



**Paul Simon
Public Policy Institute**
Southern Illinois University Carbondale



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CARBONDALE, ILL. –
Saturday, April 24, 2010

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“Southern Illinois Views on Taxes, Government and Public Services”

Southern Illinois voters have a decidedly mixed view of government, politics, and taxes in this part of the state, according to a new poll released Saturday by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

“People like the quality of the environment and quality of public safety here but they’re not as excited about the quality of the roads and bridges,” said John S. Jackson, a visiting professor at the Institute who helped develop the poll. “They also give the schools a somewhat mixed review.”

“People also want to see the state budget cut but not in the areas where most of the money is spent,” he said.

The survey finds:

- Overall, registered voters feel pretty good about the quality of the environment and public safety in southern Illinois. For example, 63 percent rate the quality of the environment in this area as good or excellent; 29.9 percent rate it as average, leaving 6.7 percent in the not so good or poor category. There are 60 percent who rate their public safety agencies (state and local police and fire protection) as good or excellent. There are 26.4 percent who rate them as average and 13.2 percent as poor or not so good.
- Public schools and the infrastructure of roads and bridges don’t fare quite as well. There are 44 percent of southern Illinois registered voters who say the schools are good or excellent and 19.8 percent rate them as average. This leaves 9.4 percent who rate them as poor or not so good. As for roads and bridges, only 27 percent rate them as good or excellent while 38.7 percent rate them as average and 34.5 percent say they are not so good or poor.

- Southern Illinois voters are also not persuaded that their area gets its “fair share” of state resources. 80.5 percent claim that view compared to only 11.5 percent who say that the region’s share is “about right” and 1.7 percent who say it gets “more than” its share.
- And instead of tax increases, they favor budget cuts in order to balance the state budget. Yet they don’t seem able to specify one area that should be cut.

When asked how they would deal with the state’s \$13 billion deficit, only 9.7 percent said that the state should raise new revenue, 60.1 percent said that the state should cut waste, leaving 24.4 percent willing to consider a combination of cutting waste and raising new revenues. This is very close to the statewide distributions found in a poll conducted by the Simon Institute in October 2009.

In the current poll voters were asked their opinion of various tax options. Majorities of southern Illinois voters opposed each. Almost four in ten (38.9 percent) favored raising the state income tax rate from 3 percent to 4 percent. This is in contrast to the 32 percent who favored the income tax increase in last fall’s statewide Simon Institute Poll. Noting the apparent increase in the percentage of voters favoring the income tax hike, Jackson said, “It may be that Governor Quinn’s proposal has made some progress with the voters since last fall although his proposal still faces an uphill battle for public support in the region.”

Raising more revenue from an expansion of gambling was favored by 40 percent and opposed by 55 percent. In the statewide poll from October, 45 percent favored expanding gambling and 51 percent opposed.

Also only one-third (33 percent) of the southern Illinois voters were in favor of raising the sales tax while almost two-thirds (64 percent) were opposed. Voters also oppose expanding the list of things covered by the sales tax. Only 36 percent favored taxing services while 60 percent opposed this idea. So, expanding the range of services available to be taxed was only slightly more popular than simply increasing the sales tax.

While only a decided minority of voters was in favor of more taxes, and most thought that “waste” should be cut, when it came to the specific public services where most of the money is spent, the voters, by substantial majorities, want those areas spared.

- Only 11.7 percent favored cutting education in the K-12 grades whereas an overwhelming 87.3 percent were opposed.
- Only 18.5 percent favored cutting the budgets of the community colleges and 76.3 percent opposed.
- Universities were favored for taking a cut by 24.9 percent of the voters with 67.1 percent opposed.
- Only 18.0 percent favored reductions in public safety spending while 78.6 percent opposed.

- Finally, the lowest level of support was evidenced for state parks where 35 percent favored cuts, but 57.9 percent were opposed.

The bottom line is, the poll indicates voters have no obvious targets for state budget cutters even though they think authorities should cut the ubiquitous category of “waste” first.

“There are no easy answers to the budget crisis indicated in these incongruous results,” said Jackson. “On the one hand, the voters by large majorities want these major services to continue and not to be cut, but they are also convinced that there must be some obvious targets out there somewhere.”

Voters have mixed feelings about the value they receive from the taxes they pay, especially to the federal government and to their local governments. When asked what value they receive from their federal taxes, 16.7 percent responded with good or excellent value, and 35.9 percent said they received fair value. This left a minority, 42.9 percent, saying they receive poor or not so good value from their federal taxes.

