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PARKWAY SOUTH

Residents not happy with New Jersey's economy, new poll finds

JOHN DeROSIER Staff Writer Apr 25, 2018



MURPHY New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy speaks at a press conference on the boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach, N.J. on Friday April 20, 2018, before signing a bill banning offshore oil and gas drilling in New Jersey's state waters, as well as prohibiting infrastructure to support drilling in more distant federal waters. New Jersey is one of numerous coastal states using state bans to try to thwart President Trump's plan to open most of America's coastline up to drilling. (AP Photo/Wayne Parry)

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John DeRosier

Greetings! Welcome to the Parkway South political blog here at The Press of Atlantic City. My name is John DeRosier, and I will serve as the gatekeeper-of-sorts for this page that will bring you the latest South Jersey political happenings, whether they be in Trenton or here in our back yards.

April 25

Residents in New Jersey still do not believe the state has recovered economically from the Great Recession in 2008, according to a new poll released by Stockton University.

The poll, released Monday, found that 48 percent of residents feel the economy is “fair” in New Jersey while 27 percent say it’s “poor.”

Only 21 percent believe the economy is in good shape, and 1 percent says it’s in “excellent” shape, according to the poll.

“The feeling of a hangover from the Great Recession appears to linger among New Jersey residents,” said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. “As of March 2018, New Jersey’s unemployment rate of 4.6 percent was seventh highest in the U.S., tied with Illinois and New York. While New Jersey has cut its unemployment rate by more than half since its peak of 9.8 percent from November 2009 to January 2010, New Jersey still has workers trying to catch up to the nation’s economic recovery.”

The poll also found that South Jersey residents are more pessimistic about the status of the economy. That’s not surprising considering North Jersey tends to be wealthier than South Jersey.

Still, residents’ low confidence overall in the state’s economy is the strongest that it’s been in several years, the poll found. That matches another poll Stockton conducted earlier this month that revealed 45 percent of residents feel the state is on the wrong track. That same poll found that 63 percent of New Jersey residents feel the country is also headed in the wrong direction.

April 19

The latest fundraising totals for candidates vying for Frank LoBiondo’s congressional seat have been released by the Federal Election Commission.

By no surprise, State Sen. Jeff Van Drew has pulled away from other Democratic candidates that are challenging him for the nomination.

At the end of the first quarter of this year, Van Drew raised \$488,845 for his campaign through several \$1,000 donations from Democratic state assemblymen and senators from New Jersey. He has also received the help of several Super PACs, including Act Blue PAC from Massachusetts and the American Dental Association PAC.

By comparison, progressive challengers Tanzie Youngblood and Will Cunningham have raised \$88,309 and \$51,951, respectively.

Van Drew clearly has the momentum heading into primary day on June 5 considering he swept all eight county conventions in the 2nd Congressional District. However, don't count out the progressive wave that could sweep the nation in this year's elections.

It could be reminiscent of the Tea Party wave that came through in 2010.

On the Republican side, front-runner Hirsh Singh raised \$109,347 in the first quarter. Singh won four of the eight county conventions for the GOP nomination in the 2nd District, and he has received the endorsement from State Sen. Chris Brown in Atlantic County.

Challengers to Singh have yet to publish their fundraising totals.

April 18

Today will briefly cover Miss America and the competition's future in Atlantic City.

On Tuesday, **the CRDA granted the Miss America Organization its \$4 million subsidy of taxpayer dollars despite the lingering effects of an email scandal that ousted its CEO, COO, and several board members.** Even without the scandal, local politicians and officials in the city **were less than thrilled** with what they were getting in return for the \$4 million every year.

Former Atlantic City mayor Don Guardian told The Press of Atlantic City last year that the annual airshow on the beach had surpassed Miss America as the most popular event in the city by a wide margin, but added that he did not want to see the organization leave.

But with the area still dealing with fallout from five casinos closing, \$4 million is a lot of money to not get a worthwhile return.

This fall will mark the last Miss America competition held in the city unless the CRDA and the Miss America Organization can iron out a contract extension. The current contract expires after this year.

