

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

EMBARGOED – NOT FOR RELEASE UNTIL: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1997

RELEASE: SL/EP 64-2 (EP 114-2)

CONTACT: JANICE BALLOU (732)828-2210, Ext. 240

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Wednesday's *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll."

In this release *The Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll includes a classification of voters that is based on how firmly they support a candidate. A "firm voter" is one who selects a candidate and says they are "very sure" about their choice and will not change their mind before the election. "Not firm voters" are those who select a candidate and say they might change their mind or who are initially undecided.

All of the percentages in this release, unless otherwise indicated, are based on New Jersey residents who report that they are registered to vote.

The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll web address: <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~eaglepol>

1997 GUBERNATORIAL RACE:

A CLOSER LOOK AT AUTO INSURANCE IMPACT OF WHITMAN'S CANDIDACY FOR OTHER OFFICES

New Jersey voters have identified automobile insurance as a key in the 1997 Gubernatorial Election. By a margin of 3 to 1, more voters have heard about Governor Whitman's suggestions to reform auto insurance than have heard about Democratic challenger Jim McGreevey's plans. At this time, while slightly more voters say McGreevey would do a better job at handling auto insurance than Whitman, about a third are not sure which of the candidates can manage this issue. In addition, more voters say the

- more -

Republicans, as compared to the Democrats, are the most responsible for increases in auto insurance.

“Governor Whitman’s plan for auto insurance reform has been the main message the voters have had on this issue prior to McGreevey’s recent announcement of his proposal,” commented Janice Ballou, the Poll Director. “While the Governor’s suggestion is not popular, voters have not had as much time to evaluate McGreevey’s recent announcement of his plan for auto insurance reform to make a comparison between the two alternatives.”

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll of 673 registered voters conducted by telephone between September 2 and 7, 1997 also found that about 6-in-10 voters would want Whitman to serve her full term as Governor if she is re-elected.

AUTO INSURANCE

Close to 8-in-10 voters are not too (23%) or not at all (55%) satisfied with the cost and coverage of their automobile insurance compared to 18 percent who are very (3%) or somewhat (15%) satisfied. Since June, the percentage of firm McGreevey voters who are not too or not at all satisfied increased 7 percentage points from 78 to 85 percent. Also, among voters who are not firm in their choice of candidates there was a 5 percentage point increase in those who are dissatisfied from 75 to 80 percent. The 67 percent of firm Whitman supporters who are not too or not at all satisfied with their auto insurance is the same as in June.

Underscoring voters’ discontent about auto insurance, 7-in-10 have the impression that insurance costs have gone up a great deal (34%) or some (37%) in the past three years. McGreevey supporters are more likely than Whitman supporters to report increases in their auto insurance costs. Among firm McGreevey supporters, 84 percent say

their auto insurance cost has increased a great deal (50%) or some (34%) compared to 62 percent of firm Whitman supporters and 71 percent of those who are not firm in their choice of a candidate.

Among those who say that their auto insurance has increased, more voters hold the Republicans responsible for the increases than Democrats by a margin of 32 to 13 percent. However, 13 percent feel both parties are responsible, 18 percent say neither is at fault, and 25 percent don't have an opinion. More firm McGreevey supporters (59%) say the Republicans are to blame than firm Whitman supporters (30%) feel the Democrats are responsible for automobile insurance increases. Among those who are not yet firm in their choice of a candidate, 31 percent say the Republicans are responsible, 11 percent identify the Democrats, 15 percent say both, 14 percent neither, and 29 percent don't have an opinion on who is responsible for the increased auto insurance costs.

At this time, about two-thirds (67%) of the voters say that they have read or heard about the candidates' suggestions on how to reform auto insurance while 32 percent have not. This awareness of the candidates' plans for auto insurance reform is an increase of 18 percentage points from the 49 percent in the June Poll. Firm Whitman supporters (74%) are more likely to say that they have heard about suggestions for reforms than are firm McGreevey supporters (67%) or those who are not yet firm in their choice for Governor (65%).

Among those who have heard about the candidates' suggestions to reform auto insurance, by a margin of 3 to 1 more have heard about Whitman's plan than McGreevey's proposal. While 61 percent say they have heard the most about the Governor's plan, 20 percent are more aware of McGreevey's suggestions, 14 percent have heard equally about

both of the candidates' plans, 2 percent have not heard of either plan, and 3 percent don't know if they had heard any of the candidates' suggestions. It should be noted that at the time of this Poll, McGreevey had just announced his proposal to reform the state's auto insurance.

By a margin of 36 to 30 percent, more voters say that McGreevey will do a better job of handling the issue of auto insurance than Whitman. However, 34 percent don't have an opinion on which candidate can better handle this issue. As would be expected, firm Whitman supporters (79%) select the Governor as being able to do a better job and firm McGreevey voters (85%) select their candidate. Among those who are not firm in their selection of a candidate, McGreevey (35%) has more support than Whitman (22%) while 42 percent say that they don't know which candidate will do a better job. The support for McGreevey among those who are not firm in their choice of a candidate is an 8 percentage point increase from 27 percent in the June Poll.

