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GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGN IN SEPTEMBER 2002
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

The public is just beginning to turn its attention to the gubernatorial campaign, and while the incumbent Governor trails his Democratic challenger in voter preferences at the moment, the advantage is modest, and there is plenty of room for movement.

Counting in those who had to be "pushed" to state a preference, Attorney General Jim Doyle enjoys a modest 43%-35% lead over the incumbent Scott McCallum; Ed Thompson and Jim Young come up far behind with 6% and 1%, respectively. This result is beyond the "margin of error", so that one can be relatively confident that, had all registered voters been asked the same question at the same time, Doyle would "win". Still, even without considering that the identity of the Democratic nominee has only been known for a week or two, and that there is yet a good deal of campaigning time, this number is somewhat soft for a number of reasons. Foremost is that when, in a first question, respondents were reminded of the four candidates on the ballot, and also asked "or haven't you made up your mind yet", almost half (48%) told interviewers that they had not decided on a candidate. On this question, Doyle garners 26%, while McCallum gets 20%. Thompson (3%) and Young (1%) get only a handful of "votes".

To be sure, most of those who stated no choice COULD be pushed. When asked "if you had to express a preference as of now, which one would you prefer", roughly one third go for each of the major party candidates, a small number go to Thompson and Young, and one in four still cannot be pushed into even a tentative response.

Combining these results to show "leaning preference" yields a close race noted above: Doyle 43%, McCallum 35%, Thompson 6%, Young 1%. If respondents who did not indicate any major party candidate were further pushed to indicate a preference "if you had to choose between McCallum and Doyle, which one would you prefer", the two come out quite close: McCallum 48%, Doyle 50%. This suggests that, net, the presence on the ballot of the two "third party candidates" harms the Governor, since they provide a way of voting against him without being for Doyle.

This is consistent with the fact that a race involving an incumbent is at least in part a referendum on his or her performance. If it is good enough, many will not really look at a challenger. If it is not, much depends on

whether the challenger is seen as acceptable, and if so, he or she can pick up support as "someone else". Looking at patterns of support for the major party candidates bears this out. (The number opting for anyone else is too small to permit systematic examination of their constituencies, but it is worth noting that if one comes down to a two way choice, the Governor does better than when respondents have multiple choices for an alternative.

Remaining with the "leaning" question, both major party candidates at least tentatively hold on to their "own" partisans, but not with unanimity. Republicans prefer McCallum to Doyle by 70%-15%; Democrats prefer Doyle to McCallum by an almost identical margin of 70%-16%. Twice as many of those calling themselves Independents opt tentatively for Doyle as do so for McCallum, but this leaves three in ten inclining to someone else or without even a tentative choice at this moment.

There seems to be something of a gender gap. Among men, McCallum edges Doyle by 39%-36% (within the margin of error). Among women, on the other hand, Doyle has a more substantial lead over McCallum (50%- 31%). Some of this is due to the fact that women as a group are more likely to call themselves Democrats than are men, while the latter group is more likely to be Republicans.

If the race were simply an up/down on perceptions of the Governor, McCallum lacks the advantage of a popular incumbent. His job ratings (6% excellent, 29% good, 40% poor, and 18% poor) are mediocre, if substantially similar to what we found in our June survey (3% excellent, 32% good, 35% fair, 19% poor).

General impressions of Scott McCallum are themselves mixed. Overall, 37% of voters have a favorable impression of him, compared to 31% who have an unfavorable impression. (The reminder either said they didn't know enough to come to a summary impression, or otherwise failed to answer the question. Thus only two voters in three have enough of a sense of him to give an overall impression. (In June, figures for the Governor were essentially identical (39%-32%).

The Democratic challenger fares little better. Now, 37% have a favorable impression of him, while 22% view him unfavorably. His "negatives" are thus a bit better than McCallum's, but there is some evidence they have grown since June. On that survey, 36% viewed Doyle favorably, 15% unfavorably, so as the favorables have held while his negatives have increased modestly, which is not the kind of change one wants from a campaign.

