

EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY



Autumn's Bounty

JOAN LABANCA

IT'S YOUR TURN

Commentary

Monmouth U Poll for NJ Senate Race: Booker Leads Bell by 15

By The Monmouth University Polling Institute

New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, D-NJ, holds a 15-point lead in his re-election bid according to the Monmouth University Poll.

The poll of likely voters found that few know GOP challenger Jeff Bell or see any benefits in his main campaign plank of returning U.S. currency to a gold standard.

Among Garden State voters likely to cast a ballot in next month's election, incumbent Democrat Cory Booker garners 53 percent support and Republican nominee Jeff Bell holds 38 percent. Another 2 percent say they will vote for a third party candidate and 7 percent are undecided.

Booker holds an 89 percent to 5 percent lead among self-identified Democrats while Bell has an 86 percent to 9 percent lead among self-identified Republicans. Among likely voters who see themselves as politically independent, Booker has a commanding 50 percent to 35 percent edge.

The poll found significant gender and age gaps in vote intention, although Booker maintains an advantage among all groups. He has a 23-point lead over Bell among women – 56 percent to 33 percent – but just a 5-point lead among men – 49 percent to 44 percent. Booker also has a 32-point lead among voters under the age of 50 – 65 percent to 33 percent – but a smaller 8-point lead among those age 50 and over – 48 percent to 40

percent. Booker (46 percent) and Bell (45 percent) split the white non-Hispanic vote while Booker holds a sizable 74 percent to 18 percent lead among voters of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

"Booker is on track to receive a full term in the U.S. Senate," said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. "Bell does somewhat better among those who are old enough to have voted the last time he appeared on a New Jersey ballot. However, few of them appear to remember him all that well."

Bell was the GOP nominee for U.S. Senate in 1978 and last ran for office in New Jersey in 1982. He gets a 22 percent favorable to 10 percent unfavorable rating from likely voters, while fully two-thirds (68 percent) have no opinion of him. Booker gets a 49 percent favorable to 21 percent unfavorable rating with 31 percent registering no opinion.

Booker has served just under a year in office after being elected to fill the remainder of the late Frank Lautenberg's term. A majority of voters (52 percent) say they are not sure about whether Booker's issue positions line up with the views of most of his constituents, while 34 percent say his views are in line with most New Jerseyans and just 14 percent say they are out of step. Fewer voters know where Bell stands, with 74 percent saying they have no idea about how his positions line up with state residents' views. The remainder is evenly split – 13 percent say Bell's views are in line with most New Jerseyans and 13 percent say they are out of step with the state.

Voters were asked to assess which candidate they think would do a better job representing their own views on five different issues. Booker has a distinct advantage over Bell on health care (43 percent to 25 percent), abortion (38 percent to 19 percent), and immigration (38 percent to 27 percent). Voters are more divided on economic issues. On taxes, 35 percent say Booker would do a better job representing their views while 31 percent give the edge to Bell. The split is similar for handling the national debt – 34 percent prefer Booker and 30 percent prefer Bell.

Bell's main platform plank centers on the debt issue. His solution – to return the country's currency valuation to a gold standard – doesn't appear to be getting much traction though. Just 17 percent of likely voters say they are very familiar with what the gold standard actually means and another 28 percent are somewhat familiar. Another 13 percent say they have heard of the term but are not too familiar with its meaning and 42 percent are not at all familiar.

Respondents were told that the gold standard means no money could be printed or minted unless there was gold to back it up, which would enable people, for example, to trade in a hundred dollars worth of paper money for a specific number of grams of gold. [Note: description came from a 1981 Roper Poll.] Given this definition, 34 percent of Garden State voters favor using the gold standard to set the value of U.S. currency and 26 percent are opposed to it. A plurality of 41 percent offers no opinion. Among Bell supporters, 48 percent favor a return to the gold standard and 14 percent are opposed. Among Booker supporters, just 23 percent favor a return to the gold standard and 36 percent are opposed. Among undecided voters or those who may change their minds before Election Day, 34 percent favor the gold standard and 22 percent are opposed.

Bell argues that bringing back the gold standard would help middle class families. That assertion appears to fall flat among likely voters in New Jersey. When asked how using a gold standard would affect the middle class, just 14 percent say the cost of living would become more affordable compared to 37 percent who say it would become less affordable. Another 27 percent say that the middle class cost of living would not be affected by the gold standard and 22 percent have no opinion. Even those voters who are familiar with the gold standard are more likely to say it would have a negative (40 percent) rather than positive (16 percent) impact on the cost of living.

"I had to go back to the days when Bell worked in the Reagan administration to find any polls that asked about the gold standard as a topic of public opinion," Murray said. "The bottom line is that the gold standard has little currency as a campaign issue today."

The Monmouth University Poll also found that only 18 percent of likely voters have a favorable opinion of the U.S. Senate as a whole while 56 percent hold an unfavorable view. Another 26 percent have no opinion. Positive views of the Senate come from 27 percent of Democrats, 16 percent of Republicans and 11 percent of independents. Negative views come from 43 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of independents.

