

Booker leads Democratic primary field, poll shows

Newark Mayor Cory Booker officially launches his campaign for the U.S. Senate

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(Gallery by William Perlman/The Star-Ledger)

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TRENTON — Newark Mayor Cory Booker is the man to beat in the Democratic primary for this year's U.S. Senate race, according to a poll released today.

The Rutgers-Eagleton **survey** found that more than half of New Jersey voters have a positive opinion of Booker, while two other Democrats seeking the vacant seat, Reps. Rush Holt and Frank Pallone, are largely unknown statewide, according to the poll of 763 registered voters.

Rutgers-Eagleton did not include Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (D-Essex) in its poll, nor any of the Republican candidates who have declared their intentions to run.

"Even with Oliver in the race, Booker is currently the odds-on favorite," said David Redlawsk, the poll director. "Booker has the most visible statewide profile by far among the Democrats running, and name recognition is critical in such a short campaign."

Booker, 44, announced over the weekend that he would run for the seat left vacant by the death of Sen. Frank Lautenberg. The Newark mayor filed a petition with more than 7,000 signatures today to run in the Democratic primary on Aug. 13 and the special general election set for Oct. 16.

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll found that 56 percent of registered voters have a favorable opinion of Booker, while 12 percent have an unfavorable opinion, and 32 percent said they didn't know enough about him.

Pallone, a 25-year congressman who helped write the Democrats' major health-care overhaul, the Affordable Care Act, is seen favorably by 21 percent of voters and unfavorably by 8 percent. But 71 percent of poll respondents said they don't know who Pallone is, underscoring the difficulty he faces in challenging Booker.

Holt, a physicist who has been in Congress since 1999, is seen positively by 18 percent of Jersey voters and negatively by 10 percent. Meanwhile, 72 percent of respondents said they don't know enough about him.

The poll, which was conducted from June 3 to 9, had a margin of error of 3.6 percentage points. Redlawsk added that "special election turnout is notoriously difficult to predict."

"We shouldn't write anyone off just yet," he said.

A **separate Quinnipiac University poll** released this morning showed 53 percent of self-described Democrats said they'll vote for Booker, while 10 percent pick Holt and 9 percent back Pallone.

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SCRAMBLE FOR THE SENATE



Republican and Democratic candidates have until Monday at 4 p.m. to declare themselves for the U.S. Senate. A look at how the scrap is shaping up, thus far:

WHO'S ANNOUNCED

Democrats: Newark Mayor Cory Booker; U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th Dist.); Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (D-Essex); U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6th Dist.)

Republicans: Former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan; Dr. Alieta Eck

WHO'S SAID NO

Republicans: Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-Union); State Sen. Michael Doherty (R-Warren), State Sen. Joseph Kyriillos (R-Monmouth); State Sen. Tom Kean Jr. (R-Union); U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th); Attorney General Jeffrey Chiesa (who was appointed to the Senate by Christie but won't run in October)

Democrats: State Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester); former Hoboken mayoral candidate Beth Mason