ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 16: WIDE OPEN AND BY NO MEANS A SHOE-IN FOR DEMOCRATS

By Joe Justin

Although I am not involved, nor have I been, in any way involved with Catherine Baker for Assembly, or any independent effort to support her candidacy, I recently was given the opportunity to review a survey in that Assembly District.
From August 5th – 11, 2014, Democratic pollsters Penn Schoen and Berland conducted a public opinion survey among 500 likely general election voters in Assembly District 16 on behalf of JobsPAC.   The results were noteworthy and I felt worthy of dissemination.

Key Findings
The Ballot
The initial ballot shows the race a dead heat at 43% Sbranti and 42% Baker with some interesting subgroup behavior: 65+ voters and "definitely voting" respondents were tied at 43 / 43.
As we'll see in the Generic Ballot, the actual ballot shows a much more motivated Republican electorate with 81% of Republicans already voting for Baker as of early August. She should be at 90% by October 1 if this trajectory continues. Given the fact that only 3 out of 4 Democrats are voting for Sbranti, it's clear the negative primary hurts Sbranti.
Once again, the race should be decided by Independents and it's noteworthy that the race among Independents is a virtual tie with Baker edging Sbranti 40% to 38%.
The Electorate Is Open Minded
There's not enough space to detail the various messaging tested, but it's clear that Baker's issues resonate among Contra Costa Democrats and Independents and Sbranti's fairly left of center ideology and record cast doubt among Independents district-wide. I am not one to ascribe any value to "2nd ballot" questions but for the fact that we can isolate who moves and where they go. I found this series fascinating.
After a battery of both positive and negative messaging against both candidates, Baker appeared to enjoy the largest cluster of voters to move toward her candidacy. To be sure, that task was made more difficult by Sbranti's 8 point registration advantage yet Baker does well among all voter groups.
Moreover, Baker's move among Independents was significant and resulted net shift of 13% toward Baker with a ballot of 53% Baker and 32 % Sbranti. Republicans movement to 88% support makes the case again, that the race will be prosecuted among non-Republicans as Sbranti's support among Democrats dropped by 2% to 68%.

The Diagnostics
Republicans Are Motivated
As would be expected in an off year election, Republicans are more energized than Democratic voters. In terms of the Generic Ballot, 72% of Republicans say they are "definitely" voting for the Republican candidate while only 63% of Democratic voters are "definitely" voting for the Democratic candidate.
The intensity among Independent voters was more stark; 42% of Independents said they were "definitely" voting for the Generic Democrat while 55% of Independents say that they are "definitely" voting for the Republican.
Sbranti Damaged From Bruising Primary
With Sbranti's hard name ID at 52 fav / 24 unfav, his ratio is fairly anemic at 2:1 while Baker enjoys over a 3.5:1 ratio due to her 62 fav / 17 unfav.
Again, looking a their images among Independent voters; Sbranti is at a 50 fav / 37 unfav – his unfavorables are 13% higher in this group than that of the survey as a whole.

Conclusion
This district has frustrated Republicans for years. But this independent poll by JobsPAC gives us a number of positive, empirical reasons to keep Baker among the top tier of targets.
I'm surprised by the lingering cloud hanging over Sbranti among moderate and Contra Costa Democrats and that bodes well for Baker should she have sufficient resources to discuss her issue set.
Although this poll is now one month old, in many ways the fact that the respondents were interviewed outside of the typical political window proves that this race is wide open and by no means a lock for the Democrats.