

Mecham popularity wanes

PHOENIX (AP) — The number of Arizonans describing themselves as "very dissatisfied" with Gov. Evan Mecham's performance appears to have grown, as has the number saying they think he should be recalled, according to the latest in a series of newspaper polls.

Three-fifths of the 310 adults surveyed statewide between Dec. 11 and Dec. 16 said they believed Mecham should resign and more than two-thirds said they had little trust in him or his capacity for telling the truth, the poll said.

"If that's not a mandate, I don't know what is," said Glenn Davis, executive director of the state Democratic Party.

Mecham, in a radio appearance, said he had no intention of resigning and believed he could win a recall election.

And his press secretary, Ken Smith, responded to the poll by saying it showed that "we have to spend more time explaining the governor's positions."

The poll, conducted for The Arizona Republic by Phoenix-based Arizona Field Research, measured a sample large enough to ensure that its results in 19 cases out of 20 would duplicate within plus or minus 3 percentage points what the results would be if every Arizona adult was surveyed.

Mecham supporters have said in the past, however, that their man usually fares better than polls would indicate because many supporters are reluctant to identify themselves as his supporters when talking with pollsters.

Sixty-one percent of those polled in the latest survey thought Mecham should resign, compared with 53 percent in a poll taken in October. Thirty-four percent of those asked said Mecham should not resign, compared with 43 percent in Oc-

tober. The percentage of those who did not know increased from 4 percent in the October poll to 5 percent this month.

Since the October poll, newspaper stories have revealed that Mecham failed to list a \$350,000 loan from Tempe developer Barry Wolfson on his campaign-disclosure forms. Also, the state grand jury was asked to look into the loan and whether Lee Watkins, the state's prison-construction chief, made a death threat against a former Mecham aide.

In addition, the state House has hired a special counsel to investigate whether there is sufficient evidence to impeach Mecham.

Since the newspaper reports, Mecham has amended his campaign reports to include details of the loan, calling the omission an "honest mistake."

Two-thirds of those responding to the latest poll said they were not satisfied with his explanation, while 25 percent said they were satisfied.

Sen. Tony West, a north-central Phoenix Republican and frequent Mecham critic, called the poll results "a very sobering Christmas present for the governor."

But he, like Davis, predicted that the results will have little impact on the governor.

"I think he'll continue to live in his little dream world and plug along," Davis said. "I think he is unable to fathom that he has alienated so many people."

Smith and Burt Kruglick, chairman of the state Republican Party, said they were heartened by some of the poll's findings, particularly a result saying that 51 percent of Arizonans will not be swayed by Mecham's performance in deciding whether to vote for Republican candidates in 1988.

However, 26 percent of those

questioned said they would be less likely to vote for Republicans because of Mecham, and 17 percent said they would be more likely to vote for Republicans. Six percent said they did not know.

"I find your figures to be rather encouraging," Kruglick said. "I think the public is intelligent enough to know that you can't blame on the candidates who might run in 1988 those things that have gone wrong for this governor."

Davis said the legislative candidates with the most to lose are Republican incumbents who have aligned themselves closely with Mecham.

"There are a lot of representatives in our own state Legislature who may disagree with Mecham on certain ways he has handled items, but on issues, they would align themselves very closely with him," Davis said. "I think with public rejection of Mecham, there may also be rejection of candidates like that."

The pollsters said that:

— 62 percent of those asked said they would disagree with a statement that Mecham can be trusted "to make the right decisions when it comes to running state government," and 33 percent agreed.

— 67 percent said they did not have confidence that Mecham would tell the truth, and 27 percent said they did.

— 69 percent disagreed with a statement that the governor has chosen "good advisers and Cabinet officers," and 16 percent agreed.

— 41 percent agreed that Mecham has a "good understanding of important issues facing the state," and 51 percent disagreed.

"People believing he has an understanding of state issues, considering the volumes of negative publicity, that's actually rather en-

couraging," Smith said. "It's a good base to start with to win an election."

