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GENERAL VIEWS OF THE GOVERNOR AND THE FISCAL SITUATION
 by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Governor Doyle's job ratings seem to have weakened a bit over the past weeks. Overall, just under four in ten rate his performance so far as either excellent (4%) or good (33%). Rather more than half choose one of the two lower ratings of fair (35%) or poor (10%). About a month ago, in early March, the balance was more positive. Then, those rating the Governor (as opposed to saying it was still too early to tell or otherwise not expressing an opinion) split roughly evenly between those who called it excellent (7%) or good (31%) versus those labeling it as fair (31%) or poor (10%). By itself, this difference is small. Compared to earlier ratings of Doyle and his predecessor (shown in a separate table), he now does less well than at the start of his term, but somewhat better than McCallum did on any of the three readings during his last full year in office. Most views of Doyle continue to be toward the middle (that is either good or fair) compared to the more "extreme" excellent or good.

Ratings of Governor

	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03+	SPT02	JUN02	MAR02
Incumbent Governor Rating							
EXCELLENT	4%	7%	5%	10%	5%	3%	3%
GOOD	33	36	34	44	29	32	23
FAIR	35	31	27	31	39	35	40
POOR	10	10	5	3	17	19	23
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL)	9	10	22	n/a	2	4	4
DON'T KNOW	10	6	7	9	8	7	7
REFUSED	*	*	*	2	*	*	2

+Rating was of job Doyle was expected to do, previous were McCallum

Democrats are more pro-Doyle than Republicans. As may be seen in the group by group result shown after this summary, just about half rate him good or better among the former, compared to about one in three among the latter, but these partisan differences are smaller than are often noted for Chief Executives at either the national or state level. Women as a group are modestly more likely to rate Doyle more highly than men as a group. When it comes to age, those between thirty and forty-five are most critical, those in the next highest group are most supportive.

State politics has been focused on the fiscal situation. When respondents were asked whether or not "Doyle will be able to solve Wisconsin's budget problems", opinion is mixed to say the least. Those who say he will be able to do so (37%) are narrowly outnumbered by those (43%) who think he will not, although 6% volunteered he Confidence has NOT increased since the last poll, when four in ten gave each answer (41% saying he would solve the problem and 39% saying he would not). Indeed, as the separate table shows, results for the February survey, conducted just before his budget message, but when the general shape of the proposals was becoming clear also showed a very close split, and their continues to be more optimism (less pessimism) than was evident in the January survey as he came into office.

No demographic group examined shows much optimism on this front. Men are modestly more hopeful about Doyle's ability to solve the situation than women. Republicans express more doubts than Democrats or (to a lesser extent) Independents. The pattern noted for age groups above in overall Doyle support finds echo on this specific perception, with those between thirty and forty-four being doubtful (by more than two to one), and those in the next higher group showing the most optimism.

Despite the repeated promises on all sides not to raise taxes, state residents feel on balance that they will be asked to open their wallets one way or the other. Respondents were first asked what they thought would happen to state "charges for things like licenses, permits, and user fees". Almost nine in ten expect this to go up, although not necessarily greatly, with 20% saying the amount they pay will go up a lot, and 68% saying it will go up "some". Almost all the remainder (11%) say this will stay the same.

Groups tend not to differ sharply on this. Compared to the twice before this question has been asked (in February and March) the present sentiment shows no increase in expectations for fee increases. On each of the earlier surveys, as now, about nine in ten expected fees to go up at least some, but the proportion thinking they would increase "a lot" was, if anything, modestly higher. It would seem that what specifics have so far emerged have generally confirmed, but not heightened the earlier more general expectations.

There is a less onesided view when it comes explicitly to "taxes". To be sure, the Governor and legislative leaders are all on record as opposing tax increases, while the "pledge" was no where nearly as strong as regards fees. Still, two thirds think that their own taxes will go up (8% a lot, 59% some). As was the case with fees, virtually all the remainder (29%) think they will stay the same; people who expect their own state tax burden to go down are few and far between.

