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In Bing, voters see reason for optimism

Charlie Cain and Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

Lansing -- Newly elected Detroit Mayor Dave Bing has plenty of problems to handle in his job, but he has the confidence of Michigan voters behind him.

A Detroit News / WXYZ poll shows that 61 percent of respondents are optimistic the NBA hall-of-famer can improve life in the state's largest city, while 26 percent doubt he can.

The expansion of Cobo Center and regional cooperation will be among the topics discussed at the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce policy conference on Mackinac Island that continues today through Saturday.

Poll respondent Beatrice Anderson, a 42-year-old mother of eight from Detroit, said Bing could be the spark to turn the city around.

"I'm a really religious person, so I just pray that we give him the chance," said Anderson, who added there are many empty lots with unmowed lawns and loose animals roaming her neighborhood. "Dave Bing can turn it around if we all do our share -- keep our neighborhoods safe, keep our yards clean and watch out for our kids."

Colin Moore, a laid-off steelworker from Wyandotte, said he wants Bing to succeed but is not sure that he can.

"Detroit is in a bad strait and it's not a one-man job," said Moore, 54. "He's a pretty astute businessman and has been successful in other areas. I think people want to give him a chance and want to see him do good. Everybody

wants to see this area rebound and do well but it's going to be a hard, uphill climb."

Robert Warfield, Bing's communications director, said: "We think this is a great sign of the confidence that the people have in Mayor Bing. It's also a positive sign that people believe he will bring positive change to the city."

In Metro Detroit, 67 percent of poll respondents said they are optimistic versus 57 percent in the rest of the state. Democrats are the most optimistic at 67 percent, followed by independents at 61 percent and Republicans at 55 percent.

Also, 64 percent of respondents more than 50 years old are hopeful about Bing's tenure, while 55 percent of those under 50 share that outlook.

The survey's margin of error is 4 percentage points.

The survey of 600 registered voters, conducted May 18-21 by EPIC/MRA of Lansing, also found that nearly half of respondents don't trust other local government leaders to be equal partners in efforts to consolidate services to save scarce resources -- 49 percent trust leaders, 45 percent don't trust them.

Women who were polled were slightly more trusting of government leaders to cooperate than men were, and Democrats were more trusting of elected officials than Republicans by a 57 percent to 43 percent count.

Lori Zurvalec, a 54-year-old attorney from Grosse Pointe, said she has confidence in local leaders but wants them to get moving.

"We need regional transit," she said. "I had a child who left the area because he wants to live in a city with regional transportation. We need our leaders to get their acts together on these kinds of issues."

Pulse of governor race

When voters were asked about their preferences for governor in 2010, the preferred choice among Democrats: U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

Stabenow drew 49 percent support from a smaller sampling of respondents who said they'd vote in a Democratic primary compared to 14 percent for Lt. Gov. John Cherry, who has formed an exploratory committee and is almost certain to run. Wayne County Executive Bob Ficano placed third at 5 percent

and no other candidate drew more than 2 percent.

Bernie Porn of EPIC/MRA said Stabenow's popularity in the poll is mainly due to her superior name identification as a second-term senator with a statewide following.

Stabenow has said she is not interested in running.

"As Michigan's voice on the Energy, Finance, Budget and Agriculture committees I believe I can best serve Michigan families in the United States Senate, so I will not be a candidate for governor in 2010," she said in a statement Wednesday.

On the Republican side, U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra of Holland, a declared candidate, has a 27 percent to 26 percent lead over state Attorney General Mike Cox, who announced Wednesday that he will run. Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land, who also has expressed an interest in the job, is running third at 19 percent. No other candidate polled more than 2 percent among respondents who said they'd vote in a GOP primary.

In both Republican and Democratic matchups in the race to succeed Gov. Jennifer Granholm, a quarter of voters say they are undecided.

The portion of the poll on the candidates has a margin of error of 4.9 percentage points.

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