

EXCLUSIVE POLL: Oregon Senate Race Shrinks to 8-point Gap
*Three-Quarters of Oregonians Likely to Vote in November Cannot Name
a Single Accomplishment by U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley*

A new survey of 600 likely voters in Oregon by Kellyanne Conway and *the polling company, inc* & *WomanTrend* finds the U.S. Senate race between incumbent Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Republican challenger, pediatric neurosurgeon Monica Wehby, remains unsettled. **Merkley has an 8-point lead, 42%-34%, with third party candidates grabbing 7% of the vote, and 14% firmly undecided.**

With so much noise and attention in 6-8 U.S. Senate contests in “swing states”, we thought it might be good check in with a less-watched race. Things could get interesting, with Merkley far from the 50% mark, President Obama unpopular in the state, 27% of Independents undecided, and Merkley unable to run his campaign out of the “War on Women” playbook against Wehby.

Both candidates are still relatively undefined. Some 20% of likely voters say they either have heard of Merkley but have no opinion of him (15%) or have never heard of him (5%). For Wehby, that number is 34%.

When asked in an open-ended question to name Merkley’s BEST accomplishment during his nearly six years in the U.S. Senate, 75% of likely voters were completely stumped, unable to name a single thing, offering up “none/nothing/don’t know/no idea.” This may be because Merkley has written has written only one bill that actually became law during his six years in the U.S. Senate.¹

Among those who did cite the “best accomplishment” of Merkley’s tenure, no single response reached double digits. Only 1% named the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, once dubbed the greatest legislative achievement and now the reason Oregonians have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a state-based exchange, “Cover Oregon², but have not yet enrolled a single person.

In reality, Senator Merkley has a near-unblemished record as a reliably partisan vote, siding with President Obama and the Democratic leadership 95% of the time.³ Obama’s deepening unpopularity in Oregon – his disapproval in the state (55%) matches his share of the vote there in 2012 (54%) – may imperil Senator Merkley’s re-election, especially among Independents, considering that his policy agenda is virtually indistinguishable from that of the President.

¹ https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/browse?sponsor=412325#current_status=28

² Federal taxpayers left holding bag for Oregon’s \$300 million Obamacare fiasco | WashingtonExaminer.com. <http://washex.am/1scfD2j>

³ Jeff Merkley - U.S. Congress Votes Database - The Washington Post. <http://wapo.st/1sci1WV>

Wehby Within Eight Points of Merkley in U.S. Senate Election; 27% of Independents Still Undecided

Although Merkley enters the stretch run of his campaign holding the head-to-head advantage over Wehby, his victory is by no means assured. For one, Merkley is closer to 40% than the 50%+ threshold goal for an incumbent.

The 14% of Oregonians who are still “on the fence” about the candidates are a critical subgroup and could provide decisive for either side in such a relatively close contest.

Among Independents, the race tightens to a five-point difference, Merkley 28%- Wehby 23%. A whopping 27% are still undecided, showcasing the extent to which Independents could determine the final outcome.

If the general election for U.S. Senate from Oregon were tomorrow, would you vote for (ROTATED) Democrat Jeff Merkley, Republican Monica Wehby, Libertarian Mike Montchalin, or Green Party Christina Lugo?

(PROBED THOSE WHO SAY A CANDIDATE: And would that be DEFINITELY or PROBABLY [INSERT CANDIDATE NAME]?)

(PROBED THOSE WHO SAY “UNDECIDED” OR “DO NOT KNOW”: Toward which candidate do you lean?)

42% TOTAL JEFF MERKLEY (NET)

34% TOTAL MONICA WEHBY (NET)

4% TOTAL CHRISTINA LUGO (NET)

3% TOTAL MIKE MONTCHALIN (NET)

14% HARD UNDECIDED/DO NOT KNOW (VOL.)

Oregonians Split on Head-to-Head U.S. Senate Ballot After Learning Candidate Career Paths

- Senator Merkley’s edge over Wehby evaporates once voters hear about the candidate’s respective backgrounds. Learning that Wehby is a pediatric neurosurgeon – and Merkley running for office for his seventh time helps her improve her ballot position by 8 points (34% to 42%) over the uninformed ballot, while Merkley’s take remains unchanged (42% in each). Another 13% could not decide between either candidate based on this description alone.

Wehby’s status as a Washington outsider and political newcomer may be attractive in what most experts agree is an anti-incumbent environment.

