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SENATOR RUSS FEINGOLD IN FALL 2003
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Overall, just under half of all state residents rate Senator Feingold's job performance as either excellent (10%) or good (38%), compared with four in ten who think either fair (29%) or poor (11%) is more like it. He tends to be viewed more positively by his fellow Democrats, almost two thirds of whom rate him good or higher, a proportion half again as high as is found among either Independents or Republicans, with the latter being more critical in that there are fewer excellents and more poors than is the case for Independents. Women are somewhat more upbeat about Feingold's performance than are men.

He compares favorably with other Federal officeholders about whom the poll asked. Ratings of President Bush, for instance, split pretty evenly between excellent (15%) and good (35%) on the one hand versus fair (27%) or poor (21%) on the other. And partisan patterns are not only reversed in direction (as would be expected, with Republicans rating Bush higher and Democrats rating Feingold higher, but the difference between the parties is stronger for Bush than for Feingold.

These are overall figures, but one can compare ratings at the individual level too, asking how many rate Bush higher than Feingold (e.g. excellent compared to good, or fair compared to poor), how many assign the two the same "grade", and how many give Feingold a higher rating than Bush. (These are shown in the numerical results which follow this summary as "CONSTRUCTED ITEMS".

Only about one in three (31%) gave the President the same score as the Senator. Since about one in eight (13%) failed to rate one or both of the two, this means that more than half gave the two different grades. Overall, those who graded Feingold higher (31%) slightly outnumbered those who graded Bush higher (26%). As would be expected, some six in ten Democrats rated Feingold higher than Bush, only a handful rated Bush higher. Among Republicans, half rated Bush higher and a small minority reversed the pattern. Six in ten independents gave the two different ratings, but there was not overall pattern in who they graded more highly.

Feingold also tends to outscore the US Congress in general. Roughly one in three call Congress's performance excellent (1%) or good (34%), contrasted with rather over six in ten who label it fair (48%) or poor (15%). (Republicans tend to be more positive about the Congress which after all their party controls than Democrats, but Independents are most critical of Congress as a whole).

At the individual level, almost four in ten (37%) gave Feingold the same performance rating as they gave Congress, and one in eight failed to rate one or both. The half who explicitly differed on views of Congress in general and Feingold in particular broke about two to one (35%-16%) towards rating Feingold more highly. Democrats were especially likely to see Feingold as doing better than Congress, Independents who differentiated between the two were twice as likely to grade Feingold above Congress than vice versa. Republicans had a modest tendency to rate Congress as better if they made a distinction at all.

Overall, Feingold is graded on a rough par with his colleague, senior Senator Herb Kohl. Half called him excellent (8%) or good (42%), while four in ten stuck with a lower ratings of fair (31%) or poor (9%). This did mean, however, that Feingold's ratings are a bit more likely to fall at the ends of the scale (excellent or poor) than are Kohl's. They are also more polarized on a partisan basis than are the Senior Senator's (that is Kohl does not do quite so well among Democrats but does better among Republicans compared to Feingold).

In keeping with this overall balance, if one looks at the individual level, almost six in ten rate Kohl identically with Feingold. Adding the one in seven who fail to rate either or both leaves only a bit more than one in four who assigned the two men different grades. They split evenly between those rating Kohl higher than Feingold and those rating Feingold higher than Kohl.

Besides the job ratings, Feingold also appeared on a list of politicians about whom respondents were asked if they had a favorable impression, an unfavorable impression, or could not make up their minds. Feingold is known enough to just about two residents in three for them to state an overall impression and it tends to be favorable (41%-23%). This contrasts with George Bush (60%-34%) in terms of the level of familiarity but is on a rough par with him in terms of the balance of opinion if one is willing to state an impression.

This masks a partisan pattern in which Democrats have a favorable view of Feingold by more than four to one (if they have an opinion), which slips to two to one favorable among Independents, and among Republicans there is a relatively narrow plurality of UNfavorable views. Bush by contrast shows an unfavorable balance of more than two to one among Democrats and overwhelmingly favorable views among Republicans.

