WISPOLITICS: Poll results suggest issue framework for high court race

By WisPolitics.com

New results from the Marquette University Law School poll show Wisconsin voters don’t know much about the candidates in the pivotal race for the state Supreme Court, but they do have firm opinions on issues the court may decide.

And that is where the race between conservative Brad Schimel and liberal Susan Crawford may be headed in the remaining days before the April 1 election that will decide ideological control of the high court. The seven-member court now has a 4-3 liberal majority with Brian Hagedorn sometimes breaking away from fellow conservatives.

The high-spending race has attracted national attention with groups tied to Elon Musk entering the fray.

The Marquette law poll showed 38% of registered voters didn’t have an opinion of Schimel, the former Republican attorney general who now sits on the Waukesha County Circuit Court. Fifty-eight percent didn’t have an opinion of his liberal rival, Susan Crawford, who was elected to the Dane County Circuit Court in 2018.

But when it came to top court issues, survey respondents were more emphatic:

• 54% want Act 10 struck down, while 42% want the courts to uphold the 2011 law that stripped most public employees of their collective bargaining powers.

• 64% favor abortion being legal in all or most cases, while 36% say it should be illegal in most or all cases.

• 77% favor requiring a government-issued photo ID to vote, while 22% were opposed.

• 58% are either very satisfied or satisfied with their public schools, while 41% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In recent years, satisfaction has been around 60%.

• 58% say holding down property taxes is more important, while 41% say it’s more important to increase funding for schools.

• 57% favor allowing all students to use vouchers to attend private or religious schools. Meanwhile, 67% would prefer to increase funding for public schools rather than upping spending in the state budget to allow more students to attend private ones.

Another factor in the race could be Dems' anger at Donald Trump and Musk. This election could be their first chance to officially register that disapproval by voting for Crawford or against Schimel.

Both Trump and Musk are under water in Wisconsin, according to the poll.

Forty-eight percent of voters approve of the job Trump is doing, while 51% disapproved.

That includes 38% who strongly approve of the job Trump is doing and 45% who strongly disapprove.

The president is a polarizing figure for self-identified partisans, with 92% of Republicans approving of the job he’s doing, while 97% of Dems disapprove.

Meanwhile, he was upside down with independents at 39-60.

Musk, the billionaire businessman who has been leading Trump’s effort to slash the federal government, was upside down with 41% having a favorable opinion of him and 53% an unfavorable one. The split for independents was 29-58, while just 1% of Dems had a favorable view of him.

He has played a prominent role in Wisconsin’s Supreme Court race, with PACs he’s funded running ads and doing GOTV efforts. Dems lately have sought to make his involvement an issue in the race.

The poll also underscored the hangover Dems are still facing from 2024.

Just 76% of self-identified Dems had a positive view of their party; 92% of Republicans had one of the GOP.

The latest Marquette University Law School sample was 36% Republican, 32% Dem and 42% independent. Poll Director Charles Franklin noted in all of 2024, the average sample was 33% Republican, 31% Dem and 36% independent.

He said a shift in how many voters identify as Republican and the Dem Party’s poor standing with the public could have implications in upcoming elections. Still, he also said the dynamic isn’t necessarily permanent. It may reflect voters still recalling an unpopular incumbent in Joe Biden and a Dem base that wants its elected officials to push back harder against Trump.

“That hurts any party,” Franklin said. “They’re blamed for the losses of the fall, and they’re blamed for not responding to Trump, at least within the Democratic coalition.”

The poll of 864 registered voters was conducted Feb. 19-26. The sample was a hybrid of 641 people from the Wisconsin voter registration list and 223 from the SSRS Opinion Panel, a sample drawn from postal addresses across the state with selected participants asked to complete the survey online.

Overall, 740 respondents completed it online, while 124 were interviewed over the phone with a live interviewer.

FiveThirtyEight rates Marquette the nation’s third-best pollster with three out of three stars.

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