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RONALD REAGAN: LOOKING BACK AND POSSIBLE HONORS
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Many have commented on the outpouring of sentiment surrounding the death of former President Ronald Reagan. As a first assessment of how Wisconsinites look back on this man, the most recent Badger Poll™ contained a short series of items concerning Reagan. Results discussed below are based on 504 telephone interviews with randomly chosen adults from throughout Wisconsin conducted from June 15 to 23, inclusive.

We began to put Reagan into context by asking about where state residents would place the incumbent occupant of the Oval Office among Chief Executives. The most common answer (given by some 43%) was that Bush was "about average". One in four placed him higher than that, either as being one of the very best Presidents (3%) or better than most (22%). The group which put Bush below average, worse than most (17%) or one of the very worst (13%) was a bit larger. In general, though, George W. Bush seems to stand more or less in the middle of the ranks of Presidents.

Not surprisingly, Democrats differ clearly from Republicans. As may be seen in the detailed tables following this summary, six in ten Democrats put Bush below average, contrasted with only 5% who rate him above average. Indeed, one in three call him one of the very worst. Among Republicans, more than half put Bush above average, and almost all the others call him about average. Independents fall between. The two middle age groups place Bush a bit higher than do either the youngest or oldest, but differences tend to be rather modest. Those backing Bush's re-election tend to rank him above average, while almost six in ten of those who would like to replace him find him to be below average.

The picture is different for Ronald Reagan. Six in ten place him either as one of the very best Chief Executives (26%) or better than most (34%). Almost all the remainder (31%) say he was about average. This leaves only a relative handful who place him below the middle of the presidential pack, as worse than most (5%) or one of the very worst (2%).

During his term, Reagan was controversial, but there seems to have been some degree of consensus growing. It is less noteworthy that Democrats are less likely to call Reagan above average than Republicans are that, on balance, all groups examined are clearly more likely to say he was above average than below average.

One can compare the two, to see if Bush is placed in a higher group than Reagan (e.g. Bush as better than most, Reagan as average or worse), if the two

men fall in the same broad group, or if Reagan is ranked higher (e.g. Reagan as one of the very best, Bush any other answer, or Reagan is seen as about average while Bush is ranked lower). Almost two thirds (65%) of residents put Reagan on a higher rung on the presidential ladder than Bush. Almost all the remainder (28%) felt that Reagan and Bush belonged in the same group. Fewer than one in twenty (3%) placed Bush higher than Reagan, the remainder failed to answer the question for one or both Presidents.

This perception holds across a remarkable collection of groups. Thus there are no major discrepancies between men and women, or between self-described Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Those under thirty, who reached legal adulthood at or after Clinton's election, are somewhat less likely to rate Reagan higher and correspondingly more likely to rate Reagan the same as Bush. The next older group, who came of legal age more or less during the Reagan-Bush years, were a bit more likely to rate Reagan in a higher group than Bush. While party made little difference, there was something of a tendency for those who want Bush re-elected to be less likely to put Reagan in a higher group Bush. But the key finding is less such minor differences and more in the fact that group after group has a high proportion of people ranking Reagan higher than Bush.

The survey also asked about two proposals that have been floated for honoring Reagan. One was "putting him on US currency, such as the ten dollar bill or the dime". On balance just over half said they favored this, either strongly (12%) or somewhat (42%). On the other side, four in ten are against it (21% somewhat, 19% strongly).

Women as a group are more likely to back putting Reagan on some unit of money than are men. Support tends to be higher among those less than forty-five than among those above that age. Democrats are half again as likely to oppose the idea than to favor it, with three in ten in strong opposition. Independents tend to split, almost three Republicans in four endorse the idea. (The ten dollar bill, which would displace Hamilton, and the dime, which would substitute Reagan for FDR, were used as examples, but we did not probe whether reactions would be the same or different).

Putting a picture of Reagan in people's wallets and purses, however, seems on balance at least as popular as "naming an important federal building, such as the Pentagon, after Reagan". Overall, half favor this (11% strongly, 39% somewhat), while just under that figure oppose it (20% strongly, 25% somewhat).

Men and women differ less than was the case for currency. The two younger groups favor this idea on balance (the older of the two somewhat more clearly), those from forty-five to fifty-nine split, and only among those sixty and older is the notion opposed on balance. Partisan differences are MORE evident here than was the case for the money. Democrats are against it by almost two to one, Republicans favor it by a larger margin.

Overall then, while there seems to be a widespread sense that ranks well among presidents in general, and that he measures up higher than the present incumbent. Yet, there is some controversy over two of the ways which have been suggested for honoring him. The fact that these questions divide Republicans from Democrats is also worth noting, especially in the wake of the general sentiment at the time of Reagan's funeral that politics was less divisive when he was in the White House than it has been much of the time since.

