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PRESS RELEASE

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EMERSON COLLEGE POLL SHOWS TIERNEY AND TISEI IN A DEAD HEAT IN THE MASSACHUSETTS 6th CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

BOSTON-With the 2014 mid-term elections still seven months away, the race in the Massachusetts 6th Congressional district is shaping up as a rematch of the 2012 contest, when Democratic incumbent John Tierney edged out Republican Richard Tisei by a razor-thin margin of 1%.

An Emerson College Polling Society (ECPS) survey conducted from April 3 to 7 shows Tierney and Tisei deadlocked in the current race, with each candidate getting just under 44% of the vote and 13% of respondents undecided. The poll of 326 likely voters has a 5.4% margin of error.

Geography, gender and expectations

To date, the 6th district appears to be the only competitive Congressional race in the state. Tisei, a former state senator who was Republican Charlie Baker's running mate in the 2010 governor's race, enjoys his strongest support in the district's north region. This area stretches from Beverly, Topsfield and Middleton to the New Hampshire border. In a head-to-head matchup, Tisei trounced Tierney 48% to 38% in this region.

Tierney has an equally lopsided advantage in the south, where he outpolled Tisei 50% to 40% in the ECPS survey. This area includes the district's three largest cities: Peabody, Salem and Lynn. Tierney's strong get-out-the-vote operation in Lynn and Peabody helped him secure his narrow win over Tisei in 2012 and could be a factor again this year.

The western region of the 6th district is a tossup, with Tisei leading Tierney by one point, 43% to 42%. This area extends from Lynnfield and North Reading to Bedford and Billerica.

It seems likely that gender will play an important role in the outcome of the race. Asked whom they would vote for if these two faced off in the general election, women strongly favored Tierney over Tisei (49% to 36%) whereas men heavily favored Tisei (51% to 38%).

In a potentially troubling sign for Tierney, 49% of those surveyed said he does not deserve to be re-elected while only 38% said he does. Nonetheless, 51% of all respondents believe he will win re-election, compared to only 26% who expect Tisei to win the race.

Favorability could be a factor, but maybe not

Likability is a potential weakness for the incumbent. While poll respondents gave Tierney (42%) and Tisei (40%) similar marks for favorability, Tierney's unfavorability rating was much higher: 48% to Tisei's 29%. Among independent voters, Tisei did even better on both measures, earning a 48% to 18% favorable/unfavorable rating.

These numbers could help Tisei make inroads with lukewarm Tierney supporters, but his potential upside may be limited. Although he is openly gay and holds liberal positions on social issues such as gay marriage and reproductive rights, he would be caucusing with the very conservative Republican majority in the House of Representatives. If Tierney follows the playbook Elizabeth Warren used in her 2012 U.S. Senate race against the popular Republican incumbent, Scott Brown, he will remind voters that a Tisei win will strengthen the Republicans' hand in the House.

In the 2010 and 2012 races, Tierney prevailed despite a controversy surrounding his wife Patrice, who pled guilty and served a brief prison stint for tax fraud in connection with an illegal Internet gambling scheme run by her brothers. Although 61% of those polled by ECPS said this event affected their opinion of Tierney "a lot" or "somewhat," that may not translate into voters switching to Tisei.

No strong Democratic challenger

Three Democrats are running against Tierney, but none pose a credible challenge at this point. Asked who they would vote for if the Democratic primary were held tomorrow, 64% of Democrats chose Tierney, compared to 10% each for Iraq war veteran Seth Moulton and immigration lawyer Marisa DeFranco. Democrat John Devine garnered less than 2% of the primary vote.

Both Moulton and DeFranco trail Tierney in name recognition: 28% of poll respondents said they had never heard of Moulton, and 29% said the same of DeFranco, compared to 1.2% who had never heard of Tierney. The challengers also have dismal favorability/unfavorability ratios: 13%/21% for Moulton and 14%/21% for DeFranco.

Concern about taxes, strong support for a minimum wage increase

Asked to identify the most important issue in the election, 28% of respondents cited healthcare and 23% said jobs. Breaking these numbers down further, 35% of women indicated healthcare was their top concern and 33% of Democrats said jobs should be the first priority. Republicans and Independents cited these same two issues but at a lower rate, in the 22% to 27% range. The deficit was the top issue for 23% of Republicans surveyed.

By a margin of 50% to 38% those taking the poll favor a proposed ballot initiative that would raise the state's minimum wage to \$10.50 an hour by January 2016. There was a dramatic split along party lines, with 78% of Democrats favoring the increase compared to 32% of Republicans and 37% of unenrolled voters who support it.

The poll also suggests there is strong support for a proposed ballot question that would repeal an automatic increase in the state gasoline tax that is now in effect. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents said they oppose the automatic hike while only 17% support it.

District-wide, poll respondents oppose casino gambling 41% to 40%. However, in the south, which is in close proximity to a proposed casino site in Revere, voters favor gambling 49% to 31%.

About the ECPS Poll

The polling sample consisted of 326 registered voters, who described themselves as very likely to vote. Data was collected by the Emerson College Polling Society, using an interactive voice response (IVR) system. The poll, ran from April 3 to 7, with a +/-5.4% margin of error and a 95% confidence level.

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