The contrast with Kohl is interesting. Overall, a somewhat higher proportion of residents state an impression of Kohl (just under seven in ten), while the balance of views (50%-19%) is a bit better than the corresponding balance for Feingold. Kohl is also noteworthy in that the partisan pattern for him compared to Feingold is even weaker than Feingold's compared to Bush.

At the individual level, almost four in ten failed to state an impression of EITHER Feingold or Bush, and one in four either had a favorable view of both or an unfavorable view of both. The one in three who differed on the two split evenly between those rating Bush favorably and Feingold unfavorably or those who make the opposite distinction.

Comparing Feingold to Kohl finds almost half failing to rate either or both. But if both are rated, they tend to be seen the same. Just over four in ten either had favorable impressions of both or unfavorable impressions of both. The one in nine who differed split evenly concerning of which one they had a favorable view.

Like the President, Feingold is coming up for re-election this year. In terms of job rating for an incumbent, he may be in as strong a position as Bush.

In terms of his own favorability, though he is less well known than the President, the balance of views places him on a rough par with Bush. Earlier, we reported that many of Bush's rivals were not yet very well known, and many others had a unfavorability problem. Three potential challengers to Feingold were included in the favorability list.

None is widely known, Just under one in four have an impression of Russ Darrow (8% favorable, 14% unfavorable), with no strong partisan pattern. Bob Welch is known to almost as many (or is unknown to even more), and favorable mentions (9%) are close in number to unfavorable mentions (8%). He is, however, better liked in Republican and Independent circles than in Democratic ones. Finally, Tim Michels is known to fewer than one in ten.

All this suggests that the campaign is very much in its early stages. That said, when respondents were asked "do you think you would like to see Senator Feingold re-elected in 2004, or would you rather see someone else in the Senate instead", the answer by five to three (50%-30%) was "yes".

This contrasts with the even split (46%-45%) President Bush got on the parallel question about next year's presidential choice. Another contrast is in the strength of partisan reaction. To be sure sentiment that Feingold deserves another term declines as one moves across the partisan scale from his "friends" to his "enemies". But the differences are less. Democrats are less convinced Feingold should be returned than Republicans are that Bush should be. But while Democrats are as likely to want someone else in the White House as they are to want Feingold returned to the Senate, Republicans at this stage are only modestly against a new Feingold term.

As shown in the accompanying table, a number of these items have been on the same survey in the past. In absolute terms, Senator Feingold's job ratings have been pretty consistent. From February to May, no category moved more than two or at most three points. And there was even less change from May to October.

Kohl's job ratings have also been quite stable, while there has been some more movement with George W. Bush. His present ratings have not moved much from August (when there were no questions about Kohl or Feingold), but they had dipped some from May, which in turn was up some from February. In any event, in October, Feingold's position relative to the President is somewhat stronger in terms of job performance. Ratings of Congress overall have also been quite stable over the three surveys. May and October are extremely similar, and February was not much different.

This was the second time we have asked the "re-elect" question concerning Feingold. In May, fewer people came down on one side or the other for this question about Feingold than for the corresponding question about Bush. There was then a modest (42%-33%) edge for re-electing Feingold as opposed to having someone else. Since May, the number answering has increased as has the balance to where it is now better than it was for Bush. (A caveat is that in August, Bush was weaker on this dimension than he is now, so he has not been following a straight trajectory. With just the two datapoints for Feingold, we cannot be sure whether he has been.)

The election remains a year away. And it is a fair inference, judging from the low level of awareness of other potential challengers, that the public is not yet really focused on the campaign. Still, Feingold's job rating, his favorability standing and precisely the lack of awareness of alternatives all put him in a good "starting" position.

