MAJORITY OF VOTERS AGREE U.S. SENATE SHOULD OVERSEE ACTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH ACCORDING TO KENNEDY INSTITUTE POLL

National bipartisan poll finds a disconnect between voters and the U.S. senators who represent them

BOSTON – Today, the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate released a national poll designed to measure Americans’ knowledge of the U.S. Senate, opinions about how elected leaders can make Congress work better, prioritization of critical issues, and level of engagement in civic life. The Institute partnered with leading Republican and Democratic polling firms to conduct a bipartisan poll with results that demonstrate a disconnect between voters and the U.S. senators who represent them.

The survey found that satisfaction with the United States Senate is low, and negative attitudes about the Senate are expressed across the political spectrum. Overall, only 28% of voters say that they are satisfied with the U.S. Senate and 72% are dissatisfied.

A majority of voters are also aligned in the issues they want their U.S. senators to prioritize, and are clear that they want their senators to be more responsive to the people they represent and to engage in compromise. Three in five voters say that the most important constitutional responsibilities of the U.S. Senate are considering and voting on legislation along with the House (63%) and overseeing the actions of the executive branch of the federal government along with the House (61%). A majority of voters (58%) prefer that a senator act as a check and balance on the president rather than supporting the president, regardless of who the president is.

Half (48%) want a senator who is willing to make compromises to get things done, compared with just one-fifth (18%) who prefer a senator who will not compromise on his or her principles. Yet fully 84% of all voters say that most senators are unwilling to make compromises in order to get things done. When presented with a series of qualities that people want in a U.S. senator, the most important quality selected by voters is someone who is in touch and listens to the people (57%). However, three-quarters (76%) of voters say that most senators are out of touch with the people of their states.

At the same time, the findings show that many of these voters are not aware of the basic facts about the U.S. Senate that empower individuals to participate in our democracy, including knowing who their senators are, and whether there is a senate election in their state in November 2018. A majority of voters do not know that senators serve a six-year term (54%), 47% are not aware of both of their senators, and 39% don’t know that there are two senators per state. Only 3 in 5 voters can
correctly answer whether there is a Senate race in their state in the 2018 midterm elections.

But despite dissatisfaction with Congress and gaps in voter knowledge of basic Senate facts, 52% of voters say they are extremely motivated to vote in the November elections, and one in five (22%) voters have engaged in three or more activities in the past year that are forms of civic engagement.

“These findings show that leaders and voters alike have work to do in building a more responsive and inclusive democracy,” said Mary K. Grant, Ph.D., president of the Kennedy Institute. “Civic education at every age level and in every community is essential; this data serves as a resource in informing how we can engage more Americans in the political process. This is at the heart of the important work we do every day at the Kennedy Institute.”

The Kennedy Institute survey was conducted online among 1,041 registered voters nationwide from June 5 to 13, 2018 by Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. View the complete findings as well as accompanying infographics here.

The Institute has conducted two previous polls on civic engagement. The 2016 poll results can be found here and the 2017 results here.

**About the Edward M. Kennedy Institute**
The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate is a nonprofit organization in Boston envisioned by the late Senator Ted Kennedy; it is dedicated to educating the public about the important role of the Senate in government, encouraging civic participation, and invigorating civil discourse. Through digital exhibits, interactive educational offerings, and topical programs, the Institute engages students and visitors in a conversation about the critical role each person plays in our democracy and in our society. Learn more via emkinstitute.org.

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