

THE GRANITE STATE POLL

BENSON APPROVAL RISES DURING BUDGET DEBATE

By: Andrew E. Smith, Ph.D.
Dennis M. Junius, M.A.
UNH Survey Center

603/862-2226
www.unh.edu/survey-center

FOR RELEASE

July 2, 2003

DURHAM, NH -- Governor Craig Benson's approval rating has increased during the contentious debate over New Hampshire's budget. Funding education continues to be the most important problem facing the state.

These findings are based on the latest **Granite State Poll**, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The Granite State Poll is sponsored by the University of New Hampshire. Five hundred twenty (520) randomly selected adults were interviewed by telephone between June 17 and June 30, 2003. The margin of sampling error for the survey is +/-4.3 percent. (For more detailed results, visit the Survey Center web site at www.unh.edu/survey-center and click on Press Releases.)

Gubernatorial Approval

Governor Craig Benson and the Republican dominated New Hampshire House and Senate have yet to agree on a budget for New Hampshire for the upcoming biennium. Benson vetoed the legislature's budget and his veto was sustained. The two branches agreed on a bill that temporarily funds the state, but a final budget agreement has yet to be reached. But during this debate, Governor Benson's approval rating has increased among residents of the Granite State. In the most recent Granite State Poll, 53 percent of New Hampshire adults say they approve of the job he has done as governor, 25 percent disapprove, and 22 percent are neutral. The percentage of New Hampshire adults who approve of the job Benson is doing as Governor increased from 48 percent in the Spring 2003 Granite State Poll. "Benson has shown considerable political skill in improving his standing in the public's eye during the budget debate," says Andrew Smith, Director of the UNH Survey Center. "He has managed to convince much of the public that his position regarding state spending is correct."

Benson's personal favorability ratings have remained stable. Currently, 54 percent say they have a favorable opinion of Benson, 24 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 12 percent are neutral, and 9 percent don't know enough about him to say. In the Spring 2003 Granite State Poll, 53 percent of New Hampshire adults said they had a favorable opinion of Benson, 21 percent had an unfavorable opinion, 9 percent were neutral, and 17 percent did not know enough about him to say.

Most Important Problem Facing New Hampshire

How to fund primary and secondary education is seen as the most important problem facing the State of New Hampshire. In the most recent Granite State poll, 27 percent of New Hampshire adults cite education funding as the most important problem facing the state, 16 percent cite jobs and the economy, 13 percent think it is taxes, 9 percent cite the state budget impasse, and 6 percent named some other issue related to education. 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.

Right Direction or Wrong Track?

Despite the economic slump of the past two years, New Hampshire residents are optimistic about New Hampshire's future. Sixty-two percent think things in New Hampshire are generally going in the right direction, 29 percent think things are seriously off on the wrong track, and 9 percent say they don't know.

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 almost 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 June 17 to June 30, 2003. A random sample of 520 New Hampshire adults was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to plus or minus 4.3 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.

Gubernatorial Approval

“GENERALLY SPEAKING, do you approve or disapprove of the way Governor Benson is handling his job as governor?”

	<u>Feb. 2003</u>	<u>April 2003</u>	<u>June 2003</u>
Approve	43%	48%	53%
Neutral, don't know	44	30	22
Disapprove	13	22	25
	(N=618)	(N=496)	(N=505)

Favorability Rating - Governor Craig Benson

"Next, I'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this person - or if you have never heard of him or her. Governor Craig Benson."

	<u>Feb. 2003</u>	<u>April 2003</u>	<u>June 2003</u>
Favorable	58%	53%	54%
Neutral	15	9	12
Unfavorable	14	21	24
Don't know enough to say	18	17	9
	(N=652)	(N=507)	(N=512)

Most Important Problem Facing New Hampshire

"Let's turn to the State of New Hampshire ... There are many problems facing the STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE today. In general, what do you think is the most IMPORTANT problem facing the STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE today?"

