

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

WHITMAN AND THE DMV: GOVERNOR GETS BLAME; JOB RATING DIPS A BIT

**RELEASE: SL/ERP 75-3 (EP125-3)
MARCH 19, 2000**

CONTACT: CLIFF ZUKIN (732) 932-9384, Ext. 247

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, March 19 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*."

The roll out of the state's new, tougher car inspection system has had a fender-bender with Governor Whitman's job performance rating. Whitman receives a fair amount of the blame for the inspection difficulties and gets low marks for her handling of the DMV situation. Yet Whitman remains generally popular in New Jersey and her overall job performance rating runs well ahead of evaluations of how she has handled the DMV matter.

These are some of the main findings of a new *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* poll, conducted by telephone with a cross-sectional sample of 800 New Jersey residents between February 28 and March 9 of this year. The poll has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Three-quarters of New Jerseyans attribute a significant part of the blame over the problems that have occurred to the Governor—33 percent say she deserves "a lot" of the blame and another 44 percent say she deserves "some" of the blame. Statewide, 31 percent say Whitman has done a "poor" job of managing the DMV predicament, while another 36 percent say she has done an "only fair" job. Just 25 percent feel Whitman has done either an "excellent" or "good" job handling the situation.

Despite the DMV fiasco, Whitman's overall job performance rating has dropped just slightly from the last reading in September of 1999. New Jersey residents today are split, with 49 percent giving their Governor positive marks of excellent or good and a similar 47 percent give her negative marks of only fair or poor. In September, positive assessments of Whitman outnumbered negative ones by a margin of 53 to 44 percent.

New Jersey has been embroiled in a controversy over the new state inspection system since its opening on December 13 of last year. The system put in place by Parsons

Infrastructure and Technology Group, the sole bidder on a \$500 million dollar contract to revamp the state's inspection system, has had problems in staffing, meeting timetables and has been prone to breakdowns. Moreover, state officials did not heed advance warnings that they could expect significant problems. Governor Whitman initially appointed Attorney General John Farmer Jr. to investigate the situation. Farmer later removed himself in favor of retired Supreme Court Justice Alan Handler.

The vast majority of people in the state are familiar with the DMV situation. Fully four-in-five New Jersey residents have heard something about the inspection mess; almost half of state residents say they have heard "a lot" about it. In fact, about one-in-three says they personally know of someone who has complained about the new state inspection procedures.

Christie Whitman remains a fairly popular personal figure in New Jersey. Half—51 percent say they have a favorable impression of her, compared to just 27 percent who have an unfavorable view of her. Yet even after 6 years in office, 22 percent say they have no opinion about Whitman as a person.

At the same time, New Jerseyans continue to think that Whitman has not had a lot of impact as Governor. Just 25 percent say think she has some major accomplishment to point to over her term in office. About half feel the Governor has minor accomplishments, and one New Jerseyan in six feels she has no real accomplishments at all to point to. These sentiments have not changed over the last two years.

As a chief executive, Whitman continues to be viewed in fairly partisan terms. Positive overall job performance ratings of "excellent" or "good" outnumber negative ones of "only fair" or "poor" among Republicans by a margin of 69 to 28 percent. Among Democrats, negative ratings outnumber positive ones by 52 to 43 percent. Independents have come to view the Governor very much like Democrats do, with Whitman receiving more negative (53%) than positive ratings (44%) ratings. In fact, most of the slippage in Whitman's job performance rating has come from the Independents. Last September Whitman's ratings were largely reversed—52% favorable to 45% unfavorable—among this group.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE (EP125-3) SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2000

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted between February 28 and March 9 with a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents 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 this survey is ± 3.5 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 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) 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 Republicans, Independents or Democrats, 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. Click here for a [chart](#) that 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 is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age, gender and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

How would you rate the job Christie Whitman is doing as Governor--excellent, good, only fair or poor? [Q.5]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
March 2000	9%	40%	28%	19%	4%	100%	(800)
<u>By Party</u>							
--Democrat	10	33	30	22	5	100	(247)
--Independent	7	37	32	21	3	100	(320)
--Republican	15	54	18	10	3	100	(184)
September 1999	11	42	31	13	3	100	(802)
<u>By Party</u>							
--Democrat	10	34	39	15	3	101	(240)
--Independent	10	42	33	12	3	100	(322)
--Republican	17	54	20	8	1	100	(182)
<u>Past Surveys</u>							
-- April/May 1999	9	37	34	16	4	100	(802)
-- January 1999	10	40	32	14	3	99	(800)
-- September 1998	9	39	33	14	6	101	(804)
-- June 1998	11	36	34	15	4	100	(602)
-- February 1998	10	39	33	13	4	99	(802)
-- 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)

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)? [Q. 7]

	<i>Favorable</i>		<i>Unfavorable</i>		No	Total	(n)
	<u>Very</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>Opinion</u>		
March 2000	23	28	10	17	22	100	(800)
<u>Past Surveys</u>							
February 1998	17	29	13	14	27	100	(802)

Thinking back over Governor Whitman's term in office, would you say that she has major accomplishments to point to, minor accomplishments, or no real accomplishments? [Q. 8]

	<u>Major</u>	<u>Minor</u>	No real <u>ones</u>	No opinion/ <u>don't know</u>	Total	(n)
March 2000	25	48	17	10	100	(800)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
January 1999	28	49	15	7	99	(800)
February 1998	28	50	16	5	99	(802)

Have you heard or read anything about problems with the new car inspection system at the New Jersey DMV? IF YES, PROBE: Have you heard or read a lot, some, or just a little? [Q. 9]

47 Yes A Lot
 22 Yes Some
 11 Yes A little/don't know how much heard/read-- SKIP TO Q13
 19 Not heard/read--SKIP TO Q13
 1 Don't know--SKIP TO Q13
 100% Total
 (800) (n)

Do you personally know someone who has complained about the new DMV inspection procedures, or not? [Q. 10]

44 Yes
55 No
-- Don't know
99% Total
(564) (n)

How responsible do you think Governor Whitman is for the problems that have occurred? Does she deserve most of the blame, some of the blame, just a little of the blame, or none of the blame? [Q.11]

32 Lot
44 Some
13 Little
7 None
4 Don't know
100% Total
(564) (n)

And overall, how good a job has she done handling the DMV situation—excellent, good, only fair or poor? [Q. 12]

4 Excellent
21 Good
36 Only Fair
31 Poor
9 Don't Know
101% Total
(564) (n)

Whitman Job Favorability Rating

