

# The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

## NEW JERSEYANS AND WHITMAN: UNDECIDED TOGETHER

### Public Lacks Clear View of Governor After Four Years

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 1998  
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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Sunday's Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

After four years in office and spending the fall making her case for reelection, New Jersey residents remain decidedly undecided about their Governor, Christine Todd Whitman. While most state residents like her, people feel they know very little about Whitman as a person. Moreover, despite keeping her promise to cut the state's income tax, most New Jerseyans feel she has no major accomplishments to point to during her first term in office.

Whitman fails to get much credit for what is going right in the state, and receives a greater share of blame for what is going wrong--especially on the hot-button issues of auto insurance and property taxes. While the Governor gets high marks for honesty, intelligence and leadership, she comes up short in how the public sees her being able to relate to the everyday problems people face.

These are some of the main findings of a *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll conducted with 800 state residents between February 12 and 17, 1998. The survey has a margin of error of just over 3 percentage points.

New Jerseyans offer a mixed assessment of Whitman's performance as Governor. Currently about half the state gives her positive marks of "excellent" or "good" (49 percent), while a similar number give her largely negative assessments of either "only fair" (33 percent) or "poor" (13 percent). A far greater number of Republicans view

Whitman positively (73 percent), than do either independents or Democrats (43 percent each). Her current job rating signals a return to the pre-campaign level. Her job rating fell to its lowest point in October of last year, when negative evaluations outnumbered positive ones by 53 to 43 percent.

There is no question that New Jerseyans identify "auto insurance" as the main reason that Whitman was almost defeated in last year's gubernatorial election, winning by only 25,000 votes out of 2.35 million cast. When asked why more people did not support Whitman for reelection, 33 percent spontaneously mentioned car insurance. Another 10 percent mentioned taxes; only 12 percent mentioned all other issues combined. In addition, 5 percent felt the Governor had not done a good job during her term, 8 percent referred to a personal quality of Whitman they disliked and 12 percent gave some other reason. About one-quarter offered no reason why she barely won last year's election.

Whitman receives more blame for problems facing the state than she receives credit for positive happenings in the state. Only between 15 and 26 percent of the public feels that Whitman deserves "most" of the credit for the following: a reduction in the number of people on welfare (26 percent), a healthy state economy (23 percent), a clean environment (21 percent), a low unemployment rate (19 percent), and a reduction in the amount of crime (15 percent). Another 40 to 46 percent give the Governor "some" of the credit in each of these areas. However, in each of these five areas a larger percentage give her "a little or none" of the credit than give her "most" of the credit.

On the other hand, about half of state residents feel the Governor deserves "most" of the blame for high auto insurance rates (49 percent) and almost as many feel she deserves most of the blame for high property taxes (41 percent). Far fewer believe that the blame for the problems of funding education in less affluent school districts (27 percent) and the loss of farmland and open space to development (18 percent) should be laid at the Governor's door.

The majority view in New Jersey is that Christie Whitman has yet to leave her mark on the state. When asked to think back over the Governor's first term, just 28 percent of New Jerseyans say that she has "major" accomplishments to point to. Half of the public credits her with just "minor" accomplishments, while 16 percent feel she has no real accomplishments to point to. While her fellow Republicans are twice as likely (45 percent) to credit her with major accomplishments than are either Democrats or independents, even half of this group feels she has only minor or no real accomplishments to speak of.

But New Jerseyans remain optimistic about what Whitman may yet accomplish. The poll, conducted after the Governor's State of the State speech, inaugural address and budget message, found that far more people feel that Whitman does have a clear vision for making the state a better place to live (59 percent) than do not (33 percent).

