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END OF THE YEAR VIEWS OF GOVERNOR AND STATE
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Overall, just over four in ten rate the job Jim Doyle is doing as Governor as excellent (6%) or good (36%) while just over half think that one of the two lower "grades" of fair (36%) or poor (16%) more accurately describes their assessments. In comparative context, this means that residents are about ten points less likely to give him one of the two higher grades than they were for George Bush, though it should also be noted that Doyle's ratings tend more to the middle of the four point scale (i.e., good or fair) than to its extremes (excellent or poor). The proportion going either to the top or the bottom was more than half again as high for the President as it was for the Governor. (Bush's exact ratings were excellent 17%, good 35%, fair 26%, poor 19%).

As a group, though with considerable overlap, women tend to assess Doyle more highly than men. He does somewhat better among those under thirty and those between forty-five and fifty-nine than those in the two other groups, with the oldest being the most critical. Partisanship, however, is the factor most clearly related to ratings of Doyle. Among self-described Democrats, two thirds rate Doyle good or above, and about three in ten go no higher than fair. These proportions are reversed among Republicans. Independents are between, but fall closer to Republicans. (Bush's ratings have an even stronger partisan cast, but this time, Independents are closer to Democrats).

Results such as these ratings may be viewed not only in an absolute context (how many say "excellent" and so on), but also as part of a cross-time trend (and they going up, down or remaining where they were). In December, residents' assessments of Doyle were just about where they were in October -- differing no more than a few points for any individual "grade". That month, however came at the end of a mild upward tendency from about May. Earlier in his term, along with more uncertainty views had been somewhat more rosy. He now stands clearly higher than did his predecessor Scott McCallum on any of the three occasions in 2002 when the Badger Poll™ asked state residents to rate him. now gets, particularly in March of that year.

Related to this, when respondents were asked to take a wider view and compare the state with the shape it was in "before Doyle became Governor", more than six in ten (62%) said the state was now "about as well off" as it was then, leaving roughly one in three who perceived a clear change. That group broke about two to one (23%-11%) towards thinking Wisconsin was now worse off as opposed to better off.

		Ratings of Governor										
		D/03	O/03	8/03	5/03	4/03	3/03	2/03	1/03	9/02	6/02	3/02
Incumbent Governor Rating												
EXCELLENT		6%	5%	4%	4%	4%	7%	5%	10%	5%	3%	3%
GOOD		36	36	30	32	33	36	34	44	29	32	23
FAIR		36	39	39	42	35	31	27	31	39	35	40
POOR		16	14	16	10	10	10	5	3	17	19	23
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL)		2	3	5	5	9	10	22	n/a	2	4	4
DON'T KNOW		3	3	6	7	10	6	7	9	8	7	7
REFUSED		*	*	--	*	*	*	*	2	*	*	2
+1/03 Rating was of job Doyle was expected to do, previous were McCallum												

Gender and age patterns here are weak, with only those from forty-five to fifty nine on balance thinking the state is no worse off, and the largest proportion in each group thinking things are on a rough par. Not surprisingly, against the common impression that things are about as they were, there are some partisan patterns to the balance of perceived change. Democrats are twice as likely to see an improvement as to think things have gotten worse. Independents come down on the other side by about the same margin, and Republicans even more so.

These results overall are quite similar to what was found the previous time this question was asked concerning Governor Doyle, back in October. It was also put several times in 2002, then referring to Scott McCallum. When that comparison (which might well have involved not only the economic downturn and state fiscal difficulties, but the transition from the widely known and liked Tommy Thompson) was made, McCallum came out worse than Doyle does. Except in March, when they were most likely to perceive a change, the proportion thinking the state was in about the same shape tended to be quite similar, but among those who DID think there had been a shift, the sense that things had worsened was rather clearer, especially in March.

Chief Executives would tend to prefer that people feel things are better under their watch, but the impact of such views can be tempered by how much of the credit or blame is laid at the feet of the incumbent. At present, when asked "how much of any change is due to Governor Doyle and his policies", fewer than one in ten (9%) said "a lot". There was a large group (43%) who felt "some" was appropriate, who together with the first group, account for half of all respondents. On the other side, one third (33%) give Doyle "only a little" of the credit (or blame) and fewer than one in ten (8%) say "none at all". The perceived connection between Doyle and his policies and the comparative shape of Wisconsin tends to lessen at least modestly as one moves from his partisan friends (two thirds of whom give him some credit/blame or more) to Republicans (fewer than half of whom do). This would further tend to limit the political impact so far.

When McCallum was Governor the public tended more clearly than now to perceive the state as being less well off, as noted above. But McCallum was NOT seen as deserving more of the credit (or blame) for whatever shift there was. September's figures on that question were generally comparable to what we now find, while earlier on in the year, the public was less likely to see a clear link between the Governor and his policies and the state's situation.