Close to 8-in-10 voters (76%) say that their opinions about auto insurance will influence their choice for Governor a great deal (31%) or some (45%) compared to 22 percent who say it will not influence their vote much (12%) or not at all (10%). Those who are not firm in who they have decided to vote for (85%) are more likely than firm McGreevey voters (72%) or firm Whitman voters (62%) to say the automobile issue will influence their choice for Governor a great deal or some.

IMPACT OF WHITMAN AS A CANDIDATE FOR OTHER OFFICES

Overall, about 6-in-10 voters have read or heard a great deal (14%) or some (47%) about the possibility of Governor Whitman running for national office such as Vice

President or U.S. Senator in the year 2000 compared to 38 percent who have not heard much (20%) or nothing at all (18%). While 58 percent of the voters feel that she should be obligated to serve her full term if she is re-elected as Governor, 32 percent say she should feel free to run for national office. These percentages are similar to those in 1987 when there was speculation about then Governor Tom Kean 's possible nomination as Vice President in 1988. At that time, 39 percent said he should feel free to run for national office compared to 54 percent who felt he was obligated to serve his full term.

About 4-in-10 voters report that they would be less likely to vote for Christie Whitman if they thought that she would not serve out her full term as governor if she was re-elected, compared to 34 percent who are about as likely to vote for her, and 9 percent who would be more likely to consider her. Twenty-three percent of the voters who are firm in their choice of Whitman as a candidate for governor say that they are more likely to vote for Whitman if she was not going to serve out her full term. In comparison, 4 percent of firm McGreevey voters and 6 percent of those who are not firm in their selection of a candidate would be more likely to vote for Whitman if she would not serve her full term. Firm McGreevey voters (47%) and those who are not yet firm in their choice of a candidate (50%) are more likely than those who are firm in their choice of Whitman (30%) to say that they are less likely to vote for her if they thought she would not serve out her full term as Governor.

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between September 2 and September 7, 1997, when a random sample of 802 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets. This data has been weighted using voter registration information from the New Jersey Secretary of State's office for party identification.

NOTE: FOR THIS RELEASE THE FINDINGS ON THE ELECTION ARE BASED ON 673 REGISTERED VOTERS AND HAVE A MARGIN OF ERROR OF ± 4 PERCENT.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE SL/EP64-2 (EP114-2), WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1997

“How much have you read or heard about the possibility of Christie Whitman running for national offices such as Vice President or U.S. Senator in the year 2000--a great deal, some, not much, or nothing at all?” [Q.22a]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	14%	47%	20%	18%	1%	100%	(673)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	19	38	23	19	--	99	(219)
--Independent	15	48	20	17	1	101	(219)
--Republican	11	54	17	18	--	100	(213)
<i>Firm Vote Choice</i>							
--Whitman	13	51	21	15	--	100	(180)
--Undecided	11	51	19	19	1	101	(344)
--McGreevey	23	30	26	20	1	100	(121)

“Some people have talked about Christie Whitman running for national office in the year 2000 before her term as governor would end. Should Christie Whitman feel free to run for a national office such as vice president of U.S. Senate in 2000 or do you think if she is re-elected this year she is obligated to serve out her full term as governor?” [Q.22b]

	<u>Run For National Office</u>	<u>Obligated To Serve Full Term</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997						
--Registered Voters	32%	58%	2%	8%	100%	(673)
<i>Party ID</i>						
--Democrat	27	65	1	7	100	(219)
--Independent	30	60	2	7	99	(219)
--Republican	42	51	--	7	100	(213)
<i>Firm Vote Choice</i>						
--Whitman	41	49	3	7	100	(180)
--Undecided	31	61	2	6	100	(344)
--McGreevey	31	57	2	10	100	(121)
PAST SURVEYS						
March, 1987 , Tom Kean	39	54	2	5	100	(800)

"Would you be more likely, less likely, or about as likely to vote for Christie Whitman this November if you thought she would not serve out her full term as governor?" [Q.22c]

	<u>More Likely</u>	<u>Less Likely</u>	<u>About As Likely</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997						
--Registered Voters	9%	44%	34%	12%	99%	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	7	54	27	12	100	(219)
--Independent	6	47	33	13	99	(219)
--Republican	19	32	43	6	100	(213)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>						
--Whitman	23	30	43	3	99	(180)
--Undecided	6	50	32	12	100	(344)
--McGreevey	4	47	29	21	101	(121)

"Thinking about the cost and coverage of your auto insurance, overall are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied or not at all satisfied with your auto insurance?" [Q.32]

