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IWU Surveys Bloomington Voters' Attitudes

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IWU Surveys Bloomington Voters' Attitudes

**GOP "Contract for America" Gets Green Light in Canvass;
House-Senate Republicans Out Poll Clinton
On Dealing with U.S. Social, Economic Problems**

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**Views on Welfare Reform, Term Limits, Balanced Budget Amendment,
Environmental Rules Detailed in April Survey by IWU Students**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The GOP's "Contract for America" gets a thumbs up from almost half of Bloomington city voters responding to an Illinois Wesleyan University poll taken earlier this month.

Forty-nine percent of the 532 Bloomington voters responding to the poll had a favorable opinion of proposals contained in the "Contract for America," the focus of the Republican agenda in the U.S. House of Representatives during the first 100 days of the 104th U.S. Congress, which began last January. Twenty-four percent had an unfavorable view of the contract and 27 percent held neutral views on the House GOP legislative blueprint.

Sixty-one percent of respondents said they followed Capitol Hill policy debates over the contract "very closely" or "somewhat closely." Thirty-seven percent said they were "not very closely" or "not closely at all" tracking congressional developments on the contract.

The "Contract for America" is an 11-point plan crafted by House Republicans, covering congressional reforms, fiscal accountability, crime, welfare reform, medicaid reform, stronger child pornography laws, tax changes and Social Security, defense, economic growth and regulatory reform, legal reform, and term limits. During the legislative process, some of its points were weakened or defeated in the Senate.

Congressional Republicans were viewed by 48 percent of respondents as being better able to cope with America's social and economic problems, compared to 36 percent who gave the nod to President Bill Clinton. Seventeen percent felt neither the Clinton White House nor the GOP majority in Congress could handle the job.

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Other poll highlights on key issues facing Congress were:

- **Term Limits**--U.S. Senate and House term limits--a centerpiece of the GOP contract which was defeated in the House--were favored by 78 percent of respondents, while 14 percent did not favor them and 8 percent were undecided.

- **Balanced Budget Amendment**--Sixty-eight percent of respondents favored a constitutional amendment barring the federal government from spending more money than it receives from taxpayers. Twenty-four percent turned thumbs down on the constitutional prohibition, while 9 percent were undecided. The balanced budget measure passed in the House, but failed in the Senate.

- **Welfare Reform**--With welfare reform looming as a major Capitol Hill debating point in the days ahead, 56 percent of Bloomington voters responding to the poll said they do not want welfare benefits denied to families headed by unwed mothers. Eighteen percent favored a benefit cutoff, while 26 percent were undecided. Key welfare reform measures were approved by the House, but are under review in Senate committees.

- **Environmental Regulations**--Forty-four percent of respondents felt U.S. environmental rules were "about right" in the restrictions they imposed. Seventeen percent said those regulations were "too restrictive," 30 percent believed they were "not restrictive enough," and 9 percent were "undecided." The House has passed five regulatory reform measures, while the Senate has passed two. One regulatory reform measure has been signed into law.

Polling results on welfare reform and environmental regulations were inconsistent with GOP agenda goals, which generally favor limiting welfare benefits and less regulation.

Sixty-four percent of canvass respondents said they were "somewhat interested" in politics; 24 percent were "very interested;" 13 percent were "not very interested;" and 2 percent were "not at all interested."

The canvass is the second IWU Bloomington Voters' Survey. The first survey was taken last October on the eve of the 1994 congressional elections. The telephone survey was fashioned and administered by IWU students enrolled in "Parties, Interests, and Elections," a course taught by Tari Renner, associate professor, chair of the political science department, and a veteran pollster.

The poll was taken April 10-11. The survey, stratified by precinct, has an error

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margin of plus or minus 4.5 percent.

IWU students drafted the poll's questions, conducted the poll by telephone, and analyzed the results.

Demographically, poll respondents had this profile:

- **Political Inclination**--Forty-four percent viewed themselves as moderates; 36 percent classified themselves as conservatives; and 12 percent said they were liberals.

- **Party Affiliation**--Forty-two percent were Republicans; 34 percent were Independents; and 23 percent were Democrats.

- **Length of Residence**--Seventy-eight percent of respondents have lived in Bloomington more than five years; 14 percent were Bloomington residents between two and five years; and eight percent lived in the city two years or less.

- **Religion**--Fifty-five percent described their religious preference as Protestant; 24 percent were Catholic; 13 percent were unaffiliated; 7 percent were "other;" and 1 percent was Jewish.

- **Age**--Fifty-two percent of respondents were between the ages of 31-50; 18 percent were 51-65; 18 percent were over 65; 11 percent were 18-30.

- **Education**--Thirty percent of respondents were four-year college graduates; 25 percent had some college; 21 percent were high school graduates; 19 percent held graduate degrees; 4 percent had less than a high school diploma.

- **Income**--Forty-one percent of those responding to the poll had annual family household earnings of more than \$50,000; 31 percent earned \$25,000-\$50,000; 16 percent earned less than \$25,000; and 12 percent offered no response.

- **Gender**--Fifty-seven percent of respondents were women and 43 percent were men.

"Conducting this poll," Renner said, "gives students experience dealing with real issues in a real world setting. The techniques and problems they experienced are the same as market researchers and professional pollsters would experience."

On the issues front, Renner's only surprise was that only 56 percent of Bloomington voters responding to the survey favored a welfare benefit cutoff to unwed mothers--a figure lower than the national average. Nationally, Renner said, about 60-70 percent of Americans don't want unwed mothers removed from the

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welfare rolls.

Renner, who joined the IWU faculty last fall, was a member of the political science faculty at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh since 1988. Among courses he taught at Duquesne were American government, American political parties, budgetary process, state and local government, urban public policy, research methods, and elections and voting behavior.

He also has taught political science at Washington College in Chestertown, Md., and at American University in Washington, D.C.

From 1986-88, Renner was Director of Survey Research-Senior Statistical Analyst at the International City Management Association in Washington, D.C. He also served for two years as a management analyst with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C.

Since 1988, Renner has developed and supervised more than 20 public policy and public opinion surveys, including a 1992 statewide Pennsylvania canvass for the presidential election and a 1991 survey of Allegheny County, Pa., for a U.S. Senate election. Other surveys conducted by Renner have focused on the salaries of city and county officials; municipal labor-management relations; finances of police, fire, and refuse collection; and local government personnel practices.

He is the author of 14 publications and has delivered more than 15 papers at various professional conferences on subjects ranging from competition in congressional primary elections to structural diversity in the formal authority of mayors and city managers.

Renner is a member of the American Political Science Association, Midwestern Political Science Association, Urban Affairs Association, and other professional groups.

He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of South Florida, and a master's degree and doctorate from the School of Government and Public Administration at American University.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. In recent years, the university's endowment has grown to more than \$90 million; a \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$24 million science building will open in 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement

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of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. *101 of the Best Values in America's Colleges and Universities* calls IWU "undoubtedly one of the finest small colleges in the country," adding, "Illinois Wesleyan has surged to national prominence on the basis of its reputation as a school with a rock-solid academic program."

Editor's Note: Inquiries about the poll--including its administration and analysis--should be directed to Tari Renner, associate professor and chair of political science, at 309/556-3039 (work) or 309/828-0791 (home).