

For Immediate Release:
February 15, 2011

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New Sachs/Mason-Dixon Florida Poll Shows Bill Nelson Vulnerable to Defeat in 2012

Tallahassee – Florida’s Senior U.S. Senator Bill Nelson is vulnerable to defeat in 2012, according to a new statewide Sachs/Mason-Dixon Poll released today.

“Regardless of his many years of public service, Sen. Nelson’s reelection in 2012 is anything but a sure thing – in fact, any of his prospective Republican challengers is positioned to be competitive and possibly win,” said Ron Sachs, president and CEO of Ron Sachs Communications who commissioned the poll. “This contest will be a national story, as will the fact that, if he ran and the election were held today, former Gov. Jeb Bush would beat Sen. Nelson.”

In the poll of 625 registered Florida voters conducted Feb 9-10, 2011 by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, Sen. Nelson fails to gain 50 percent support against any potential Republican challenger.

“Bill Nelson will clearly have a much more difficult path to victory next year than he had in 2006. He is in trouble if voters in 2012 are looking to throw out career politicians like they did in the past election,” said Mason-Dixon Managing Director Brad Coker. “The fact that Sen. Nelson currently can’t crack 50 percent against any GOP challenger in a head-to-head match-up, including several lesser-known lawmakers, is a clear sign of vulnerability.”

In hypothetical races, the Sachs/Mason-Dixon Poll shows:

- Former Gov. Jeb Bush leads Nelson 49 percent to 41 percent.
- Nelson edges U.S. Rep. Connie Mack 45 percent to 40 percent.
- Nelson is ahead of former U.S. Senator George LeMieux 49 percent to 35 percent.
- Nelson leads Florida Senate President Mike Haridopolos 48 percent to 25 percent.
- Nelson is leading former State Rep. Adam Hasner 46 percent to 24 percent.

Coker notes Sen. Nelson’s reelection chances may be largely tied to whether or not the state economy shows significant improvement and President Obama can regain and then maintain his popularity.

The Sachs/Mason-Dixon Poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.

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NELSON LIKELY TO FACE STIFF CHALLENGE IN 2012

After cruising to re-election in 2006 largely because he faced an extremely weak Republican challenger, Democratic U.S. Senator Bill Nelson will clearly have a much more difficult race to run next year. Nelson currently fails to win the support of at least half of Florida's voters in head-to-head match-ups against any of his noteworthy potential GOP opponents, a clear sign of vulnerability.

Former Governor Jeb Bush has consistently beaten Nelson in hypothetical match-ups over the past several years and continues to do so. Statewide, Bush leads Nelson by a wide 49%-41% margin among Florida voters.

Senator Nelson's numbers, however, show some improvement. A year ago, Bush led by 50%-35% at the height of the healthcare reform debate, when Nelson alienated a significant number of senior voters by voting in favor of the legislation multiple times. While there is no doubt Bush would be hard for Nelson to beat, it is also a bullet he will likely get to dodge since the former governor is largely seen as not having an interest in entering the race.

Still, against the Republican "B" team there are obvious signs of weakness in the Senator's armor. U.S. Representative Connie Mack IV, who also brings a big Florida political name to the table, trails Nelson by only 4-points. Statewide, Nelson leads Mack by just 45%-41% with 15% undecided. If Mack decides to get in, the race will immediately start on equal footing.

Former Senator George LeMieux, who served out the short balance of Mel Martinez's term, would have a tougher road. LeMieux appears to have gained no significant political strength from serving in the caretaker role, as he trails Nelson by 14-points (49%-35). It would take time and work for LeMieux to establish himself as a strong challenger to the Democratic incumbent, but there remains a clear possibility he could catch up. This is because, as in the other match-ups, Nelson's support does not reach the 50% level.

The clearest sign that Nelson is vulnerable next year is the fact that he also fails to crack the 50% threshold when matched against two GOP state legislators who have had little statewide exposure. Nelson leads State Senator Mike Haridopolos by 49%-27% and State Representative Adam Hasner by 46%-24%. The margins are wide, but they are primarily the result of Nelson's higher statewide name recognition.

