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# Backing for same-sex marriage, higher minimum wage in N.J.

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New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, left at podium, stands in the Assembly Chamber of the Statehouse in Trenton, N.J., as he deliver his budget address Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2012. Christie presented to lawmakers with a \$32.1 billion budget for the next fiscal year that calls for a small increase in school aid and flat funding for municipalities that would set aside money to pay for the first half-year of his proposed 10 percent income tax cut. (AP Photo/Mel Evans) (AP)



**GALLERY:** New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, left at podium, stands... (AP)

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By Joelle Farrell, Inquirer Trenton Bureau

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TRENTON - Legalizing same-sex marriage and increasing the minimum wage - two Democratic priorities this legislative session - continue to draw strong support from New Jersey residents, according to a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

And although Republican Gov. Christie leads his most prominent challenger, State Sen. Barbara Buono (D., Middlesex), in his reelection bid, his popularity may not help GOP candidates in other races, said David Redlawsk, director of the poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University.

"Gov. Christie's 30-point lead over Sen. Buono is not trickling down to preferences for the Legislature," he said. "Statewide, voters seem quite willing to split their ballot. But we have not polled individual races, so, although Democrats hold a large overall lead, some specific races are likely to be more competitive."

The poll results were drawn from landline and cellphone interviews with 923 New Jersey adults, 819 of them registered voters. The poll, conducted from April 3 to 7, has a margin of error from the registered voter sample of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

A strong majority of those polled - 76 percent - said they would vote for a constitutional amendment to increase the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.25 and then index the wage to inflation. That support cuts across party lines, with backing from 91 percent of Democrats, 57 percent of

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Republicans, and more than 70 percent of independents.

More than seven out of 10 Christie supporters said they would approve the measure.

Democrats circumvented Christie and put the minimum wage question on the ballot after the governor conditionally vetoed a bill to raise the minimum wage, knocking out the clause that would provide automatic cost of living increases in the minimum wage.

"The poll's findings are welcome but not surprising, as I've heard strong support for increasing the minimum wage all throughout our state," Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (D., Essex) said Tuesday. "Gov. Christie made a major mistake by not signing my bill, but the people of New Jersey will fortunately have final say and I'm confident their support will remain strong."

A majority also expressed support for same-sex marriage: 62 percent said they would approve legalizing it - the highest level of support recorded by the poll. Thirty percent said they would oppose same-sex marriage.

But voters won't have the opportunity to weigh in on same-sex marriage this fall. Democratic leaders have not put the question the ballot, arguing that civil-rights issues should not be decided by majority vote.

Christie conditionally vetoed a same-sex marriage bill in February 2012, offering to hire an ombudsman to strengthen enforcers of the state's civil union law.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D., Gloucester) said he believes that the Democratic-controlled legislature can eventually override the governor's veto, although all attempts to do so have failed.

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## Governor Chris Christie

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