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PDF version; crosstabs by district:

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Siena College State Senate Polls:

37th SD, Open Westchester Seat, is Neck-and-Neck As Democrat Latimer Is Up By 3 Points Over Cohen; In 55th SD, Open Monroe/Ontario Counties Seat, Republican Hanna Leading O'Brien By 8 Points

Loudonville, NY. The Siena College Research Institute today released its first two State Senate polls for 2012 – both in open seats, one currently held by a Democrat and one currently held by a Republican. In the 37th SD (currently held by retiring Suzi Oppenheimer) Democratic Assemblyman George Latimer and Republican Bob Cohen are locked in a tight race, with Latimer having the support of 44 percent of likely voters, compared to 41 percent for Cohen. In the 55th SD (currently held by retiring James Alesi) Republican Assemblyman Sean Hanna has a 47-39 percent lead over Democrat Ted O'Brien among likely voters.

“These two open seats – one each currently held by a Republican and a Democrat – are seen by both parties as important races in determining whether the State Senate will have more Rs or Ds among its 63 members next year,” said Siena pollster Steven Greenberg. Republicans currently have a 33-29 seat advantage in the Senate.

“Siena College’s first State Senate polls for 2012 show that the Democratic open seat in Westchester County features an extremely close race in a district with a 10-point Democratic enrollment advantage, between a current Democratic Assemblyman and a Republican who came within 730 votes of knocking off the incumbent Senator two years ago. And in the Republican open seat in Monroe and Ontario Counties – which has a five-point Democratic enrollment edge – a current Republican Assemblyman has an eight-point lead over a current Democratic Monroe County Legislator.”

SD	Candidate	Senate Race	Favorability Rating			Presidential Horse Race		
			Fav	Unfav	DK/NO	Obama	Romney	DK/NO
37	George Latimer (D)	44%	30%	29%	41%	47%	48%	4%
	Bob Cohen (R)	41%	31%	23%	46%			
	Undecided / Not Voting	15%						
55	Sean Hanna (R)	47%	37%	29%	34%	53%	39%	6%
	Ted O'Brien (D)	39%	22%	26%	52%			
	Undecided / Not Voting	14%						

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Key Issues for Voters

“Job creation is far and away the single most important issue voters want their senator working on in Albany in the 55th SD, and along with property taxes, are the two most important issues for voters in the 37th SD,” Greenberg said. “Ethics reform is the least important issue to voters in both districts, although government reform was a top-three issue in both districts in 2010.”

What is the most important issue you want your State Senator to be working on in Albany?		
Issue	37 th SD	55 th SD
Property taxes	22%	10%
State budget	13%	16%
State taxes	11%	14%
Ethics reform	5%	7%
Health care	7%	10%
Education	16%	13%
Creating jobs	23%	28%
Something else	2%	1%
Don't know/no opinion	2%	1%

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“Governor Andrew Cuomo is viewed favorably by more than three-quarters of likely voters in both districts. President Obama is viewed very favorably and Mitt Romney very unfavorably in the 55th SD. The favorability ratings of both are near break-even in the 37th SD,” Greenberg said.

Favorability Ratings				
	37 th SD		55 th SD	
	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav
Dem. Senate Candidate	30%	29%	22%	26%
Rep. Senate Candidate	31%	23%	37%	29%
New York State Senate	35%	51%	33%	58%
Andrew Cuomo	76%	19%	80%	17%
Barack Obama	50%	47%	55%	43%
Mitt Romney	47%	49%	41%	56%

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37th SD – Westchester County – George Latimer (D) vs. Bob Cohen (R)

Latimer has the support of 44 percent of likely voters and Cohen has the support of 41 percent. Both candidates do well with voters of their own party, Latimer with the support of 76 percent of Democrats and Cohen has the support of 75 percent of Republicans. Independents currently side with Cohen by a 43-34 percent margin. Cohen leads among men by five points, while Latimer has an 11-point lead with women. Latimer has a 12-point lead in the portion of the district that remains the same as the current district (59 percent of likely voters), while Cohen leads by nine points in the area new to the senate district.