The third party candidates lag in recognition. Ed Thompson is viewed negatively on balance (26%-15%) also unchanged really since June's reading of 26%-16%. The Green Party's Jim Young remains a bit of a cipher to the electorate. In September, fewer than one in ten had an impression at all (2% favorable, 6% unfavorable). June found him rated by even fewer (3% favorable, 3% unfavorable). Just under half (46%) of all persons indicating a preference say they are strongly for their candidate. As may be seen in the detailed tables following this summary, this is virtually identical for McCallum (49%) and Doyle (46%) supporters, with the Governor's constituency being at least as committed as Doyle's is.

Overall, just OVER half of voters say that they are "more FOR" their candidate (52%) while four in ten (39%) describe their choice as being more "AGAINST the others". Here, there is a difference between the Governor's backer and Doyle's. Among the former, almost two thirds (62%) say they are mostly for their man. The comparable figure for Doyle is just under half (49%). This reflects the "referendum on performance" component of an election with an

incumbent.

The two are closer again when it comes to stated determination to stick to the tentative decision. All respondents indicating at least a tentative choice were asked, "would you say that you are pretty sure to vote that way, or that you might change your mind between now and the election?". Six in ten (61%) think they will hold steady, but almost four in ten (37%) say they "might change your mind between now and the election". McCallum's constituency (65% pretty sure) is at least as clear as Doyle's (61% indicating they are "pretty sure").

On a final measure, respondents were asked if they were absolutely certain to vote on November 5, and if not how likely they were actually to cast a ballot. This question was put AFTER the various preference related questions and other election related items. Overall, somewhat over two thirds (69%) claimed it was certain that they would vote, one in four (25%) said they probably would. McCallum and Doyle demonstrate a similar pattern. Among this group, however, Doyle's advantage over the Governor increases somewhat to 47% compared to 38% with 6% for Thompson and 1% for young. Clearly though, what turnout actually comes out to be can be crucial. And if the choice were just between McCallum and Doyle, the spread between them (51% Doyle, 47% McCallum) is within the margin of error. (This means that, if every eligible person claiming to be certain of voting were asked this question, it is more likely that Doyle would outpoll McCallum than vice versa, but there is too much of a chance that one could obtain this result in a sample by chance even if McCallum backers in the population equally matched Doyle voters for one to be confident that the lead is "real".)

It should be emphasized that things are still very early, and the public intends to focus more clearly on the election in the future. Thus, just over half (54%) of respondents say it makes "a lot" of difference who gets elected Governor this year, with 32% saying "some", 9% only a little, and 3% none at all, providing an incentive to gather information before one has to vote. McCallum and Doyle constituencies are quite similar in how vital they view this contest. But, voters know there is time to gather more information and make up their minds, and they know the election is not "being held tomorrow".

Despite the perceived importance of the ultimate choice, only one in five registered voters (21%) say they have so far been paying a lot of attention to the candidates. Four in ten (42%) have been paying some, 28% only a little and 10% none at all. Doyle backers are slightly more likely to have paid a lot of attention, but in neither camp is this figure very high (27% for Doyle leaners, 20% for McCallum). Looking ahead, voters manifest cautious optimism that when things finally must be decided they will have the necessary information. One in three (34%) is very confident they "will have enough information to really make up your mind about who would make the best Governor of Wisconsin". Just under half (47%) say they are "somewhat confident" that this WILL be the case. Those who are now backing the Governor are more likely than those in Doyle's corner to feel very confident (41% versus 33%), but both figures help indicate that things remain at a relatively early stage, with many planning to focus more closely on the contest in the weeks ahead.

Neither major party candidate, it should be noted, has the kind of near universal basic familiarity civics books might hope for, and the "disconnect" between the perceived importance of the race and the information actually in voter's minds provides grounds for expecting both that many will turn their attention more closely to the campaign and that, for many voters, it is not so much a question of changing minds as making them up.

