



**Paul Simon
Public Policy Institute**

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 21, 2009

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ILLINOIS VOTERS WANT BUDGET CUTS BUT CAN'T SAY WHERE

CARBONDALE, ILL. - Registered voters in Illinois oppose tax increases and think the state should make big cuts in the state budget - but they also don't seem to have specific things they want to see trimmed, according to a poll released Wednesday by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

"These numbers pose a real quandary for political leaders in the state. People say they want to cut state services, but they can't seem to point to things that should be trimmed," said David Yepsen, director of the institute.

A substantial majority (56.5 percent) of Illinoisans polled thought the state's budget problems could be solved by cutting waste and inefficiency in government. Only about one in ten (9.5 percent) said they thought only a revenue increase could fix the state's budget problems. Another quarter (27.3%) said a combination of budget cuts and tax increases would be needed to solve the budget problem.

Charles Leonard, the Simon Institute visiting professor who supervised the poll, said, "A huge underlying problem lawmakers face is the folk wisdom that state government is so full of massive waste and fraud that, if we could only find the will to cut them, such an action would make our fiscal problems disappear. While we could continue to find more things to trim, the size of the deficit looms well beyond what cutting waste alone can solve."

Almost two-thirds (65.5 percent) of registered voters oppose raising the income tax from 3 percent to 4.5 percent as proposed by Gov. Pat Quinn. Three-fourths (75.8 percent) oppose raising the state sales tax; 53.3 percent oppose expanding the sales tax to

cover more services. Another 51.4 percent oppose expanded gambling; 63.5 percent oppose selling state assets like the lottery or toll roads.

But when asked a series of questions about what should be cut, respondents were hard-pressed to point to anything specific:

There are 84.4 percent who oppose cuts to K-12 education; 61.4 percent oppose cuts to higher education; 79.8 percent oppose cuts to state police or prison operations; 63 percent don't want to cut spending on state parks or environmental projects.

Also, 72.4 percent don't want to cut spending on programs for poor people; 85.3 percent oppose reductions in spending for people with mental and physical disabilities; 53.4 percent oppose cuts to state pensions.

"A cynic might suggest people in Illinois are being quite rational here," Yepsen said. "Many seem to want services without paying for them. We all like that kind of deal, but the trouble is, you can't build a state budget on such logic."

"Part of the problem for policy makers in Illinois is that many people don't feel they get good value for state services," he said. "There are 48 percent who don't think the value of state services is very good. By contrast, 39 percent don't think federal services are so good and 30 percent don't think much of local services."

These numbers also may explain why legislators want to wait until after the February primary before voting on budget cuts or revenue increases. "Lawmakers can sense this is how people feel," Yepsen said. "No matter what they do to resolve the budget questions, they are going to make people mad."

The Simon Institute poll repeated many of these questions from last year's inaugural statewide poll. Just as last year's results showed, Illinoisans are as reluctant to raise taxes as they are to support cuts.

However, there has been some public opinion movement since fall 2008, both on the revenue-enhancing side and the program-cutting side.

Last year, for example, 20.9 percent favored spending cuts for state universities; this year support grew to 31.9 percent. In 2008, 21.2 percent favored spending cuts for natural resources such as state parks and environmental services; in 2009 that increased to 32.0 percent.

In the Simon Institute's 2008 poll, 28.4 percent favored expanding the state sales tax to cover services, such as dry cleaning or haircuts; in the 2009 poll, 44.1 percent

approved. In a less dramatic result, 21.4 percent of those surveyed this year approved of raising the sales tax rate, up from 17.0 percent in 2008.

“These results may show that increasing numbers of voters have come to the conclusion that something’s got to give,” Leonard said. “While most people still oppose both specific cuts and various tax increases, the continued media attention to the budget situation, and the daily realities of people losing their jobs and state services disappearing may be bringing people closer to the stark realities of funding state operations. I expect next year’s poll will demonstrate even more movement.”

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute funded, created and directed this telephone survey of 800 registered voters across the state of Illinois. Interviews were conducted between September 9, 2009, and October 8, 2009, by the Survey Research Center at the University of North Texas. Respondents were chosen at random, and each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Results from the entire sample have a statistical margin for error of ± 3.4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3.4 points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic, and response subgroups.