As a person, Christie Whitman remains unknown to most New Jerseyans. Just 15 percent say they know her very or pretty well. One-third say they know her "just a little," and

fully half of the state's citizens feel they know her "not at all." Figures for Whitman's predecessors, Tom Kean and Brendan Byrne, were similar before they were reelected. Statewide, 46 percent express a generally favorable view of Christie Whitman, while 27 percent say their general impression of her is unfavorable. Even after four full years in office, 27 percent offer no opinion of Whitman.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Poll commented, "Because television serving the state comes largely from New York and Philadelphia, and people tend to get a better feel for politicians from television than from newspapers, New Jersey residents know less about and tend to be less attached to their political figures. In that sense these figures are not surprising." However, Zukin went on to note that the number of people saying they know nothing about Whitman has actually increased from last February when 36 percent felt they knew nothing about her as a person: "It is somewhat remarkable that the public could go through the gubernatorial campaign and feel they know her less well than before the campaign began. Clearly she did not get her message across during the election."

While she is little known, Whitman is thought to have some much admired leadership qualities. About four-in-five residents say the words "intelligent" and "a hard worker" apply to her "a lot." Also, 58 percent see her as "a role model for women," and as "a strong leader," although this latter figure is down from 66 percent from February of a year ago. Just over half (52 percent) feel "honest" is a term that fits her well.

The Governor is less well thought of in terms of being able to connect on a personal level. Just one-quarter feel she "understands the concerns you personally face in day-to-day life," or that she "understands the common person." Slightly more, 35 percent, feel that the term "warm and caring" describes Whitman "a lot"; 43 percent feel similarly about the term "likeable."

The survey found a very mixed reading when respondents were asked to consider Whitman's political and personal sides together. With just over one-in-ten undecided:

- 32 percent said they both like her personally and like her policies
- 21 percent said they like her personally but don't like her policies
- 11 percent said they don't like her personally but do like her policies
- 24 percent said they neither like her personally nor like her policies

The poll also finds the Governor has avoided any controversy over the hiring of some former legislators to high-paying state jobs. Only 25 percent said they had heard or read anything about this situation, and most (87 percent) felt this is a normal part of politics rather than being something out of the ordinary. The vast majority think this practice goes on no more or no less in the Whitman administration than in others.

Finally, when compared to her two immediate predecessors, Christie Whitman comes off better than Democrat Jim Florio but not as good as Republican Tom Kean. Whitman was chosen as a better Governor than Florio by a margin of 56 to 27 percent, down from a 62 to 23 percent difference in February of 1997. More felt Kean had been a better Governor

than Whitman by a closer margin of 40 to 33 percent, with 5 percent saying "neither" and just over 20 percent expressing no opinion.

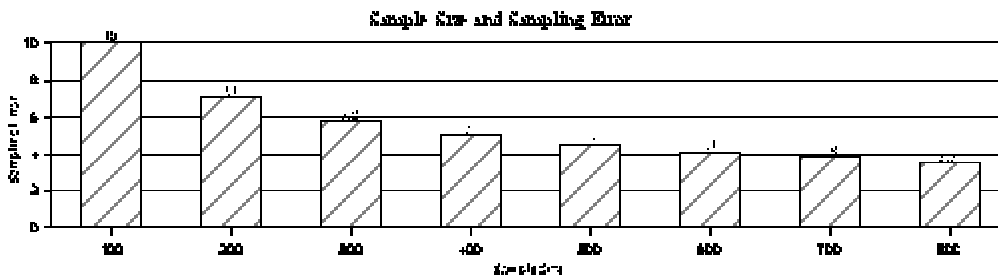
In summing up the results Zukin said, "While there is not much in the way of a deep emotional attachment to the Governor on the part of the state's citizens, New Jerseyans generally like Christie Whitman and want her to do well. She has come through her first term without much on the ledger--either positive or negative--as far as the public is concerned. She is seen as a strong leader with integrity, but people seem a bit unsure of her agenda and whether she really understands their concerns."

