, the state budget, etc,” said Perricone Group CEO and former Michigan Speaker of the House Chuck Perricone. “So a big part of what will separate the winners from the losers will be how they can attach negative characteristics to their opponents while deflecting any mud from getting on themselves. It will be interesting to see how each of the candidates manages to do that in the coming year.”

Right Time for an Independent in Michigan?

The survey also asked Democrat and Republican voters to name the candidate they would most likely vote for if the election were held today. Among Democrats, Lieutenant Gov. John Cherry leads the pack with 20 percent support. Michigan Speaker of the House Andy Dillon and former Michigan State University football coach George Perles tied for second place with six percent support each. The vast majority of Democrats surveyed remain undecided, however, with 59 percent still unsure of their candidate.

Republicans were considerably less indecisive about their candidate, with only 37 percent currently undecided. Congressman Pete Hoekstra leads the Republican field with 21 percent support, and

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox and Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard followed with 15 percent and 13 percent support respectively.

“With such a large number of undecided Democrat voters and a wide open field among Republicans, 2010 might just be the year for an Independent candidate,” said Rossman-McKinney. “People are less and less trusting of partisan approaches to solving our state’s problems.”

When asked whether voters would consider voting for a viable independent candidate, 54 percent of voters indicated they would be willing. Respondents identified as strong Republicans were more supportive of an independent than their strong Democratic counterparts. Fifty percent of strong Republicans were either “very likely” or “likely” to support an independent compared to only 36 percent of strong Democrats.

GOP on the Upswing in Michigan?

Voters were also asked to indicate whether they would vote for a Democrat or Republican in the upcoming state House and Senate elections. The results show that Democrats have only a slight edge in the battle for control of Michigan’s legislature, with 25 percent indicating their support for a Democrat compared to 24 percent who would support a Republican. The remaining respondents – 48 percent – were either undecided or gave another answer.

Strong Democrats were more undecided of the political parties, with 21 percent landing in the Other/Unsure/Do Not Know category, compared to 11 percent of Republicans.

“Given Obama’s overwhelming victory in Michigan just a year ago, you would expect more voters to be supportive of Democratic candidates,” said Perricone. “Democrats will not have Obama’s coattails to ride next year so they will have to earn their votes district by district. However, disappointment in one Party does not always translate to votes for another. Republicans will need a positive, substantive message to pull disenchanted voters out of their homes on Election Day.”

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Methodology: This survey was part of the Rossman Group/Perricone Group/Denno Noor Polling Quarterly Survey of the Michigan electorate. 950 respondents the state of Michigan were surveyed between November 12 through November 17, 2009, with a margin of error of plus/minus 3%, and the participation was stratified based on census data and past voter behavior. A screen was employed to include only those participants who said they would vote, either at the polls or by absentee ballot, in the November 2010 General Election. All numbers are rounded and may exceed 100%.

Attribution: For attribution purposes, please recognize all three organizations that partnered in the poll: The Rossman Group, Denno-Noor Research and The Perricone Group.