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RIC Media Advisory

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For Immediate Release

RIC's Bureau of Government and Research Services Releases Results Of Third Statewide Issues Survey

The survey measured the reactions of Rhode Islanders on issues and public figures in the news.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The Bureau of Government and Research Services (BGRS) at Rhode Island College, an affiliate of the College's Center for Public Policy, has released the results of its latest poll measuring the opinions of Rhode Islanders on several issues of public policy. The survey was conducted October 12-14 and 16 and sampled 375 randomly selected respondents for a 5.1 percent margin of error.

The survey showed that:

- **The Separation of Powers State Constitutional Amendment has overwhelming support with Rhode Islanders Winning by a margin of 3 to 1; the Calling of a Constitutional Convention Wins by 2 to 1.**
- **By a margin of nearly 2 to 1, Rhode Islanders say they are concerned about the One Party Dominance of the State.**
- **Many have unfavorable opinions of House Majority Leader Gordon Fox, House Speaker Bill Murphy, and Senate President Joseph Montalbano and tend to have little confidence in their abilities.**
- **37% say they plan to vote for Democratic Legislative Candidates in November; 22% will vote for their Republican Opponents; Governor Carcieri's endorsement of Republican Legislative Candidates fails to influence voter choices.**
- **Voters will easily approve three of four higher education bond issues; seem ready to vote down a fourth to build and renovate Athletic Facilities at URI.**
- **Rhode Islanders are about equally divided on who will win the presidential race.**
- **Rhode Islanders have a favorable opinion of U. S. Senator Lincoln Chafee, but are almost equally split on if he should be reelected in 2006. If Cranston Mayor Laffey challenges Chafee in 2006, Republicans favor Laffey by 3 to 1; Independents and Democrats chose Chafee in a possible Chafee-Laffey Matchup**

The survey also finds jobs and the economy the top issues on the minds of people surveyed and that the quality of life in Rhode Island hasn't changed much since Donald Carcieri became governor.

"As a public service, the Bureau of Government Research and Services continues to conduct regular polls designed to help the state's decision makers understand what Rhode Islanders are thinking about current issues in the news, said Victor Profughi, director of the Bureau. "Our principal focus in BGRS surveys is on issues and concerns of average people."

A more detailed account of the poll showed that the Separation of Powers state constitutional amendment has overwhelming support winning by a margin of 3 to 1 (52% percent for it, 15 % against, 22% undecided, and 6% wouldn't vote on it). The call for a constitutional convention is a probable winner by a wide margin of 2 to 1 (44% for, 17% against, 26% don't know, and 9% won't vote on it).

By nearly a 2 to 1 margin those surveyed said they were at least a little concerned by the one-party Democratic dominance of the General Assembly (39% concerned a great deal, 23% a little concerned) and they also have very little confidence in the legislative leadership to do what is right. Thirty-three percent reported having hardly any confidence in legislative leaders to do right, compared with only 11 percent who have a great deal of confidence in them, according to the survey. By contrast, 50 percent said they had a great deal of confidence in Governor Donald Carcieri to do the right thing, and only nine percent had hardly any confidence in him.

The governor also has a far more favorable image with the public than do the Democratic Legislative Leaders Majority Leader Gordon Fox, Senate President Joseph Montalbano, and House Speaker William Murphy. Seventy three percent give Carcieri a favorable rating, 15 percent unfavorable. About half of the poll's sample never heard of Fox, Montalbano, and Murphy, but negative ratings outnumber positive ones by about 2 to 1 for Fox and Montalbano. Speaker Murphy's unfavorable scores slightly outnumbered his positive ones. (11% favorable, 15% unfavorable)

Even though most Rhode Islanders express concern over Democratic party dominance of the legislature, they trust Governor Carcieri, and think favorably of him and unfavorably of the legislative leadership. Thirty one percent said they would be voting for Democratic legislative candidates this year, compared with 22 percent who say they will select Republicans. Thirty six percent said they were undecided. More than two out of three persons surveyed indicated that an endorsement of legislative candidates by Carcieri would have no affect on their legislative choices.

Three of four bond issues for higher education have overwhelming voter support, but more Rhode Islanders oppose the \$6.7 million proposal to build and renovate athletic facilities at URI (39% against, 35% for, 13% undecided, and 11% won't vote on the issue). Nearly two in three favor the other three higher education measures: spending \$50 million to build or renovate residence halls at RIC and URI (61% for; 14% against, 13% don't know, 10% wouldn't vote); \$14 million for an addition to the library at URI's School of Oceanography (59% for, 15% against, 13% don't know, and 11% won't vote); and \$50 million to build a center for biotechnology at URI (61% for, 12% against, 16% don't know, and 8% won't vote,

Looking ahead to the next election cycle, the poll asked whether Senator Lincoln Chafee should be reelected in 2006 or whether it is time to elect someone new who would do a better job. Slightly more (43%) favored reelection, but 38% said that it was time to elect someone new. Nearly one in five (18%) didn't know. Surprisingly, two-thirds of the Republicans polled (67%) said elect someone new, while 48% of Democrats and 46% of Independents were for reelection.