If Miss America wants to stay in the city, the organization will most likely have to take a cut in the amount of money they get from the CRDA and will have to give more in return.

Miss America would have never existed without Atlantic City, but the annual live telecast of the pageant does little to showcase the city and its history. After the pageant, representatives from Miss America generally disappear and are not seen back in the city until the next fall.

Miss America herself has some scheduled appearances in the area, but that number will likely be multiplied.

The CRDA and Dick Clark Productions previously had a deal to host a concert in Boardwalk Hall as part of New Year's Rockin' Eve on ABC to sweeten the pot for Atlantic City, **but that was bungled and never happened.**

Look for sweeteners like concerts and other televised productions on ABC to be part of the deal if the organization has any shot of staying in Atlantic City.

April 17

The state legislature passed a bill last week that would allow municipalities to accept property taxes as charitable donations as a work-around to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that was passed by the federal government last year.

The bill will now head to Gov. Phil Murphy's desk, and he is expected to sign it in the near future.

So how does this bill offset the tax cuts passed by the federal government?

Well, first of all, **many New Jersey residents actually saw a tax increase** because the tax cut bill put a \$10,000 cap on deductions of the state and local tax, sometimes referred to as the SALT taxes.

The average New Jersey homeowner pays \$18,000 in SALT taxes, according to the tax policy center.

So allowing residents to "donate" their taxes to a trust set up by each municipality can save people money because they can write off the expenses on their federal taxes as a charitable donation.

The Democratic-sponsored bill had some bi-partisan support – GOP State Sen. Chris Brown voted for it – but most Republicans opposed the measure, saying it doesn't address the core issues as to why the SALT taxes are some of the highest in the nation in the first place.

There is also the question of whether this will even be legal, because there is no precedents for a state-wide effort to have municipalities accept property taxes as charitable donations.

April 16

On Thursday, the state legislature passed a bill that will automatically register people to vote when they visit one of several state agencies.

It includes any agency that collects the age, citizenship, and address of a New Jersey resident. That includes the Parole Board, which can submit and register a person to vote after they have completed their sentence.

The bill, passed along party lines, will almost certainly register more people who favor Democrats than Republicans.

Local Democrats, including Jeff Van Drew, Vince Mazzeo, John Armato, Bruce Land, and Bob Andreczak, all voted in favor of the bill. Local Republicans, including Chris Brown and Chris Connors, voted against the bill.

According to a report by Politico, Democrats argued that passing this bill would “expand democracy” by getting more people involved in the voting process.

Republicans, however, said the bill would flood the voter rolls and increase the chance of voter fraud.

The Office of Legislative Services, which is non-partisan, said in its analysis that the bill will increase the overall number of people registered to vote by an indeterminate amount.

Many of these additional registered voters will all receive voter acknowledgement cards and a sample ballot before elections, which will be an extra cost for counties to print and mail, the analysis said.

But will it get more people out to vote?

That probably still depends on the candidates.

April 12

Election season is officially in full swing.

Primary day in New Jersey is in less than two months, and the much-anticipated midterm elections are in seven months.

These elections, much like all other elections, will see millions of dollars spent on ads, voting initiatives, and campaign salaries.

Candidates in New Jersey have already raised millions on their campaigns.

Bob Hugin, who is the likely GOP challenger against U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, **has raised \$8 million for his campaign. Over \$7 million of that money came from his own pocket.**

According to a report by The Star-Ledger, **Hugin is willing to spend \$20 million from his pocket to try and defeat Menendez.**

That still may not be enough to overcome Menendez, **who has raised \$1.8 million in the first quarter of this year and has the solid backing of several Democratic Super PACS.**

According to a **new poll released by Monmouth University**, Menendez would defeat Hugin by 21 points in the election were held today.

Patrick Murray, director of the polling institute at Monmouth, said Menendez having a "D" next to his name will give him a big advantage among New Jersey voters this year.

Meanwhile, local candidates for the congressional seat being vacated by U.S. Rep. Fran LoBiondo have not yet filed 2018 financial reports to the Federal Election Commission.

