Scripps poll shows West with sizable lead over Murphy

By Jonathan Mattise

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Just 2 1/2 weeks before Election Day, U.S. Rep. Allen West has built a sizable lead over Democrat Patrick Murphy in a Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers/WPTV News Channel 5 poll of likely District 18 voters.

The poll of 600 likely voters puts West up by 9 percentage points over Murphy — 51 to 42 percent — in the Martin-St. Lucie-northern Palm Beach County congressional race. Mitt Romney also holds a 5-point edge against President Obama among district voters, according to the poll by North Carolina-based Public Policy Polling. The survey took place Monday and Tuesday. The latest presidential debate took place Tuesday night at Hofstra University in New York.

According to a pollster with the group, the back-and-forth negative ad blitz has hurt Murphy. The congressman also is getting more support from independent voters in the poll.

“Negative advertising seems to have taken more of a toll on Patrick Murphy then on Allen West,” said Jim Williams, a Public Policy Polling polling analyst. “West owes his overall 9-point lead to a 52-34 advantage among independent voters. He also earns more support from Republicans than Murphy does from Democrats.”

The Scripps poll is one of a handful of District 18 surveys, some Democratic, some Republican, and a couple third-party offerings. The results have varied widely, giving Murphy as much as a 9-point lead or putting him behind West by up to 11. Most are much closer.

Florida Atlantic University Associate Professor Kevin Wagner said not to put too much stock in a single survey, though he said the numbers on the West-Murphy race are somewhat telling.

“You never want to read too much into one poll. This is especially true with automated polls that usually have fairly low response rates and often do not call cellphones,” Wagner said. “The samples tend to be older and lean a bit toward the GOP. With that said, this is still a sizable margin and is large (enough) that even a bias would not explain the such a large lead in this poll.”
The poll puts West up by 8 percentage points in northern Palm Beach County and by 20 in Martin. In St. Lucie County, where Democrats have almost a 20,000-voter edge over Republicans, West holds a 1-point lead in the poll. Less than 10 percent of voters polled were unsure which candidate they prefer.

“This poll just goes to show that Patrick Murphy’s false, negative and even racist attack campaign has blown up in his face,” West campaign manager Tim Edson said. “No doubt Patrick Murphy will soon try to counter with another phony poll, but it won’t change the reality that Patrick Murphy’s campaign is circling the drain.”

Murphy senior campaign advisor Eric Johnson disagreed with the poll’s voter registration breakdown. The poll includes 40 percent Republicans, 32 percent Democrats and 29 percent others. District 18 breaks down to 36 percent Democrat, 38 percent Republican and 26 percent other. The poll had a plus-minus margin of error of 4 percent.

Johnson also criticized the results because they include more voters from Martin County than reflected in the district. The poll includes 26 percent Martin County voters, 40 percent from Palm Beach and 34 percent from St. Lucie. The district itself breaks down with 21.5 percent of its voters in Martin, 41.9 percent in Palm Beach and 36.6 percent in St. Lucie, according to local supervisors of elections numbers.

Johnson also said the poll was still in “Romney bump period” from the former Massachusetts governor’s first debate performance in Denver. The second debate, considered a much closer contest, occurred the day after the poll ended.

“Our internal polling has the race at a dead heat,” Johnson said.

The pollster said Public Policy Polling doesn’t go in with a “preconceived notion” of how many Republicans and Democrats are needed. He said the breakdown is usually close in the end, anyway.

“Registration numbers are not the end-all, be-all of what the voting population will end up looking like,” Williams said.

Eight percent more voters said they had a favorable, versus unfavorable, opinion of West. But Murphy’s totals landed with 13 percent more in the unfavorable direction.

Wagner said it’s surprising to see such a negative opinion of Murphy, given he’s a political newcomer. He agreed the big swing could be because of effective negative ads from West.

Wagner added the live debate, slated for Friday night could greatly affect the race.
“The debate could be a game changer in this race as many have never seen Murphy outside the commercials,” Wagner said. “If he can have an effective debate, it could shift some of these numbers.”

DISTRICT 18 POLL

Here are the questions asked by Public Policy Polling:

1: The candidates for President are Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney. If the election was today, who would you vote for?

Mitt Romney, 50 percent; Barack Obama, 45 percent; undecided, 4 percent

2: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Allen West?

Favorable, 49 percent; unfavorable, 41 percent; not sure, 10 percent

3: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Patrick Murphy?

