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## **MIRS Capitol Capsule, Friday, April 13, 2012**

### **Solid Majority Now Says Michigan Economy Improving**

*Publisher's Note: The following is a regular monthly column for MIRS by Bernie **PORN**, president of the Lansing-based polling firm of EPIC-MRA.*

A 58-percent majority now say that "the economy has bottomed out and is starting to improve." This is up from 49 percent in January in two polls, and up from 39 percent in November of last year, 35 percent in September and 31 percent in August.

Twenty three percent said the economy "is at the bottom but is not yet getting any better," with 16 percent saying the economy "has not yet bottomed out and will still get worse."

Among the 58 percent who said the economy is improving, President Barack **OBAMA** leads Republican Mitt **ROMNEY** 54 to 44 percent. In January, Obama led Romney among the 49 percent who said the economy was improving by 52 to 40 percent. These numbers show that Obama is clearly benefiting from the improved perception of the Michigan economy, which is clearly why a Romney lead last year turned into an Obama lead so far in 2012, albeit one that is shrinking.

Democrats say the Michigan economy is improving by a 65 percent solid majority, as do a fairly solid 57 percent majority of Republican voters, with a narrow 51 percent majority of Independent voters sharing that view.

#### *Narrow plurality now believes state headed in right direction*

In November of last year, a 54 percent majority said Michigan was headed off on the wrong track, with 33 percent saying it was headed in the right direction. Now, a 44 percent narrow plurality said the State of Michigan is headed in the right direction, with 43 percent saying wrong track. This represents a significant change.

During the height of the economic recession in Michigan in 2008 and 2009, the percentage saying the state was off on the wrong track hit 85 percent or more. When Gov. Rick **SNYDER** was first elected began serving in January 2011, there was optimism about the direction of the state with 41 percent saying the state was "off on the wrong track" and 39 percent saying "right direction." In a second poll conducted in January 2011, a 43 to 34 percent plurality said "right direction," as did a 41 to 32 percent plurality in February.

But then, following Snyder's budget message, a 42 to 36 percent plurality said "wrong track," and then in May of last year, a 52 to 30 percent majority said "wrong track." Subsequent surveys showed a fairly consistent 55 percent saying "wrong track." If the economy improves, and voter perception continues to be optimistic, voter perception about the direction of the state is likely to continue as well.

A 58 percent majority of Democrats and a 45-to 41-percent plurality of Independent voters say the state is off on the wrong track, while a 62 to 26 percent majority of Republicans say right direction.

Governor Snyder favorability improves, job rating holds

Snyder's numbers are improving, with 48 percent now offering a favorable opinion of him, and 40 percent expressing an unfavorable view. A 53 to 41 percent majority give Governor Snyder a negative job rating, close to the 54 to 41 percent negative rating in January, but well below the 59 to 36 percent majority offering similar ratings in November, October and September of last year.

A 67 to 24 percent majority of Democrats have an unfavorable opinion of Snyder, while a 46 to 35 percent plurality of Independent voters offers a favorable view, as do a 77 to 12 percent majority of Republicans.

A 75 to 19 percent majority of Democrats give him a negative job rating (8 points higher than his unfavorable rating), as do a 57 to 34 majority of Independent voters (in contrast to the 46 to 35 percent plurality of Independent voters who have a favorable opinion of him). However, a 68 to 29 percent majority of Republicans give Snyder a positive rating, which is 9 points lower than his favorable rating among GOP voters.

Clearly, voters like Snyder more than they think he is doing a good job, regardless of partisan affiliation.

Obama 8 point lead in January closes to 4 points in April

After more than a year of trailing Romney by a low of 2 to a high of 5 points in a general election the race for President, Obama took a three point lead (43 to 40 percent) in an initial January survey (conducted from January 17 to 21), and then stretched his lead to 8 points (48 to 40 percent), in a second survey in January (conducted from January 21 to 25).

In our April EPIC-MRA poll, the general election race for president has tightened with Obama leading Romney by 4 points, 47 to 43 percent. Obama dropped by only 1 point from his January total support, but Romney improved his position by 3 points, bringing the race to a four-point margin.

When the race is simulated, meaning that undecided voters are apportioned to each respective candidate based on their partisan leanings in responding to other questions, the race remains a 4 point spread, with Obama increasing his support from 47 to 49 percent, and Romney increasing his support from 43 to 45 percent, with 6 percent remaining undecided.

The biggest shift in support came from Independent voters. In January, Obama led Romney among all Independent voters by a 12 point, 44 to 32 percent lead. That included a 21 point, 48 to 27 percent lead among Independent women, and a 6 point, 41 to 35 percent lead among Independent men.

That lead in January has totally evaporated, and Romney now narrowly leads Obama among all Independents 41 to 39 percent, including 41 to 40 percent of Independent men and a 3 point, 40 to 37 percent lead among Independent women.

Independent voters moved toward Obama at a time when Mitt Romney and the other Republican candidates running for office were having an interparty food fight, which likely repelled many voters, especially Independent voters.

In January, as the GOP presidential primary was approaching the February election and TV ads were running heavily, including attack ads that exceeded positive ads, the GOP base was divided with Romney getting significantly less than half of those intending to vote. Rick **SANTORUM** only narrowly lost in a state that arguably should have been a fairly easy walk for Romney.

Now, Independent voters who may lean Republican, as well as strong Republican base voters, seem to have come to accept the fact that Romney, whether they would have preferred someone else or not, is going to be the Republican nominee for President, and the choice is going to be Obama or Romney. Also, with gasoline prices hovering just below and at times above \$4 per gallon, TV ads that are running in Michigan which attack Obama and blame him for the high gas prices, could be having an impact on the race, even though most national polling shows that voters do not as yet, blame Obama for the high prices at the pump.

For whatever reasons, Independent voters in Michigan have significantly shifted toward Romney over Obama, and base Republican voters have firmed up their support for Romney. In January, a 79 to 10 percent majority of Republicans were voting for Romney over Obama. Now, an 86 percent majority supports Romney, a 7-point shift. Republican women increased in support for Romney from 79 percent in January to 88 percent now (up 9 points), and GOP men increased by 4 points, from 80 to 84 percent.