A series of questions addressed general perceptions of the state's fiscal situation and set the stage for the coming legislative debates. Overall, the public shows resistance to increases in the level of both state taxes and spending - which may not predict responses to particular policy choices but does

Comparative State Status Across Time					
	12/03	10/03	9/02	6/02	3/02
Compared to last Governor					
BETTER OFF NOW	11%	12%	4%	3%	5%
WORSE OFF	23	22	32	31	40
SAME	62	59	59	59	50
DK. ETC.	4	6	5	5	4
REFUSED	1	*	5	1	1
Credit/blame to Gov.					
LOT	9%	8%	8%	11%	11%
SOME	43	45	43	35	32
ONLY A LITTLE	33	30	29	32	32
NONE	8	8	11	13	15
DK. ETC.	7	8	9	9	9
REFUSED	*	*	*	1	1

reflect general predispositions. Some two thirds (68%) say the level of state taxes in Wisconsin is now too high, while one in four (27%) called them "about right" and only a small handful (1%) labelled them "too low". Except for a markedly lower proportion among the youngest calling state taxes "too high" (though still a plurality), group differences tend to be modest. The proportion calling taxes too high did rise from about six in ten among Democrats to eight in ten among Republicans, but views are onesided among all three partisan groups.

There also is resistance (about ten points less onesided) on the other side of the ledger, the "level of state spending". Just under six in ten (57%) said this was too high, one in four (24%) felt it was about right, and almost one in ten (8%) called it too low. Again this does not relate directly to any particular program area, but does suggest that new initiatives might well go down easier if they are "offset" and that fiscal decisions will be taken against a backdrop of a general sense that the state spends too much.

Again men are modestly more likely than women to see too much money in the state budget, and the youngest group stands out in the relative weakness of its opposition. While all groups tend to express more opposition to the level of taxes than that of spending, the differences among the three are at least as great when it comes to spending as when the overall level of taxation is the issue.

Neither of these sentiments are new, but have to a greater or lesser extent been found each time the Badger Poll™ has asked the question over the past two years. When it comes to taxes, the current results are very similar to what the previous two surveys have shown, which represented a modest increase over the March to May period. Resistance to taxes was, if anything, higher than in the final months of the previous administration.

Spending attitudes have tended to move in a somewhat narrower range (between a high of 66% and a low of 57% saying they are higher than they should be). Though the differences are small, the current results represent a level of general aversion to spending that is no stronger than previously found. With a few exceptions (notably June of 2002 when it was larger, and May of this year when it was smaller), the SIZE of the gap between the proportion feeling taxes are too high and the corresponding proportion thinking spending is excessive has

tended to be similar across time.

General Budget-Related Perceptions Across Time

	D/03	O/03	8/03	5/03	4/03	3/03	2/03	1/03	9/02	6/02	3/02
Current level of taxes											
TOO HIGH	68%	69%	70%	63%	66%	62%	68%	71%	74%	77%	71%
TOO LOW	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	2
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	27	26	25	32	30	36	29	26	22	19	24
DEPENDS ON TAX (VOL.)	1	1	1	--	1	2	1	*	*	1	1
DON'T KNOW	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
REFUSED	*	--	--	*	--	--	--	1	--	*	*
Current level of spending											
TOO HIGH	57%	59%	61%	62%	61%	61%	66%	63%	63%	58%	61%
TOO LOW	8	5	4	4	2	2	2	3	3	5	5
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	24	26	24	20	26	24	21	22	23	25	25
DEPENDS ON PROG. (VOL)	2	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	2	3	5
DON'T KNOW	8	8	9	10	8	9	9	8	9	9	5
REFUSED	1	1	--	1	--	*	*	1	1	1	*

There is a good deal of skepticism that the state has seen the last of budget difficulties. Specifically, only one in seven (14%) said thought "the budget plan passed this year has more or less solved the state's fiscal problems for the moment", while seven in ten (70%) thought the state was "going to be right back in the same situation next year". Both figures are generally comparable with what was found in October (14% thinking the problem had been more or less solved with 74% expecting more of the same).

Group differences tend to be modest. Thus, for instance, just shy of two thirds of Democrats and just over three in four Republicans expect at least a partial repeat. The oldest respondents are slightly more skeptical than others, but the common sense is that we have NOT seen the end of budget difficulties. On the one hand then, no one has yet been given credit for solving the problem (because people tend not to think it has been solved). On the other, should there be another round, while public attitudes to spending and taxing may not make it easy to deal with, at least the public will not be surprised.