As was the case with fees, demographic patterns tend to be weak or nonexistent, sentiment that taxes will go up at least some, for instance ranges only from a low of 62% among Democrats to 74% among Republicans. Those in the oldest group are least likely to expect their own levies to increase, but still six in ten think they will. As may be seen in the cross-time table, the expectation of somewhat higher tax burdens has held remarkably stable since January.

If residents expect that in the end they will pay more, this does not mean they prefer it. Some two thirds (66%) describe Wisconsin taxes as now being too high. This contrasts with three in ten (30%) who feel they are about right, and a handful (2%) who think they are too low. Sentiment that taxes are too high rises from one in two among Democrats to three in four among Republicans and from under half among the youngest to three in four for the forty-five to fifty-

Short-Run Fiscal Expectations

	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03
Doyle and fiscal problem				
CAN SOLVE	37%	41%	41%	25%
CAN'T SOLVE	43	39	40	54
HELP, NOT SOLVE (VOL.)	6	9	4	5
DON'T KNOW	14	11	14	15
REFUSED	1	*	1	1
Expectation for fees				
GO UP A LOT	20%	26%	26%	
GO UP SOME	68	62	65	
STAY ABOUT THE SAME	11	10	7	
GO DOWN SOME	*	*	*	
GO DOWN A LOT	*	*	--	
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	
REFUSED	*	--	--	
Expectation for own taxes				
GO UP A LOT	8%	8%	12%	11%
GO UP SOME	59	56	57	57
STAY ABOUT THE SAME	29	32	28	24
GO DOWN SOME	1	1	1	3
GO DOWN A LOT	*	*	*	1
DON'T KNOW	2	3	2	3
REFUSED	*	*	--	1

nine year old group before falling back to two thirds. But this means that all groups are predisposed to feel the present level is enough and more than enough.

Similar views emerge when respondents were asked about the level of state spending. Here, six in ten (61%) labeled that as too high, while one in four (26%) found it about right and again a handful (2%) felt it was too low overall. Group patterns are in general similar to what was found for taxes, and MOST groups (except for those under thirty manifest as much or more resistance to taxes as to spending, that is the proportion saying taxes are too high is the same or higher than the proportion saying spend levels are.

These sentiments are nothing new, and have been generally evident since the very first Badger Poll™ in March of 2003, as may be seen in the accompanying table. The past several surveys have hovered around two thirds saying taxes are too high, whereas earlier it was usually only very modestly higher at a level just above seven in ten (with a "spike" last June). When it comes to spending, the proportion saying THAT is too high has tended to be modestly lower than the the comparable proportion for taxes, but the "gap" between the two was generally bigger last year.

Because taxes are, for most, at best a necessary evil, and it can be difficult to find widespread support for particular cuts, a key question is how seriously the public takes the fiscal situation. Respondents were asked whether "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". In April 2003, somewhat over four in ten (43%) say such a choice must be made, but an equal number (43%) say it is possible to have one's cake (by

keeping taxes down) and eat it to (by maintaining programs). Men are twenty points more likely than women to believe a choice is necessary. Among age groups the proportion ranges from one in three (among the youngest) to numbers approaching half, with the forty-five to fifty-nine year olds most convinced on balance that a choice is necessary. Party makes little difference. But clearly, substantial doubt remains across the board.

Moreover, if one looks at cross-time trends, it would appear that what had looked like a general increase in belief that serious choices would have to be made (with a modest downward blip last June) has not continued. Whether this represents another "blip" or whether belief in the reality of serious dilemmas has plateaued remains to be seen. But the general upward trend has not continued.