This same question elicited more positive results for local governments with 28.6 percent saying that they receive good or excellent value, and 39.9 percent saying they receive fair value from the local taxes they pay. This means that over two-thirds of the voters were positive about the value received from their local tax dollars. The remainder, 29.7 percent, said they receive poor or not so good value.

The lowest rating by far was placed on the value received from state government with 58.9 percent saying they received poor or not so good value from the state taxes they pay. This critical group is about 10 percent larger in southern Illinois than the most critical group was in the statewide poll taken last fall. Only 25.9 percent in southern Illinois said they received fair value and only 12.2 percent said they received good or excellent value for their state taxes.

So, the state government lagged behind both the federal government and local governments in terms of the evaluations of southern Illinois voters on this indicator.

The poll of 401 registered voters in the area was taken April 5 to 13 and has a margin of error of 4.9 percent. The poll was conducted for the Institute by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. It reports no Illinois political figures as clients and was paid with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund.

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**Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale**

**Poll Results of Registered Voters in Southern Illinois
Conducted April 5-13, 2010
*Released April 24, 2010***

1. How good a value would you say you get in terms of services for the taxes you pay to the federal government?

An excellent value	1.7%
Good value	15.0%
A fair value	35.9%
Not so good	20.9%
A poor value	21.9%
Other/Don't know	4.5%

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

An excellent value	1.2%
Good value	11.0%
A fair value	25.9%
Not so good	28.7%
A poor value	30.2%
Other/Don't know	3.0%

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

An excellent value	2.7%
Good value	25.9%
A fair value	39.9%
Not so good	14.2%
A poor value	15.5%
Other/Don't know	1.7%

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 | 1.7% |
| About the right amount | 11.5% |
| Less than its fair share | 80.5% |
| Other/Don't know | 6.2% |
5. The quality of the environment, such as clean air and water. In your area, would you say environmental quality is excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor?
- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| Excellent | 9.0% |
| Good | 54.1% |
| Average | 29.9% |
| Not so good | 5.0% |
| Poor | 1.7% |
| Other/Don't know | .2% |
6. The quality of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. Is the quality of infrastructure in your area excellent, good, average, not so good or poor?
- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| Excellent | 2.2% |
| Good | 24.4% |
| Average | 38.7% |
| Not so good | 19.5% |
| Poor | 15.0% |
| Other/Don't know | .2% |
7. What about public safety in your area, for example police and fire protection? Would you say public safety in your area is excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor?
- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| Excellent | 10.5% |
| Good | 49.1% |
| Average | 26.4% |
| Not so good | 8.7% |
| Poor | 4.5% |
| Other/Don't know | .7% |
8. What do you think about the quality of public education in your area, in kindergarten through high school? Is public K through 12 education excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor?
- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| Excellent | 7.5% |
| Good | 36.2% |
| Average | 28.2% |
| Not so good | 11.0% |
| Poor | 12.2% |
| Other/Don't know | 5.0% |

9. How well is the economy performing in your area? Would you say the performance of the economy in your area is excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor?

Excellent	0.0%
Good	8.0%
Average	31.2%
Not so good	26.8%
Poor	32.4%
Other/Don't know	1.5%

10. How good are the parks and recreational opportunities in your area? Would you say the quality of parks and recreation in your area is excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor?

Excellent	10.5%
Good	44.4%
Average	24.7%
Not so good	8.7%
Poor	9.2%
Other/Don't know	2.5%

11. The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over 13 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...

...taking in more revenue, such as a tax increase	9.7%
...cutting waste and inefficiency in government	60.1%
...a combination of budget cuts and revenue increases	24.4%
...haven't thought much about it	2.5%
...other/don't know	3.2%

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

Favor	11.7%
Oppose	87.3%
Other/Don't know	1.0%

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

Favor	24.9%
Oppose	67.1%
Other/Don't know	8.0%

14. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on community colleges?

Favor	18.5%
Oppose	76.3%
Other/Don't know	5.2%

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

Favor	18.0%
Oppose	78.6%
Other/Don't know	3.5%

16. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulation?

Favor	35.2%
Oppose	57.9%
Other/Don't know	7.0%

17. Do you favor or oppose raising the state income tax rate from 3 percent to 4 percent?

Favor	38.9%
Oppose	58.1%
Other/Don't know	3.0%

18. Do you favor or oppose raising the state sales tax rate?

Favor	33.2%
Oppose	64.1%
Other/Don't know	2.7%

19. Do you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services like dry cleaning or haircuts, which are not currently taxed?

Favor	36.2%
Oppose	60.1%
Other/Don't know	3.7%

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

Favor	40.1%
Oppose	54.9%
Other/Don't know	5.0%

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

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