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Moran: Gov. Christie's attack on Eagleton pollsters is small, mean



(<http://connect.nj.com/user/tmoran/index.html>) By **Tom Moran**/ The Star-Ledger

(<http://connect.nj.com/user/tmoran/posts.html>)

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Noah K. Murray/The Star Ledger

In the latest installment of “Gov. Christie Goes Haywire,” we see our fearsome leader **attacking the Rutgers-Eagleton poll**

Gov. Chris Christie appears in this file photo.

(<http://www.politickernj.com/60270/christie-has-one-word-eagleton-poll>) and then refusing to answer any questions that refer to it. Harrumph!

“The Eagleton poll is crap,” he barked at NJTV’s Michael Aron. “It’s never good. It’s never accurate, and when I see the headline says ‘the Eagleton poll,’ I just fold the paper up, I don’t read it. It’s never right ever. When it’s good for me, it’s not right. When it’s bad for me, it’s not right. It’s never right. So save it, Michael, I’m not going to answer questions on the Eagleton poll.”

Before diagnosing this one, readers should know that this rant is not based in reality. The poll is respected by other pollsters and by most politicians. When asked, the governor’s office could not back up the boss’s tirade.

Nothing unusual in that. We should all feel sympathy for the professional staff that has to clean up after these messes.

Still, to many people, this particular rant was a head-scratcher. Throttling Democrats makes some sense. Ditto for unions, town-hall loudmouths, reporters of all kinds and citizens on the boardwalk who interrupt a good ice cream cone.

But a respected poll? And one that just said most people in New Jersey think he's doing a pretty good job?

The answer may seem bizarre, but not to those of us who have watched Christie over the years: He hates this poll because, in the fall of 2009, it suggested that Chris Daggett, the independent candidate for governor, had the support of 20 percent of voters.

I'm not making this up. That's the one poll that the governor's office cited when asked about it.

At the time, Daggett was a threat because he was siphoning off a good portion of the anti-Jon Corzine vote, and Christie needed all that to win. The Star-Ledger had just endorsed Daggett and several other polls showed a surge as well.

Yes, Eagleton was out front at 20 percent. But polls from Zogby and Fairleigh Dickinson University put Daggett as high as 14 points, and Quinnipiac put him at 13. The margins of error overlapped.

Daggett later plunged and wound up getting only 6 percent of the vote. But polls don't pretend to predict outcomes. They are snapshots in time.

Why would Christie clutch onto this one? Because he is a guy who nurtures a grudge, holding it deep in the vault of his psyche. Picture Gollum in "The Lord of the Rings," crouched in his dark cave, fondling the Ring of Power for 500 years, and you get the idea.

The people at Eagleton, of course, are academics who are unaccustomed to this kind of brawling.

"I'm not interested in going mano-a-mano with the governor," said professor David Redlawsk, the director of the poll.

Ruth Mandel, the director of the Eagleton Institute, explained his reticence this way: "He's an academic, and they're not usually out in the public square having an argument with the governor of the state."

In other words, this isn't really a fair fight. It might even qualify as bullying under the schools statue that, ironically, the governor signed himself.

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For the record, the latest Eagleton poll showed that 47 percent of New Jerseyans give the governor an "A" or "B" for his performance. It also showed that 47 percent think it's time for a new governor next year, while a smaller 44 percent want Christie to stay put.

"New Jersey voters remain evenly split over the governor, as they have been consistently since he's been in office," Redlawsk said when he released the finding. "While we see small moves up and down, opinions on Christie remain pretty settled."

All the polls show that. In fact, several polls hire the same firm to actually make the random calls. The Pew and Monmouth University polls often use the same firm that Eagleton does.

Pollsters parse the data so that each demographic group gets its proper weight. And they have discretion, too, in phrasing the questions. "Marriage equality" gets better numbers than "gay marriage," for example.

But Eagleton plays a straight game. As the governor acknowledged, it gives him good news one day and bad news the next. The problem for Eagleton is that a poll is only as influential as its reputation. And the governor's big megaphone has power.

Sometimes, that's a good thing. Other times, it's just small and mean.

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