



Polling Analysis

Jefferson County, Colorado

Survey of Likely Voters August 2018

Overview

Right now, most Republicans start at a deficit in Jefferson County and yet, there are real opportunities. The good news is there is a pathway to victory for all of the countywide Republican candidates.

The worst deficit to start is in the gubernatorial race. Jared Polis begins this poll with 48% support among JeffCo voters, while Walker Stapleton only garners 39.7% support. As Stapleton closes the gap, expect this to improve the footing of county candidates.

The countywide races all have promise in and of themselves and it is clear that voters view them differently than state or national races. As it stands here at the end of summer, the commissioner's race sits just outside the margin of error in favor of the Democrat, with a significant 30% still undecided, the county treasurer race is within the margin of error slightly in favor of the Democrat, and the clerk and recorder's race is in favor of Republican Faye Griffin with an 8-point lead and the highest percentage of the vote for any Republican (39.8%) on the ballot.

As we will see throughout this analysis, the less well known candidates, such as the commissioner and treasurer candidates, have the opportunity to gain some of the same support as the better known candidates as well as supporters of President Trump (who has both the most support of any Republican we tested and the most detractors) who aren't already supporting local Republican candidates.

Most encouraging, this survey provides clear insight as to the top four local Republican messages that overwhelmingly resonate with both Undecided and Unaffiliated voters in countywide races and provide a great opportunity for these local candidates to win over voters.

Heart of the Matter: What Undecideds Look Like in County Races

We looked at the undecided voters in the three county races and honed in on what they look like specifically in the Commissioner and Treasurer races, since the Republican is already leading in

the County Clerk and Recorder race, though the same takeaways generally apply to that race as well.

Undecided Voters: Treasurer and Commissioner Races

Following is a general thumbnail sketch of who these voters are and what they look like. As you can imagine, they are more likely to respond “not sure,” “don’t know,” or “never have heard of” to any given question. They lean towards Jared Polis in the race for governor, though it is clear that Walker Stapleton currently is not well known by them.

When looking specifically at the Undecideds in the Commissioners race, Clerk and Recorder Faye Griffin, is leading this subset of undecideds by 24.5% to 8.2%, which shows that they are willing to support a local Republican and suggests that other local Republicans could win over these voters too. In fact, each of the countywide candidates, have supporters that their fellow county candidates do not already have. This presents the opportunity that these candidates could help each other by tapping into each other’s voters.

Additionally, we were surprised to find that 41% of these undecided voters in county races approve of the job President Trump is doing. When it comes to support for any Republican this is the highest level within this group.

Demographics of Undecided Voters:

Following is the general demographic makeup of the undecideds for the county-level races.

AGE	GENDER	PARTY
25-34: 18.9%	Female: 48.5%	Republican: 18.3%
35-44: 15.4%	Male: 51.5%	Democrats: 25.4%
45-54: 18%		Unaffiliated: 48.9%
55-64: 20%		Other: 2.7%
65-74: 14.1%		DK: 4.6%
75+: 10.4%		

Opportunities for Growth

If you just look at the demographics of the undecideds, it could be scary, but there are really great opportunities to win them over. They are with us on the top four messages we tested and are moved by those messages. Equally important, the messages we tested on these issues are at least somewhat popular with Republicans, and definitely don’t scare them away. Win-Win.

Additionally, there appear to be opportunities to close the gap with Republican-leaning voters already supporting other candidates or who approve/have positive feelings toward other leaders like Commissioner Libby Szabo or President Trump.

We also looked at messages--beyond support for the President--that could motivate Republicans to show up to vote. There are also some possible landmines to consider.

What Moves Voters: Top Messages and Issues

When considering "What Moves Voters," there are two primary areas to focus on: persuading voters who are undecided (or possibly supporting the opponent) to choose the Republican and motivating Republican voters to turn out to vote and to vote for every race down the ballot.

There will be some overlap between these two groups and some persuasive or motivating messages specific to each group. We focus on Persuasion in this document.

PERSUASION: Winning Over Down Ballot Undecideds and Unaffiliated Voters

Below we break out the top issues for both Unaffiliated Voters and then the Undecideds in the Commissioner race, as it represents the top of the ticket as far as county races go. It is important to note that these top issues track similarly for the undecideds in all races.