One key attitude shaping public reaction to hard choices is the degree to which residents believe tough choices are necessary. In December of 2003, only a bit above one in three (36%) thought "a choice will have to be made between service cuts and big increases in taxes", while half (51%) felt it was "possible to both maintain essential services and keep taxes down". This is NOT a partisan issue, with all three groups closely divided. Interestingly, this is NOT a partisan issue in Wisconsin, Democrats and Republicans are in close agreement, with Independents slightly less convinced on balance that a choice will be necessary. The oldest respondents come closest to splitting evenly, and are the only group on balance to be more likely to think choices are necessary than that they can be avoided.

A parallel question about local services and property taxes reveals at least as much doubt about the necessity of choice. Overall just shy of three in ten (32%) felt a choice would have to be made, almost six in ten (58%) felt services could be maintained and property taxes held down, suggesting that this will be an area to keep a close eye on. Groups tend to be even more similar here than they were on the corresponding question about state-level choices.

General Budget-Related Perceptions Across Time

	D/03	O/03	8/03	5/03	4/03	3/03	2/03	1/03	9/02	6/02	3/02
Serious budget choices											
HAVE TO CHOOSE	36%	43%	39%	47%	43%	50%	46%	41%	30%	34%	28%
DOESN'T HAVE TO	51	46	48	43	43	41	42	46	56	55	56
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	3	3	4	5	5	3	5	4	3	5	6
DON'T KNOW	9	7	7	6	8	4	6	9	10	6	8
REFUSED	1	*	1	*	1	1	1	1	1	--	2
Serious local choices											
HAVE TO CHOOSE	32%	38%	31%								
DOESN'T HAVE TO	58	55	58								
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	3	3	5								
DON'T KNOW	7	4	4								
REFUSED	*	1	1								
Budget Plan's impact											
MORE/LESS SOLVED	14%	14%									
BACK IN SAME SIT.	70	74									
MINOR TINKERING (VOL)	1	1									
DON'T KNOW	15	12									
REFUSED	1	--									

Both these questions have trends (longer for the state level). Current results show a bit more skepticism about the necessity of choice now than in October or (smaller yet) August. While the public has never been shown to clearly endorse the idea that choice was necessary, the proportion thinking it might be was somewhat higher during the budget debate of this past year, achieving either balance or a plurality believing choice was necessary in the surveys of last spring. There was even more doubt last year (2002), although the current results are not all that different from June of McCallum's last full year of office.

The shorter trend on local-level choices shows that at each point there has been at least as much doubt about the necessity of choice locally than for the state. The current results are almost exactly what was found in August, while October showed slightly less doubt than either, but differences were scarcely sharp, and the balance of opinion has always been that choices can be avoided.

Opinion can change, of course, and none of this means the public cannot be convinced of the necessity of tax increases (or further real service cuts) if it comes to that. What does mean is that before future unpleasant choices can go down easily, the case will have to be made.

Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. All results shown are for the basic sample of state residents. The first column is the percentage of the entire sample giving each response. The second and third reports the percentages for men and women separately. The fourth, fifth, and sixth columns show self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Columns seven through ten group respondents by age.

Q01. INTERVIEWER: (DO NOT ASK) Enter respondent's gender

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	47%	50%	50%	48%	48%	49%	48%
FEMALE	51	--	100	53	50	50	52	52	51	52

Q02. How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing as President?
Excellent, good, fair or poor?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	17%	18%	16%	--%	7%	41%	15%	19%	14%	20%
GOOD	35	39	32	18	33	47	43	37	35	29
FAIR	26	24	29	41	30	10	29	23	26	28
POOR	19	18	21	38	29	--	9	19	24	20
TOO SOON TO TELL(VOL.)	*	*	*	--	*	*	1	--	*	--
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	3	1	1	4	1	*	2
REFUSED	1	*	1	1	--	--	--	1	1	1

Q04. Turning to state politics... How would you rate the job Jim Doyle is doing as Governor of Wisconsin? Excellent, good, fair or poor?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	6%	8%	5%	11%	5%	4%	6%	4%	7%	9%
GOOD	36	30	41	54	33	24	44	32	40	28
FAIR	36	35	36	27	47	35	33	43	30	38
POOR	16	21	12	3	9	33	11	16	16	19
TOO SOON TO TELL(VOL.)	2	3	1	2	2	1	--	1	3	4
DON'T KNOW	3	2	4	3	4	1	6	4	3	1
REFUSED	*	*	*	--	--	1	1	--	--	1

WICMP04. Compared to before Doyle became Governor, do you think Wisconsin is now in better shape than it was, worse shape than it was or about as well off as it was?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BETTER OFF THAN WAS	11%	12%	10%	23%	12%	4%	6%	7%	18%	10%
WORSE OFF THAN WAS	23	24	22	11	21	34	28	24	16	27
ABOUT AS WELL OFF	62	61	62	61	62	59	61	64	64	57
DON'T KNOW	4	2	6	6	5	2	5	5	2	6
REFUSED	1	1	*	*	--	1	--	--	*	1

