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local politics

## Poll: Ritter in lead across state

50% of voters back Dem in governor's race; 35% say Beauprez

By Karen E. Crummy  
Denver Post Staff Writer  
DenverPost.com

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Democrat Bill Ritter leads Republican Bob Beauprez for governor by 15 percentage points, according to a new poll.

Ritter is beating Beauprez in every region of the state, including Beauprez's own congressional district and Republican strongholds like the Western Slope and Colorado Springs.

The poll, conducted for The Denver Post by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, shows Ritter leading Beauprez 50 percent to 35 percent. The former Denver district attorney has siphoned Republicans from Beauprez and has collected the majority of unaffiliated voters.

It also shows Beauprez's unfavorable rating at 40 percent, 8 percentage points higher than those who view him favorably. As a result, political watchers say Ritter should continue what he's doing, but they also predict the final four weeks of the campaign season will be ugly.

"Beauprez has to drive Ritter's unfavorables up. The only way you get elected when your unfavorable ratings are that high is to get your opponent's up as well," said GOP consultant Katy Atkinson. "The No. 1 issue in the state is still illegal immigration. He has to pound Ritter on that."

John Marshall, campaign spokes man for Beauprez, called the poll results "wrong" and said:

"Ugly? It won't be ugly. There is nothing ugly about telling voters the truth about Ritter's atrocious record on illegal immigration."

Ritter and Beauprez were essentially tied in the poll on the question of who would better handle the issue of illegal immigration.

Only 11 percent of those polled said they were undecided about whom they would vote for.

The poll was of 625 registered voters who say they vote regularly in state elections. It was conducted Tuesday through Thursday by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research and had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

A similar poll by the same group in July showed Ritter leading 42 percent to Beauprez's 35 percent.

### "It's going to be close"

Other statewide races haven't captured the attention of voters yet.

The majority of those polled didn't recognize the names of the candidates for state treasurer and attorney general, and more than a third were unfamiliar with the secretary of state candidates.

If Ritter wins and the state Senate and House retain their Democratic majorities, it will be the first time Colorado has been run by Democrats since 1961.

However, experts caution that in politics, a month is enough time to turn things around.

"Things look very good for Ritter, but the election is still a month away, and this isn't a state where Democrats tend to win by

big margins statewide," said Seth Masket, a political science professor at the University of Denver.

Ritter campaign manager Greg Kolomitz agreed.

"This race is going to tighten up. It's going to be close," he said.

### **Illegal immigration**

Ritter leads Beauprez on issues such as the economy, environment and regulation of energy development. However, on illegal immigration, the two are neck and neck, potentially giving Beauprez an opening.

Twenty-one percent of those who said they would vote for Beauprez said it was because of Ritter's record on plea-bargaining with illegal immigrants.

Colorado Springs Republican Jack Hutchens said he's voting for Beauprez because they have similar thoughts on the issue.

"I've seen what illegal immigrants do to the country. We haven't been tough enough," he said.

Democrat Arlene Munyon of Golden supports Ritter. She said illegal immigration was a priority issue for her, but she wasn't sure that she had heard enough from the candidates on it.

"I'm concerned about it. Illegal immigration needs to be stopped," she said.

Beauprez has already attacked Ritter because his office approved plea bargains from legal and illegal immigrants that knocked down some drug, traffic and other charges to a non- deportable felony charge of trespassing on agricultural land.

Ritter has said that the plea agreements represented only a tiny fraction of the thousands of cases handled by the DA's office.

Atkinson said that, strategically, Beauprez should shift his focus to slamming Ritter for supporting in-state college tuition rates for illegal immigrants.

"Ritter is vulnerable on these issues," she said.

Kolomitz said they're ready.

"We've proven Bill Ritter can take a punch," he said. "What the people of Colorado want to know is what you're going to do and what you're for."

*Staff writer Karen Crummy can be reached at 303-954-1594 or [kcrummy@denverpost.com](mailto:kcrummy@denverpost.com).*