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**BACKGROUND MEMO -- RELEASE SL/EP67-2 (EP117-2), SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1998**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between February 12 and 17, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 800 is just over  $\pm 3$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 47 and 53 percent ( $50 \pm 3$ ) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked are reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

"How would you rate the job Christie Whitman is doing as Governor--excellent, good, only fair or poor?" [ CW.1]

			Only		Don't		
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Party</i>							
--Democrat	5	38	40	15	3	101	(242)
--Independent	9	34	37	15	5	100	(335)
--Republican	21	52	17	6	4	100	(186)
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	10	38	37	10	4	99	(391)
--Female	10	40	30	16	5	101	(411)
<b>PAST SURVEYS</b>							
--October, 1997	9	34	32	21	5	101	(800)
--September, 1997	10	37	32	16	5	100	(800)
--June, 1997	9	40	29	17	5	100	(800)
--February, 1997	10	42	29	15	5	101	(800)
--September, 1996	12	41	29	12	6	100	(808)
--February, 1996	9	40	34	15	3	101	(804)
--November, 1995	9	43	32	10	6	100	(803)

--September, 1995	8	40	36	10	6	100	(804)
--May, 1995	11	42	29	11	7	100	(802)
--February, 1995	13	43	28	12	4	100	(801)
--September, 1994	12	40	33	9	6	100	(801)
--June, 1994	11	39	29	7	14	100	(801)
--February, 1994	9	28	28	5	31	101	(801)

"In general, is your general impression of Christie Whitman favorable or unfavorable, or don't you have an opinion about her? IF FAVORABLE OR UNFAVORABLE, PROBE: Is that very (FAVORABLE/UNFAVORABLE) or somewhat (FAVORABLE/UNFAVORABLE)?" [CW.2]

	Favorable		Unfavorable		No	Total	(n)
	Very	Some	Some	Very	Opinion		
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Party</i>							
--Democrat	9	24	18	19	30	100	(242)
--Independent	14	32	13	14	27	100	(335)
--Republican	36	33	9	6	17	101	(186)

ASK EVERYONE

"How well do you feel you know Christie Whitman as a person-- very well, pretty well, just a little or not at all? " [CW.4]

	Very	Pretty	Just A	Not	Don't	Total	(n)
	Well	Well	Little	At All	Know		
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	3	9	32	54	2	100	(242)
--Independent	2	8	33	55	2	100	(335)
--Republican	9	19	31	39	2	100	(186)

PAST SURVEYS							
February, 1997	4	15	45	36	--	100	(800)
Tom Kean, 1985	5	12	35	46	2	100	(1000)
Brendan Byrne, 1981	3	7	34	56	--	100	(999)

"I'm going to read you four statements about Christie Whitman. Please tell me which comes closest to your own views." [CW.5]

	"I like her personally, AND I like her <u>policies</u> "	"I like her personally, BUT I don't like her <u>policies</u> "	"I don't like her personally, BUT I like her <u>policies</u> <u>OR</u> "	"I don't like her personally, AND I don't like her <u>policies</u> "	Don't Know	Total	(n)
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
Party ID							
--Democrat	22	25	11	28	14	100	(242)
--Independent	29	20	11	28	12	100	(335)
--Republican	54	16	9	11	11	101	(186)

FORM B Only

"As you may know, Christie Whitman ran for re-election in November and most people expected her to win easily. Instead, she barely beat her challenger. What is the most important reason why you think more people did not support her?" [CW.6B]

<u>Percentages</u>							
--------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

32%	Car Insurance
5	Property Taxes
5	Other Taxes
12	Other Issues
5	Has not done a good job
8	Personal qualities
12	Other responses
<u>21</u>	Don't know/no response
100%	Total
(399)	(n)

ASK EVERYONE

"Thinking back over Governor Whitman's first term, would you say that she has major accomplishments to point to, minor accomplishments, or no real accomplishments?" [CW.7]

	Major <u>Accomplishments</u>	Minor <u>Accomplishments</u>	<u>None</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
Party ID						
--Democrat	22	52	20	7	101	(244)
--Independent	23	55	17	5	100	(335)
--Republican	45	41	9	5	100	(186)

"And do you think she does or does NOT have a clear vision for making New Jersey a better place to live?" [CW.8]

	Does Have A <u>Clear Vision</u>	Does Not Have A <u>Clear Vision</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
Party ID					
--Democrat	52	41	7	100	(242)
--Independent	55	38	7	100	(335)
--Republican	77	15	8	100	(186)



