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Siena College State Senate Polls:

Four Key Races Will Help Decide Control of Senate In '11

Two Incumbent Republican Senators Have Big Leads

(11th SD in Queens and 44th SD in Capital Region)

Two Incumbent Democrats in Neck-and-Neck Races

(3rd SD in Suffolk and 48th SD in North Country)

Loudonville, NY. With Democrats currently holding a slim 32-30 majority in the State Senate, one of the most intriguing political questions is which party – if either – will control the Upper House of the State Legislature come January? In Siena’s first look at four of the hotly contested Senate races, two incumbent Republican senators that Democrats hope to defeat to increase their majority both have strong double-digit leads, while two incumbent Democrats that Republicans hope to defeat to take back the majority are locked in extremely tight races against their challengers, according to new Siena (College) Research Institute polls of likely voters in four State Senate districts released today.

SD	Candidate	Senate Race	Favorability Rating			Gubernatorial Horse Race			
			Fav	Unfav	DK/NO	Cuomo	Paladino	Lazio	DK/NO
3	Brian Foley (D) *	44%	39%	41%	20%	49%	23%	20%	8%
	Lee Zeldin (R)	43%	26%	17%	57%				
	Undecided	13%							
11	Frank Padavan (R) *	56%	71%	17%	13%	61%	23%	10%	7%
	Tony Avella (D)	32%	40%	21%	39%				
	Undecided	12%							
44	Hugh Farley (R) *	55%	59%	30%	11%	52%	30%	9%	9%
	Susan Savage (D)	37%	35%	26%	38%				
	Undecided	8%							
48	Darrel Aubertine (D)*	45%	54%	33%	13%	48%	32%	10%	11%
	Pattie Ritchie (R)	48%	39%	18%	43%				
	Undecided	7%							

* Incumbent

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“These are four of the many Senate districts political insiders are watching, and the two currently held by Democrats appear to be very much in play. The two Republican incumbents that Siena looked at in this go-round appear to be in strong positions,” said Siena pollster Steven Greenberg. “We will be looking at other hotly contested Senate races in the coming weeks but these four offer no initial indication that either party will win a big majority in the Senate in 2010.”

“Frank Padavan (R-11th SD) has a large double digit lead over Tony Avella, and Hugh Farley (R-44th SD) also has a large double-digit lead against Susan Savage in two districts that Democrats are hoping will help to increase their majority. And in their quest to take back the majority, Republicans have candidates locked in very tight races against Brian Foley (D-3rd SD), being challenged by Lee Zeldin, and Darrel Aubertine (D-48th SD), being challenged by Patty Ritchie,” Greenberg said.

Key Issues for Voters

“Job creation is the most important issue voters want their senator working on in Albany in the three districts outside of Long Island, where property taxes slightly overtakes jobs,” Greenberg said. “Ethics reform is a top-three issue in all the districts except the one in New York City. The state budget is a top-three issue in all the districts except the Long Island seat.”

What is the most important issue you want your State Senator to be working on in Albany? (choices were rotated)				
Issue	3 rd SD	11 th SD	44 th SD	48 th SD
Property taxes	25%	NA	14%	9%
State budget	10%	13%	16%	13%
State taxes	7%	10%	7%	10%
Government reform	12%	8%	15%	17%
Health care	10%	11%	9%	10%
Education	11%	18%	7%	7%
Creating jobs	22%	34%	26%	32%
Crime	NA	1%	NA	NA
Something else	3%	2%	2%	2%
Don't know/no opinion	1%	1%	2%	0%
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3rd SD – Suffolk County – Brian Foley (D, incumbent) vs. Lee Zeldin (R)

Foley and Zeldin are in a virtual dead heat, with Foley having the support of 44 percent of likely voters and Zeldin having the support of 43 percent. Foley does a better job of holding Democrats (73-14 percent) than Zeldin does attracting Republicans (65-26 percent), however, Zeldin leads among independents 51-35 percent. The candidates are tied at 44 percent each in Brookhaven, while Foley has a slim 44-41 percent lead in Islip. Zeldin leads among voters under 55 years-old by 6 points, while Foley leads among voters 55 and older by 13 points. Zeldin has a nine-point lead among men and Foley leads among women by 12 points.

Foley is viewed favorably by 39 percent of voters and unfavorably by 41 percent of voters, with 20 percent having no opinion. Zeldin has a 26-17 percent favorability rating, with 57 percent having no opinion.

Twenty-six percent of voters would like to see the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate, while 36 percent want to see the Republicans regain the majority, and 34 percent want that chamber to continue to be closely divided.