Unaffiliated Voters

82% Support ALL forms of Public Education, including Charters and Vocational
67% Reduce Red Tape / Housing Costs
61% Complete JeffCo Parkway
54% Keep Taxes Low / Protecting Taxpayer Bill of Rights

Undecideds in Commissioner Race

84% Support ALL forms of Public Education, including Charters and Vocational
65% Keep Taxes Low / Protecting Taxpayer Bill of Rights
58% Complete JeffCo Parkway
58% Reduce Red Tape / Housing Costs

As you can see, for both Undecided and Unaffiliated Voters, the absolute best issue is support for ALL forms of public education, including charter schools and vocational education. This is something that all Republicans can use while speaking to undecided and unaffiliated voters. Also, support for public school choice could be an opportunity for a Republican to create a contrast with their Democrat opponent. Following is the language exactly as it was tested.

Support ALL Forms of Public Education

Thinking about education, are you more or less likely to vote for a candidate that supports all forms of public education including traditional public schools, charter schools, and vocational education?

Undecideds: 84% More Likely #1 Message | Unaffiliated: 82% More Likely #1 Message

Undecided voters and particularly Unaffiliated Voters also want a government that works efficiently. That means protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights and reducing burdensome red

tape. Don't confuse this with necessarily opposing higher taxes. For instance, a plurality of undecided voters support raising fees and taxes if it were necessary to balance the county budget. These voters seem to simply want to make sure they have a say in any tax increases and may support them if they are choosing it themselves and it is going towards something they want like transportation projects or education, which is indicated in the results of other questions.

Keeping Taxes Low / Spending Under Control / Protecting TABOR

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will keep taxes low and spending under control by protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights?

Undecideds: 65% More Likely #2 Message | Unaffiliated: 54% More Likely #4 Message

Reducing Red Tape and Making New Homes More Affordable

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who reduces burdensome red tape in order to speed up housing projects and make new homes more affordable?

Undecideds: 58% More Likely #3* Message | Unaffiliated: 67% More Likely #2 Message

(*JeffCo Parkway and Reducing Red Tape have the exact same overall support from undecideds.)

Finally, voters clearly want someone who will complete Jefferson County's Northwest Parkway (W-470). This possibly speaks to politicians finally keeping their word--as indicated in the Verbatims section below--as much as it has to do with the convenience of their commute. This was surprising as many people probably perceive opposition to this as being very significant, but the numbers clearly say something else.

Complete Jefferson County's Northwest Parkway (W-470)

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will complete Jefferson County's Northwest Parkway, also referred to as W-470?

Undecideds: 58% More Likely #3* Message | Unaffiliated: 61% More Likely #3 Message

(*JeffCo Parkway and Reducing Red Tape have the exact same overall support from undecideds.)

Considering the possible positions of the Democrats running, there is a potential for Republican candidates to draw a strong contrast on the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, Cutting Red Tape vs Adding More Regulations, and Support for Charter Schools/Public School Choice.

There's more good news with the undecideds. On guns, undecideds want their rights protected. With that said, they aren't looking for an expansion of gun rights or what they may see as risky proposals like training teachers to conceal carry (42.5% Much Less Likely to Support). However, 52.5% of Undecided Voters reject a candidate who wants to limit their ability to own or carry a gun.

The county Republican candidates are uniquely qualified to tap into the vein of all the voter desires outlined above, which provide a real opportunity for Republicans to distinguish themselves from the Democratic candidates.

Aside from messages and issues, one additional area to take advantage of is that Republican Commissioner Libby Szabo has about a 1:1 Positive to Negative Ratio among supporters of the Democrat commissioner candidate, Lesley Dahlkemper. Szabo may be able to help pick off some Dahlkemper supporters. Szabo also appears to be the JeffCo county official with the most potential influence. Conversely, Democrat Commissioner Casey Tighe is barely even known.

TURNOUT: Getting Republicans Out to Vote and Voting Down Ballot

Below we take a look at the top messages and issues for Republican voters. It is clear that for most of the local races that they are not yet winning over all of the Republican votes available to them, converting Trump supporters to becoming their supporters, or tapping into the support for the most popular Republican leaning issues.