Cohen is viewed favorably by 31 percent of voters and unfavorably by 23 percent. Latimer’s favorability rating is 30-29 percent. Both candidates are unknown to more than 40 percent of likely voters. Voters have a decidedly unfavorable view of the State Senate by a 51-35 percent margin, are they are virtually evenly divided on whether they want to see the Democrats or Republicans control the Senate.

The race for President within this Senate district is as tight as it can be with Romney having the support of 48 percent of voters and Obama being supported by 47 percent. Independents side with Romney by 14 points.

Voters say that Cohen will be better than Latimer on property taxes (44-35 percent), state budget (44-35 percent), state taxes (43-36 percent) and job creation (39-36 percent), four of the five most important issues for voters. They give Latimer the edge on health care (43-36 percent) and education (41-36 percent), and rate the two virtually evenly on ethics reform and representing the community in Albany.

“While this district has a significant Democratic enrollment edge, likely voters are closely divided on which party they want to control the Senate, on the favorability ratings of both Obama and Romney and their choice in the presidential election,” Greenberg said. “In light of that, it’s not particularly surprising to see a hotly contested Senate race also dividing voters nearly down the middle. Cohen has the better favorability rating, while Latimer has an early, narrow three point edge. It won’t be surprising if this stays close until the end.”

55th SD – Monroe and Ontario Counties – Sean Hanna (R) vs. Ted O’Brien (D)

Hanna has a 47-39 percent lead over O’Brien. O’Brien has the support of two-thirds of Democrats, however, Hanna has the support of more than three-quarters of Republicans and a 16-point lead among independents. He leads by eight points with both women and men. Hanna has a 15-point lead in the southern part of the district and the two candidates are separated by a single point in the northern part of the district.

Hanna is viewed favorably by 37 percent of likely voters and unfavorably by 29 percent, with 34 percent having no opinion. O’Brien has a negative 22-26 percent favorability rating, with 52 percent having no opinion. By a 58-33 percent margin voters view the State Senate unfavorably, and they are evenly divided with 45 percent of voters each wanting to see the Democrats or the Republicans in control of the Senate.

Obama has a significant 53-39 percent lead over Romney, including a 15-point lead among independent voters, in this district with a five-point Democratic enrollment edge. Obama has a 12-point net positive favorability rating, while Romney has a 15-point net negative favorability rating.

By double digits, voters say Hanna will do a better job than O’Brien on state taxes, property taxes and job creation. They also say Hanna will be better on the state budget and representing their communities. Voters are closely divided on who will be better on health care, education and ethics.

“Hanna is more well-known and has a stronger favorability rating than O’Brien. Voters think Hanna will do a better job for them on most issues, including the three most important issues to voters,” Greenberg said.

“While Democrats enjoy an enrollment edge and the President is far outpacing his challenger, O’Brien has catching up to do if he wants to be able to move this seat from its current Republican representation in the Senate and make it a Democratic seat. Five weeks is a long time but Hanna has the early advantage.

“Currently, the Republicans appear to have the edge in holding on to the seat of one of their retiring members, while Democrats are locked in a tighter race to hold the seat of one of their retiring members,” Greenberg said.

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These SRI State Senate surveys were conducted from September 27-October 1, 2012 by telephone calls to likely voters in each State Senate district. For the 37th SD, 438 voters were included in the sample, with a margin of error of ± 4.7 percentage points. For the 55th SD, 446 voters were included in the sample, margin of error ± 4.6 . In each district a likely voter screen was applied to a weighted representative sample of registered voters. The Siena College Research Institute, directed by Donald Levy, Ph.D., conducts political, economic, social and cultural research primarily in New York State. SRI, an independent, non-partisan research institute, subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research Code of Professional Ethics and Practices. 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.