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IA-Gov: Branstad looks set to win GOP primary

by [desmoinesdem](#), Sun Jun 06, 2010 at 12:07:16 PM EDT

Three recent Iowa polls show former Governor Terry Branstad in a position to win this year's Republican gubernatorial primary on June 8. The [Sunday Des Moines Register published results from the latest Iowa poll by Selzer and Co](#), which surveyed 501 likely Iowa Republican primary voters. About 57 percent of respondents plan to vote for Terry Branstad, 29 percent plan to vote for Bob Vander Plaats, and 8 percent plan to vote for Rod Roberts. The poll was in the field from June 1 through June 3, and results for the likely Republican voters have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percent.

Two other Iowa polls by [Public Policy Polling](#) and [Research 2000 for KCCI](#) have found Branstad below 50 percent but comfortably ahead of Vander Plaats and Roberts. Public Policy Polling had Branstad with 46 percent, Vander Plaats with 31 percent and Roberts with 13 percent. Research 2000 for KCCI put Branstad at 44 percent in the GOP primary, Vander Plaats at 29 percent and Roberts at 12 percent.

In Iowa's 2002 Republican primary, [Vander Plaats did much better than his final poll numbers](#), but he benefited that year from a highly negative campaign between front-runners Steve Sukup and Doug Gross. Vander Plaats [announced James Dobson's endorsement on Thursday](#) and held rallies around the state with Chuck Norris on Friday and Saturday, but I doubt it will be enough to overcome [the hurdles he's facing in the primary](#).

This race might have played out differently had Vander Plaats had more resources to make his case. About 34 percent of likely Republican primary voters in the new Des Moines Register poll weren't sure whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Vander Plaats, and 60 percent said the same about Roberts. Branstad [not only is much better known](#), he also scored highest on attributes like "best ideas for bringing new jobs to Iowa" and "best able to curb government spending" (which is laughable when you consider Branstad's record on fiscal issues).

Public Policy Polling's survey [had Vander Plaats slightly ahead of Branstad](#) among Republican primary voters

who had heard of both candidates. Branstad's lead among self-identified conservatives was much smaller than his lead among those who called themselves moderates. Vander Plaats [has campaigned as a more conservative candidate](#), a stauncher opponent of gay marriage, and [the only Republican in the field who supports an Arizona-style immigration law](#) in Iowa (though Branstad and Roberts [have done plenty of pandering on the immigration issue too](#)).

I will never understand why the Club for Growth and other national right-wing organizations declined to get involved in the Iowa governor's race. Given the way the national conservative movement pushed Marco Rubio against Florida Governor Charlie Crist in the U.S. Senate primary, you'd think they would have some issues with Branstad. During his four terms as governor, he received a "D" grade from the Cato Institute, [greatly increased the state budget](#), [borrowed money to pay bills](#) and [kept two sets of books to hide illegal deficits](#).

Assuming Branstad is the Republican nominee, Democratic Governor Chet Culver has a tough road ahead. Every poll on the race since last fall has shown Branstad leading Culver, and in many cases Branstad was above the 50 percent mark. Last week [Public Policy Polling's survey](#) showed Branstad ahead 52-37, while [Research 2000 for KCCI](#) had Branstad leading Culver 51-42. The Des Moines Register hasn't published general election numbers yet for its latest poll by Selzer. Culver's approval ratings have been below 50 percent since last fall, and he will need to bring them up a bit and make this election a choice rather than a referendum on the incumbent. He also needs to hope that social conservatives and tea party activists who favor Vander Plaats either stay home or vote third party in the governor's race. Some conservatives [have already pledged not to support Branstad](#) against Culver.

Any thoughts about the Iowa governor's race are welcome in this thread.

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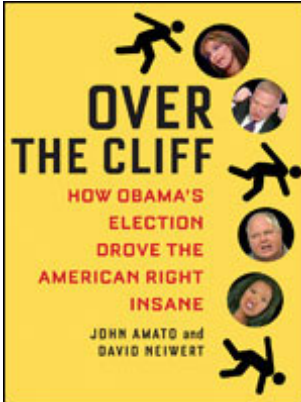
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