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Poll: Smith in Trouble in 2002

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*UNH News Bureau***

DURHAM, N.H. -- Senator Bob Smith (R-NH), after leaving the Republican Party, is in serious danger of losing his U.S. Senate seat if he were to run for re-election in 2002. These findings are based on the latest **WMUR / CNN Poll**, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The WMUR / CNN Poll is sponsored by WMUR - TV, Channel 9 in Manchester, and CNN. *We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to the "WMUR / CNN Poll, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center."

2002 Senate Race

New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith, unsuccessful in his quest for the Republican nomination for President, recently quit the Republican Party and is now an Independent. His decision to leave the Republican Party is having an extremely negative impact on his chances for re-election to the Senate in 2002. New Hampshire likely voters were asked if they would vote for Bob Smith running as an Independent, an unnamed Republican candidate, or an unnamed Democratic candidate in the 2002 U.S. Senate race -- 23% said they would vote for the Democratic candidate, 23% would vote for the Republican candidate, only 14% would vote for Smith, 35% said that it would depend on the candidate, and 4% are undecided.

Since Smith left the Republican Party his favorable ratings among New Hampshire voters have dropped dramatically. Currently, 36% percent of New Hampshire likely voters have a favorable opinion of Smith, 48% have an unfavorable opinion of him, 9% are neutral, and 7% say they don't know enough about him to say.

In the May, 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll, 45% of likely voters said they had a favorable opinion of Smith, 33% had an unfavorable opinion of him, 8% were neutral, and 13% said they did not know enough about him to say.

Smith's net favorability rating, the percentage having a favorable opinion of him minus the percentage having an unfavorable opinion, has dropped from +12 in May to -12 today. Among Republicans, Smith's net favorability rating has dropped from +45 to +12. Currently, 37% of New Hampshire Republicans say they have an unfavorable opinion of Smith.

Political Impact

Bob Smith narrowly won re-election in 1996 and was considered vulnerable, even before he left the GOP. If Smith runs in 2002 as an Independent and splits the Republican vote, Democrats will have an excellent chance of winning the seat. Even if Smith chooses not to stand for re-election, his seat will be a difficult one for Republicans to hold.

These findings are based on the most recent WMUR / CNN Poll, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center from September 5 through September 11, 1999. A random sample of 702 likely New Hampshire primary voters was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to plus or minus 3.7 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 voters and telephone lines within households.

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