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UNH Poll Shows Shaheen, Humphrey Ahead of Primary Pack

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Democratic Governor Jeanne Shaheen and former U.S. Senator Gordon Humphrey (R-NH) look to win comfortably in their respective party primary races for New Hampshire Governor. Shaheen leads all of her potential Republican opponents, including Humphrey, in match-ups for the November gubernatorial election.

These findings are based on the latest **WMUR / UNH Poll**, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The WMUR / UNH Poll is sponsored by WMUR-TV, in Manchester. Seven-hundred eighty-six (786) likely voters were interviewed between Sept. 1 and Sept. 6, 2000, including 302 likely Republican primary voters and 286 likely Democratic primary voters. The margin of sampling error for the overall sample is +/-3.5%, +/-5.6% for the Republican sub-sample and +/-6.0% for the Democratic sub-sample.

The "Other" Primary

New Hampshire is known for its First in the Nation Presidential Primary, but there is an important primary election next week for state and local offices, which has not received as much attention. And while turnout is typically very high for the presidential primary, getting voters to the polls in early September will be much more difficult. Secretary of State William Gardner estimates only 150,000 of the state's roughly 790,000 registered voters will vote in the September 12 gubernatorial primary elections.

Democratic Gubernatorial Primary

Among those likely to vote in the Democratic primary, incumbent Governor Jeanne Shaheen leads her opponent, state Senator Mark Fernald by 33 percentage points. Shaheen is favored by 59% of likely Democratic primary voters; 26% favor Fernald; 1% favor some other candidate; and 13% remain undecided. When undecided voters are allocated to the candidates, the

gap between Shaheen and Fernald closes slightly, with Shaheen getting 63% of the vote, Fernald getting 35%, and other candidates getting 1%. "Governor Shaheen is likely to win, but Fernald has run a surprisingly effective race for a relatively unknown candidate challenging a popular incumbent," said pollster Andrew Smith, director of the UNH Survey Center.

Republican Gubernatorial Primary

Former U.S. Senator Gordon Humphrey holds a commanding lead in the more crowded Republican primary field. Forty-eight percent of likely Republican primary voters say they will vote for Humphrey; 14% favor former state Attorney General Jeff Howard; 14% support state Senator Jim Squires; businessman Fred Bramante trails with 6%; while 4% favor some other candidate; and 14% remain undecided. When undecided Republican primary voters are allocated, Humphrey gets 52% of the vote, Howard gets 19%, Squires gets 19%, Bramante stays at 6%, and 4% favor other candidates. "Humphrey enjoys higher name recognition from his days as senator, which is critical in a primary election. Also, he has raised three-times as much money as his Republican challengers. These two factors have kept him in the lead in a tough, four-way race," said Smith.

Education Funding Looms Large

The New Hampshire Supreme Court ruled in what has become known as the "Claremont Decision," that the state must adequately and equitably fund primary and secondary education throughout the state. How to meet those requirements has been the focus of attention in Concord for the past two years. It is no surprise that financing the state's public schools is THE leading issue for New Hampshire voters. Among those likely to vote in November, 44% named education funding as the most important problem facing the gubernatorial candidates; 19% are most concerned with the quality of public education; while 19% consider taxation -- another facet of the education funding problem -- to be the most pressing issue. Health care was the major concern of 12% of likely voters; 3% cited jobs and the state's economy; 1% named population growth and sprawl; 1% named some other problem, and 1% said they don't know.

Education Funding Solutions

Republican and Democratic candidates are campaigning hard for their preferred solution to the education funding problem. Democrat Fernald and Republican Squires both favor an income tax; Howard

and Bramante favor modifying the current state property tax; Humphrey advocates a constitutional amendment overturning the Claremont decision. Governor Shaheen awaits a recommendation from her blue-ribbon commission investigating education funding solutions.

The range of solutions proposed by candidates for governor reflects the attitudes of New Hampshire voters. There is no one education funding solution favored by a majority of likely voters. Some form of income tax is favored by 22% of likely voters; 20% prefer using revenues from expanded gambling; 18% support a statewide sales tax; 17% advocate a constitutional amendment reversing the Claremont decision; 13% support keeping the statewide property tax system; 3% prefer some other solution; and 8% are unsure.

The funding solution preferred by voters is having an important impact on their choice for governor. Humphrey runs strongest among likely Republican primary voters who favor a constitutional amendment overturning the Claremont decision, among those who favor the statewide property tax, and those who favor using expanded gambling revenues. Squires leads among likely GOP primary voters who favor an income tax.

In the Democratic primary, Fernald has criticized Shaheen for not supporting an income tax, and Fernald runs strongest among likely Democratic primary voters who favor an income tax to fund education. But even among this group, Shaheen holds a slight edge over Fernald. Shaheen also runs very strong among voters who prefer using revenues from expanded gambling to fund education.

November Outlook

Looking toward the general election in November, Governor Shaheen leads all potential Republican opponents. When asked how they would vote in a race between the likely nominees, Shaheen and Humphrey, 49% of likely voters support Shaheen; 36% say they will vote for Humphrey; 7% favor other candidates; 8% remain undecided.

Shaheen holds larger leads over the other potential Republican nominees. Shaheen leads Howard 50% to 30% with 9% favoring other candidates and 11% undecided. She leads Squires by a similar margin; 50% to 31% with 9% favoring other candidates and 11% undecided. Against Bramante, Shaheen holds a 50% to

27% advantage with 11% favoring other candidates and 12% undecided.

If Fernald scores an upset win over Shaheen in the Democratic primary, he faces a difficult task against Humphrey, the likely GOP nominee. In a hypothetical Fernald-Humphrey race, Humphrey leads 37% to 30% with 17% favoring other candidates and 17% undecided.

Subgroup Analysis

In the Democratic primary race, Shaheen runs strongest among moderate and conservative Democrats, younger (under 30) and older (65 and over) voters, as well as residents of western New Hampshire. Fernald leads Shaheen among only one group of voters -- residents of "donor" towns under the current statewide property tax.

In the Republican primary, Humphrey runs strongest among conservatives and younger voters (under 30). Squires gets his strongest support from proponents of an income tax, older voters (65 and over), Independents, and voters who consider themselves moderate or liberal. Howard and Bramante have relatively equal support across all demographic groups.

Income tax proponents and voters with post-graduate educations are most likely to think that the most important problem facing candidates for governor is education funding. Supporters of a constitutional amendment overturning the Claremont decision are most likely to say that taxes are the most important problem facing the gubernatorial candidates.

Democrats, liberals, and voters with post-graduate educations are most likely to support an income tax to fund primary and secondary education. Voters with only high school educations are most likely to favor expanding gambling and using the revenues to fund education. Residents of northern New Hampshire, residents of "donor" towns, and voters who think that jobs and the economy are the most important problems facing gubernatorial candidates are the strongest supporters of a sales tax. Conservatives are the strongest advocates of a constitutional amendment overturning the Claremont decision.

In trial heat races for Governor, Shaheen gets her strongest support from Democrats, undeclared voters (often referred to as Independents), liberals and moderates. Humphrey enjoys his strongest support from Republicans and conservatives.

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