Nelson's incumbency will likely provide him with early financial and organizational advantages, and he could further benefit from a divisive Republican primary race. On the flip side, Nelson will share the ballot with President Obama and that could prove to be a huge weight if the state economy does not recover and healthcare reform remains a major election issue.

Of more importance is that if the current anti-incumbent mood continues into 2012, Nelson will be easy to tag as a career politician. In addition to his 12 years in the Senate, he has also served multiple terms in the U.S. House and in the state cabinet. He has served more years in major elected offices than any other current Florida elected official. Last year, a similar resume of holding a variety of state offices over a long period of time heavily contributed to the defeat of the once popular Charlie Crist.

HOW THE SACHS/MASON-DIXON POLL WAS CONDUCTED

This poll was conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, Inc. of Washington, D.C. from February 9 through February 10, 2011. A total of 625 registered voters were interviewed statewide by telephone. All stated they vote regularly in state elections.

Those interviewed were selected by the random variation of the last four digits of telephone numbers. A cross-section of exchanges was utilized and quotas were assigned to reflect voter turn-out by county.

The margin for error, according to standards customarily used by statisticians, is no more than plus or minus 4 percentage points. This means that there is a 95 percent probability that the "true" figure would fall within that range if all voters were surveyed. The margin for error is higher for any subgroup, such as a gender or party grouping.

QUESTION: If the 2012 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were Bill Nelson, the Democrat, and Jeb Bush, the Republican?

	<u>STATE</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>IND</u>
BUSH	49%	57%	42%	19%	84%	42%
NELSON	41%	37%	45%	71%	7%	45%
UNDECIDED	10%	6%	13%	10%	9%	13%

QUESTION: If the 2012 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were Bill Nelson, the Democrat, and Connie Mack IV, the Republican?

	<u>STATE</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>IND</u>
NELSON	45%	41%	48%	74%	11%	47%
MACK	40%	44%	37%	9%	77%	31%
UNDECIDED	15%	15%	15%	17%	12%	22%

QUESTION: If the 2012 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were Bill Nelson, the Democrat, and George LeMieux, the Republican?

	<u>STATE</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>IND</u>
NELSON	49%	45%	53%	81%	13%	52%
LEMIEUX	35%	41%	30%	5%	72%	25%
UNDECIDED	16%	14%	17%	14%	15%	23%

QUESTION: If the 2012 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were Bill Nelson, the Democrat, and Mike Haridopolos, the Republican?

	<u>STATE</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>IND</u>
NELSON	48%	46%	50%	76%	15%	51%
HARIDOPOLOS	27%	35%	19%	4%	53%	24%
UNDECIDED	25%	19%	31%	20%	32%	25%

QUESTION: If the 2012 election for Florida's U.S. Senate seat were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were Bill Nelson, the Democrat, and Adam Hasner, the Republican?

	<u>STATE</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>IND</u>
NELSON	46%	44%	48%	75%	12%	52%
HASNER	24%	29%	20%	2%	49%	23%
UNDECIDED	30%	27%	32%	23%	39%	25%

DEMOGRAPHICS:

PARTY REGISTRATION:

Democrat	274 (44%)
Republican	248 (40%)
Independent or Other	103 (16%)

AGE:	18-34	75 (12%)
	35-49	179 (29%)
	50-64	165 (26%)
	65+	205 (33%)
	Refused	1 -

RACE/ETHNICITY:

White/Caucasian	469 (75%)
Black/African American	73 (12%)
Hispanic or Cuban	78 (12%)
Other/Refused	5 (1%)

SEX:	Male	308 (49%)
	Female	317 (51%)

REGION:	North Florida	120 (19%)
	Central Florida	130 (21%)
	Tampa Bay	115 (18%)
	Southwest Florida	70 (11%)
	Southeast Florida	190 (30%)