

Gov. Racicot's rating still sky high

By CHARLES S. JOHNSON
IR State Bureau

Republican Gov. Marc Racicot remains at the top of the heap in the eyes of Montana voters who evaluated how their top elected officials are performing their jobs.

Racicot, who is seeking re-election next year, had a positive score of 74 percent, according to the latest Lee Newspapers poll of 817 registered voters done Dec. 15-17. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.

The state's three-member congressional delegation all hovered around the 50-percent positive mark for their job performance ratings. Republican U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns was highest at 53 percent, followed by Democratic U.S. Rep. Pat Williams at 50 percent and Democratic U.S. Sen. Max Baucus at 49 percent.

THOSE POLLED are asked to assess whether the job performance of each of these officeholders is "excellent," "good," "only fair" or "poor." As in the case of most polls, the Lee poll combines the

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—Pollster Del Ali

"excellent" and "good" ratings for a positive rating and the "only fair" and "poor" scores for a negative rating.

Racicot's 74 percent positive score included 26 percent of the people who said he was doing an excellent job and 48 percent who rated his job performance as good. His negative job score included 20 percent who rated him as only fair and 4 percent who rated him poor. The other 2 percent were undecided.

Pollster Del Ali said Racicot's rating, which has stayed in the 70 percentile range over three polls in the past year, is highly unusual.

"It's incredible," Ali said. "I absolutely am shocked he's held it."

He has the second highest rating of any governor in the 50 states in which Political/Media Research polls. The only one higher is Wisconsin Gov.

Tommy Thompson, also a Republican, who has a 76 percent score.

THE MONTANA GOVERNOR'S positive ratings peaked at 79 percent in December 1994, dropped to 73 percent in April after the 1995 Legislature adjourned and now moved up a point to 74 percent.

Racicot has faced sharp criticism the past year from Rob Natelson, a University of Montana law professor who is opposing him in the GOP primary in June. Natelson has accused Racicot of being a big spender and big taxer who is a Republican in name only, charges Racicot denies.

BURNS IS STILL approaching his high water mark with a positive rating of 53 percent (10 percent "excellent" and 43 percent "good") versus a negative rating of 44 percent (27 percent "only fair" and 17 percent "poor," Ali said.

His positive ratings were down in the 30s in May 1994, but they rose to the mid 50s later in 1994 during his re-election campaign in which spent \$3.4 million to easily defeat Democrat Jack Mudd by a 62 to 38 percent margin. His rating was 60 percent in December 1994.

BAUCUS, RUNNING FOR re-election next year, saw his positive ratings drop one percentage point to 49 percent (11 percent "excellent" and 38 percent "good"). His negative score is also 49 percent (28 percent "only fair" and 21 percent "poor"), while 2 percent are undecided.

His ratings tumbled in 1994 after his votes in support of the ban on semi-assault weapons and the Brady law requiring a waiting period to buy handguns. But Baucus bounced up to the 50-percent range over the past year.

WILLIAMS, SEEKING HIS ninth term in Congress next year, saw his numbers drop slightly this poll. His positive job performance score was 50 percent (13 percent "excellent" and 37 percent "good") from the 53 percent in April. His negative score in December was 45 percent (23 percent "only fair" and 22 percent "poor").

In 1994, Williams won with less than 50 percent of the vote. He had 49 percent, Republican Cy Jamison had 42, while independent Steve Kelly had 9 percent.

Lead

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Chet Blaylock, a retired teacher and legislator from Laurel, by a 75 to 10 percent margin, with 15 percent undecided.

In this poll, Racicot got the support of 77 percent of the men surveyed and 73 percent of the women, while Blaylock got the support of 12 percent of the men and 8 percent of the women. In all, 15 percent of those surveyed were undecided, including 11 percent of the men and 19 percent of the women."

Ali said Racicot's hardest battle may well be the primary election race against Natelson, "which I think is going to be a huge win for Racicot."

SENATE

Democrat Baucus may have a tougher time winning his fourth term in the Senate, based on the re-elect questions, although he enjoys healthy leads over likely challengers.

Those polled were asked if the election were held today, would they vote to re-elect Baucus, consider another candidate or vote to replace him.

Results showed 44 percent of those surveyed said they would re-elect Baucus, while 31 percent said they would consider another candidate and 25 percent would replace Baucus.