WICMP05. How much of any change is due to Governor Doyle and his policies? A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
A LOT	9%	8%	9%	14%	6%	9%	8%	7%	8%	14%
SOME	43	40	46	49	45	37	33	45	48	38
ONLY A LITTLE	33	38	27	25	35	39	40	29	34	32
NONE AT ALL	8	10	7	5	5	11	10	10	5	9
DON'T KNOW	7	3	10	6	9	4	8	9	5	6
REFUSED	*	*	*	--	--	1	1	--	--	1

TAX01. Right now do you think the level of state taxes in Wisconsin is too high, too low, or just about right?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
TOO HIGH	68%	74%	63%	60%	68%	79%	53%	69%	72%	73%
TOO LOW	1	1	1	4	1	--	3	1	1	2
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	27	23	31	33	29	18	40	28	26	19
DEPENDS WHICH TAX (VOL.)	1	1	1	1	*	1	--	1	*	1
DON'T KNOW	3	1	4	2	2	3	4	1	1	5
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1

TAX02. How about the level of state spending, is that too high, too low, or just about right?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
TOO HIGH	57%	61%	53%	43%	57%	73%	43%	57%	59%	63%
TOO LOW	8	12	4	13	2	6	18	4	7	3
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	24	20	29	31	30	14	33	25	22	23
DEPENDS ON PROG. (VOL.)	2	3	2	4	3	1	2	2	2	4
DON'T KNOW	8	4	11	10	7	6	4	11	9	6
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	--	--	--	1	1	1

BUDG02X. Do you think the budget plan passed this year has more or less solved the state's fiscal problems for the moment, or are we going to be right back in the same situation next year?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MORE OR LESS SOLVED	14%	14%	13%	14%	11%	15%	20%	13%	15%	8%
BACK IN SAME SIT.	70	73	66	64	69	77	68	73	62	77
MINOR TINKERING (VOL.)	1	1	1	2	1	--	--	2	1	1
DON'T KNOW	15	10	19	19	19	8	12	13	20	12
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	2	2

BUDG02Y. In order to balance the state budget, NEXT YEAR do you think a choice will have to be made between serious service cuts and big increases in taxes, or is it possible to both maintain essential services and keep taxes down?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
HAVE TO CHOOSE	36%	41%	31%	40%	30%	38%	36%	31%	37%	42%
DOESN'T HAVE TO CHOOSE	51	49	52	50	54	50	53	57	52	37
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	3	4	3	2	3	3	2	4	5	2
DON'T KNOW	9	5	14	7	13	9	9	8	5	17
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	1	2

BUDG02A. How about in your local community. In order to balance the local budget, do you think a choice will have to be made between serious service cuts and big increases in taxes, or is it possible to both maintain essential services and keep property taxes down?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
HAVE TO CHOOSE	32%	33%	31%	32%	29%	32%	28%	28%	36%	35%
DOESN'T HAVE TO CHOOSE	58	59	57	58	59	60	65	64	52	51
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	3	4	2	3	4	2	4	3	4	3
DON'T KNOW	7	4	9	7	8	6	2	5	8	11
REFUSED	*	--	*	1	--	--	--	--	*	*

QD05. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DEMOCRAT	26%	25%	27%	100%	--%	--%	23%	22%	30%	30%
REPUBLICAN	34	34	33	--	--	100	38	36	27	35
INDEPENDENT	25	25	24	--	100	--	25	25	25	26
OTHER	10	11	9	--	--	--	10	13	10	5
NONE	3	2	4	--	--	--	4	2	5	1
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	*	2	2
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	1	1	1

QD11. In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR) (Calculated and grouped as below)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	14%	14%	15%	13%	14%	16%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	30	30	31	25	30	32	--	100	--	--
45-59	32	32	32	37	32	26	--	--	100	--
60 and over	22	22	22	25	23	23	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	1	2	*	--	--	3	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%

-- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This BADGER POLL™ was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center as part of its ongoing program of research designed to benefit the research community and the people of Wisconsin, under the direction of G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Associate Director for Public Opinion Research of the Center. The media sponsors of the survey are the (Madison) Capital Times, and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The BADGER POLL™ is intended to be a "poll of record" for the state, investigating matters of concern to Wisconsinites including politics, culture, and their daily lives, adhering to the highest standards of polling methodology and rigorous independence.

A total of 510 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between December 2 and 9, inclusive. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Theoretically, results from this survey have a "margin of error"

of a little over +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible resident in Wisconsin, exactly these questions at the time the survey was conducted, there is only a one in twenty chance that the answers would differ by more than that in either direction from what we report here. There could be differences because of changes in question wording, events occurring in the meantime, or any of the practical difficulties involved in taking a scientific survey. Results based on subgroups are subject to a larger "margin of error".