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EMERSON POLL: TRUMP EXTENDS HIS LEAD IN SOUTH CAROLINA; RUBIO PASSES CRUZ IN FIGHT FOR SECOND

Boston, MA – In the final day of a three-day tracking poll in South Carolina, momentum is favoring Donald Trump, who leads in the Republican contest with 36% of likely primary voters, up 3 points since Tuesday. Marco Rubio (19%) and Ted Cruz (18%) remain locked in a battle for second. Cruz has seen a 2-point drop since Tuesday while Rubio has stayed at 19%.

John Kasich and Jeb Bush were tied at 10%, and Ben Carson is in last with 6%.

Trump's support is wide and solid. He leads in all seven of the state's congressional districts, by margins that range from 4 to 26 points. Trump also holds a commanding lead with both sexes. Men favor him 36% to 18% over Rubio, his closest challenger. Among women, his advantage is 35% to 20%, again ahead of Rubio. Trump even gets the nod from Evangelicals, who prefer him over Ted Cruz, 37% to 23%.

GOP voters see the writing on the wall: 54% believe Trump will win the primary, a 9-point jump since Tuesday. In that same period, the percentage who said Rubio will win fell 6 points, from 20% to 14%.

Trump's strong showing is despite the fact that voters believe he, of all the GOP candidates, is the least honest in how he portrays his own record and that of his opponents; 42% of respondents rank him the least honest, followed by Cruz at 36%. Perhaps confirming the cliché that nice guys finish last, the three lowest vote getters were seen as being most trustworthy, with only 9% saying Bush was the least honest, 2% naming Kasich, and 1% choosing Carson.

Asked which issue mattered most to them in the presidential race, 41% said defeating ISIS and terrorism was their top concern. The national deficit (16%) and jobs (15%) were a distant second and third. In the wake of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's recent death, 69% of those polled said they agreed with Senator Mitch McConnell's call to block any attempt by President Obama to appoint a justice to the court before the next president takes office.

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The Emerson College Polling Society poll was conducted from Tuesday, February 16 through Thursday, February 18. The polling sample for the GOP primary consisted of 418 likely voters, with a margin of error of +/-4.7% and a 95% confidence level. Data was collected using an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. The full methodology and results can be found at www.theecps.com.