

# The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

March 13, 2002  
Release 136-4

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to “**The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.**”

## **GARDEN STATE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT McGREEVEY’S TENURE**

### *While Realistic About Some of His Goals*

Governor James McGreevey gets positive marks so far, and New Jerseyans are optimistically looking forward to the next four years. Forty-five percent of New Jerseyans approve of the job McGreevey is doing as governor, while 21 percent disapprove and 34 percent have no opinion. Fifty-five percent of state residents say they are optimistic about the next four years with McGreevey as governor.

Residents are skeptical, however, that McGreevey will be able to accomplish some of the tougher goals he has set for himself. New Jerseyans believe McGreevey will be able to improve public education, cut government waste and protect open spaces. But on some of the state’s most entrenched problems – taxes and traffic – residents do not expect much success.

These are some of the main findings from the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*, conducted from February 28 through March 6. The survey was conducted by telephone with a scientifically selected sample of 803 adults statewide, and has a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points.

The poll’s interim director, Monika McDermott, comments on the findings: “Governor McGreevey is off to a good start with the New Jersey public. People are looking forward to his time in office while still being realistic about the state’s problems and how much he’ll be able to do to solve them – they don’t expect him to perform miracles.”

On a personal level, McGreevey receives high marks. Just over half of New Jerseyans have a favorable impression of the new Governor while only 19 percent have an unfavorable impression. These numbers compare favorably with those of former governors Jim Florio and Christie Whitman at similar points in their administrations. In February 1994, 35 percent of New Jerseyans viewed Whitman favorably; and in April of 1990, 42 percent viewed Florio favorably.

**The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics**

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New Jerseyans are somewhat less positive about how McGreevey has been dealing with the state's budget problems than they are about his job performance overall. While the public approves of his overall performance by 45 percent to 21 percent, 37 percent of New Jerseyans approve of the way McGreevey is handling the state's budget problems and 28 percent disapprove.

McGreevey's top government appointments do not seem to have made much of a public impression so far, despite some negative coverage – many residents have no opinion of the appointments, and among those who do, ratings are positive. Thirty-nine percent of residents approve of McGreevey's choices for top positions in state government, and 17 percent disapprove. Forty-three percent of New Jerseyans say they do not have an opinion on the appointments.

Residents are looking forward to McGreevey's tenure. Over half of New Jerseyans are optimistic about his governorship while only 24 percent say they are pessimistic. And residents expect McGreevey to be at least as good a governor as Christie Whitman was, if not better. Thirty-nine percent expect McGreevey to do a better job than Whitman and a nearly equal number – 38 percent – expect him to do a similar job. Only 13 percent think McGreevey will not measure up to Whitman's performance.

Residents' overall optimism is in some contrast to their expectations for what McGreevey will be able to do in office. When asked about some of the goals McGreevey has publicly discussed, New Jerseyans say they expect him to accomplish only half of them. The issues on which the public expects McGreevey to be stymied include some of the worst in the state historically – taxes and traffic congestion.

#### **McGreevey's Goals**

	Will be able to	Will NOT be able to
Protect open spaces	60%	24%
Improve public education	57%	33%
Cut waste in government	48%	40%
Improve roads and decrease congestion	40%	50%
Avoid raising income and sales taxes	33%	54%
Ease property taxes	26%	62%

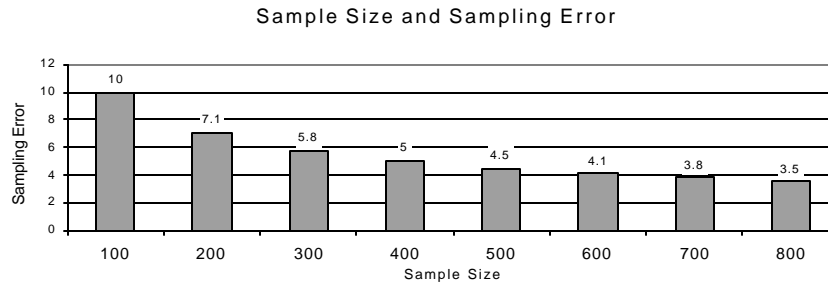
Residents do not expect that McGreevey will be able to either relieve their property tax burdens or avoid raising state income and sales taxes. Sixty-two percent think McGreevey will *not* be able to ease property tax burdens while only 26 percent believe he will be able to do so. Just over half – 54 percent – think he will *not* be able to avoid raising income or sales taxes during the next four years. Only one-third believe he will be able to keep those taxes at their current levels. And when it comes to traffic congestion, 50 percent predict McGreevey will *not* be able to decrease congestion and improve roads, while 40 percent predict he will.