	<u>Oct. 2001</u>	<u>Feb. 2002</u>	<u>Apr. 2002</u>	<u>June 2002</u>	<u>Feb. 2003</u>	<u>Apr. 2003</u>	<u>June 2003</u>
Education Funding	42%	27%	31%	31%	29%	28%	27%
Jobs, the economy	15	12	11	16	16	16	16
Taxes	11	17	24	15	16	14	13
State budget	-	3	1	5	2	6	9
Other education issue	4	21	7	12	12	8	6
Health care	1	0	2	2	2	4	3
Other / Don't Know	27	20	24	19	23	24	26
(N)	(519)	(312)	(684)	(424)	(644)	(497)	(513)

NH - Right Direction or Wrong Track

“Do you think things in New Hampshire are generally going in the right direction or are they seriously off on the wrong track?”

	<u>June 2003</u>
Right Direction	62%
Wrong Track	29
Don't Know	9
	(N=510)

Gubernatorial Approval

STATEWIDE	<u>Approve</u> 53%	<u>Neutral</u> 22%	<u>Disapprove</u> 25%	<u>(N)</u> 505
Democrat	34	22	45	192
Independent	50	32	18	83
Republican	70	19	12	219
Liberal	43	19	37	87
Moderate	49	21	30	228
Conservative	67	22	11	150
Union household	42	17	41	60
Non-union	54	23	23	445
5 Years or less in NH	58	23	19	61
6 to 10 years	68	20	12	39
11 to 20 years	55	21	24	102
More than 20 years	49	22	29	302
18 to 34	57	20	23	118
33 to 49	54	23	24	171
50 to 64	50	22	28	111
65 and over	51	24	24	97
Male	55	23	22	248
Female	50	22	28	257
High school or less	47	31	22	148
Some college	61	22	17	121
College graduate	61	16	23	143
Post-graduate	37	18	45	92
Less than \$30K	51	20	29	78
\$30K to \$60K	55	21	24	126
\$60K to \$75K	54	25	20	73
\$75K to \$100K	50	18	32	61
More than \$100K	62	19	19	53
Married	57	20	23	311
Divorced/separated	47	24	30	92
Never married	46	28	27	101
Protestant	51	23	26	197
Catholic	59	21	19	165
Other	46	21	33	129
Northern NH	51	28	21	66
Western NH	43	12	46	49
Central/Lakes	47	18	35	81
Hillsborough County	58	21	21	152
Seacoast	54	26	19	157
1st Cong. District	54	24	21	268
2nd Cong. District	51	20	30	238

Favorability Rating - Craig Benson

STATEWIDE	<u>Favorable</u> 54%	<u>Neutral</u> 12%	<u>Unfavorable</u> 24%	<u>Don't Know</u> 9%	<u>(N)</u> 512
Democrat	34	13	43	10	195
Independent	54	18	18	10	84
Republican	74	9	10	6	221
Liberal	36	10	43	11	89
Moderate	52	13	26	9	231
Conservative	72	12	9	6	152
Union household	47	7	43	3	60
Non-union	55	13	22	10	452
5 Years or less in NH	62	9	16	13	66
6 to 10 years	60	18	17	5	39
11 to 20 years	57	8	24	11	103
More than 20 years	51	14	27	8	303
18 to 34	62	5	23	10	120
33 to 49	53	16	23	8	174
50 to 64	50	17	23	10	113
65 and over	57	10	25	8	97
Male	58	12	22	8	250
Female	51	13	26	10	262
High school or less	53	10	21	16	150
Some college	59	14	18	9	124
College graduate	64	10	23	3	145
Post-graduate	37	17	37	9	93
Less than \$30K	49	13	26	12	79
\$30K to \$60K	55	10	26	9	128
\$60K to \$75K	64	14	17	5	75
\$75K to \$100K	57	9	28	5	60
More than \$100K	65	17	13	5	55
Married	59	11	23	7	314
Divorced/separated	45	20	25	10	94
Never married	47	9	28	16	103
Protestant	56	16	20	8	204
Catholic	60	12	20	8	164
Other	44	8	37	11	130
Northern NH	58	17	16	9	67
Western NH	40	8	43	10	49
Central/Lakes	51	8	37	5	81
Hillsborough County	59	11	20	10	154
Seacoast	55	15	20	10	161
1st Cong. District	58	13	21	9	271
2nd Cong. District	51	12	28	10	241