General Budget-Related Perceptions Across Time

	APR03	MAR03	FEB03	JAN03	SPT02	JUN02	MAR02
Current level of taxes							
TOO HIGH	66%	62%	68%	71%	74%	77%	71%
TOO LOW	2	1	1	1	2	1	2
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	30	36	29	26	22	19	24
DEPENDS ON TAX (VOL.)	1	2	1	*	*	1	1
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	1	--	*	*
Current level of spending							
TOO HIGH	61%	61%	66%	63%	63%	58%	61%
TOO LOW	2	2	2	3	3	5	5
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	26	24	21	22	23	25	25
DEPENDS ON PROG. (VOL)	3	4	2	3	2	3	5
DON'T KNOW	8	9	9	8	9	9	5
REFUSED	--	*	*	1	1	1	*
Serious budget choices							
HAVE TO CHOOSE	43%	50%	46%	41%	30%	34%	28%
DOESN'T HAVE TO	43	41	42	46	56	55	56
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	5	3	5	4	3	5	6
DON'T KNOW	8	4	6	9	10	6	8
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	1	--	2

Going along with this, despite the fact that the budget as proposed contains some significant cuts, the public has not clearly engaged on this issue. When asked how much attention they were paying to "Governor Doyle's tax and spending plan", only one in ten (11%) said "a lot". Including those who said "some" (38%) still leaves us no higher than about one in two. The only demographic to show much impact on the level of attention is age. For those below forty-five the proportion paying a least some attention is below one in three. This rises to seven in ten among those forty-five to fifty-nine, and falls back to one in two for the older group.

If one compares the present level of attention to what was found when the parallel question was asked before (last March and both June and March of 2002), the public seems now to be paying no more attention than at earlier stages. Indeed, roughly one year ago, six in ten were paying at least some attention. In June levels modestly declined, but one month ago were almost exactly back to

where they had been one year previously, before declining again in April, which has the lowest proportion yet found who were paying "a lot" of attention.

Of course, this is not merely a reflection of how critical members of the public think the situation is. All things being equal, the more seriously something is taken, the more attention people will pay. But all things are not equal, and the fact that the state continues to face a large budget gap which has not been resolved must content with other claimants on people's attention. The period from March 2003 to April 2003 of course coincided with the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq, which tended to dominate the news and reduce the subjective importance of other issues.

The public may not be familiar with the details of the only specific plan now before the Legislature, namely that proposed by Governor Doyle, and manifestly has not focused on the issue. Nonetheless, they can have (and do) at least general predispositions about it. "To make up the deficit, the Governor proposes holding taxes where they are, but sharply cutting a number of programs, eliminating more than 1000 state jobs, and counting on extra money from Indian gambling casinos and the Federal government". So described, opinion divides roughly five to four in favor: 9% strongly favor; 45% somewhat favor; 29% somewhat oppose; 14% strongly oppose. It is worth noting here that not only is the balance relatively close, but intensity (those taking a position strongly as opposed to somewhat) is relatively lacking.

Men are more favorably disposed to the plan than women as a group. Partisan reaction is evident, but scarcely overwhelming. Ignoring intensity, Democrats favor the plan by a bit less than two to one, Independents by about five to four, and Republicans narrowly oppose it on balance. But the budget finds substantial groups of each party on both sides, and this level of partisan distinction is lower than many would expect. Older residents tend to be more favorable than younger residents.

Similar questions (changing the reference to the Governor and the description of the plan) have been on Badger Polls™ before. In March of this year, the balance of opinion was almost two to one in favor (16% strongly favor, 47% somewhat favor, 23% somewhat oppose, 10% strongly oppose). Thus the intervening month has seen some slippage in positive predisposition as well as attention to the issue.

Last year, parallel queries looked to public reaction to then Governor McCallum's plan, described as "to make up the deficit, the Governor has proposed holding taxes where they are, but cutting a number of programs, in particular the money the state gives cities and towns for purposes OTHER than education." In both March and June of last year, results found about a five to four margin opposing rather than favoring the plan. (The two surveys were virtually identical, as may be seen in the table). In any event, sentiment about McCallum's plan was similarly close, but in the opposite direction.