Unfavorable, 47 percent; favorable, 34 percent; not sure, 19 percent

4: The candidates for Congress are Republican Allen West and Democrat Patrick Murphy. If the election were today, who would you vote for?

West, 51 percent; Murphy, 42 percent; not sure, 8 percent

5: Would you say the negative advertising surrounding this Congressional race made you more likely to vote for Allen West, more likely to vote for Patrick Murphy, has it made no difference, or do you not find the advertising to be negative?

No difference, 39 percent; More like to vote for West, 31 percent; More likely to vote for Murphy, 27 percent; Not sure, 2 percent; Didn’t find advertising to be negative, 0 percent

POLL SAMPLE

Population: 600 likely voters

Gender: Female, 55 percent; male, 45 percent

Party: Republican, 40 percent; Democrat, 32 percent; independent/other, 29 percent

Race: White, 70 percent; Hispanic, 13 percent; African-American, 10 percent; other; 7 percent
Age: 46 to 65 years old, 41 percent; 65 or older, 27 percent; 30 to 45 years old, 20 percent; 18 to 29 years old, 12 percent

County: Palm Beach County, 40 percent; St. Lucie County, 34 percent; Martin County, 26 percent

District 18 Breakdown

Voter registration: Republican, 38.2 percent; Democrat, 36.2 percent; other, 25.6 percent

Breakdown of total voters: Palm Beach County, 41.9 percent; St. Lucie County, 36.6 percent; Martin County, 21.5 percent

Source: Martin, St. Lucie, Palm Beach counties supervisors of elections

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

Here is a closer look at some of the numbers from the Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers/WPTV News Channel 5 poll:

WEST FAVORABILITY

Men: favorable, 52 percent; unfavorable, 40 percent; not sure, 8 percent

Women: favorable, 48 percent; unfavorable, 42 percent; not sure, 11 percent

Democrats: favorable, 20 percent; unfavorable, 68 percent; not sure, 11 percent

Republicans: favorable, 78 percent; unfavorable, 17 percent; not sure, 5 percent

Independent/other: favorable, 43 percent; unfavorable, 44 percent; not sure, 13 percent

Ages 18 to 29: favorable, 50 percent; unfavorable, 35 percent; not sure, 11 percent

30 to 45: favorable, 61 percent; unfavorable, 28 percent; not sure, 11 percent

46 to 65: favorable, 43 percent; unfavorable, 48 percent; not sure, 8 percent

Older than 65: favorable, 50 percent; unfavorable, 42 percent; not sure, 8 percent

MURPHY FAVORABILITY

Men: favorable, 33 percent; unfavorable, 49 percent; not sure, 18 percent

Women: favorable, 34 percent; unfavorable, 45 percent; not sure, 20 percent
Democrats: favorable, 66 percent; unfavorable, 19 percent; not sure, 16 percent

Republicans: favorable, 15 percent; unfavorable, 67 percent; not sure, 17 percent

Independent/other: favorable, 24 percent; unfavorable, 50 percent; not sure, 26 percent

Ages 18 to 29: favorable, 28 percent; unfavorable, 44 percent; not sure, 28 percent

30 to 45: favorable, 17 percent; unfavorable, 59 percent; not sure, 24 percent

46 to 65: favorable, 41 percent; unfavorable, 43 percent; not sure, 16 percent

Older than 65: favorable, 38 percent; unfavorable, 45 percent; not sure, 17 percent

PROJECTED VOTE BREAKDOWN

DISTRICT 18

Men: West, 51 percent; Murphy, 42 percent; not sure, 7 percent

Women: West, 50 percent; Murphy, 41 percent; not sure, 8 percent

Palm Beach: West, 51 percent; Murphy, 43 percent; not sure, 7 percent

Martin: West, 56 percent; Murphy, 36 percent; not sure, 8 percent

St. Lucie: West, 46 percent; Murphy, 45 percent; not sure, 9 percent

PRESIDENTIAL

Men: Romney, 53 percent; Obama, 42 percent; not sure, 5 percent

Women: Romney, 49 percent; Obama, 47 percent; not sure, 4 percent

Palm Beach: Obama, 44 percent; Romney, 49 percent; undecided, 7 percent

Martin: Obama, 39 percent; Romney, 57 percent; undecided, 3 percent

St. Lucie: Obama, 51 percent; Romney, 47 percent; undecided, 2 percent