On the goals of education, the environment and government waste, however, residents believe McGreevey *will* be able to make progress. Sixty percent of adults statewide believe McGreevey will be able to protect open spaces, while only 24 percent think he will not. Fifty-seven percent predict he will be able to improve New Jersey's public schools with only 33 percent dissenting. And finally, 48 percent feel he will cut waste and mismanagement in state government, but 40 percent think he will not.

The new state legislature receives job performance marks similar to McGreevey's. Just under half of New Jerseyans – 48 percent – approve of the job the state legislature is doing, 19 percent disapprove and 33 percent do not have an opinion. Approval is fairly non-partisan at this point – while Democrats give the legislature higher ratings than Republicans, both groups rate the body positively. Fifty-four percent of Democrats approve of the state legislature's job performance while 16 percent disapprove. Among Republicans, 46 percent approve and 19 percent disapprove.

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP136-4) March 13, 2002**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted by telephone from February 28 to March 6 with a scientifically selected random sample of 803 New Jersey adults. The figures in this release are based on this sample size. 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 is  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to have a favorable opinion of McGreevey, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey residents 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.



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 and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“So far, do you approve or disapprove of the way James McGreevey is handling his job as Governor?” [M1]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	61	15	24	100	(275)
--Independent	43	21	36	100	(275)
--Republican	34	30	47	101	(201)

“And do you approve or disapprove of the way McGreevey is handling problems with the state budget?” [M2]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	46	21	33	100	(275)
--Independent	36	27	37	100	(275)
--Republican	30	41	29	100	(201)

“Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about the next four years with McGreevey as Governor?” [M3]

	<u>Optimistic</u>	<u>Pessimistic</u>	<u>Neither (VOL)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	70	13	3	14	100	(275)
--Independent	52	25	9	15	101	(275)
--Republican	42	40	6	12	100	(201)

“Do you think McGreevey will do a better job as governor than Christie Whitman did, or a worse job than Whitman, or about the same job as Whitman?” [M4]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	55	6	35	5	101	(275)
--Independent	38	14	36	13	101	(275)
--Republican	23	23	46	8	100	(201)

“Here are some things that McGreevey says he wants to do as governor. Regardless of whom you supported in last year’s election, please tell me whether you think he will or will NOT be able to do them. Will McGreevey be able to ... [FILL – RANDOMIZE] (A. AVOID raising state income and sales taxes, B. Cut waste and mismanagement in government, C. Improve public education in New Jersey, D. Improve roads and highways, and ease traffic congestion, E. Protect open spaces, F. Ease property tax burdens) ...or not?” [M5A-F]

	<u>Will be able to</u>	<u>Will NOT be able to</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<u>AVOID RAISING TAXES</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	37	51	12	100	(275)
--Independent	31	53	16	100	(275)
--Republican	30	63	7	100	(201)
<u>CUT GOVERNMENT WASTE</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	55	35	10	100	(275)
--Independent	48	39	13	100	(275)
--Republican	41	51	7	99	(201)
<u>IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	73	19	8	100	(275)
--Independent	51	37	12	100	(275)
--Republican	44	49	7	100	(201)

	<u>Will be able to</u>	<u>Will NOT be able to</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<u>IMPROVE ROADS / EASE CONGESTION</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	51	42	7	100	(275)
--Independent	33	52	14	99	(275)
--Republican	32	61	7	100	(201)
<u>PROTECT OPEN SPACES</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	68	18	14	100	(275)
--Independent	56	26	18	100	(275)
--Republican	60	29	11	100	(201)
<u>EASE PROPERTY TAX BURDENS</u>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	34	51	14	99	(275)
--Independent	19	66	14	99	(275)
--Republican	25	72	3	100	(201)

“So far, do you generally approve or disapprove of the people McGreevey has nominated or appointed to top positions in state government?” [M6]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	51	10	39	100	(275)
--Independent	35	19	47	101	(275)
--Republican	31	25	45	101	(201)

“Now I’m going to ask you about some political figures in New Jersey. For each person, please tell me if your opinion is favorable, unfavorable, or if you don’t really have an opinion of them. Is your opinion of ...[FILL – RANDOMIZE] (A. James McGreevey) favorable or unfavorable, or don’t you really have an opinion of [him/her]? [RT1]

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>DK/No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b><i>JAMES MCGREEVEY</i></b>					
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
-- Democrat	66	11	23	100	(275)
-- Independent	47	19	34	100	(275)
-- Republican	40	33	37	100	(201)
<u>Previous Surveys</u>					
April 2001	30	8	62	100	(802)
<b><i>Christie Whitman</i></b>					
February 1994	35	11	53	99	(801)
<b><i>Jim Florio</i></b>					
April 1990	42	27	30	99	(800)

“Do you approve or disapprove of the job the New Jersey state legislature is doing?” [RT4]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don’t know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>March 2002</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	54	16	30	100	(275)
--Independent	47	21	32	100	(275)
-- Republican	46	19	35	100	(201)