NH - Right Direction or Wrong Track

	<u>Right Direction</u> 62%	<u>Wrong Track</u> 29%	<u>Don't Know</u> 9%	<u>(N)</u> 510
STATEWIDE				
Democrat	48	46	6	193
Independent	58	22	20	81
Republican	76	19	6	222
Liberal	52	42	6	89
Moderate	58	33	10	230
Conservative	78	15	7	151
Union household	53	42	5	61
Non-union	63	28	9	448
5 Years or less in NH	69	22	10	66
6 to 10 years	70	25	5	37
11 to 20 years	64	28	8	106
More than 20 years	59	32	9	301
18 to 34	73	21	6	123
33 to 49	63	31	7	170
50 to 64	55	33	12	111
65 and over	59	32	9	99
Male	64	28	9	251
Female	61	31	9	259
High school or less	61	29	10	148
Some college	70	22	8	124
College graduate	72	20	7	145
Post-graduate	38	52	10	94
Less than \$30K	61	31	8	78
\$30K to \$60K	62	27	10	127
\$60K to \$75K	62	29	9	74
\$75K to \$100K	66	27	8	61
More than \$100K	66	29	5	55
Married	62	30	8	314
Divorced/separated	51	36	13	91
Never married	73	21	6	104
Protestant	66	28	6	200
Catholic	63	28	9	166
Other	54	35	11	130
Northern NH	64	23	13	67
Western NH	50	41	10	46
Central/Lakes	58	38	4	81
Hillsborough County	69	23	8	155
Seacoast	61	30	9	162
1st Cong. District	62	30	8	272
2nd Cong. District	62	28	10	239

Most Important Problem Facing NH

	<u>Educ. Funding</u> 27%	<u>Jobs/ Economy</u> 16%	<u>Taxes</u> 13%	<u>State Budget</u> 9%	<u>Other Educ.</u> 6%	<u>Other</u> 22%	<u>Don't Know</u> 8%
STATEWIDE							
Democrat	25	20	12	5	7	26	5
Independent	22	19	8	9	8	23	11
Republican	31	11	16	11	4	18	8
Liberal	23	23	12	5	5	29	4
Moderate	29	16	11	9	7	19	9
Conservative	31	12	18	11	4	19	6
Union household	32	12	20	5	14	15	1
Non-union	26	16	12	9	5	23	9
5 Years or less in NH	25	11	16	3	6	29	9
6 to 10 years	18	26	9	3	5	30	8
11 to 20 years	20	12	18	6	12	16	16
More than 20 years	31	17	11	12	4	22	5
18 to 34	25	13	7	4	8	25	17
33 to 49	30	21	15	6	4	19	5
50 to 64	32	16	12	9	6	23	2
65 and over	20	10	18	17	6	22	8
Male	24	16	14	11	3	22	11
Female	31	15	13	6	9	22	5
High school or less	21	19	17	3	5	21	15
Some college	25	20	14	7	6	21	7
College graduate	33	14	10	13	7	18	5
Post-graduate	31	7	11	14	4	31	2
Less than \$30K	24	16	14	7	3	22	15
\$30K to \$60K	33	17	13	8	4	20	6
\$60K to \$75K	23	12	24	10	11	13	8
\$75K to \$100K	24	17	12	15	4	26	2
More than \$100K	35	12	11	8	5	24	4
Married	30	15	15	10	5	21	4
Divorced/separated	26	18	12	8	3	26	7
Never married	19	16	9	3	9	23	20
Protestant	29	11	15	9	5	23	7
Catholic	25	19	15	11	6	19	5
Other	26	18	9	6	6	24	11
Northern NH	25	19	12	6	4	29	6
Western NH	25	24	15	5	5	24	3
Central/Lakes	31	10	15	9	8	23	4
Hillsborough County	25	17	9	11	4	22	12
Seacoast	29	14	17	8	7	18	8
1st Cong. District	30	14	12	9	6	20	8
2nd Cong. District	24	17	14	8	6	24	7