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Florida Senate poll shows Crist annihilating field

By Aaron Blake

Posted: 02/11/09 05:21 PM [ET]

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist (R) looms hugely over his state's open Senate race, holding 2-to-1 leads over all Democrats interested in the race, according to a new Strategic Vision poll.

The poll finds the popular governor, who will wait until after Florida's legislative session to make his plans known, leading Democratic Reps. Ron Klein and Kendrick Meek by 34 points each.

He leads state Sen. Dan Gelber 58 percent to 27, and Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio 57 percent to 29.

The independent poll, set to be released Thursday, was conducted by a GOP-leaning firm.

Meek and Gelber are the only two candidates in the race on either side so far. Klein and Iorio are still weighing their options.

The poll shows Klein would lead a primary between the four of them, but with only 12 percent of the vote and with 66 percent of primary voters undecided. None of the four has a sizable statewide profile.

In a GOP primary with four other candidates, Crist is at 54 percent, while Rep. Connie Mack is at 16 percent.

Mack, who could benefit from having the same name as his father, a two-term senator, leads a Crist-less primary, taking 21 percent. Rep. Vern Buchanan takes second, with 11 percent, while former state House Speakers Allan Bense and Marco Rubio are at 8 and 5 percent, respectively.

Mack leads all four Democrats in head-to-head general election match-ups, while Buchanan, Bense and Rubio are all neck-and-neck with the Democrats.

"Buchanan and Rubio have problems despite being in the news a lot recently," Strategic Vision CEO David Johnson said. "Buchanan could, with money, buy name ID, but would need to attack Mack. Bense could be a sleeper."

Among the Democrats, Iorio and Klein run best in the general election.

In almost every race without Crist, though, about half of those polled are undecided.

Johnson said Iorio looks strong for the general election but could have trouble in the primary.

"Meek has a ceiling of support of about 25 percent, and it's hard to see him winning the primary," Johnson said. "Klein and Gelber have the most potential but could cross each other out."

The seat became vacant when Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) announced he wouldn't seek a second term in 2010.