

Poll says top issue for Atlantic City's Tourism District is crime

By JENNIFER BOGDAN, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, May 17, 2011 6:55 am

Likely voters in Atlantic County overwhelmingly say reducing crime should be the top priority of the Atlantic City Tourism District, a poll released Monday by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey shows.

The poll asked voters to choose what they believe is the top priority for the Tourism District from a list of six options, including "don't know." About 67 percent chose reducing crime, followed by 32 percent who said cleaning the Boardwalk and there is no other issue was most important.

The remaining choices, which focus on the health of the casino industry, each received less than 1 percent. Other possible responses included improving downtown Atlantic City, building more casinos or gaming establishments, and ignoring attractions on the Boardwalk.

The poll, commissioned by the center's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy and conducted by IBOPE Zogby International, surveyed 400 likely voters in the 2nd Legislative District covering much of Atlantic County between May 4 and 17. It has a margin of error of 5 percent.

Sharon Schulman, executive director of the Hughes Center, said the poll provides reputable information that state leaders can look upon when setting priorities for the district.

"Atlantic City has the reputation of having a crime problem. That perception is important," Schulman said. "Press reports and other outlets have shown that the problem isn't nearly as bad as people think. More than anything, they have to deal with that perception."

Gov. Chris Christie and the Legislature have enacted New Jersey's gaming regulations and created a new state-run Tourism District in hopes of revitalizing the casino industry and Atlantic City's economy. The district encompasses the entire Boardwalk, Ocean's Basin in the Northeast Inlet, the adjacent Marina District and 10 gateways that lead into the district and to the Boardwalk.

The poll reflects the input that State Police Lt. Col. Tom Gillet, commander of the Tourism District, has been getting. And it follows Christie's vision, he added.

"One of the cornerstones of the governor's plan has been clean and safe streets," he said. "The principles are very crucial for maintaining the viability of the district."

Gilbert has stressed that authorities will take a holistic approach to policing the whole city and not operate strictly according to the Tourism District's boundaries.

"We've developed this into an effective public-private partnership to address some of the quality of life issues," Gilbert said. "We want to police the city more effectively by enhanced technology and partnerships."

He said he's been pleased with the involvement of all agencies within the city, including the casino industry, the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and especially social service agencies.

"Clean and safe is the mantra, a

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