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

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
MALE	49%	100%	--%	42%	52%	59%	51%	46%	49%	52%	56%	45%	55%	45%
FEMALE	51	--	100	58	48	41	49	54	51	48	44	55	45	55

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

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
EXCELLENT	14%	17%	11%	3%	7%	34%	11%	9%	17%	18%	30%	1%	27%	2%
GOOD	33	34	32	11	32	47	30	43	32	22	55	13	55	9
FAIR	27	25	29	35	34	16	27	30	27	27	14	37	18	36
POOR	25	24	26	50	26	3	31	17	24	31	*	48	1	53
TOO SOON TO TELL (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	1	--	2	1	--	--	2	1	--	1	--	1	--	*
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	*	--	*	--

VOTE24. This November, the ballot for President will probably be George W. Bush as a Republican, John Kerry as a Democrat, and Ralph Nader as an Independent. As of now, which one, if any, do you plan to vote for?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
GEORGE W. BUSH	42%	50%	34%	6%	32%	87%	37%	42%	44%	42%	90%	5%	85%	--%
JOHN KERRY	38	37	39	83	43	4	51	31	33	43	1	72	--	82
RALPH NADER	4	5	2	2	8	3	1	5	5	2	*	6	3	4
NONE OF THEM	4	2	5	2	3	*	5	5	2	3	2	5	2	4
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
WILL NOT VOTE	2	*	3	1	2	--	--	4	2	1	1	1	2	1
DON'T KNOW	10	4	15	5	10	5	6	12	13	6	6	9	9	7
REFUSED	1	1	2	1	2	1	--	2	1	3	--	2	--	1

VOTE25. (IF DID NOT NAME ONE OF THREE) If you had to make up your mind among these three, as of now who would you prefer?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
NOT ASKED	83%	92%	75%	92%	82%	94%	90%	78%	82%	87%	91%	83%	87%	87%
GEORGE W. BUSH	5	3	6	2	2	2	3	9	5	1	8	2	10	--
JOHN KERRY	4	2	6	2	5	2	3	5	3	7	--	8	--	9
RALPH NADER	2	*	3	2	2	--	3	1	4	*	--	3	1	3
NONE OF THEM	*	--	1	--	*	--	--	1	--	*	*	--	--	--
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	4	2	7	2	5	2	3	5	5	3	1	3	2	1
REFUSED	1	*	2	*	2	1	--	1	1	2	--	1	*	*

VOTE26. (UNLESS NAMED BUSH/KERRY IN VOTE24. OR VOTE25.) Suppose you were choosing just between Bush and Kerry? Which would you prefer?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
NOT ASKED	89%	92%	85%	94%	82%	95%	93%	87%	85%	93%	98%	86%	94%	91%
GEORGE W. BUSH	3	3	3	*	6	3	--	3	5	2	1	3	6	--
JOHN KERRY	4	3	4	4	7	*	3	5	6	2	--	7	--	9
NONE OF THEM	1	*	1	--	1	--	1	1	--	*	*	*	--	--
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	3	1	5	2	3	1	2	4	4	1	--	2	--	--
REFUSED	1	--	2	--	1	1	--	1	1	2	--	1	--	--

PUSH3WAY. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM FROM VOTE24, VOTE25) ADDING IN LEANERS If you had to make up your mind among these three, as of now

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
GEORGE W. BUSH	46%	53%	40%	9%	34%	90%	39%	51%	49%	43%	98%	6%	94%	--%
JOHN KERRY	42	39	45	85	48	6	54	35	36	50	1	80	--	91
RALPH NADER	5	6	5	4	10	3	4	6	9	2	*	9	4	7
NONE OF THEM	*	--	1	--	*	--	--	1	--	*	*	--	--	--
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	4	2	7	2	5	2	3	5	5	3	1	3	2	1
REFUSED	1	*	2	*	2	1	--	1	1	2	--	1	*	*

PUSH2WAY. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, COMBINING VOTE24-25) Choice between Bush and Kerry

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
GEORGE W. BUSH	49%	56%	43%	9%	40%	92%	39%	54%	54%	45%	99%	9%	100%	--%
JOHN KERRY	46	43	50	89	55	6	57	40	42	52	1	87	--	100
NONE OF THEM	1	*	1	--	1	--	1	1	--	*	*	*	--	--
INSISTS ON "OTHER"	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	3	1	5	2	3	1	2	4	4	1	--	2	--	--
REFUSED	1	--	2	--	1	1	--	1	1	2	--	1	--	--

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?

	GENDER				PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK	
LIKE BUSH RE-ELECTED	43%	50%	37%	8%	31%	86%	36%	47%	45%	42%	100%	--%	87%	1%	
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE	51	47	55	89	61	11	61	46	49	55	--	100	9	96	
DON'T KNOW	4	3	6	1	8	2	3	6	5	2	--	--	3	2	
REFUSED	1	1	2	2	*	1	--	1	1	2	--	--	--	2	

REAG01. Compared to other Presidents, would you say George W. Bush is one of the very best, better than most, about average, worse than most, or one of the very worst Presidents we have had?

