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Most voters identify jobs and the economy as the top public issues in Rhode Island. Legalizing same sex marriages very rarely mentioned and was at the bottom of a list of options, seen as a top issue by only 7 percent of the voters.

Rhode Islanders think the issue of gay marriage should be decided by voters at the ballot box in a statewide election, not by the state legislature. If put to a vote, most oppose same-sex marriage in Rhode Island, say they would support a referendum issue recognizing only marriage between men and women as being valid in the state, believe gays and lesbians have a right to live as they choose but do not have the right to redefine marriage, and do not think that Rhode Island school children should be taught about gay marriage in the schools.

June 15, 2009 Smithfield, RI – Quest Research, and veteran Rhode Island pollster Victor L. Profughi, today released the results of its most recent Rhode Island issues survey. The poll measured voter opinion on public issues, and explored the breadth and depth of views relating to legalizing gay marriage.

Designed, implemented, and administered under the supervision of Dr. Victor Profughi, who has conducted polls in Rhode Island since 1966, the study was completed by telephone Monday, June 8 and Tuesday, June 9. A sample of 400 randomly selected voters was interviewed by professional interviewers from a central telephone bank, and has a margin of error of 4.9 percent.

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Quest Research June Rhode Island Issues Survey

According to Dr. Profughi, “Public policy issues have been the focus of my statewide surveys for the past ten years, first both at Rhode Island College through its former Bureau of Government Research and my polling service, Quest Research, and now exclusively through Quest. This survey, as all others, was developed and administered by Rhode Island’s most experienced polling team, one which has the longest history in professional surveys by far in the state.”

Persons surveyed were first asked what they thought was the single most important issue that they felt government should do something about. Of the 400 persons participating, 378 (95%) were able to volunteer one or more issues which they saw as the one which the legislature should address; offering a total of 422 unaided replies.

Jobs and the economy (volunteered by 30 percent and 19 percent respectively) were the two hottest issues, followed by the state budget deficit and taxes (13 percent and 11 percent). Much smaller numbers suggested health care, education, and corruption 5 percent, 5 percent, and four percent. Somewhat surprisingly, only 2 percent mentioned improving the business climate, highways, housing, or gay marriage, and only 1 percent illegal immigration and pensions and unions.

When asked to identify what they considered to be the two public issues which they thought deserved the highest priority for state government to work on, from a list of six issues provided, jobs and the economy came in first once again, the choice of two out of three respondents. This was then followed by health care reform (39%), lowering taxes (31%), government corruption (29%), and illegal immigration (27%). Legalizing gay marriage was identified as a top priority for government action by fewer than one in ten of those sampled (7 percent).

According to Dr. Profughi, “Although much has been made in the media recently of Rhode Island’s sole status in New England as a hold out against legalizing gay marriage, it is obvious that the issue is not on the agenda of the average person in Rhode Island.”

The Quest survey went on to probe more deeply into voter attitudes regarding marriage and found that:

- More Rhode Islanders say they oppose same sex marriage in Rhode Island than support it (43 percent to 36 percent), and opponents are more strongly in opposition to it than are those in favor. Of those opposing gay marriage 82 percent said they were strongly against it, while 64 percent of the supporters claimed to be strong supporters of it.
- Approximately three out of four of those surveyed initially indicated that the voters should have the opportunity to deal with the gay marriage issue at the ballot box, rather than have the legislature decide.
- When told that 30 states have given voters the opportunity to decide whether gay marriage would be legalized in their state and asked if Rhode Island voters should have an opportunity to vote on this issue, the number agreeing to decide the issue by popular vote, rather than legislation, rose to more than eight in ten.

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- When presented with the following proposal, “Only marriage between a man and a woman will be valid or recognized in Rhode Island,” more than half those surveyed supported it, while 38 percent expressed opposition (40% strongly favored, 12%, somewhat favored; 27% strongly opposed and 11% somewhat opposed it).
- There is widespread opposition to legalizing gay marriage across key demographic groupings; although those under 36 and women have greater numbers in favor than in opposition; Democrats are more favorable to it than Republicans and Independents. Among the religious, only Jews favor legalizing it. The more faithful one is in practicing one’s religion, as measured by attendance, the greater the opposition.
- When asked whether they agreed that gays and lesbians have a right to live as they choose but do not have the right to redefine marriage for society, nearly six in ten agreed (57%) while one-third (34%) disagreed.
- By a margin of more than two to one respondents are against teaching children in Rhode Island public schools about gay marriage. (57% strongly oppose, 9% somewhat opposed, 17 percent strongly favor, and 8 percent somewhat favor.)

The survey was independently administered and developed by Quest Research which is solely responsible for its findings, presentation and analysis. The research was paid for by NOM RI (National Organization for Marriage RI).

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