The latest information for Democrats Jeff Van Drew, Tanzie Youngblood, and Will Cunningham came just after Christmas.

Information on Hirsh Singh, the likely Republican nominee vying for LoBiondo's seat, has not been filed to the FEC.

Those reports will be required by Primary Day.

April 11

Hirsh Singh, a **Linwood business man and front-runner in the GOP Primary election for the 2nd District congressional seat**, said recently that Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russian meddling in the 2016 election, should be fired after the raid of longtime Trump lawyer Michael Cohen.

"This has nothing to do with Russia – which is why this unending investigation began," **Singh told Max Pizzaro at InsiderNJ on Tuesday.**

Part of Singh's campaign has been his **pledge to support the president and push for conservative ideals.**

"The president's agenda of slashing regulations, cutting taxes and returning decision-making to state and local governments is working to grow the economy and must be supported," Singh said when he announced his candidacy.

Over the last several months, Singh, a graduate of Egg Harbor Township High School and the New Jersey Institute of Technology, **has locked in endorsements from four of the eight county Republican parties in the 2nd congressional district.** Those included Atlantic, Burlington, Camden and Ocean counties.

Doubling down on the president's policies and defending him against the special counsel could actually work out for Singh. **While Trump remains deeply unpopular as a whole in New Jersey,** that's not the case in the 2nd congressional district.

Trump won the 2nd district over Hillary Clinton in 2016, and former gubernatorial candidate Kim Guadagno lost in a landslide after trying to shy away from former Republican governor Chris Christie.

April 10

Today we're quickly going to cover the issue of gun control.

Last month, **two days after the March for our Lives**, the New Jersey assembly **passed six laws that will make the state's regulations on guns even stricter.**

Those laws included expanding background checks for private gun sales, decreasing the amount of bullets allowed in a magazine from 15 to 10, making residents show that they have a justifiable need to carry a handgun if they want to get a permit, allowing the seizure of weapons from people dealing with mental health issues who may be a threat to themselves or others, and banning bullets that can pierce police armor.

The bills still haven't been up in the senate.

According to a schedule put out by senate president Steve Sweeney, the earliest those bills could be posted is June 7, two days after the primary elections in New Jersey.

The bills easily passed the Democratic controlled assembly, and would seemingly pass the Democratic controlled senate with relative ease. So why wait until June to post them?

Will Cunningham, a progressive congressional candidate in the 2nd district, thinks it has to do with Senator Jeff Van Drew, **who has an "A" rating with the NRA on gun control legislation.**

For the past week, Cunningham has tweeted several times that he believes Sweeney is purposely slow-rolling the bills to protect Van Drew, who has been questioned several times this primary season about his record on gun control.

There is no concrete evidence that Sweeney is purposely delaying the vote, and a spokesman for Senate Democrats told Politico's Matt Friedman that Sweeney is just following the legislative process and senate schedule.

Van Drew's most ardent critics, opponents Tanzie Youngblood and Cunningham, **have hammered him specifically on the issue of gun control.**

And by the looks of it, he will not have to address it again until he is the only Democrat left standing.

April 9

Happy Monday! Hope the weekend treated you well.

Let's quickly talk about **sea level rise.**

Whether or not you believe climate change and sea level rise are caused by humans, it's happening and **is a problem for those of us that live near the coast.**

Here's what New Jersey lawmakers are proposing to do about it. A little over a month ago, the state legislature passed a resolution that requires New Jersey to enter the **United States Climate Alliance**, which is a group of lawmakers from numerous states that pursue policies to keep commitments made in the Paris Climate Accord.

President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the climate accord last year, but now several states, including the Garden State, are bucking the president's lead.

What that means for the state is to be determined, as the alliance hasn't said how it's going to achieve its goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature below 2 degrees centigrade in the next five years and limit the increase in average global temperature to 1.5 degrees beyond that.

South Jersey's lawmakers. State Senators Chris Brown, a Republican, and Jeff Van Drew, a Democrat, both voted in favor of the resolution. Senator Chris Connors, a Republican, voted against it.