	GENDER				PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK	
ONE OF VERY BEST (OR J	3%	5%	2%	--%	4%	7%	3%	2%	3%	6%	8%	--%	7%	--%	
BETTER THAN MOST	22	26	18	5	11	49	18	22	27	18	47	3	42	2	
ABOUT AVERAGE	43	39	47	35	54	41	43	48	41	39	44	38	47	36	
WORSE THAN MOST	17	16	18	28	22	2	23	14	16	18	1	32	2	34	
ONE OF VERY WORST (OR	13	13	13	31	9	1	11	13	12	16	*	25	*	27	
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	1	1	--	*	3	*	1	1	1	
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	

REAG02. How about Ronald Reagan, compared to other Presidents, would you say HE is one of the very best, better than most, about average, worse than most, or one of the very worst Presidents we have had?

	GENDER				PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK	
ONE OF VERY BEST (OR J	26%	32%	20%	8%	18%	51%	16%	31%	28%	26%	46%	12%	44%	9%	
BETTER THAN MOST	34	28	39	27	36	36	37	34	32	34	37	31	37	29	
ABOUT AVERAGE	31	29	32	45	39	12	26	26	31	37	17	41	17	45	
WORSE THAN MOST	5	6	4	12	2	--	8	3	6	2	--	9	1	9	
ONE OF VERY WORST (OR	2	3	2	5	2	--	4	2	3	*	--	4	--	4	
DON'T KNOW	2	2	3	4	3	1	9	2	1	*	*	3	*	4	
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	

RRGWB. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, BASED ON REAG01, REAG02)

	GENDER				PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK	
REAGAN RANKED HIGHER	65%	63%	67%	67%	65%	65%	53%	73%	65%	65%	59%	73%	61%	71%	
REAGAN SAME AS BUSH	28	30	27	25	31	29	33	22	30	31	37	20	34	22	
BUSH RANKED HIGHER	3	4	2	4	1	4	5	2	4	1	4	3	4	2	
ONE OR BOTH DK/REF	3	3	4	4	3	2	9	3	1	3	*	4	1	4	

REAG03. There have been proposals to honor Reagan by putting him on US currency, such as the ten dollar bill or the dime. Would you strongly favor this, somewhat favor it, somewhat oppose it, or strongly oppose it?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
STRONGLY FAVOR	12%	9%	15%	8%	11%	15%	10%	12%	18%	6%	18%	8%	16%	7%
SOMEWHAT FAVOR	42	39	46	33	39	56	51	49	35	41	53	34	51	34
SOMEWHAT OPPOSE	21	24	18	25	24	15	14	24	17	24	14	26	16	27
STRONGLY OPPOSE	19	23	15	29	21	10	22	11	24	23	9	28	11	28
DON'T KNOW	6	5	7	6	5	3	4	5	7	6	6	4	6	4
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

REAG04. How about naming an important federal building, such as the Pentagon, after Reagan. Would you strongly favor this, somewhat favor it, somewhat oppose it, or strongly oppose it?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
STRONGLY FAVOR	11%	12%	11%	4%	9%	21%	7%	15%	13%	7%	22%	3%	20%	3%
SOMEWHAT FAVOR	39	37	41	30	37	45	47	48	34	30	44	33	44	33
SOMEWHAT OPPOSE	25	24	25	36	23	17	27	19	22	32	15	32	17	34
STRONGLY OPPOSE	20	23	17	27	26	12	16	14	26	21	13	27	13	27
DON'T KNOW	5	5	6	3	5	5	2	3	6	10	5	4	6	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
DEMOCRAT	30%	26%	33%	100%	--%	--%	37%	27%	25%	33%	5%	52%	5%	57%
REPUBLICAN	31	37	25	--	--	100	24	37	31	30	62	7	58	4
INDEPENDENT	21	23	20	--	100	--	21	17	24	23	15	25	17	25
OTHER	13	11	15	--	--	--	13	16	16	7	14	11	15	9
NONE	3	3	3	--	--	--	4	2	3	3	2	3	2	3
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	1	--	2	1	*	1	*	2
REFUSED	1	--	3	--	--	--	--	1	*	3	2	1	2	*

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

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				RE-ELEC		TWOWAY		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	GWB	JK
18-29	16%	16%	15%	19%	15%	12%	100%	--%	--%	--%	13%	18%	12%	19%
30-44	28	26	29	25	22	33	--	100	--	--	30	25	30	24
45-59	31	31	31	26	35	31	--	--	100	--	32	30	34	28
60 and over	23	25	22	26	26	22	--	--	--	100	23	25	21	26
DK/REFUSED	2	2	3	3	2	2	--	--	--	--	2	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 504 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between June 15 and 23, 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".