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5-8-2003

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Andrew, "UNH Poll Finds Governor off to Modest Start" (2003). *UNH Today*. 1922.
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Education funding seen as major problem in the Granite State

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May 8, 2003

DURHAM, N.H. -- Governor Craig Benson has earned only modest approval for his first 100 days as governor of New Hampshire, according to the latest Granite State Poll conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. Education funding continues to be the most important issue facing New Hampshire, followed by concern about taxes and the state economy.

The Granite State Poll is sponsored by UNH. Five hundred nine (509) randomly selected adults were interviewed by telephone between April 11 and April 22, 2003. The margin of sampling error for the survey is +/-4.4 percent. For more detailed results, visit the Survey Center Web site at www.unh.edu/survey-center and click on Press Releases.

Gubernatorial Approval

After 100 days in office, and faced with a stagnant economy and a serious budget shortfall, Governor Craig Benson has had little time to enjoy his November victory and settle into the corner office. And he has not been accorded the "honeymoon" that new office holders typically enjoy in the eyes of their constituents. In the most recent Granite State Poll, Benson receives only modest approval ratings from New Hampshire residents -- 48 percent say they approve of the job he has done as governor, 22 percent disapprove, and 30 percent are neutral. "Benson has faced the daunting tasks of assembling an administration while negotiating a budget in the midst of a fiscal crisis," says Andrew Smith, director of the UNH Survey Center. "Approval ratings in the 40s are a sign of political vulnerability. Office holders really want to see their approval ratings in the high 50s or more." Both Benson's approval and disapproval ratings have gone up since the Winter 2003 Granite State Poll when 43 percent of New

Hampshire adults said they approved of his handling of his job as governor, 13 percent disapproved, and 44 percent were neutral.

Another indication of the difficulties Benson has faced is that his personal favorability ratings have dropped in recent months. Currently, 53 percent say they have a favorable opinion of Benson, 21 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 9 percent are neutral, and 17 percent don't know enough about him to say. In the Winter Granite State Poll, 58 percent of New Hampshire adults said they had a favorable opinion of Benson, 14 percent had an unfavorable opinion, 15 percent were neutral, and 18 percent did not know enough about him to say.

Most Important Problem Facing New Hampshire

The greatest difficulty both Benson and the state legislature face is how to bring in a balanced budget in the face of declining revenues while still grappling with how to fund primary and secondary education in the wake of the Supreme Court's Claremont decisions. How to fund education is also seen as the most important problem facing the state by New Hampshire citizens. In the most recent Granite State poll, 28 percent of New Hampshire adults cite education funding as the most important problem facing the state, 16 percent cite jobs and the economy, 14 percent think it is taxes, 8 percent named some other issue related to education, and 6 percent cite the state budget. Education funding has been cited as the most important problem facing the state in UNH Survey Center polls, in good economic times and bad, since early 1999.

Subgroup Analysis

Benson's highest approval and favorability ratings come from Republicans and conservatives. Democrats, liberals, union households, and people with post-graduate degrees give Benson his lowest approval and favorability ratings.

New Hampshire adults from all demographic and geographic groups are remarkably similar in their perceptions of problems facing the state. Education funding is cited by all groups as the most important problem facing the state.

Granite State Poll Methodology

These findings are based on the most recent Granite State Poll conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center from April 11 to April 22, 2003. A random sample of 509 New Hampshire adults was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to plus or minus 4.4 percent. Results

reported for other subgroups have potential for somewhat larger variation than those for the entire population.

The data have been weighted to adjust for numbers of adults and telephone lines within households, respondent sex, and region of the state. In addition to potential sampling error, all surveys have other potential sources of non-sampling error including question order effects, question wording effects, and non-response.

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