GOV01. The ballot for Governor this year is a race between Scott McCallum as the Republican, and Jim Doyle as the Democrat. Also on the ballot are Ed Thompson for the Libertarian Party and Jim Young for the Green Party. Which one will you vote for, or haven't you really made up your mind yet?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
MCCALLUM	20%	22%	17%	6%	9%	50%	56%	--%	--%	--%	23%
DOYLE	26	23	30	52	19	6	--	61	--	--	32
THOMPSON	3	3	3	3	6	*	--	--	38	--	3
YOUNG	1	1	--	1	2	--	--	--	8	--	1
HAVEN'T MADE UP MIND	48	48	48	37	61	41	42	38	51	88	41
OTHER SPECIFIC PERSON	1	2	1	1	2	1	--	--	--	10	*
DON'T KNOW	1	1	*	*	1	--	--	1	3	1	*
REFUSED	1	1	1	*	1	2	1	*	--	1	1

GOV01A. (IF NO CHOICE) If you had to express a preference as of now, which one would you prefer?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
MCCALLUM	31%	34%	28%	27%	23%	46%	100%	--%	--%	--%	36%
DOYLE	34	26	42	49	43	21	--	100	--	--	36
THOMPSON	7	9	4	5	8	7	--	--	83	--	7
YOUNG	1	2	1	--	3	--	--	--	18	--	*
DON'T KNOW	24	24	24	18	21	23	--	--	--	88	18
REFUSED	3	5	2	2	2	3	--	--	--	12	3

GOV02. Would you say you are strongly for your candidate or not so strongly for him?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
FOR YOUR CANDIDATE	46%	42%	50%	50%	39%	55%	49%	46%	40%	13%	52%
NOT STRONGLY FOR	48	52	45	46	59	43	46	49	57	47	44
NEITHER (VOL.)	4	5	3	2	2	2	3	4	--	40	3
DON'T KNOW	2	2	2	2	--	*	2	2	3	--	1
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

GOV03. And are you more FOR your candidate, or more AGAINST the others?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
FOR CANDIDATE	52%	49%	56%	51%	43%	63%	62%	49%	35%	14%	53%
AGAINST OTHERS	39	42	35	40	50	33	32	41	59	15	40
MIXED (VOL.)	3	3	3	4	4	1	3	4	--	--	3
DON'T KNOW	5	6	5	4	2	4	3	5	7	65	3
REFUSED	1	1	2	1	1	--	1	1	--	7	1

GOV04. Would you say that you are pretty sure to vote that way, or that you might change your mind between now and the election?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
PRETTY SURE	61%	59%	63%	68%	46%	76%	65%	61%	45%	72%	67%
MIGHT CHANGE MIND	37	39	35	31	53	24	34	37	55	7	33
DON'T KNOW	2	2	1	1	1	--	1	2	--	14	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	--

GOV05. (UNLESS McCallum or Doyle) If you had to choose between McCallum and Doyle, which one would you prefer?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
MCCALLUM	27%	33%	18%	15%	32%	55%	--%	--%	43%	18%	32%
DOYLE	27	21	35	50	28	18	--	--	44	19	34
EITHER/BOTH	1	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	2
NEITHER	10	16	2	4	13	--	--	--	7	12	9
DON'T KNOW	32	24	44	31	28	23	--	--	7	45	20
REFUSED	3	5	1	--	--	5	--	--	--	5	3

LEANERS. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM; COMBINING GOV01,GOV01A) Choice, including "if you had to make up your mind"

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
MCCALLUM	35%	39%	31%	16%	24%	70%	100%	--%	--%	--%	38%
DOYLE	43	36	50	70	46	15	--	100	--	--	47
THOMPSON	6	7	5	5	11	4	--	--	83	--	6
YOUNG	1	2	*	1	4	--	--	--	18	--	1
OTHER SPECIFIC	1	2	1	1	2	1	--	--	--	10	*
DON'T KNOW	12	12	12	7	13	10	--	--	--	80	8
REFUSED	2	2	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	11	1

MAJOR. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, COMBINING LEANERS, GOV06) Major Party preference (pushing respondents for McCallum/Doyle choice)