What is also clear is that for all voters - Republican, Unaffiliated, or Undecided - talking about keeping taxes low and protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights is a winning issue. You cannot go wrong making the case that if the Democrats win control of JeffCo government, that your Taxpayer Bill of Rights will fly out the window.

One of the promising results from the survey is that many of the best messages overlap for undecided voters, unaffiliated voters, Republican voters, and current supporters of the local Republican candidates.

Though it is evident that local Republican candidates have some work to do to shore up support among Republican voters and voters who support the President or his policy positions, as luck would have it, there are a number of messages that, if delivered, would do the trick.

Republican candidates should be aware that 90.1% of voters supporting the local Republican candidates and 86.6% of registered Republicans approve of the job President Trump is doing. Additionally, 77.9% of Republicans say that they are more likely to support candidates who support the President and his policies.

Targeted messages strongly aligning candidates to local angles on the issues President Trump is highlighting and clear “high signs” to these targeted voters that the President has an ally in these candidates will motivate Republicans and Trump supporters to get out to vote and to vote for down ballot races. However, a word of caution here, the key word is TARGETED, as any BROADCAST messages focused on aligning a Republican with President Trump in Jefferson County will likely cause an equal or greater backlash to any support earned. This means messages about Trump or the Trump agenda should be delivered to Republicans through direct methods of advertising or grassroots contact like digital, mail, phones and door knocks.

It's also clear that Republicans need to be made fully aware of what's at stake in this election at the county level. Not only do they need to know that the Taxpayer Bill of Rights is gone in JeffCo if Republicans lose control of county government, as we mentioned above, but they also need to know that regulations and red tape get worse in county government, and that charter schools will be on the chopping block. Either JeffCo continues to be JeffCo or becomes like Boulder.

Following are the top messages for Republican voters. As mentioned above, beyond the need to increase turnout so Republicans make up a larger portion of the electorate, local candidates have work to do to speak to the issues that matter to these Republicans and win them over.

Republican Voters (BOLD overlaps with top Undecided messages)

94.9% Keep Taxes Low / Protecting Taxpayer Bill of Rights

89.3% Stop Opioid Drug Crisis / Support President's Wall / Cut off Drug Supply / Support Sheriff

85.5% Support ALL forms of Public Education, including Charter and Vocational

84.5% Enforce Immigration Laws and Cut Funding for Sanctuary Cities

84.1% Oppose Candidates Who Support Gun Control

77.9% Candidate Supports Trump and His Policies

67.7% Reduce Red Tape / Housing

66.9% Complete JeffCo Parkway

The above results suggest that a County Candidate would do well taking the top three to four messages that overlap between Undecided voters and Republicans, with an emphasis on the "keeping taxes low and protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights" and "supporting All forms of public education, including charters and vocational" messages and communicating these in their broader messaging.

Then in targeted communications directly to Republicans, adding in some messaging around immigration and possibly fighting the Opioid Epidemic. These Republican specific messages could give a sense of being on board with the President's agenda without being focused on him.

The specific questions and messages presented in the poll that won the most Republican support (and not included above in the Undecided section) are the following:

Stop Opioid Crisis / Support Trump's Wall / Cut off Drug Supply / Support Sheriff

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will keep taxes low and spending under control by protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights?

Republicans: 89.3% More Likely #2 Message

Enforce Immigration Laws and Cut Funding for Sanctuary Cities

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will keep taxes low and spending under control by protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights?

Republicans: 84.5% More Likely #4 Message

Oppose Candidates Who Support Gun Control

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will keep taxes low and spending under control by protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights?

Republicans: 84.1% More Likely #5 Message

Candidate Supports Trump and His Policies

Are you more or less likely to vote for someone who will keep taxes low and spending under control by protecting the Taxpayer Bill of Rights?

Republicans: 77.9% More Likely #6 Message

Transportation

In our issue battery, Transportation and Immigration earned the top spots with roughly 25% each. However, when you add Traffic and Congestion as a top concern to Transportation, it tops nearly 30%. Transportation definitely matters to voters; Republicans and Undecided voters alike.

While other issues are very clear and well defined in the polling, an overall approach to transportation, traffic, congestion and funding is more murky. The one area within transportation that is more clear is that completing the Jefferson County Northwest Parkway is popular with both Undecideds and Republicans.

