



NORTH STAR
OPINION RESEARCH

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Whit Ayres, Dan Judy, and Jon McHenry
North Star Opinion Research
DATE: June 1st, 2016
RE: Key Findings from Survey of Iowa Registered Voters

Our survey of Iowa Registered Voters Regarding the Supreme Court Vacancy, conducted May 17-19, 2016, finds that the battle for the Supreme Court is important to voters, particularly conservatives, but holding a hearing and vote on Merrick Garland’s nomination is *not* a high priority to them. Voters know little about Merrick Garland personally, and are not following the issue particularly closely. Moreover, the debate is not hurting Senator Chuck Grassley, who is in a solid position as he begins his reelection campaign.

1. The decision about Justice Antonin Scalia’s replacement on the Supreme Court is a very important voting issue for one-half of all Iowa voters, with Republican base voters granting it the highest importance. Fifty percent of all voters say that the decision is either the “single most important” (3 percent) or “very important” (47 percent) to their vote for President and Congress this year. Among Republicans, 60 percent say it is the single most important or very important voting issue, compared to 51 percent of Democrats, and just 43 percent of independents. The issue rises in importance among key segments of the Republican base, including 72 percent among “strong Republicans” (versus just 60 percent among “strong Democrats”), and 73 percent among “very conservatives” (versus just 50 percent among liberals and 44 percent among moderates).

Question Wording:

As you may know, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia passed away recently, and his replacement could become the deciding vote on many important issues facing the nation for many years since it is a lifetime appointment. How important is the decision about Scalia’s replacement on the Supreme Court in determining your vote for President and Congress in November: the single most important issue, very important, somewhat important, or not too important?

2. But holding a hearing and a vote on Merrick Garland’s nomination to the court is *not* a high priority for Iowa voters compared to other issues, particularly conservatives Just nine percent of all voters say that holding a hearing and vote on Garland is one of the top-three issues in determining their vote for President and Senate, tying it with protecting the electric grid against an EMP attack, and ranking it far behind immigration (20 percent), social issues like abortion and gay marriage (26 percent), government spending and debt (43 percent), terrorism and national security (49 percent), and jobs and the economy (60 percent). Among Republicans, just 4 percent say that hearing and a vote on Garland is a priority, similar to the 7 percent seen among independents.

Question Wording:

Which of the following issues will be among the top-three issues in determining your vote for President and Senate this November: (RANDOMIZE AND ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES: terrorism and national security, jobs and the economy, government spending and debt, immigration, holding a hearing and vote on Merrick Garland’s nomination to the Supreme Court, social issues like abortion and gay marriage, or protecting our electric grid against a natural or man-made electromagnetic pulse attack)?

3. Not surprisingly, then, Iowa voters narrowly prefer that the Supreme Court vacancy be filled by the newly-elected president next year, rather than by President Obama this year. All voters prefer that the vacancy be filled by the newly-elected president by 47 to 45 percent, a change from March when they preferred the vacancy be filled by Obama by 49 to 44 percent. Republicans want the vacancy to be filled next year by an overwhelming 77 to 17 percent margin, while independents agree by a much slimmer 48 to 44 percent margin, and Democrats want the vacancy to be filled this year by 86 to 10 percent. Again, Republican base voters are particularly adamant on this question, with 82 percent of strong Republicans and 85 percent of very conservatives wanting the vacancy to be filled by the next president.

Question Wording:

Do you think the Supreme Court vacancy created by Justice Antonin Scalia's death should be filled (ROTATE: by President Obama this year, or by the newly-elected president next year)?

4. Iowa voters, particularly independents, are not following this debate very closely. Merrick Garland has just 31 percent total name ID in Iowa, with an 11 to 9 percent favorable-unfavorable rating. Only 29 percent of Republicans have even heard of Garland, compared to 28 percent of independents and 41 percent of Democrats. Just 31 percent of voters say they have heard “a lot” about the Garland nomination, while 53 percent say they have heard “only a little” and 16 percent have heard “nothing at all.” And when asked if they think the Senate should or should not confirm Garland to the court, or if they’re unsure, 47 percent say they’re unsure (57 percent of independents), while the rest split, with 28 percent saying the senate should confirm him and 25 percent saying it should not.

Question Wording:

First I would like to read you a list of names and have you tell me, for each one, whether you've heard of that person and, if so, whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them. If you haven't heard of the person, just say so: Merrick Garland

How much have you heard about Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to be the next Supreme Court justice: (ROTATE: a lot, only a little, or nothing at all)?

From what you've heard so far, do you think the Senate should or should not confirm Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court, or are you unsure?

5. This issue is having a negligible impact on the U.S. Senate race in Iowa. Among the voters who are currently undecided in the senate race, only 34 percent say the decision about Scalia’s replacement is the single most important or very important issue to their vote, with just 5 percent saying that holding hearings and a vote on Garland are one of their top-three voting issues, ranking it dead last. Only 16 percent have even heard of Garland, 74 percent have heard only a little or nothing at all about his nomination, and 72 percent are unsure about whether or not the senate should confirm him.

To the extent that Grassley’s position on this issue is important to voters, it is a modest positive for him – voters say that the position that “the American people need to have a voice in filling this vacancy by the person they elect as President in November, and the Court appointment should be made by the newly-elected president” makes them more likely to support Grassley by 32 to 28 percent with 38 percent saying it has no effect on their vote.

The bottom line is that Grassley is in a solid position in the race right now. In a strongly anti-incumbent environment, he enjoys a 51 to 35 percent favorable-unfavorable rating (including 49 to 33 percent among independents), and currently leads Patty Judge by a wide 53 to 35 percent margin (including 56 to 28 percent among independents). His firm stand on the Garland nomination helps him among his base voters, who care intensely about this issue, while doing little to no damage among independents, who care very little about it.

Question Wording:

If Senator Chuck Grassley said the American people need to have a voice in filling this vacancy by the person they elect as President in November, and the Court appointment should be made by the newly-elected president, would that make you more likely or less likely to vote for Senator Grassley, or would his position on the Supreme Court vacancy have no effect on your vote?

If the election for U.S. Senate were being held today and the candidates were (ROTATE: Chuck Grassley, the Republican, and Patty Judge, the Democrat), for which candidate would you vote?