Federal Officeholders at Three Points in Time

	October	May	February
Rating of George W. Bush			
EXCELLENT	15%	25%	19%
GOOD	35	35	39
FAIR	27	25	25
POOR	21	14	16
TOO SOON TO TELL (vol)	--	*	--
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1
REFUSED	*	1	1
Rating of US Congress			
EXCELLENT	1%	1%	1%
GOOD	34	34	37
FAIR	48	46	45
POOR	15	15	12
DON'T KNOW	2	4	5
REFUSED	--	1	*
Rating of Herb Kohl			
EXCELLENT	8%	6%	6%
GOOD	42	39	40
FAIR	31	32	30
POOR	9	9	7
DON'T KNOW	10	14	16
REFUSED	*	1	1
Rating of Russ Feingold			
EXCELLENT	10%	7%	8%
GOOD	38	38	40
FAIR	29	30	27
POOR	11	11	10
DON'T KNOW	12	15	15
REFUSED	--	*	1
Like to See Feingold re-elected			
LIKE TO SEE FEINGOLD	50%	42%	
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	30	33	
DON'T KNOW	20	24	
REFUSED	*	1	
Like to see Bush re-elected			
LIKE TO SEE BUSH	46%	52%	
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	45	43	
DON'T KNOW	9	4	
REFUSED	*	1	

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%	--%	43%	48%	58%	53%	54%	46%	43%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	52	42	47	46	54	57

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	15%	18%	13%	1%	15%	37%	20%	16%	13%	14%
GOOD	35	35	35	18	36	48	36	40	33	31
FAIR	27	27	28	37	30	14	26	28	29	23
POOR	21	19	24	43	19	1	15	15	25	31
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	2	1	1	1	--	3	--	1	1
REFUSED	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	--	*

VOTE03. I'm going to read you a list of people in public life. For each of them, please tell me if you have a favorable impression of them, an unfavorable impression, or don't know enough to make up your mind. George W. Bush

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	60%	65%	54%	27%	60%	94%	66%	68%	55%	48%
UNFAVORABLE	34	29	39	64	34	5	27	27	39	44
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	5	4	5	7	5	1	4	5	6	6
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	3	1	1	3	1	1	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

VOTE06. Russ Feingold (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	41%	44%	38%	54%	41%	31%	30%	37%	38%	59%
UNFAVORABLE	23	31	15	12	22	39	24	26	25	15
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	35	24	46	33	36	28	44	36	36	25
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	*	1	2	--	2	1
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	--	1	--	1	--	--

VOTE07. Herb Kohl (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	50%	53%	47%	61%	48%	40%	34%	52%	45%	65%
UNFAVORABLE	19	24	14	13	19	31	18	16	21	20
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	30	22	38	25	33	29	48	32	32	13
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	--	*	--	1	1	1
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	1

VOTE17. Russ Darrow (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	8%	7%	8%	6%	9%	7%	3%	6%	12%	5%
UNFAVORABLE	14	18	11	19	17	14	13	13	17	15
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	76	72	80	73	72	78	83	78	71	78
DON'T KNOW	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2
REFUSED	*	1	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	2

VOTE18. Tim Michels (MIKE-uls) (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%	*%	1%	3%
UNFAVORABLE	5	7	3	5	8	2	1	4	6	8
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	92	88	95	92	89	94	95	93	92	87
DON'T KNOW	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1
REFUSED	*	1	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	2

VOTE19. Bob Welch (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVORABLE	9%	9%	10%	6%	10%	13%	10%	8%	9%	10%
UNFAVORABLE	8	13	4	15	9	5	4	6	10	13
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH	81	75	85	77	79	82	84	83	80	76
DON'T KNOW	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	*

GBRF2. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM) Comparison of Bush favorability to Feingold

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BUSH HIGHER	17%	23%	11%	2%	16%	39%	19%	22%	16%	11%
BOTH SAME	26	30	23	22	27	29	23	27	25	30
FEINGOLD HIGHER	19	19	18	39	21	1	12	13	20	30
ONE/BOTH DK	38	28	48	38	37	31	46	39	39	29

HKRF2. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM) Comparison of Kohl favorability to Feingold

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
KOHL HIGHER	6%	9%	3%	5%	5%	9%	7%	7%	7%	4%
BOTH SAME	42	47	37	48	49	40	28	41	41	58
FEINGOLD HIGHER	5	7	2	4	3	7	4	2	5	6
ONE/BOTH DK	47	37	58	42	43	44	61	50	48	32