I will now read you brief descriptions of the U.S. Senate candidates in Oregon. (ROTATED MERKLEY/WEHBY DESCRIPTIONS)

Jeff Merkley is a career politician who is running for office for the seventh time.

Monica Wehby is a pediatric neurosurgeon and not a career politician.

Knowing this, would you vote for (ROTATED) Jeff Merkley or Monica Wehby? (PROBED: And would that be DEFINITELY or PROBABLY vote Merkley/vote Wehby?)

42% TOTAL JEFF MERKLEY (NET)

35% DEFINITELY JEFF MERKLEY

8% PROBABLY JEFF MERKLEY

42% TOTAL MONICA WEHBY (NET)

17% PROBABLY MONICA WEHBY

25% DEFINITELY MONICA WEHBY

13% DO NOT KNOW/CANNOT JUDGE (VOL.)

2% REFUSED (VOL.)

Merkley Favorability Rating Matches his Ballot Position; One-third Still Do Not Know Monica Wehby

Oregonians prove more likely to assess Jeff Merkley, who was State Speaker of the House before running for federal office, than political newcomer Monica Wehby. Still, Merkley actually underperforms his favorability rating (43%) on the ballot (42%), while Wehby overperforms hers by 4 points. Merkley's job approval is even lower, standing at 40%. Some 29% strongly disapprove of his performance.

Δ	TOTAL FAV. (NET)	TOTAL UNFAV. (NET)		HEARD OF/NO OPINION (VOL.)	NEVER HEARD OF (VOL.)
+9 FAV.	43%	34%	Jeff Merkley	15%	5%
-3 UNFAV.	30%	33%	Monica Wehby	20%	14%

Obama and Merkley Receive Middling Reviews in Electorally-Blue Oregon

- President Obama is 14-points under-water among Beaver State voters. **After winning 54% of the vote in Oregon in his 2012 re-election, a nearly identical figure – 55% - disapprove of his performance as President.**
- **In fact, the number of votes that STRONGLY disapprove of the job President Obama is doing (46%) is greater than the total number of those that approve (41%).**
- Similar to President Obama, Senator Merkley's current job approval (40%) stands far south of the vote share achieved in his previous election. Oregonians' largely lukewarm reviews of Senator Merkley's tenure echo their inability to identify his most significant achievements in a separate question.

Do you (ROTATED) approve or disapprove of the job that Barack Obama is doing as President? (PROBED: And would that be STRONGLY or SOMEWHAT approve/disapprove?)

41% TOTAL APPROVE (NET)
18% STRONGLY APPROVE
23% SOMEWHAT APPROVE

55% TOTAL DISAPPROVE (NET)
9% SOMEWHAT DISAPPROVE
46% STRONGLY DISAPPROVE

Do you (ROTATED) approve or disapprove of the job that Jeff Merkley is doing as United Senator representing Oregon? (PROBED: And would that be STRONGLY or SOMEWHAT approve/disapprove?)

40% TOTAL APPROVE (NET)
21% STRONGLY APPROVE
19% SOMEWHAT APPROVE

42% TOTAL DISAPPROVE (NET)
13% SOMEWHAT DISAPPROVE
29% STRONGLY DISAPPROVE

Will Oregonians Make a Safe Choice or Make History?

Oregon sent a woman to the U.S. Senate only one time – and that was in 1960. With states to its north (Washington) and south (California) having all-female U.S. Senate delegations, the pull to elect a woman of their own may have resonance. Insurgent challenger Monica Wehby is not the typical Republican candidate. She is pro-choice, pro-gay marriage, and has practiced medicine on babies, not politics in Washington.

At 34%, Wehby has some ground to cover before she claims victory. But the real question is how Senator Merkley converts a fairly monolithic, fairly unremarkable term in the Senate into the case for rehire. The blue hue of Oregon helps certainly, but if voters and those who contribute to or cover politics begin to focus on Oregon, the next several weeks could get fascinating.

Methodology Statement

the polling company, inc. & WomanTrend conducted a dual-frame statewide telephone survey (75% landlines, 25% cell phones) among 600 likely voters in Oregon from September 9-11, 2014. Surveys were conducted using live interviewers at a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility. The margin of error is +/- 4% at the 95% confidence level. Quotas were used to ensure proper representation of age, gender, race and region; data were weighted slightly to ensure that party registration among the survey sample matched the most recent breakdown provided by the Oregon Secretary of State.⁴

⁴ <http://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/Jul14.pdf>