BASED ON THOSE WHO SAY THEY KNOW WHITMAN "VERY", "PRETTY WELL" OR "A LITTLE" IN Q.CW4,

"People are often described by a number of characteristics such as "smart" or "nice." Please tell me if you think each characteristic I read describes Christie Whitman a lot, a little, or not very well. If you don't have an opinion on some, just say so. First, how about ( ), does this fit Whitman a lot, a little or not very well?" [CW.9]

	A <u>Lot</u>	A <u>Little</u>	Not Very <u>Well</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	(n)
-- <i>A hard worker</i>	77%	14%	6%	4%	101%	(200)
February, 1997	74	18	3	5	100	(523)
--Warm and caring	35	40	18	7	100	(200)
--Understands the common person	26	41	30	3	100	(200)
--Honest	52	29	13	7	101	(189)
February, 1997	53	27	10	10	100	(523)
--A strong leader	58	27	12	3	100	(381)
February, 1997	66	24	7	2	99	(523)
--Understands the concerns you personally face in day-to-day life	27	45	26	2	100	(181)
--Intelligent	80	12	2	6	100	(177)
February, 1997	82	12	2	4	100	(523)
--Likeable	43	41	11	5	100	(181)
--A role model for women	58	25	12	5	100	(181)
<i>Gender</i>						
--Men	53	26	12	9	100	(92)
-- <i>Women</i>	54	24	11	1	100	(89)

"There have been a number of positive things that have happened in New Jersey recently. Please tell me how much of the credit Governor Whitman should get for each item I read. Just tell me if you think she deserves most of the credit, some of the credit, or just a little of the credit. READ FIRST ITEM...Most, some, or a little of the credit.." [CW.10A]

	Most of The <u>Credit</u>	Some of The <u>Credit</u>	A Little Or None	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
--A healthy state economy	23%	45%	29%	2%	99%	(403)
--A clean environment	21	40	36	4	101	(403)
--A reduction in the number of people on welfare	26	39	29	6	100	(403)
--A reduction in the amount of crime	15	45	36	3	99	(403)
--A low unemployment rate	19	46	32	4	101	(403)

"There have been a number of negative things that have happened in New Jersey recently. Please tell me how much of the blame Governor Whitman should get for each item I read. Just tell me if you think she deserves most of the blame, some of the blame, or just a little of the blame. READ FIRST ITEM...Most, some or just a little of the blame. **ROTATE ITEMS**" [CW.10B]

	Most of The <u>Blame</u>	Some of The <u>Blame</u>	A Little Or None	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
--High auto insurance rates that keep rising	49%	28%	21%	3%	101%	(399)
--High property taxes	41	34	22	3	100	(399)
--Problems funding education in less affluent school districts	27	39	31	3	100	(399)
--The loss of farmland and open space to development	18	36	35	11	100	(399)

"Comparing Christie Whitman to New Jersey's last governor, Jim Florio, who do you think has been a better governor -- Whitman or Florio?" [CW.11]

	Whitman	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Neither</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>

<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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"And Comparing Christie Whitman to the governor before that, Tom Kean, who do you think has been a better governor -- Whitman or Kean?" [CW.12]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Kean</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(802)</b>

"There have been some stories in the news about Christie Whitman giving high paying government jobs to people who supported her in the past but were defeated when they ran for re-election to the legislature. Have you read or heard anything about this?" [CW.13]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>

"Do you think the people she appointed to these jobs probably were or were NOT qualified for their new positions, or don't you have an opinion?" [CW.14]

	<u>Were Qualified</u>	<u>Were Not Qualified</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>

"Do you think this practice of giving former legislators government jobs is very wrong, a little wrong, or that there is nothing really wrong with it?" [CW.15]

	<u>Very Wrong</u>	<u>A Little Wrong</u>	<u>Nothing Wrong</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(802)</b>

"And do you think this is a normal part of politics, or is this something out of the ordinary?" [CW.16]

	Normal <u>Politics</u>	Out Of <u>Ordinary</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>

"Do you think that giving jobs to political supporters has happened more often in the Whitman administration than in others, less often, or about the same amount?" [CW.17]

	More <u>Often</u>	Less <u>Often</u>	Same <u>Amount</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>