BUSH06. As of now, do you think you would like to see President Bush reelected in 2004, or would you rather see someone else in the White House?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
LIKE SEE RE-ELECTED	46%	51%	41%	15%	45%	84%	49%	50%	45%	41%
LIKE SEE SOMEONE ELSE	45	40	50	79	44	11	43	40	45	50
DON'T KNOW	9	9	9	6	11	5	7	11	10	9
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*

RATE03. Thinking more generally of politics, How would you rate the job the US Congress is doing? Excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	1%	2%	--%	2%	--%	2%	--%	2%	2%	--%
GOOD	34	34	34	28	24	48	45	39	26	26
FAIR	48	47	49	47	57	43	39	48	51	52
POOR	15	16	15	20	18	7	9	11	20	19
DON'T KNOW	2	1	3	3	2	*	7	1	1	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

RATE04. How would you rate the job Herb Kohl is doing as Senator from Wisconsin? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	8%	10%	6%	13%	9%	4%	2%	8%	8%	14%
GOOD	42	37	46	45	36	41	32	45	40	47
FAIR	31	32	30	34	34	29	29	31	34	29
POOR	9	11	7	3	8	15	9	7	13	4
DON'T KNOW	10	10	11	5	12	11	28	10	6	7
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--

RATE05. How about the job Russ Feingold is doing as US Senator from Wisconsin? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY).

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
EXCELLENT	10%	11%	9%	17%	10%	5%	5%	8%	8%	20%
GOOD	38	31	44	45	32	36	36	34	36	45
FAIR	29	31	27	27	36	26	18	35	31	26
POOR	11	13	9	4	11	21	11	12	17	3
DON'T KNOW	12	13	12	8	11	13	30	11	8	6
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

GBRF1. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM) Comparison of Bush rating with Feingold rating

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BUSH HIGHER	26%	30%	21%	4%	30%	51%	20%	31%	27%	21%
BOTH SAME	31	27	35	29	30	28	31	33	32	27
FEINGOLD HIGHER	31	30	32	59	29	8	19	25	33	45
ONE/BOTH DK	13	13	12	8	11	13	30	12	8	7

CNRF1. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM) Comparison of Congress rating with Feingold rating

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
CONGRESS HIGHER	16%	19%	12%	7%	15%	29%	11%	20%	20%	7%
BOTH SAME	37	34	39	35	38	34	40	38	33	33
FEINGOLD HIGHER	35	34	37	49	36	24	18	30	38	54
ONE/BOTH DK	13	13	12	9	11	13	30	12	9	7

HKRF1. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM) Comparison of Kohl rating with Feingold rating

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
KOHL HIGHER	14%	16%	13%	10%	14%	18%	7%	19%	15%	13%
BOTH SAME	58	53	62	62	57	55	47	57	64	56
FEINGOLD HIGHER	14	16	12	19	14	13	14	10	11	24
ONE/BOTH DK	14	15	14	8	15	15	31	15	10	7

FEING01. As of now, do you think you would like to see Senator Feingold re-elected in 2004, or would you rather see someone else in the Senate instead?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
LIKE SEE FEINGOLD	50%	47%	53%	73%	45%	35%	40%	44%	53%	65%
LIKE SEE SOMEONE ELSE	30	34	27	16	36	46	35	34	32	16
DON'T KNOW	20	19	20	12	19	19	26	22	15	19
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*

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	30%	27%	33%	100%	--%	--%	28%	28%	32%	33%
REPUBLICAN	30	36	25	--	--	100	41	30	25	28
INDEPENDENT	21	21	21	--	100	--	8	21	25	26
OTHER	11	10	12	--	--	--	13	10	14	6
NONE	6	6	5	--	--	--	6	9	2	4
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	--	--	--	1	1	1	--
REFUSED	2	1	3	--	--	--	2	1	1	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%	17%	14%	14%	6%	21%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	31	34	28	29	31	31	--	100	--	--
45-59	30	29	32	32	37	25	--	--	100	--
60 and over	21	18	23	23	26	20	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	3	2	3	2	1	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 511 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between October 21 and 28, 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".