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Poll: Despite election results, NH not looking very blue

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HANOVER -- Despite recent election results, political pollsters at Dartmouth College say the results of a recent survey of registered New Hampshire voters don't reflect a blue-state mentality.

In the second annual State of the State poll, which surveyed 403 registered voters, only 4.2 percent of respondents said they find the federal stimulus package to be "very effective" while more than half of respondents find it to be "not very effective" (33.3 percent) or "not effective at all" (19.1 percent).

The voters surveyed recognized the seriousness of the state's budget problems, with 28.7 percent indicating the problems are "very serious" and 54.1 percent indicating the problems are "somewhat serious." When asked about what action to take to resolve local budget problems, respondents favored maintaining taxes and decreasing services (47.9 percent), rather than increasing taxes and maintaining services (30.4 percent). The proportion of voters who favored a 1 percent sales tax to help solve the state's financial problems (32.7 percent) decreased from last year's figure of 40 percent.

"It's not a liberal pro-government response that one might expect to get in a state that's now electing Democrats disproportionately," said professor Ronald Shaiko, survey director and associate director of the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth. "I think it certainly gives one pause in referring to New Hampshire as a blue state. I think it's still New Hampshire, and I think it's still the 'Live Free or Die' state."

In addition, U.S. Congressman Paul Hodes polled only slightly better among respondents regarding the 2010 U.S. Senate race for retiring Sen. Judd Gregg's seat than Republican challengers former Rep. Charlie Bass and former Sen. John Sununu.

The poll also showed some unexpectedly weak approval ratings for Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Shaiko said. Voters who rated Shaheen as "favorable" (33.1 percent) only slightly outnumbered those who rated her as "unfavorable" (30.1 percent).

"I'm not sure why that is, but she needs to work on that," Shaiko said.

Gov. John Lynch's approval and job performance rating remains high, according to the survey. More than half (54.3 percent) of respondents think he's doing a "favorable" job. But the results also showed that he has a tough decision to make on the issue of same-sex marriage. Respondents' opinions were closely divided on the issue, and within the 5 percent margin of error, with 44.8 percent opposing same-sex marriage and 40.8 percent supporting it.

"He's in a tough spot because either way he decides, he's going to lose support," Shaiko said.
On another social issue before the Legislature, almost half of respondents (46.9 percent) said they oppose abolishing the death penalty in New Hampshire, compared to 34.5 percent who support abolishing it. Permitting the use of medicinal marijuana found support among 59.2 percent of respondents. Respondents opposed to medicinal marijuana (22.4 percent) narrowly edged out those who were unsure (18.4 percent).

With regard to voters' personal finances, there was relative stability in respondents' opinions compared with 2008. About half (48.5 percent) of respondents believed that their personal economic situation is "about the same" as last year, which closely tracks last year's poll response of 46 percent for the same question. Respondents who believe they are "worse off" this year are about as numerous as last year's respondents, at 44 percent and 42.8 percent, respectively.

This is the second year the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth has conducted a political poll. Unlike the University of New Hampshire's Granite State Poll, which contacts citizens at random, the Dartmouth College pollsters contact only registered voters at random.

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