A gender gap was evident in this question. The poll showed 53 percent of the women surveyed but only 35 percent of the men would re-elect Baucus, while 36 percent of the men would consider another candidate compared with 26 percent of the women. Among men, 29 percent said they would vote to replace Baucus, compared with 21 percent of the women who favored getting a new senator.

If an incumbent has re-elect numbers under 50 percent, it's always a sign of vulnerability, Ali said, but Baucus' 44 percent isn't bad for a member of Congress in this period.

The poll tested Baucus against several potential challengers. Baucus would defeat Republican favorite, Lt. Gov. Dennis Rehberg, by a 48 to 24 percent margin, with independent Becky Shaw of Clancy, who ran as a Democrat for the Senate in 1994, getting 4 percent, and 23 percent

were undecided. Baucus would fare better with women, while Rehberg runs better with men, and Shaw favors slightly better with women.

"Max is definitely in better shape than he was a year ago, no doubt about it," Ali said. "Can Rehberg make this a race? Sure."

Ali said Shaw could help Rehberg by pulling away votes from Baucus because she's likely to draw Democrat votes.

Another potential opponent is Edward Borchardt, a Butte native and California businessman who has moved to Bozeman. Baucus would defeat Borchardt by a 50 to 13 margin, with Shaw getting 8 percent, and 29 percent undecided, the poll showed.

If Baucus is paired against John Domenech, a Bozeman businessman who unsuccessfully sought the GOP Senate nod in 1990, Baucus scores the best, taking 52 percent of the vote, compared with Domenech's 11 percent, Shaw's 7 percent and 30 percent undecided.

While the above questions were asked of all 817 respondents, the 238 Republicans in the sample were asked which GOP Senate candidate they would vote for if the election were held today.

Rehberg was the top choice among Republicans, although he didn't get a majority. Rehberg was the top choice of 47 percent of the Republicans, followed by Borchardt at 11 percent and Domenech at 4 percent, while 38 percent were undecided.

CONGRESS

In the race for Montana's lone congressional seat, 43 percent of the voters said they would re-elect Williams if the election were held today, while 28 percent said they would consider another candidate, while 29 percent said they would vote to replace him.

Ali said 43 percent isn't a bad number of a congressman, especially when people are upset at Congress, even though they often like their congressman.

Williams enjoyed stronger support from women as 46 percent of them favored re-electing him, compared with 40 percent of the men who backed him.

In three faceoffs against potential Republican opponents, Williams ran the strongest against

Rick Hill, a Helena businessman who heads the state workers' compensation board of directors. Williams would defeat Hill by a 54 to 21 percent margin, with 25 percent undecided if the election were held now.

Williams would get 58 percent of the women's votes and 50 percent of the men's votes, while Hill would get 27 percent of the men's votes and 15 percent of the women's votes.

Dwight MacKay, a former Yellowstone County commissioner and ex-Burns aide, would run the strongest of the Republicans against Williams but still trails. Williams would defeat MacKay by a 51 to 25 percent margin, with 24 percent undecided, if the election were held now.

Williams would get 54 percent of the female vote and 48 percent of the male vote, while MacKay would get 21 percent of the female vote and 29 percent of the

Roeder

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Roeder and Malone lectured widely on the early 1900s homestead boom in eastern and central Montana. In a talk in Great Falls in 1984, Roeder debunked the theory that homesteaders were "dumb honyockers."

Instead, he said, homesteaders developed new communities and institutions — such as schools and churches — in a vast region that previously had been unsettled. Largely conservative and Protestant, they brought a balance to Montana because the western part of the state was heavily liberal and Catholic, he said.

Malone said he has dedicated his new book, on the life of Great Northern Railroad magnate James J. Hill, to Roeder. The book will be released in January.

Roeder lived in Helena for more than a decade and served as executive assistant to Lt. Gov. George Turman in the 1980s. One of his primary interests was constitutional history, and he was described by several delegates as the "James Madison" of the 1972 convention that resulted in a new constitution for Montana. The nickname was applied for his skillful role in debating and help-

ing write the document.

Roeder was a past member of the Montana Historical Society's board of trustees and served on the editorial board of the Society's quarterly magazine, Montana: The Magazine of Western History. He also was an editorial board member and contributing essayist to the 1988 collection, "The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology" and was a columnist for the Independent Record's history column, "More From The Quarries of Last Chance Gulch."

