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# UNH Poll Finds Benson Pulling Away from GOP Field for NH Governor

By Erika Mantz

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UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. , Craig Benson has widened his lead over Gordon Humphrey in the race for the Republican gubernatorial nomination while Bruce Keough is threatening Humphrey for second place, according to the latest Granite State Poll conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. Mark Fernald and Bev Hollingworth are tied in their race for the Democratic nomination.

The Granite State Poll is sponsored by UNH. Six hundred fifty-eight (658) New Hampshire adults were interviewed between June 23 and July 1, 2002 (margin of sampling error, +/-4 percent). Included in this sample were 529 likely voters in the 2002 general election (margin of sampling error, +/-4 percent), 230 likely Republican primary voters (margin of sampling error, +/-6 percent), and 179 likely Democratic primary voters (margin of sampling error, +/-7 percent). For more detailed results and methodology, visit the Survey Center Web site at [www.unh.edu/survey-center](http://www.unh.edu/survey-center) and click on Press Releases.

## GOP PRIMARY

The race for New Hampshire governor is generating more interest entering the summer months. Candidates are heavily into the mass media advertising phase of their campaigns, and voters are paying more attention to the races.

In the race for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, Cabletron founder Craig Benson is pulling away from his opponents, former U.S. Senator Gordon Humphrey and former New Hampshire State Senator Bruce Keough. In the latest Granite State Poll, 43

percent of likely Republican primary voters plan to vote for Benson, 23 percent plan to vote for Humphrey, 15 percent favor former State Senator Bruce Keough, 6 percent favor some other candidate, and 13 percent are undecided. Support for Benson has steadily increased over the past six months. In the Winter 2002 Granite State Poll, only 20 percent of likely Republican primary voters favored Benson.

While support for Benson has increased, support for Humphrey continues to decline. In the Winter 2002 Granite State Poll, 37 percent of likely Republican primary voters favored Humphrey. Humphrey now faces the possibility of being passed by Keough, who has seen his support almost double from 8 percent in the Spring 2002 Granite State Poll to 15 percent now.

Humphrey's slide can be tied to an increasingly unfavorable opinion of him in the eyes of New Hampshire voters. Currently, 32 percent of likely November voters say they have a favorable opinion of Humphrey, 46 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 10 percent are neutral, and 12 percent don't know enough about him to say. Humphrey's net favorability ratings, the percentage who have a favorable opinion of him minus the percentage who have an unfavorable opinion, have dropped from +8 percent in April to -14 percent.

Benson also has seen a slide in his favorability ratings, but not on the scale of Humphrey's. Currently, 30 percent of likely November voters say they have a favorable opinion of Benson, 26 percent have an unfavorable opinion of him, 11 percent are neutral and 34 percent say they don't know enough about him to say. Benson's net favorability rating is +4 percent, down from +10 percent in April. Keough is still relatively unknown to voters with 63 percent saying they don't know enough about him to have an opinion. His net favorability rating stands at +6 percent, up from +2 percent in April.

## **DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY**

Among Democrats, state Senator Bev Hollingsworth of Hampton and state Senator Mark Fernald of Sharon continue to run neck and neck for the nomination. Currently, 32 percent of likely Democratic primary

voters say they plan to vote for Fernald, 31 percent plan to vote for Hollingworth, 12 percent favor some other candidate, and 25 percent remain undecided. Caution must be used when interpreting these figures as sample sizes for the likely primary voter sub-samples are small.

In spite of their campaigns, both Hollingworth and Fernald are not well known to New Hampshire voters. Fifty-nine percent of likely November voters say they don't know enough about Fernald to have an opinion about him, and 62 percent say they don't know enough about Hollingworth to form an opinion of her. The net favorability ratings of the Democratic gubernatorial candidates are +16 percent for Hollingworth and +10 percent for Fernald, essentially unchanged since the Winter 2002 Granite State Poll.

### **LOOKING TO NOVEMBER**

The Granite State Poll also looked at potential matchups in the November gubernatorial election to test the strength of the five candidates. In trial heats, Benson leads both Fernald and Hollingworth by about 10 percentage points (47% to 36% versus Hollingworth, 48% to 35% versus Fernald). Keough and Fernald are tied (37% to 37%) and Keough is slightly behind Hollingworth (40% to 35%). Humphrey fares worst among the potential Republican candidates and is currently trailing both Democratic candidates. Hollingworth currently holds a 49 percent to 38 percent lead over Humphrey and Fernald holds a 44 percent to 39 percent lead over Humphrey.

### **SUB-GROUP ANALYSIS**

There are few demographic differences between supporters of both the Republican and Democratic candidates among their respective primary electorates.

Both Hollingworth and Fernald draw their strongest support among the November electorate from Democrats, liberals, people with post-graduate education and people who do not attend church. Benson's strongest support in November comes from Republicans, conservatives, voters with lower levels of income, those with high school educations and regular church goers. Benson also does very well among

undecided (independent) voters compared to his potential Democratic challengers.

Humphrey gets his strongest support from Republicans, conservatives, voters with high school educations and regular church goers. Undeclared voters split evenly between Humphrey and his potential Democratic challengers.

Keough get his strongest support from Republicans and conservatives. Undeclared voters also split evenly between Keough and his Democratic challengers.

### **GRANITE STATE POLL METHODOLOGY**

These findings are based on the most recent Granite State Poll conducted by the UNH Survey Center from June 23-July 1, 2002. A random sample of 658 New Hampshire adults was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to plus or minus 3.8 percent. Results reported for other subgroups have potential for somewhat larger variation than those for the entire population. The margin of sampling error for likely November voters (N=529) is +/-4 percent. The margin of sampling error for likely Republican primary voters (N=230) is +/-6 percent and the margin of sampling error for likely Democratic primary voters (N=179) is +/-7 percent.

The data have been weighted to adjust for numbers of adults and telephone lines within households, respondent sex, region of the state and likelihood of voting in either the Sept. 10, primary or the November general election. In addition to potential sampling error, all surveys have other potential sources of nonsampling error including question order effects, question wording effects and nonresponse.

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