In an attempt to get a better sense on a general approach to transportation and funding, we asked a question that gave voters two different visions for how to solve the Transportation, Traffic, and Congestion issue.

Voters were required to make a choice between the following two statements:

Raise sales taxes to spend more on bike paths, mass transit, and roads

Solve Transportation and Congestion issues by raising sales taxes in order to spend more money on bike paths, mass transit, and roads?

Overall: 42.5% | Undecided Voters: 44.8% | Republicans: 17.4%

Fix roads without raising taxes by focusing budget on roads, not other spending

Solve Transportation and Congestion issues by fixing our roads without raising taxes by focusing our current budget on roads and not bike paths and mass transit, and prioritizing transportation funding over items like increasing Medicaid spending.

Overall: 42.0% | Undecided Voters: 33.0% | **Republicans: 68.3%**

For the overall electorate, they were nearly evenly split 42.5% to 42% between the two visions. For Undecideds, they leaned more toward the raising taxes and spending on all forms of transportation. Republicans clearly are very much behind the second statement.

Since the second statement really works for Republicans and overall people are pretty split between the two visions, a potential way to create a positive message around transportation that could be attractive for both Undecided voters and Republicans would be to:

- Use the “Fix Roads without Raising Taxes” statement as the basis and simply remove the hints at cutting funding for mass transit and other budget priorities,
- Add “Completing Jefferson County’s Northwest Parkway” as a concrete outcome voters can count on.

Verbatim Responses: Straight from the Horse’s Mouth

We asked voters the open ended question, “What is the number one quality you are looking for in the candidates you vote for at the county government level?” This gives them an opportunity to tell it like they see it and we record their responses verbatim. This can yield valuable insights into what voters are really thinking.

While people may have said it slightly differently in their responses, there were three very clear themes of Core Values that voters desire across all demographics.

First and foremost, JeffCo voters are looking for honesty in their county officials. Next, they talk about Integrity, as in honoring one’s word. And finally, there is a theme around the idea that they be “For The People.”

Core Values: Honesty, Integrity, For The People



Often using the words of regular people can be very powerful. Here are some variations of how people spoke about the themes above, as well as some additional values:

- **Honesty:** Straightforward, Straight Shooter, Transparent, Tell the Truth, No B.S.
- **Integrity:** Do what they say, High Integrity, Be true to your word

- **For the People:** “For the people. Period,” “Dedicated to the People”, Listens, Helps the People of Jefferson County
- **Some Additional Values:** Responsible, Fair, Sincere, Common Sense, Level-headed, Reliable, Open-minded, Down to Earth

Possible Landmines

While cutting funding to Sanctuary Cities is very popular with Republicans, a combined 54% of Undecided voters say they are less likely to vote for someone who will do that, with 40% of that being “much less likely.” A stronger way to talk about immigration to the larger public is to focus on the local impacts particularly in fighting the opioid crisis. This is also a way to highlight the work of the Sheriff and raise his popularity and name recognition. Any messages about cutting funding to Sanctuary Cities should be left to very targeted advertising or grassroots contact directly to Republicans or others identified through modeling or Voter ID.

When asked “How important is which party controls county government in your vote this fall?” Undecideds are much less likely to say that it is important than those who have already decided, though 35% still say it is important. This could be an enticing message for candidates to employ in their overall campaigning, though it is clear it is not particularly persuasive to undecideds and should be focused on turning out voters who would already support the Republican candidate if they vote.

Final Thoughts

While Republicans start out from behind, it is clear that focusing on the four most popular local Republican messages offers County-level candidates a path to victory. Voters and particularly undecided voters agree with the Republican message on local issues. Additionally, the less well known candidates have the opportunity to shore up their base by winning over Republicans and Trump supporters through targeted voter contact to the appropriate voter universes.

Another final note is how Democrats can be sunk with the movable electorate by letting voters know about the Democrats desire to kill the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, limit Constitutional freedoms like further limiting gun rights, and their wishes to limit educational choices for parents and children in the county. These issues are non-starters with Republicans and Unaffiliateds alike.

The takeaway for Republican county races is pretty simple. Consolidate Republican support and motivate that support to vote and vote down ballot through targeted messages and communication; county candidates work together to get their voter bases to align; and focus on persuading Undecided and Unaffiliated voters using the top four messages for Undecideds laid out throughout the document.