Sen. Rabin could be in Trouble in 2014

Poll Show's Rabin might have to fight to keep seat

By Travis Fain

I'd stop somewhere short of having hope if I were you, North Carolina Democrats, but Public Policy Polling released some polling data today from eight N.C. senate districts where it believes Democrats stand a good chance next year. Conveniently, winning all of them while everything else stays the same would turn a 33-17 GOP Senate majority into a 25-25 split.

I'm going to paste PPP's analysis below. I don't usually go in for polls, particularly this far out. But I think this stuff's interesting because it's likely to help mold Democrat strategy as party leaders pick races to target next year in an effort to at least chip away at Republican margins in the House and Senate. You can download the full results here.

Note the similarities - but not outright match up - between PPP's districts and those the N.C. Democratic Party is targeting with newspaper ads. Dome lists them and I'll bold the ones PPP also highlighted: **Senate District 50, Jim Davis; SD 12, Ron Rabin; SD 1, Bill Cook; SD 2,** Norman Sanderson; SD 18, **Chad Barefoot; SD 15, Neal Hunt; SD 9, Thom Goolsby;** and SD 31 Pete Brunstetter.

Here's PPP's breakdown:

Based on our polling we find 2 districts where Democrats have a clear advantage for next year, and another 6 that can be classified as toss ups based on what we're seeing right now.

Here's the run down of the places where Democrats have a clear edge:

***-Senate District 9** provides the best pick up opportunity for Democrats at this point. **Thom Goolsby** is unusually well known for a State Senator and also unusually disliked. As a result he trails a generic Democratic opponent by 12 points:*

***-Senate District 19** is the other where Democrats have a clear advantage for next year. It's the only Republican held State Senate district that Barack Obama won last year, and it likely would have gone Democratic last fall if the party had had a stronger candidate. Even after 3 years in the Senate **Wesley Meredith** is mostly undefined, with 42% of voters holding no opinion about him. He trails a generic Democrat by 7 points.*

And here's a rundown of the six districts that are looking like toss ups right now:

***-Senate District 1** provided the closest race in the state last fall, and **Bill Cook**'s position has been further weakened after pulling out a narrow victory. Although a plurality of voters don't have an opinion about him, more than 60% of those who do have one disapprove of his performance. Add to that Pat McCrory being even more unpopular in this district than he is statewide, and Cook trails a generic Democrat by a point.*

***-SD 12** doesn't seem like the kind of place where Democrats should be able to compete. Pat McCrory won the district by 24 points last year and Mitt Romney took it by 19. But McCrory's approval is under water now, and **Ronald Rabin** is both unknown (50% of voters have no opinion about him) and unpopular (among those who do have one his approval spread in 20/30). A match up with a generic Democrat comes out tied.*

***-SD 15**'s location in Wake County makes it a place where voters are unusually familiar with what's going on in the legislature, and it's reflected in the favorability numbers for the Republicans in the General Assembly which stand at 33/57. This is also another district where Pat McCrory won overwhelmingly last fall but is now very unpopular. The up shot of it all is **Neal Hunt** holds only a small lead over a generic Democratic opponent.*

***-SD 17**, **Tamara Barringer**'s district, provides a clear example of how newer GOP legislators who aren't that well known are becoming defined by the unpopularity of the legislature in general. 65% of voters in her district have no opinion about her, and she fares very poorly with the few who do (10% approve, 25% disapprove). She hasn't done much to define herself and the fact that she trails a generic Democrat by 4 points suggests she's instead being defined by the 34/54 favorability rating of the Republicans in the legislature.*

***-SD 18** is another Wake County based district where the incumbent is largely undefined (54% of voters have no opinion about **Chad Barefoot**), the Republicans in the legislature are extra unpopular (33/54 favorability), and the generic ballot is essentially a toss up with the Democrat leading by a point.*

***-SD 50** provides an opportunity in that McCrory (31/55 approval), the Republicans in the legislature (36/52 favorability), and the incumbent Senator **Jim Davis** (27/40 approval) are all very unpopular. Despite all that though, Davis still leads a generic Democratic opponent by a point. That's a reminder that even in areas where voters are really unhappy with the Republicans it's still going to require strong Democratic candidates to take them out.*