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November 23, 2009

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## Undecided vote looms large in gubernatorial primaries

*Dillon holds narrow edge among Dems; Hoekstra adds to GOP lead; Rise of the Nerd*

**LANSING, Mich.** —House Speaker Andy Dillon is locked in a virtual dead heat with Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero in the race for the Democratic nomination for governor, clinging to a 13-11 edge less than five months before the Aug. 3 Primary. On the GOP side, U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra has added to his early lead in what's shaping up as a four-man contest for the nomination.

The statewide poll of likely voters found that Ann Arbor venture capitalist Rick Snyder has surprisingly catapulted from a virtual unknown into second place in the Republican field, eclipsing Attorney General Mike Cox and Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard in the early going.

The survey conducted by Denno-Noor Research in partnership with The Rossman Group and The Perricone Group shows that undecided voters will play a decisive role in the battle to succeed Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who is barred by term limits from seeking a third, four-year term.

"In the Republican race, nearly a third of voters haven't made a decision on a candidate and in the Democratic contest undecided voters constitute a gigantic 56 percent of the total," said Kelly Rossman-McKinney, APR, CEO and founder of The Rossman Group. "It's clear that candidates will have to target their messages to female voters from here on out since the undecided vote among women is 42 percent in the GOP and a whopping 58 percent among Democrats."

The political landscape has changed dramatically since the November Quarterly Poll. Lt. Gov. John Cherry was the frontrunner on the Democratic side in the last tally with 20 percent support. He has since quit the race, citing an inability to raise sufficient campaign money. Dillon, of Redford Township, has doubled his support since the earlier poll (going from 6 percent to 13 percent). Bernero, who wasn't a candidate four months ago, has capitalized on his cable TV appearances and angry man defense of the embattled auto worker and industry to move into second place and could benefit in the coming months from union endorsements that are so critical in a Democratic primary.

Hoekstra, the ranking Republican member on the U.S. House Intelligence Committee, led in the GOP matchup with 28 percent support (up from 21 percent in November). Rounding out the field where Snyder at 18 percent, Cox at 12 percent, Bouchard with 8 percent, and state Sen. Tom George of Kalamazoo with 2 percent support. Cox and Bouchard have been lost ground since the last survey.

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The poll, which asked questions about a wide array of issues, also found that:

- Voters were pretty much split over whether they love or loathe Rick Snyder's TV ads touting himself as "one tough nerd." Thirty-two percent of poll participants were more likely to vote for him based on that credential while 30 percent were less likely to vote for a nerd.

"Still, there's no denying that the million-dollar ad purchase, starting with his Super Bowl spot, has increased Snyder's name ID and standing in the polls," said Denno-Noor Research President Dennis Denno.

- Former Gov. John Engler, despite more than seven years out of the political spotlight, would still be a formidable potential Republican candidate. In a hypothetical 2012 matchup against Democratic U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, the survey found Engler up 42-41, a statistical tie with Stabenow. Engler, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, says he's not a candidate for office and said speculation he might be stemmed from his recent search for a possible second home in Michigan.

"Only 10 percent of those surveyed were undecided in this potential contest, showing that both candidates are well-known political commodities," said Perricone Group CEO and former Michigan Speaker of the House Chuck Perricone.

"The fact that Engler does so well demonstrates that a good portion of the electorate still remembers him fondly as a tax and budget cutter and a true reformer."

- Michigan voters don't have much appetite for a rewrite of Michigan's 1963 constitution and are poised to defeat the November ballot proposal calling for a constitutional convention by a better than two-to-one margin (61-28), the survey found. Michigan has had only four constitutions in its 173-year history. The question of whether to draft a new one is posed to voters every 16 years – and they overwhelmingly rejected the idea in 1978 and 1994.

A constitutional convention, for better or worse depending on a person's political philosophy, could recommend an end to Michigan's ban on capital punishment, gay marriage, and affirmative action. It could usher in a graduated income tax or a part-time Legislature. It could cost \$45 million to run a convention, a big expense in these tough times. To many voters, it's just too big a risk.

- More than half of the state's voters (55 percent) are optimistic a new governor will be able to turn around Michigan's troubled economy, while 23 percent don't think it will make much difference. Those who believe a fresh face will help revive Michigan's economic fortunes include 46 percent of loyal Democrats, 47 percent of independents, and 78 percent of those who strongly identify themselves as Republicans.

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**Methodology:** This survey was part of the Rossman Group/Perricone Group/Denno Noor Research Quarterly Survey of the Michigan electorate. 600 likely voters were interviewed from March 3 through March 5, 2010, with a margin of error of plus/minus 4%, and the participation was stratified based on census data and past voter behavior. A screen was used to include only those participants who said they would vote, either at the polls or by absentee ballot, in the November 2010 General Election. The margin of error for the primary ballot questions is plus/minus 7%. All numbers are rounded and may exceed 100%.

**Attention Media:** For attribution purposes, please recognize all three organizations that partnered in the poll:

- The Rossman Group
- Denno-Noor Research
- The Perricone Group.