Smith blamed the news media for depressing Mecham's standing with the public by reporting only negative stories.

"How on Earth would they (the public) know what the governor is doing? Attracting industry, starting new businesses, opening trade offices. Virtually none of that is reported," he said.

Smith also criticized the wording of some of the poll questions.

"I know questions could be worded in such a way as to show different results," Smith said.

He said he would have reworded a question that asked whether Mecham's statements about blacks and other groups have helped or hurt his administration to ask, "Do you think this governor is a racist?"

"I would think most persons do not believe he is," the spokesman added.

The poll said that 86 percent of respondents thought Mecham's statements about blacks and other groups have hurt his administration, and only 2 percent believe they have helped. Seven percent of those polled thought they had neither hurt nor helped, and 5 percent did not know.

The number of those "very satisfied" with Mecham's performance declined to 5 percent from 10 percent in October, and the percentage of those "very dissatisfied" increased to 35 percent from 29 percent. Twenty-six percent were "dissatisfied" — the same percentage as in October — and 29 percent were "satisfied," compared with 27 percent in October.

Those said they who don't know numbered 5 percent in the most recent poll, compared with 8 percent in October.

State

Jackpot will be split three ways

PHOENIX (AP) — It's a good thing the top prize in the Arizona Lottery's latest "The Pick" game was \$5.85 million. After all, it's going to have to be split three ways.

Officials said Sunday that the three tickets their computers identified as having all six primary numbers correct will each be worth \$1,959,205.

Officials also found nine tickets with five primary numbers correct and the right bonus number. Each of those is worth \$24,938.80, they said.

The winning numbers picked in Saturday night's televised drawing were: three, nine, 10, 12, 21 and 34. The bonus number was 25.

Grand opening begins with bang

PRESCOTT (AP) — A Prescott boat-sales store sporting a "grand opening" sign got an unexpected opening Sunday when it was rocked by an explosion, police said.

The cause of the 1:30 p.m. explosion at Western Boat Sales wasn't immediately known, but investigators found a natural gas leak as they sifted through the wreckage, according to police Sgt. William Hobbs.

No injuries were reported, and there was no initial damage estimate, Hobbs said, but it appeared that the boats were all kept outside in back of the building and were undamaged by the blast.

Valley citrus survives big chill

PHOENIX (AP) — Citrus growers on the outskirts of the Phoenix Metropolitan area say they think their crops escaped major damage during the coldest night of the year this weekend.

Frost began forming around 11 p.m. Saturday and lingered until morning. Growers said Sunday they believe they were able to protect their crops from the cold.

According to the National Weather Service, the overnight low recorded at Sky Harbor International Airport was 31, with colder temperatures reported in outlying areas.

Citrus trees are damaged when temperatures fall below 28 degrees for durations of four hours or more. Growers, however, can keep groves warm by running wind machines to circulate cold air away from the groves and by running warm water through irrigation canals.

Catholic bishop earns his wings

GALLUP, N.M. (AP) — Bishop Donald Pelotte received a Christmas present that will enable him to reach the remote corners of his 55,000-square-mile diocese quicker and more often.

A two-seater airplane arrived last week from the Wings of Hope, a Catholic, non-profit organization in St. Louis, Mo., that refurbishes airplanes for missionary dioceses.

Pelotte, who has recruited a pilot, is coadjutor of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gallup.

"The farthest point away is Page (Ariz.), and that's a six-hour drive," he said. "My people have got to see me more than just once every three years."

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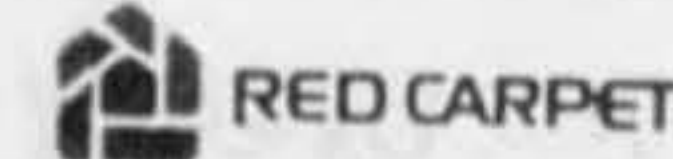
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