	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat Satisfied</u>	<u>Not Too Satisfied</u>	<u>Not At All Satisfied</u>	<u>DK/Not Insured</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	3%	15%	23%	55%	4%	100%	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	3	16	23	54	4	100	(219)
--Independent	1	14	24	56	4	99	(219)
--Republican	5	18	18	52	5	98	(213)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	7	21	19	48	5	100	(180)
--Undecided	2	13	26	54	5	100	(344)
--McGreevey	1	13	15	70	1	100	(121)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
June, 1997							
--Registered Voters	4	17	20	54	5	100	(633)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	8	18	22	45	7	100	(157)
--Undecided	3	18	21	54	4	100	(311)
--McGreevey	5	12	13	65	4	99	(145)

"Over the past 3 years, do you think your automobile insurance has gone up, gone down, or stayed the same? IF GONE UP, ASK: How much has it gone up--a great deal or some?" [Q.32a]

	<u>Gone Up A Great Deal</u>	<u>Gone Up Some</u>	<u>Gone Down</u>	<u>Stayed The Same</u>	(No Ins.) <u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	34%	37%	5%	19%	4%	99%	(673)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	40	34	5	17	4	100	(219)
--Independent	34	36	4	22	4	100	(219)
--Republican	25	41	8	20	7	101	(213)
<i>Firm Vote Choice</i>							
--Whitman	24	38	9	23	6	100	(180)
--Undecided	34	37	5	19	5	100	(344)
--McGreevey	50	34	1	13	1	99	(121)

AMONG THOSE WHO SAY THEIR AUTO INSURANCE HAS GONE UP

"In your opinion, who has been the most responsible for the costs of auto insurance going up--the Democrats or the Republicans?" [Q.32b]

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	13%	32%	13%	18%	25%	101%	(473)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	9	54	9	10	18	100	(158)
--Independent	11	25	17	19	28	100	(155)
--Republican	23	18	9	23	27	100	(140)
<i>Firm Vote Choice</i>							
--Whitman	30	6	5	40	19	100	(112)
--Undecided	11	31	15	14	29	100	(241)
--McGreevey	4	59	12	5	21	101	(101)

"Both candidates have made suggestions on how to reform auto insurance. How much have you read or heard about these proposals--a great deal, some, not much, or nothing at all?" [Q.331]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	17%	50%	21%	11%	--	99%	(673)
<i>Firm Vote Choice</i>							
--Whitman	17	57	15	11	--	100	(180)
--Undecided	16	49	25	11	--	101	(344)
--McGreevey	14	53	21	11	1	100	(121)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	14	50	26	9	1	100	(219)
--Independent	18	47	21	13	--	99	(219)
--Republican	16	60	13	10	--	99	(213)

PAST SURVEYS

June, 1997

--Registered Voters	10	39	30	19	1	99	(633)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	11	37	30	21	1	100	(157)
--Undecided	8	42	29	20	1	100	(311)
--McGreevey	16	39	30	16	--	101	(145)

AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD ABOUT AUTO INSURANCE

"And, which candidate's suggestions to reform auto insurance have you heard to most about?" [Q.33a]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	61%	20%	14%	2%	3%	100%	(598)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	58	21	16	3	2	100	(196)
--Independent	61	23	12	1	3	100	(188)
--Republican	63	15	17	3	2	100	(194)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	68	12	15	3	2	100	(162)
--Undecided	63	20	12	2	3	100	(304)
--McGreevey	49	30	16	2	2	99	(111)

"Which candidate do you think would do a better job at handling the issue of auto insurance [Christie Whitman] or [Jim McGreevey]? [ROTATE CHOICES]" [Q.34]

	<u>Christie Whitman</u>	<u>Jim McGreevey</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997					
--Registered Voters	30%	36%	34%	100%	(673)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	79	3	18	100	(180)
--Undecided	22	35	42	99	(344)
--McGreevey	--	85	15	100	(121)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	16	57	27	100	(219)
--Independent	26	36	38	100	(219)
--Republican	56	16	28	100	(213)
<u>Gender</u>					
--Male	37	35	29	101	(330)
--Female	22	38	40	100	(343)

PAST SURVEYS

June, 1997

--Registered Voters	32	31	36	99	(633)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	74	5	21	100	(157)

- more -

--Undecided	23	27	50	100	(311)
--McGreevey	8	78	14	100	(145)

"How much will your opinions about auto insurance influence your choice for Governor--a great deal, some, not much, or not at all?" [Q.35]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	31%	45%	12%	10%	1%	99%	(673)
<i><u>Firm Vote Choice</u></i>							
--Whitman	21	41	19	19	--	100	(180)
--Undecided	33	52	9	5	2	101	(344)
--McGreevey	40	32	15	14	--	101	(121)
<i><u>Party ID</u></i>							
--Democrat	37	38	15	10	--	100	(219)
--Independent	32	49	10	7	2	100	(219)
--Republican	22	45	17	16	--	100	(213)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
June, 1997							
--Registered Voters	35	42	13	10	1	101	(633)
<i><u>Firm Vote Choice</u></i>							
--Whitman	20	41	19	21	--	101	(157)
--Undecided	36	45	12	6	11	100	(311)
--McGreevey	50	36	9	5	--	100	(145)