

UNH Poll Finds Tight Race for U.S. Senate in New Hampshire

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DURHAM, N.H. , Democratic Governor Jeanne Shaheen is in a dead heat with incumbent Senator Bob Smith, but trails Congressman John Sununu in the race for New Hampshire's seat in the U.S. Senate. Sununu also leads Smith for the GOP nomination.

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 UNH. For more detailed results, visit the Survey Center web site at www.unh.edu/survey-center and click on Press Releases.

Although the Nov, 5, 2002, election for Senate, Governor and Congress in New Hampshire is almost a year away, the candidates are already campaigning and fundraising in what will likely be the most expensive election in New Hampshire history. Currently, at least six people are running for Governor and three are running for Senate.

U.S. SENATE

The race that is attracting the most nationwide attention is for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Wolfeboro Republican Bob Smith. Although Smith has been elected twice, he is considered by many analysts to be the most vulnerable Senator running for reelection in 2002. Smith has attracted strong opponents both inside the GOP and from the Democrats.

Smith came under considerable fire within his own party for an abortive run for President in 2000 during

which he briefly quit the GOP and ran as an Independent. He later rejoined the party and was rewarded with the chairmanship of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. However, his hiatus from the party weakened his standing among New Hampshire Republicans and has led to a primary challenge by 1st District Congressman John Sununu. Sununu, of Bedford, was elected to his third term in Congress in 2000 and has benefited from voter familiarity with his father, former Governor John Sununu.

Currently, Sununu leads Smith in the race for the GOP nomination with 53 percent of likely GOP primary voters saying they plan to vote for Sununu, 35 percent plan to vote for Smith, 4 percent favor some other candidate, and only 8 percent are undecided. "The low percentage of undecided voters is a sign that these two well known candidates face a polarized Republican electorate, even though they hold similar issue positions," says Andrew Smith, the director of the UNH Survey Center. "The campaign for the GOP nod will hinge on the personalities of the candidates and on the ability of their respective organizations to rally their supporters. It will likely be a bruising campaign by these two well-financed, well-known candidates."

Whoever survives the GOP primary will face a formidable opponent in the general election. Three-term Democratic Governor Jeanne Shaheen of Madbury does not face a primary challenge, has a proven campaign organization, and will be well financed. A hypothetical race between Smith and Shaheen is currently deadlocked. Forty-five percent of New Hampshire registered voters favor Shaheen, 44 percent favor Smith, 5 percent favor some other candidate, and only 7 percent are undecided.

Sununu fares much better than Smith versus Shaheen. Currently, 50 percent of registered voters favor Sununu, 38 percent favor Shaheen, 3 percent favor some other candidate, and 9 percent are undecided.

FAVORABILITY RATINGS

Because the election is far in the future, most voters are heavily influenced by their perceptions of the candidates rather than specific issue positions. Sununu

is leading in the race for U.S. Senate, in part, because he has high favorability ratings. Among registered voters, 66 percent have a favorable opinion of Sununu, only 19 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 7 percent are neutral, and 7 percent don't know enough about him to say. Sununu's net favorability rating, the percentage having a favorable opinion of him minus those having an unfavorable opinion, is a very high +47 percent. Smith's favorability ratings are considerably lower than Sununu's with 50 percent of New Hampshire registered voters saying they have a favorable opinion of Smith, 29 percent having an unfavorable opinion, 9 percent are neutral, and 12 percent not knowing enough about him to say. Smith's net favorability rating is a moderate +21 percent. Shaheen's favorability ratings are also lower than Sununu's with 59 percent having a favorable opinion of Shaheen, 31 percent having an unfavorable opinion of her, 8 percent are neutral, and 3 percent don't know enough to say. Shaheen's net favorability rating is +28 percent.

NH GOVERNOR

The race for New Hampshire Governor is in much greater flux with most candidates vying for both the Republican and Democratic nomination currently unknown to N.H. voters. On the Democratic side, former State Senate President Bev Hollingworth of Hampton is viewed favorably by 17 percent of registered voters, 3 percent have an unfavorable opinion of her, 9 percent are neutral, and 71 percent don't know enough to say. Hollingworth's net favorability rating is +14 percent. Her major primary opponent, former State Senator Mark Fernald of Sharon is also not well known. Fifteen percent of New Hampshire voters say they have a favorable opinion of Fernald, 8 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 9 percent are neutral, and 67 percent don't know enough about him to say. Fernald's net favorability rating is +7 percent.

Among the Republican candidates, all are essentially unknowns except former U.S. Senator Gordon Humphrey of Chichester, who ran unsuccessfully for Governor against Jeanne Shaheen in 2000. Forty-two percent of registered voters have a favorable opinion of Humphrey, 26 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 13 percent are neutral, and 20 percent don't know enough

to say. Humphrey's net favorability rating is +16 percent.

Cabletron founder Craig Benson of Rye is already airing television commercials in his campaign for the GOP nomination. Currently, 10 percent of registered voters have a favorable opinion of Benson, 8 percent have an unfavorable opinion of him, 6 percent are neutral, and 76 percent don't know enough about him to say. Benson's net favorability rating is +2 percent.

Former state representative and UNH professor of political science Dave Corbin of Stratham is viewed favorably by 6 percent of registered voters, 2 percent have an unfavorable opinion of him, 8 percent are neutral, and 84 percent don't know enough about him to say. Corbin's net favorability rating is +4 percent.

Former State Senator Bruce Keogh of Dublin is viewed favorably by 7 percent of registered voters, 3 percent have an unfavorable opinion of him, 7 percent are neutral and 84 percent don't know enough about him to say. Keogh's net favorability rating is +4 percent.

FAVORABILITY RATINGS OF OTHER PUBLIC FIGURES

The Granite State Poll also asked about voter knowledge of several other elected officials and hopefuls. Among candidates for U.S. Congress, current 2nd District Congressman Charlie Bass has a very strong net favorability rating of +42 percent. Martha Fuller Clarke, in her second run at the 1st District seat being vacated by Sununu, has a net favorability rating of +13 percent. Former Congressman Dick Swett, who has been mentioned as a possible candidate for Congress, has a net favorability rating of +17 percent.

In New Hampshire's other U.S. Senate seat, incumbent Republican Judd Gregg of Rye enjoys high popularity with a net favorability rating of +51 percent.

And President George W. Bush is wildly popular among NH registered voters with a net favorability rating of +80 percent.

U.S. Senate Election - Smith vs. Shaheen (Registered Voters)

Percent

Shaheen (D)	45%
Smith (R)	44
Other/Neither	5
Undecided	7

(N=505)

**U.S. Senate Election - Sununu vs. Shaheen
(Registered Voters)**

Percent

Sununu (R)	50%
Shaheen (D)	38
Other/Neither	3
Undecided	9

(N=505)

U.S. Senate Election - Likely GOP Primary Voters

Percent

Sununu (R)	53%
Smith (R)	35
Other/Neither	4
Undecided	8

(N=202)

These findings are based on the most recent Granite State Poll conducted by the UNH Survey Center from October 19 through October 29, 2000. A random sample of 703 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 registered voters (N=505) is +/-4.4 percent. The margin of sampling error for the GOP Senate primary question (N=202) is +/-6.7 percent.

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