

Sarwar A. Kashmeri  
In Conjunction With  
The Twin-State Valley Media Network

**A conversation with Andy Smith, director of the University of New  
Hampshire Survey Center.  
~ Transcript of Podcast ~**

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Andy Smith, director of the University of New Hampshire Survey Center.

Q. The survey center gauges public opinion in the state of New Hampshire.

What are you learning about the candidates and the campaign at this point in the cycle?

A: Well, I think the biggest thing we're seeing right now is that most voters are just not paying that much attention to the race yet. We found that less than 10 percent of likely Republican primary voters and less than 10 percent of likely Democratic voters say they've actually decided who they're going to vote for. I should change that, it's not that they're not paying attention, it's just that they're nowhere near decided who they are going to vote for. So typically voters decide who they're going to vote for very late in the process - in the last few weeks before the actual election day. So this time, people are going out there seeing the candidates they're reading about them, they're seeing them on television, they're not making up their mind who they are going to vote for. I think what they're trying to do now is decide who's an acceptable candidate to vote for - who is somebody that they would consider voting for, and who are the candidates that they aren't considering voting for.

And so obviously the candidates have pretty sophisticated polling mechanisms themselves.

A: The ones that have money

Q: But so have they in any way changed the way they're campaigning, in some of the trends you seeing coming out - now vs. when they started?

A.: Some of the campaigns are changing their focus to spend more time in New Hampshire. Most, I think the one that stands out the most is John McCain campaign, who I think they've decided they have to count on winning New Hampshire. That is kind of an all-or-nothing with them with New Hampshire. And some of the other campaigns are deciding that maybe New Hampshire is not the place that they have a good chance of winning. And they're looking at other place, I think the Giuliani campaign has talked about focusing on states that are Feb. 5 states. You are seeing some of the tactical decisions being made now in the campaign.

Q. Well now, you folks have been doing this a long time. I suspect one of the important aspects of New Hampshire is that it allows the winner to emerge with the glow of a national leader, doesn't it?

A: Yes, because New Hampshire is the first primary state. There is quite a bit of difference between a primary and a caucus. The biggest difference is that a lot of people will come out and vote at a primary vs. a caucus, where the turnout is quite light. So in the New Hampshire primary, we're going see turnout rates of more 50 percent of eligible voters - which in many states they don't get that high of a turnout rate for the general election. So we're going to see, this is the first date where you're really going to be looked at by what you would think of as a general election-type electorate. So the press pays a little more attention to New Hampshire for that reason than they do to some of the other states. The biggest reason is that once New Hampshire starts, it's kind of a traditional kickoff of the election, the campaign season. So the press will pay a lot of attention to New Hampshire and the winner of New Hampshire and this is why I think the winner

of New Hampshire will be the eventual nominee. Because one week after New Hampshire will be the South Carolina primary, one week after that will be Florida and then one week after that will be all of the primary on Feb. 5. More than half of these delegates will be selected by the end of March. The momentum that a candidate has by winning New Hampshire, the press coverage they get and the negative press you get when you're the loser of New Hampshire I think are going to make a number of people drop out. Then the winner of New Hampshire will have tremendous momentum going in to the next primaries in South Carolina, and immediately into the next primary. So historically we've seen as the primary schedule gets more compressed, more frontloaded, that the winner of New Hampshire has a great chance of winning the nomination than they have previous years.

Q. Let me talk about that issue just a bit. I read an article by Bob Graham, the former governor of Florida, who also campaigned in New Hampshire, and he thinks this change of primary schedules has unintentionally been very damaging to the presidential election process so that's one point I want to ask you about - whether you agree and the second point is that he then goes on to conclude that Iowa and New Hampshire are unlikely to reclaim the role they once played in the screening of future presidents, so could you address those two points for us?

A. Sure I think first off, that I agree with him, that the increasingly frontloaded process is damaging to the nomination process. We're now choosing our candidates for president almost a year before the actual election, far before the time anyone will pay attention. There could be huge national or international events that occur in the meantime. So there's a real good chance that there is going to be buyer's remorse on the part of one party or both parties in the candidate they've selected. The second thing that I think is more problematic is that it really means the

candidates have to raise enormous amounts of money to be competitive at all.

And now winning the nomination is less about the ideas that you have or the vision you have for the future, or demonstrations of your leadership, it's how much money can you raise. And I think that that's not necessarily a good thing. I think that money is by itself, a bad thing in politics. But when we determine who's going to be our next president by who's able to raise the most money, that I think is a bad thing. So the one group that benefits from this compressed process and I think that this is an intentional reason we see it, is the process is becoming more front loaded, are political parties are there only to win elections that's their function and it's more difficult for a political party to win a general election if they have to spend a lot of time and money on inner party squabbles in a primary.

Typically the less of a contest there is in the primaries the better chance the candidate has of winning the presidency. And ever since the reforms that have come out in the 1968 Democratic convention and since they've kicked in parties have been looking for ways to gain back some of the power that they lost as an organization in choosing the candidates and I think the frontloaded process is the latest strategy to do that. By front loading the process means that money is more important in helping candidates raise money so that the organization and the people within the parties now have I think, even greater leverage in choosing the candidate than they did before.

Q. And do you agree with this conclusion, therefore that New Hampshire and Iowa are unlikely to reclaim the roll they once play?

A.: Actually I think that he's wrong in that my assessment in that New Hampshire is going to have an even greater role in choosing the nominee this year - more than it has in the past. Because of that frontloading process and the momentum that a candidate gets from winning New Hampshire is going to be essentially, in my view, unstoppable. It's going to be very difficult

for the loser of New Hampshire to rebound and retool their methods after loosing here.

Q. At this point your advice to New Hampshire voters is ...?

A. My advice is pay attention, go see as many candidates as you can and take seriously the threat that I think is coming from the states like Florida and Michigan, take seriously the threat to New Hampshire's primary. New Hampshire does the nation a real service by venting candidates by helping weed out the field or narrow the field somewhat. I think that it would be very difficult for any other state to do as good as a job as New Hampshire has done historically in that roll.