The small group of voters with a favorable view of the Senate say they will vote for Booker over Bell by a 65 percent to 28 percent margin. Those with an unfavorable view of the Senate split their vote, 46 percent for Booker and 45 percent for Bell.

"Booker appears to have overcome widespread disdain for the institution he represents. With public sentiment about the Senate so low, however, you've got to wonder why anyone wants to go to Washington," Murray said.

The poll also found that New Jersey voters' opinion of President Obama as a person tend to be more favorable (47 percent) than unfavorable (42 percent).

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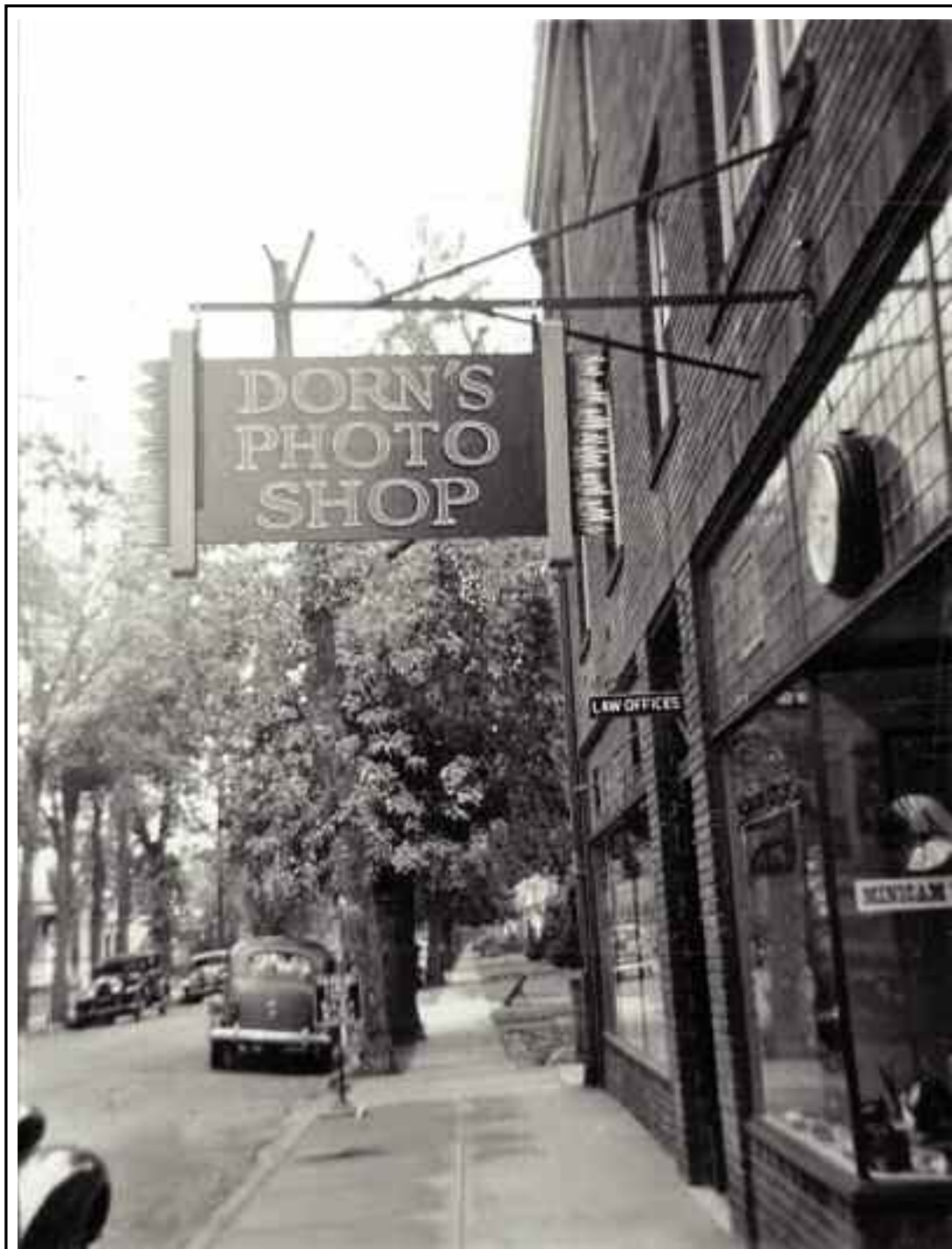
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Two River Moment

Dorn's Photo Shop was located on the south side of Wallace Street (now also called Dorn's Way), opposite where it operated for most of its 70 years. This shot was taken some time between 1938 and 1940.

The Monmouth University Poll was conducted by telephone from Oct. 2-5, with 477 New Jersey voters likely to vote in the November general election. The sample has a margin of error of + 4.5 percent.