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MISSOURI:

Voters Divide on Congressional Control, Generic Ballot... McCaskill & Hawley Competitive in Senate Race

For Immediate Release

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This NBC News/Marist Poll Reports:

Most Missouri registered voters (80%) place a great deal of importance on next week's midterm elections although voters do not agree on what they hope will be the outcome. The divisions in the electorate translate into a U.S. Senate race that is highly competitive. Democratic incumbent Senator Claire McCaskill is closely matched against her Republican opponent Josh Hawley. Voters' impressions of McCaskill have improved since September. Although better known than he was, voters remain divided in their perceptions of Hawley.

Missouri voters believe a great deal is riding on the upcoming elections. 80% of registered voters including 85% of likely voters characterize the midterm elections as very important. Among likely voters, there is little partisan difference in this intensity. 89% of Democrats, 84% of Republicans, and 82% of independents likely to participate describe the elections as very significant.

47% of registered voters prefer a Congress controlled by Republicans including 48% of likely voters. 45% favor a legislature controlled by Democrats. The Republicans (45%) were preferred by 5 points over the Democrats (40%) in September. The gender gap on this question has narrowed from 27 points to 17 points. Nearly half of women (49%) prefer Democratic control. A majority of men (51%) favor Republican control.

The Missouri electorate also divides on the generic congressional ballot question. 47% of registered voters say they support the Democrat on the ballot while 46% support the Republican. Among likely voters, 48% back the Republican in their district, and 47% support the Democrat. Registered voters similarly split in September. 43% said they backed the Republican, and 41% were for the Democrat. 12% were undecided.

By 10 points, independents now say they support the Democratic candidate (47%) to the Republican (37%) in their district for Congress. Independents who are likely to participate are a net +16 for the Democrat. Nine percent of registered voters who identify as independent are undecided. Previously, 37% of Missouri independents backed the Republican, 30% supported the Democrat, and one in four were undecided (25%). A 14-point gender gap exists, down from 30 points. The Democratic candidate receives majority support (51%) among women while half of men (50%) are for the Republican.

“Missouri is politically split down the middle,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “Republicans are hoping to emerge with their red state status intact while Democrats are hoping to score an upset. Independents are in the driver’s seat and right now they’re leaning towards the Democrats.”

More than seven in ten voters (72%) consider President Donald Trump’s nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court to be a voting issue. This includes 38% who say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supported the nomination and 34% who say they are more likely to back a candidate who opposed the appointment. 25% assert it makes no difference to their vote.

In the U.S. Senate race in Missouri, McCaskill (47%) and Hawley (44%) are competitive among likely voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate or already voted. Libertarian candidate Japheth Campbell has 3%, and Green Party candidate Jo Crain receives 2%. 11% of likely voters are persuadable, that is, they are either undecided or indicate they may vote differently on Election Day. The gender gap is now 15 points, down from 26 points previously. Independents have moved to the McCaskill column, 49% to 29% for Hawley. In September, independents divided 34% for McCaskill and 35% for Hawley.

When last reported in September, McCaskill garnered 44% to 40% for Hawley among likely voters. Campbell had 5%, and 3% backed Crain.

Among registered voters, McCaskill has 46% to 43% for Hawley. Campbell receives 3%, and 2% are for Crain. McCaskill previously had a 4-point lead over Hawley among registered voters.

68% of Missouri likely voters with a candidate preference strongly support their choice. 72% of McCaskill's supporters, compared with 69% of Hawley's backers, are firmly committed to their candidate.

McCaskill (50%) and Hawley (47%) are similarly matched among likely voters in a head-to-head contest without the Libertarian or Green Party candidates. McCaskill and Hawley were previously tied (47% each) among likely voters in this two-candidate matchup.

"In a state that Trump carried by about 19 points in 2016 and where he remains popular today, McCaskill is trying to find a way to go against the current" says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "Any real chance Democrats have in achieving majority status in the Senate goes through Missouri."

McCaskill's favorable rating has improved among likely voters. She has gone from an underwater net -8 points in September to a net +4 now. 49% of likely voters, up from 41% in September, have a favorable view of McCaskill. 45%, notched down from 49% previously, have an unfavorable opinion of her. Six percent have either never heard of McCaskill or are unsure how to rate her. This compares with 10% who previously did not have an opinion of McCaskill.

Hawley has become better known during the campaign in Missouri, but the likely electorate still divides in its opinion of him. 45%, an increase from 36% last time, have a favorable opinion of Hawley. 42% have an unfavorable impression of him, also up from 36% last time. 13% of likely voters have either never heard of Hawley or are unsure how to rate him, a decline from 28%.

50% of residents, including 51% of likely voters, approve of the job President Trump is doing. This includes 34% who strongly do so. 42% of adults, including 44% of likely voters, disapprove. This includes 35% of residents who strongly feel this way. Missouri residents divided in September. 44% of Missouri adults approved, and 45% disapproved of how the president was handling his job.