When Senator Chafee was pitted against Cranston Mayor Steve Laffey in a hypothetical contest for Senate, Chafee got 42 percent of the vote, compared with Laffey's 27 percent. However, Republican respondents favored Laffey 57 percent to 19 percent, with 21 percent undecided.

"Even though the Republican sub sample is a small one, about 50 people, the considerable gap in the trial heat between the two men, clearly suggests that Laffey would be a formidable opponent in a Republican primary should he choose to challenge Chafee," said Profughi.

Reasons respondents gave for their choices include:

Reasons for Choosing Chafee		Reasons for Choosing Laffey	
Experience in the Senate	15%	Job Performance as Mayor	25%
Chafee's Job Performance in Senate	11%	Laffey's Tough, No-Nonsense Style	19%
Chafee's Integrity and Likeable Ways	11%	Chafee's Poor Performance on the Job	18%
Laffey's Poor Performance as Mayor	9%	Time for a Change	8%
Laffey's Abrasive Style	8%	Know More About Laffey Than Chafee	5%
Chafee's Independence	7%	A Real Republican Unlike Chafee	4%
Know More About Chafee Than Laffey	7%	Laffey Honesty	3%
Chafee Family Name	4%		
Issue Positions: Environment, Abortion	3%		
None Given	25%	None Given	18%

Of the two, Chafee is better known. More than nine out of ten were able to tell interviewers whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of him (60% favorable, 20% unfavorable). Still, for a Mayor who has never run statewide, Laffey is very well known. Three in four knew his name well enough to rate him (40% favorable, 16% unfavorable). The Republican sub sample of interviewees was almost evenly split on favorable and unfavorable ratings for Chafee (43% favorable, 42% unfavorable). Laffey, by contrast, is perceived by most Republicans in a favorable light (48% favorable, 14% unfavorable).

Attorney General Patrick Lynch was seen favorably by 41 percent; his unfavorables were 22 percent; 21 percent heard of him but were unable to rate his favorability; another 15 percent never heard of him.

The quality of life in Rhode Island has stayed about the same since Carcieri became governor according to 56 percent of those surveyed; 29 percent think that it has gotten better, 10 percent worse.

According to the poll, the single most important issue facing the state right now that those surveyed felt state government should address is jobs and the economy (mentioned by 22%) followed closely by schools and education (17%) and state taxes (16%). Others mentioned were corruption (9%), controlling government spending (7%), one party control of the legislature (5%), and the power of public employee unions (4%). Eighteen percent of those sampled mentioned other issues.

Those surveyed were not asked who they supported for President this year, but a question was posed as to who they thought would win the presidency, Bush or Kerry, regardless of who they would be voting for. Even though Rhode Island is expected to vote overwhelmingly for John Kerry, the poll indicated that Rhode Islanders are slightly more inclined to think that President Bush will be the winner (42% to 38% for Kerry).

"These surveys, which we hope to conduct on a quarterly basis, are intended to be educational and informative. They are but one of the services provided to the state by the Center For Public Policy at RIC," said Dan L. King, RIC's vice-president of academic affairs.

The survey was conducted on the Rhode Island College campus. It was based on a statewide random sample of 375 Rhode Island adults 18 and older. Controls were applied in the sampling process to reflect adult population regionally, and weights were applied to ensure appropriate sampling of age groups as shown in the 2000 census. Gender was controlled to approximate the ratio of adult males and females in the state. Overall, the poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 5.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

How much confidence do you have in the legislative leaders to do the right thing?					
		a great deal	only some	hardly any confidence	Don't Know
TOTAL		11%	50%	33%	5%
Region	Bristol County	5%	47%	48%	-
	Blackstone Valley	15%	47%	29%	7%
	West Bay	8%	57%	33%	2%
	Newport County	17%	47%	33%	3%
	Western RI	11%	46%	43%	-
	Providence N. W.	9%	59%	22%	9%
	Providence Metro	13%	47%	31%	8%
	Washington County	7%	45%	44%	5%
Gender	Male	10%	48%	36%	5%
	Female	12%	52%	31%	5%
Age	18-25	15%	69%	8%	4%
	26-39	14%	52%	25%	7%
	40-49	12%	55%	29%	4%
	50-64	6%	50%	37%	6%
	65 and over	11%	39%	46%	4%
Nationality	Italian	8%	56%	24%	9%
	Irish	14%	46%	32%	8%
	Hispanic	20%	55%	20%	4%
	Portuguese	19%	48%	33%	-
	African	10%	50%	30%	10%
	French/Canadian	12%	48%	33%	5%
	English	10%	47%	39%	4%
	other	6%	53%	39%	3%
How likely are you to vote in the November...	very likely	11%	50%	35%	4%
	somewhat likely	5%	61%	17%	17%
	somewhat unlikely	-	82%	18%	-
	very unlikely	18%	40%	27%	15%
	don't know	16%	16%	67%	-
Party	Republican	12%	60%	22%	2%
	Democrat	14%	45%	30%	10%
	Independent	9%	48%	40%	3%
	other	-	68%	24%	8%