

Rocky Mountain News

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Ritter's robust lead persists in latest poll

1 in 5 Republicans is 'defecting' to former Denver DA

By **Stuart Steers and Alan Gathright**, © Rocky Mountain News
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With time running out, Republican Bob Beauprez has failed to gain any ground on Democrat Bill Ritter in the Colorado governor's race, according to a new poll.

Fifty-five percent of surveyed voters support Ritter, versus 33 percent for Beauprez. Ritter has solid support from Democrats and a 3-to-1 advantage among unaffiliated voters, a crucial part of the Colorado electorate.

Ritter is racking up a huge lead among voters in the metro area, and is leading in every part of the state except Colorado Springs.

Only 7 percent of likely voters say they haven't yet decided which candidate to support, according to the Rocky Mountain News/CBS 4 poll by Public Opinion Strategies.

Pollster Lori Weigel said Ritter, the former Denver district attorney, is benefitting from voter anger at President Bush and the unpopularity of the war in Iraq.

"Democrats are just more fired up this year," said Weigel. "They smell blood. You've got 91 percent of Democrats voting for Ritter and only 67 percent of Republicans voting for Beauprez. In fact, you've got 1-in-5 Republicans defecting to Ritter."

The poll found that Beauprez, congressman from the state's 7th district, had higher negatives among voters than Ritter did, a key indication of how people will vote. Forty-nine percent of voters surveyed had a negative impression of Beauprez, while only 35 percent had a favorable one. Ritter was regarded favorably by 58 percent of voters, while just 21 percent disliked him.

Beauprez had been hoping to cut into Ritter's support with his TV ad campaign highlighting 151 plea bargains Ritter's office made with immigrants. But Weigel said an FBI investigation into allegations that Beauprez may have used information stolen from a government database had undercut the TV ads.

"That took away their most effective negative against Ritter and just completely neutered it," said Weigel. She said it was almost unprecedented for a candidate to have the high positive rating Ritter does at the end of an election campaign.

"The fact he has that high a positive rating is astonishing," she said. "The attacks never seemed to stick."

The poll findings are based on statewide telephone interviews of 500 registered voters who said they are likely to vote Nov. 7. It was conducted Oct. 28 to Oct. 30 by Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies, a firm that generally polls for Republican candidates. Political consultant David Kenney of the Kenney Group, a firm that generally works with Democratic candidates, consulted on the questionnaire and analysis. The margin of error is 4.38 percentage points.

The only place in the state where Beauprez leads is Colorado Springs. In metro Denver, Ritter is ahead with 62 percent support to 27 percent for Beauprez.

Robert W. Anderson, of Denver, counts himself as one Republican who will vote for Ritter.

"I'm not sure I can trust Beauprez," he said. "I don't agree with a lot of the things he said. On immigration you can't send them back, it's impossible."

Jackie Kopp, a registered Republican in Douglas County, said she is supporting Beauprez.

"He's a Republican and I support his economic policies. I'm a straight party voter most of the time."

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