In the Governor's race, polled prior to Rick Lazio's withdrawal, Andrew Cuomo has the support of 49 percent of voters, Carl Paladino has the support of 23 percent and Rick Lazio had the support of 20 percent. Voters are nearly evenly divided on how they feel about both President Obama and the Tea Party movement.

By an 11-point margin, a plurality of voters think Zeldin would be a better senator on the issue of property taxes, the most important issue voters want their senator to work on in Albany. Zeldin is also given a small four-point edge on job creation, the second most important issue for voters. Zeldin also ranks higher on state taxes and the state budget. Foley is given the edge on education and health care. Voters are divided on the issue of ethics reform and representing the interests of their community in Albany.

“Senator Foley won a huge victory two years ago defeating a long-time incumbent. Running as an incumbent, Foley faces an electorate that has an overwhelmingly negative view of the State Senate, and where only one-quarter of voters wants to see the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate. When voters were asked whether they were inclined to re-elect Foley or they would prefer ‘someone else,’ someone else is the big winner 53-31 percent. While Zeldin is unknown to the majority of voters, he is running neck-and-neck with Foley five weeks before Election Day,” Greenberg said.

11th SD – Queens County – Frank Padavan (R, incumbent) vs. Tony Avella (D)

Padavan has a 56-32 percent lead over Avella. Padavan has the support of three-quarters of Republicans and two-thirds of independent voters. Avella, however, is virtually splitting Democrats with Padavan, taking only 46 percent of Democrats, compared to Padavan's 44 percent. Padavan has a 15-point lead with voters under 55 years old and leads among voters 55 and older by 35 points. He leads among women by 21 points and men by 27 points.

Padavan is viewed favorably by an overwhelming 71 percent of voters, and unfavorably by 17 percent of voters. Avella has a two-to-one favorability rating, 40-21 percent, and 39 percent have no opinion.

Voters are closely divided, with 34 percent (including 20 percent of Padavan voters) wanting to see the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate, 31 percent wanting to see the Republicans regain control, and 30 percent preferring to see the Senate closely divided.

In the Governor's race, polled prior to Lazio's withdrawal, Cuomo has the support of 61 percent of voters, including half of Padavan voters, Paladino has the support of 23 percent and Lazio had the support of 10 percent. Obama has a 50-42 percent favorability rating, and voters have a negative 34-49 percent view of the Tea Party movement.

Creating jobs is the most important issue to voters and education is second most important issue they want their senator working on in Albany. By an 18-point margin, voters think Padavan would be better on jobs and they think he would be better on education by 24 points. On all seven issues, and representing the interests of their community in Albany, voters give Padavan the edge by margins of between 14 and 32 points.

“Senator Padavan can take nothing for granted in this district that has an overwhelming Democratic enrollment advantage, however, he appears to be in a very strong position with voters. He is more well known and viewed far more favorably than is Avella and voters think he is better on every issue. Cuomo is very strong in this district and it seems that riding his coattails may be the best hope Avella has at this point, although there are still five weeks to go until Election Day,” Greenberg said.

44^h SD–Fulton/Montgomery/Saratoga/Schenectady – Hugh Farley (R, incumbent) vs. Susan Savage (D)

Farley has a 55-37 percent lead over Savage. Farley has the support of nearly three-quarters of Republicans, he has a narrow 49-44 percent lead among independent voters, and he attracts the support of 39 percent of Democrats. Savage trails Farley by 26 points in the Fulton/Montgomery/Saratoga Counties region of the district and also trails Farley 50-42 percent in Schenectady County, where she serves as presiding officer of the County Legislature. Farley leads among men by 18 points and among women by 17 points.

Farley has a two-to-one, 59-30 percent, favorability rating. Savage is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters (43 percent in Schenectady) and unfavorably by 26 percent (33 percent in Schenectady), with more than one-third of voters having no opinion of Savage.

Only 20 percent of voters want to see the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate, compared to 34 percent who would prefer to see the Republicans regain control, and a plurality of 41 percent who favor the Senate continuing to be closely divided.

In the Governor’s race, polled prior to Lazio’s withdrawal, Cuomo has the support of 52 percent of voters, Paladino has the support of 30 percent and Lazio had the support of nine percent. By a slight 42-39 percent margin, Farley voters favor Cuomo over Paladino. Obama has a break-even 48-47 percent favorability rating, and voters have a slightly favorable view of the Tea Party movement, 43-39 percent.

Creating jobs is the most important issue to voters with the state budget, government reform and property taxes finishing in a near-tie for the second most important issue they want their senator working on in Albany. By an 18-point margin, voters think Farley would be better on jobs. They rank him better by 10 points on property taxes and eight points on the state budget.