Attention/Reaction to Governor's Budget

	APR03	MAR03	JUN02	MAR02 Attention
paid to Gov. Plan				
A LOT	11%	16%	15%	16%
SOME	38	44	36	43
ONLY A LITTLE	27	23	23	19
NOT MUCH AT ALL	24	16	26	20
DON'T KNOW	*	1	--	1
REFUSED	*	--	--	*
General Reaction to it				
FAVOR STRONGLY	9%	16%	7%	7%
FAVOR SOMEWHAT	45	47	33	34
OPPOSE SOMEWHAT	29	23	33	33
OPPOSE STRONGLY	14	10	20	21
DON'T KNOW	3	4	8	4
REFUSED	1	1	--	1

Reference to then current Governor by name

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%	--%	36%	58%	58%	46%	56%	51%	42%
FEMALE	51	--	100	64	42	42	54	44	50	58

Q04. 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	4%	3%	5%	3%	6%	3%	3%	3%	6%	4%
GOOD	33	31	35	46	24	29	32	24	41	35
FAIR	35	38	32	31	39	36	43	40	31	28
POOR	10	12	8	5	8	17	8	16	7	8
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL)	9	8	9	6	12	7	1	2	11	16
DON'T KNOW	10	9	11	9	11	9	13	16	4	9
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	*	--

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	61%	62%	60%	51%	57%	71%	48%	63%	68%	59%
TOO LOW	2	2	2	6	3	--	4	1	3	1
JUST ABOUT RIGHT	26	27	26	33	28	19	37	24	19	30
DEPENDS ON PROG. (VOL.)	3	2	4	2	1	3	3	1	4	3
DON'T KNOW	8	7	9	8	10	7	8	11	6	7
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

BUDG02. In order to balance the state 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 taxes down?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
HAVE TO CHOOSE	43%	51%	35%	48%	47%	43%	32%	43%	49%	46%
DOESN'T HAVE TO CHOOSE	43	39	46	42	40	42	56	46	39	36
SOME OF EACH (VOL.)	5	4	7	4	6	6	4	4	7	5
DON'T KNOW	8	6	11	6	8	9	6	8	4	14
REFUSED	1	--	1	--	--	--	3	--	1	--

BUDG06. How much attention have you been paying to Governor Doyle's tax and spending plan? A lot, some, only a little, or not much at all?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
A LOT	11%	12%	11%	9%	13%	12%	6%	6%	17%	11%
SOME	38	38	37	38	38	40	22	26	53	39
ONLY A LITTLE	27	28	27	30	28	27	32	36	18	27
NOT MUCH AT ALL	24	21	26	23	20	21	40	32	12	22
DON'T KNOW	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	*	--	--	--	*

BUDG07. To make up the deficit, the Governor proposes holding taxes where they are, but sharply cutting a number of programs, eliminating more than 1000 state jobs, and counting on extra money from Indian gambling casinos and the Federal government. In general, do you strongly favor the plan, somewhat favor it, somewhat oppose it, or strongly oppose it?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVOR STRONGLY	9%	12%	6%	16%	8%	6%	2%	2%	13%	17%
FAVOR SOMEWHAT	45	48	41	48	49	39	35	43	52	43
OPPOSE SOMEWHAT	29	25	32	21	29	34	42	35	21	24
OPPOSE STRONGLY	14	11	17	14	10	16	16	18	12	12
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	2	3	4	4	2	2	4
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	1	1	*	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	28%	21%	35%	100%	--%	--%	28%	26%	27%	34%
REPUBLICAN	32	37	26	--	--	100	22	38	32	31
INDEPENDENT	22	26	18	--	100	--	20	19	24	24
OTHER	11	10	13	--	--	--	17	14	10	4
NONE	4	4	5	--	--	--	10	2	2	6
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	1	1	2
REFUSED	2	2	2	--	--	--	2	*	3	*

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	15%	15%	16%	15%	14%	11%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	24	28	21	22	21	30	--	100	--	--
45-59	32	33	31	31	35	32	--	--	100	--
60 and over	25	21	28	30	27	24	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	4	3	4	1	3	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 509 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between April 8 and 15, 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".