The Absecon Island, for instance, **now experiences tidal flooding about 30 times a year, up from about five times a year in 1970.**

Mid-range predictions say that number will increase to 240 times a year by 2045.

That's it for today. Check back tomorrow for the next post!

April 6

A new poll conducted by Stockton University **found that New Jersey residents are split** on the idea of legalizing the recreational use of marijuana.

This is problematic for Gov. Phil Murphy as he tries to establish his agenda. According to multiple reports, **Murphy planned on paying** for some of his policies, including tuition-free community college and the renovations on New Jersey Transit lines, through revenue generated by legal weed and the implementation of a "millionaire's tax."

It's still early (Murphy has only been in office for 3.5 months) but so far the agenda has stalled a bit in Trenton.

A new report by Politico's Matt Friedman, a journalist who has been ranked as one of the top 50 most powerful people in New Jersey, **detailed the rift between Murphy and Senate President Steve Sweeney.**

Murphy will need Sweeney to post bills in the state Senate if he hopes to get his agenda passed.

Murphy also touted legalizing marijuana as a form of social justice. Currently, there is a bill in the legislature that would take marijuana out of its "Schedule I" category in the legal system, which is a first step towards decriminalization.

Murphy also announced the expansion of medical marijuana, **though there are concerns about the cost and how people can afford it.**

That's all for today. A new post will come on Monday at 4 p.m. Have a great weekend!

April 5

Let's start with the elephant in the room: President Donald Trump. **A new poll conducted by Stockton University** found that the president is very unpopular here in New Jersey. Readers who support the president had plenty to say about this poll. Some accurately pointed out that the polls were wrong about Trump before the 2016 election, while others bashed the Stockton polling institute for doing it (and us for writing about it).

But the results shouldn't come as a surprise. New Jersey is one of the bluest states in the country.

The real value in this poll is that it could give us a glimpse into how people may vote in the midterm elections this November.

And we have a big midterm here in South Jersey.

After two decades in congress, U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo decided that he **will retire and not seek re-election this year.**

Numerous Republican and Democratic candidates announced their intentions to run for LoBiondo's seat. The eight counties in the 2nd Legislative District all held their conventions, and it looks like the match up in November will be against Democratic State Senator Jeff Van Drew, **who swept all the counties**, and Republican businessman Hirsh Singh, **who won four of the eight counties** and received an endorsement from Republican State Senator Chris Brown.

Speaking of Brown, the state senator **just sent a letter to Gov. Phil Murphy** officially asking that Atlantic County get its desired 13.5% share of the PILOT moneys that Atlantic City casinos pay every year.

That's all for today, check back tomorrow for the latest on South Jersey politics.

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About this column

My goal for this is to round up all political stories published by The Press of Atlantic City and post some information that can only be found exclusively on this page. I will do this by "time-stamping" the page every day with new content. Every month, the page will refresh.

Why Parkway South? Well, all of the areas The Press covers can be accessed by the Garden State Parkway. The South is because we are in South Jersey. (OK, the name isn't that creative)...

In my two years at The Press, I've covered everything from breaking news to Atlantic County, Cape May County, local politics, and everything in between.

I really enjoy covering local politics because things that happen in the municipal hall and the statehouse affect your life on a daily basis much more than the president and his Twitter feed, whether you love or hate his tweets.

This is also the only job where you can be accused of being a communist or a fascist in the same day, which brings me to my next point:

I will in no way inject my own political views into this blog. This is a way for me to keep the residents of South Jersey informed on what their elected officials are up to, and what new policies could be enacted that will change our daily lives.

Feel free to follow me on Twitter for South Jersey news as well. My handle is @ACPressDeRosier. I will warn you that I do sprinkle in tweets about Penn State athletics as well because I am a proud alum.

With that, let's get to the politics!

New Jersey residents split on legalizing recreational weed, new poll finds



Middle Township man taken to hospital following police standoff

National Republicans walk back negative comment on South Jersey GOP candidates

John DeRosier

I joined The Press in January 2016 after graduating from Penn State in December 2015. I was the sports editor for The Daily Collegian on campus which covered all 31 varsity sports and several club sports.