On the issue of reform, voters are nearly evenly divided. On the three other issues and representing the interests of their community in Albany, voters rate Farley better by margins of between 13 and 18 points.

“Senator Farley remains popular with voters in the district. While only 46 percent say they would prefer to re-elect him, compared to 45 percent who would prefer ‘someone else,’ when matched up against Savage he has an 18-point lead. With the exception of government reform, voters think Farley is better on every issue and they are not inclined to want to help the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate. Five weeks is a long time and anything can happen, however, unless Savage can find a way to convince a lot of voters to join her, Farley appears to be in a strong position to win another term as senator,” Greenberg said.

48th SD – Oswego/Jefferson/St. Lawrence – Darrel Aubertine (D, incumbent) vs. Patty Ritchie (R)

Ritchie leads Aubertine by a narrow 48-45 percent margin. Aubertine is winning more than three-quarters of Democrats and taking nearly one-third of Republicans, however, Ritchie has a two-to-one, 60-32 percent, lead among independent voters. While Aubertine has a 19-point lead in Jefferson County, Ritchie has an identical 19-point lead in St. Lawrence County, and she leads by 12 points in Oswego County. Ritchie leads by nine points with men and trails by four points with women. Voters under 55 years old are with Ritchie by 15 points, and those 55 and older are with Aubertine by 19 points.

Aubertine is viewed favorably by 54 percent of voters and unfavorably by 33 percent. He is very favorable with Democrats and has a 45-43 percent favorability rating with Republicans. Ritchie has a 39-18 percent favorability rating, with 43 percent having no opinion. Aubertine is viewed most favorably in St. Lawrence and Jefferson Counties, while Ritchie is best known, and best liked, in St. Lawrence, virtually matching Aubertine there. Voters are nearly evenly divided on whether they want to re-elect Aubertine or they prefer ‘someone else.’

Two-thirds of voters view the State Senate unfavorably and only 20 percent want to see the Democrats increase their majority in the Senate. Nearly twice that number, 39 percent, want to see the Republicans retake the majority in the Senate, and another 34 percent want to see it remain closely divided.

In the Governor’s race, polled prior to Lazio’s withdrawal, Cuomo has the support of 48 percent of voters, Paladino is at 32 percent and Lazio had the support of 10 percent. Cuomo has the support of three-quarters of Aubertine voters and one-quarter of Ritchie voters. Obama has a near-break-even 48-46 percent favorability rating, and voters have a moderate favorable view of the Tea Party movement, 42-36 percent.

Job creation is the top issue for 32 percent of voters, followed by government ethics reform at 17 percent. Voters give a slight edge to Ritchie (42-39 percent) on jobs and a 45-38 percent advantage to Ritchie on ethics reform. She has single digit leads over Aubertine on all of the issues, except for state taxes, where she has an 11-point margin.

“Senator Aubertine has won two elections in this district that has a significant Republican enrollment edge. At this stage two years ago, however, he had a 20-point lead in the Siena Poll, and saw the gap close to six points on Election Day. Aubertine is well known and well liked but Ritchie has nosed ahead even though she remains unknown to more than 40 percent of the voters. This is going to be a fiercely contested election over the next five weeks and clearly one of the most closely watched,” Greenberg said.

Favorability Ratings								
	3 rd SD		11 th SD		44 th SD		48 th SD	
	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav
Incumbent State Senator	39%	41%	71%	17%	59%	30%	54%	33%
State Senate challenger	26%	17%	40%	21%	35%	26%	39%	18%
Andrew Cuomo	54%	33%	62%	29%	59%	30%	52%	35%
Carl Paladino	28%	33%	31%	36%	35%	41%	31%	35%
Rick Lazio	46%	40%	29%	41%	18%	56%	20%	44%
Barack Obama	46%	48%	50%	42%	48%	47%	48%	46%
Tea Party Movement	40%	40%	34%	49%	43%	39%	42%	36%
New York State Senate	28%	60%	38%	52%	17%	75%	22%	67%

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These SRI surveys were conducted from September 20-23, 2010 by telephone calls to likely voters in each State Senate district. For the 3rd SD, 406 voters were included in the sample, with a margin of error of ± 4.9 percentage points. For the 11th SD, 409 voters were included in the sample, margin of error ± 4.8 . For the 44th SD, 400 voters were included in the sample, margin of error ± 4.9 . For the 48th SD, 400 voters were included in the sample, margin of error ± 4.9 . Among likely voters, data was statistically adjusted as necessary by respondent age, region, gender and party to match voter registration distribution and historic voting patterns. For more information, please call Steven Greenberg at 518-469-9858. Cross-tabulations and frequencies for these six polls can be found at: www.Siena.edu/SRI/SNY.