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
MCCALLUM	48%	52%	43%	25%	40%	77%	100%	--%	45%	62%	47%
DOYLE	50	44	56	74	57	21	--	100	36	30	51
EITHER/BOTH	1	2	1	1	1	1	--	--	5	5	1
NEITHER	1	3	*	1	2	1	--	--	14	3	2
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	*

GOV32. In the 1998 election for Governor, did you vote for Tommy Thompson, Ed Garvey, someone else, or didn't you happen to vote in that election?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
THOMPSON	50%	56%	43%	32%	41%	80%	77%	37%	36%	29%	58%
GARVEY	11	11	12	24	13	--	2	22	5	3	15
SOMEONE ELSE	5	3	6	7	8	--	2	7	8	4	5
DIDN'T VOTE	26	25	27	27	27	17	16	25	40	45	15
INELIGIBLE (VOL.)	2	2	1	1	2	2	--	2	5	4	1
DON'T KNOW	5	2	8	8	7	1	3	6	5	9	6
REFUSED	2	1	2	1	3	--	--	2	--	6	1

GOV33. (ASK EVERYONE) Is it absolutely certain you will vote in the upcoming election on November 5? (If not) Would you say you probably will vote, probably won't vote, or definitely will not vote?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
CERTAIN TO VOTE	69%	67%	70%	71%	67%	74%	74%	74%	63%	42%	100%
PROBABLY WILL VOTE	25	26	25	27	24	23	23	23	33	32	--
PROBABLY WON'T VOTE	4	4	3	2	5	2	2	2	4	12	--
DEFINITELY WON'T VOTE	2	2	1	1	2	*	*	*	--	8	--
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	2	--	1	--	--	3	--
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	--

GOV34. When it comes right down to it, how much difference do you think it makes who gets elected Governor of Wisconsin this year? A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
A LOT	54%	51%	57%	53%	53%	63%	59%	57%	48%	37%	62%
SOME	32	32	33	34	30	28	32	33	30	35	28
ONLY A LITTLE	9	13	6	10	12	8	9	7	16	15	8
NONE AT ALL	3	3	3	3	5	1	*	2	7	10	1
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	--	*	1	1	--	3	1
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

ELEC16. By the time the campaign is over, how confident are you that you will have enough information to really make up your mind about who would make the best Governor for Wisconsin? Are you very confident, somewhat confident, only a little confident, or not confident at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
VERY CONFIDENT	34%	39%	29%	31%	36%	42%	41%	33%	24%	24%	43%
SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	47	39	54	46	45	44	44	48	53	43	44
ONLY A LITTLE CONFIDEN	15	16	14	17	14	13	13	14	15	24	10
NOT CONFIDENT AT ALL	4	6	3	6	6	2	2	4	8	8	3
DON'T KNOW	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--
REFUSED	*	*	--	1	--	--	--	1	--	--	*

QD03. Are you currently registered to vote in Wisconsin?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
Yes	96%	96%	96%	97%	93%	97%	99%	97%	95%	88%	99%
No	3	3	4	1	7	3	1	3	5	9	1
Will register on/befor	*	*	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	1	--
DON'T KNOW	*	*	*	1	1	--	--	*	--	1	*
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

QD03A. (ASKED ONLY OF NON-REGISTERED IN QD03) Do you have definite plans to register on or before November 5?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
Yes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
No	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			LEAN PREF			VOTE	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	MCC	DOY	OTR	DK	CRT
Democrat	34%	28%	41%	100%	--%	--%	16%	56%	28%	18%	35%
Republican	29	29	28	--	--	100	57	10	14	23	31
Independent	20	23	17	--	100	--	13	21	39	22	19
Other	10	12	9	--	--	--	6	8	12	24	8
None	4	4	3	--	--	--	4	2	8	7	4
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	--	--	--	3	3	--	4	2
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	1	*	--	3	*

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 539 "registered voters" (including some twenty who said they had definite plans to register on or before election day) were interviewed by telephone from September 17 to 25, 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 voter 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".