Roeder was born in Schuylkill Haven, Penn., in 1930, graduated from Swarthmore College and received a Ph.D. in history from the University of Pennsylvania. He was a faculty member at Montana State University from 1962 to 1985, served as an adjunct professor at the University of Montana in 1991 and the College of Great Falls in 1992.

At the time of his death, he was general editor at Sweet Grass Books and had been an adjunct professor at Carroll College in Helena since 1986. Funeral services will be held Dec. 28 at 7 p.m. at Linden's Herrman and Co. Funeral Home in Helena.

Ski lift accident kills one

WHISTLER, British Columbia (AP) — One skier was killed and eight others injured Saturday when chairs from a ski lift tumbled 30 feet to the ground at Whistler Mountain.

The accident happened about 3 p.m., when thousands of pre-Christmas skiers crowded on the mountain. The resort, about 55 miles north of Vancouver, is one of the world's top spots for ski vacations.

"The best we can tell, four chairs became detached from their lift line and fell to the ground," said Whistler Mountain president Doug Forseth, who confirmed the death and the injuries.

"We don't know the cause of the accident at this point," he said. "Obviously we're going to continue to do the investigation as best we can, as quickly as we can."

The skier who was killed was not identified.

Poll

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by telephone from Dec. 15 through Dec. 17. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percent for the entire sample, but higher by subgroups of the total sample.

Phone numbers were selected by a random variation of the last four digits of the numbers, and a cross-section of exchanges were used to ensure an accurate reflection of the state. Quotas were assigned to reflect the voter registration distribution by county.

Here is the distribution of those polled:

Bells

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bell, the lower the tone.

The other 11 bells, all on the first tier, are technically chimes, Corbett said. They are stationary and struck by hammers.

The larger bells also can be struck by hammers. Together, the bells and chimes ring over a range of 1.5 octaves, beginning one-half step above middle C.

The largest bell in St. Helena's Cathedral is a 3,500-pound bell that strikes the D flat.

JOSEPH MUNZENRIDER, a professor of music at Carroll College, has a long history with the bells.

As a child in Helena during the 1950s, Munzenrider and friends would gather in a small room off of the choir loft to peal the bells. They used ropes hanging through a hole in the ceiling to ring the large bells anchored high above them.

Then, the bells would play morning, noon and evening, before Sunday mass, Sunday evening, before Tuesday mass and on both religious and secular holidays.

"We'd play the bells for a half hour or more," Munzenrider said.

The swing of the bells would lift the boys hanging onto the ropes 20 feet in the air, he added.

The swinging ended in 1958 when the bells and chimes were electrified.

Since then, they have been played from a keyboard in the

■ Eastern Montana, including Custer County: 15 counties, 98 interviews total.

■ Southeastern and southcentral Montana, including Yellowstone County: 11 counties, 162 interviews.

■ Northcentral and central Montana, including Cascade County: 12 counties, 145 interviews.

■ Southwestern Montana, including Lewis and Clark, Butte, Silver Bow and Gallatin counties: 10 counties, 204 interviews.

■ Western and northwestern Montana, including Missoula and Flathead counties: 8 counties and 208 interviews.

choir loft. Munzenrider described the change from rope power to electricity as "a huge mistake."

ELECTRIFYING THE bells has caused some problems.

The bells can draw too much electricity and "fry" the electronics, Corbett said.

The cold weather also causes problems with the electronics, Munzenrider said.

Still, the chimes are played occasionally from the keyboard, Corbett said.

Even though the playing of the bells has changed over the decades, 81 years after they were installed, the bells remain twice a day, a part of all Helenans' lives — once at noon and again at 6 p.m.

"You can hear them all over town," Munzenrider said. "I can even hear them from Mount Helena."

CORRECTION

It was incorrectly reported in a story in Saturday's IR that Tom Yurk was drafted for pro football while in the Navy. Yurk was drafted by pro baseball.

LOTTERY

Saturday **Powerball** numbers: **3-7-10-42-43**
Powerball 38. The estimated jackpot is \$10 million.
Saturday's **Tri-West Lotto** numbers: **5-8-19-25-32-33**.
The estimated jackpot is \$333,000.
Saturday's **Montana Cash** numbers: **1-18-30-35-36**.
The estimated jackpot is \$40,000.

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