**Voter Support for Program Cuts and Revenue Enhancements:
Results from the 2008 and 2009 Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Surveys**

Proposal	% Favor 2008	% Favor 2009
<i>Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on:</i>		
Kindergarten through high school education?	10.7%	13.0%
State Universities?	20.9%	31.9%
Public safety, such as state police and prisons?	16.8%	16.3%
Natural resources, such as state parks and the environment?	21.2%	32.0%
Programs for the poor people?*	20.6%	20.4%
Pension benefits for state workers' retirement?***	24.1%	39.5%

I'm going to read several ways people have suggested for raising more money. For each one that I read, I'd like you to tell me whether you favor or oppose raising revenues in that way, OK?

Raise the state sales tax	17.0%	21.4%
Expand the sales tax to cover services, such as dry cleaning or haircuts.	28.4%	44.1%
Expand legalized gambling in Illinois	46.6%	44.5%
Sell or lease state assets, such as the lottery or the Illinois toll road system	37.8%	25.9%

* *In 2008 survey, "programs for the needy"*

** *In 2008 survey, "State workers' retirement"*

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**Poll Results of Registered Voters in Illinois
Conducted September 8-October 9**

Released October 21, 2009

I have a few questions about government taxes and services:

1. First, how good a value would you say you get in terms of services for the taxes you pay to the federal government? Would you say you get:

An excellent value	2.8%
Good value	16.6%
Fair value	38.4%
Not so good	20.9%
Poor value	19.4%
No opinion/Don't know	2.0%

in services for the tax dollars paid to the federal government?

2. And what about the value of services you get for the tax dollars paid to the state of Illinois? Would you say you get:

An excellent value	1.6%
Good value	13.1%
Fair value	35.6%
Not so good	25.0%
Poor value	23.3%
No opinion/Don't know	1.4%

in services for the tax dollars paid to the state government?

3. How good a value would you say you get in terms of services for the taxes you pay your local governments? Would you say you get:

An excellent value	7.8%
Good value	26.3%
Fair value	34.0%
Not so good	16.1%
Poor value	14.1%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	1.8%

in services for the tax dollars paid to your local government?

4. And what do you think about government spending in your area of the state? In terms of its share of state spending, do you think your part of the state gets:

More than its fair share	8.8%
About the right amount	37.9%
Less than its fair share	39.3%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	14.1%

of state spending?

Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about the state of Illinois' budget:

5. The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over 12 billion dollars. I'm going to read three statements that people have made about how to fix the deficit, and ask you which one comes closest to your views.

Only a revenue increase can solve the state's budget problems	9.5%
The budget problems can be solved by cutting waste and inefficiency	56.5%
A combination of budget cuts and revenue increases will be needed to solve the problem	27.3%
Have not thought about it	3.4%
No response/Don't know	3.4%

There have been a number of proposals to address the state's budget problems by making cuts in state programs and services. I'm going to read several areas where people have suggested that the state could make cuts. Tell me whether you favor or oppose budget cuts in that area.

6. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on kindergarten through high school education?

Favor	13.0%
Oppose	84.4%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	2.7%

7. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on state universities?

Favor	31.9%
Oppose	61.4%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	6.8%

8. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on public safety, such as state police and prison operations?

Favor	16.3%
Oppose	79.8%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	4.1%

9. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulation?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 32.0% |
| Oppose | 63.0% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 5.0% |
10. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for poor people?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 20.4% |
| Oppose | 72.4% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 7.3% |
11. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for people with mental or physical disabilities?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 11.8% |
| Oppose | 85.3% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 3.0% |
12. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on pension benefits for state workers' retirement?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 39.5% |
| Oppose | 53.4% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 7.2% |

There have been a number of proposals to address the state's budget problems by finding ways to raise more money to pay for programs and services. I'm going to read several areas where people have suggested that more money could be raised. For each one that I read, I'd like you to tell me whether you favor or oppose raising revenues in that way.

13. Do you favor or oppose raising the state income tax rate from 3 percent to 4.5 percent?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 32.1% |
| Oppose | 65.5% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 2.4% |
14. Do you favor or oppose raising the state sales tax rate?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 21.4% |
| Oppose | 75.8% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 2.9% |
15. Do you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services like dry cleaning or haircuts, which are not currently taxes?
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Favor | 44.1% |
| Oppose | 53.3% |
| Other/No opinion/Don't know | 2.7% |

16. Do you favor or oppose a proposal expanding legalized gambling in the state?

Favor	44.5%
Oppose	51.4%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	4.1%

17. Do you favor or oppose selling state assets, such as the lottery and the Illinois toll road system, to private investors?

Favor	25.9%
Oppose	63.5%
Other/No opinion/Don't know	10.6%

**Some columns do not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.*

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