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Contact: Charles Leonard
618-303-9099

Southern Illinois Voters Strongly Support Reforms in Candidate Financial Reporting

It is not surprising, given Illinois' reputation for pay-to-play politics, that a large majority of voters in southern Illinois are dissatisfied with the information they have about the finances of political candidates in their state.

The latest Southern Illinois Poll® from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU Carbondale also shows strong support for a number of financial reporting reform proposals that have been talked about in Springfield.

The survey, conducted February 23 – 28, showed that three in ten (30 percent) were very or somewhat satisfied with the information they have on elected officials' outside financial interests. More than twice as many (65 percent) were not very or not at all satisfied with the information they had on elected officials' finances. The sample of 400 registered voters in Illinois' 18 southernmost counties has a margin for error of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points.

"More disclosure of information might help convince people their political leaders are operating in the public interest and not in their own personal interest," said David Yepsen, director of the Simon Institute. "As Rod Blagojevich heads to prison, it's another opportunity for political leaders to consider what more they can do to restore public confidence in themselves and their institutions. Most politicians, who have nothing to hide, have little to fear from more disclosure."

Respondents rated six finance-related features of potential candidates' finances as very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to know. Most often rated as very important to know (80 percent) is whether an elected official or candidate receives loans on terms better than what is available to the public.

Almost three-fourths (74 percent) thought it was very important to know whether a candidate was a lobbyist or related to a lobbyist. Seven in ten (70 percent) thought it was very important to know whether a candidate owned real estate that may benefit from government projects or regulations.

Six in ten (62 percent) thought it was very important to know whether a candidate was a leader in an organization that may receive tax dollars, and just over half (53 percent) thought it was very important to know whether a candidate received non-family gifts worth more than \$500.

Lowest on the “very important” list (47 percent) was whether a candidate for state office had another job or source of income.

“Southern Illinois voters clearly want to know about potential conflicts of interest on the part of their public office holders or candidates,” said Simon Institute visiting professor John Jackson, one of the authors of the survey. “This is a vote for transparency.”

The poll of 400 registered voters covered the 18 southernmost counties in Illinois: Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, Washington, White, and Williamson. Live phone interviews were conducted February 23-28. The sample of 400 has a margin of error of 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the result would be within plus or minus 4.9 percentage points from the results obtained here. We also included a special sample of cell phone users to ensure greater accuracy.

Telephone interviews were conducted by Issues and Answers of Virginia Beach, VA. It reports no Illinois political figures as clients. The poll was paid for with non-state dollars using proceeds from the Institute’s endowment fund.

Note: The “Simon Poll” and “Southern Illinois Poll” are copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use of publication of these polls is encouraged- but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIUC.

Table 1 • Satisfaction with Financial Information

How satisfied are you with the information you currently have about elected officials' outside financial interests and incomes? Are you...?

Very satisfied	2.3%
Somewhat satisfied	27.3%
Not very satisfied	33.0%
Not at all satisfied	32.3%
Don't know	5.3%

Table 2 • Importance of Knowing Aspects of Candidate Finances

How important is it to you personally to know if an elected official or political candidate...

a. receives loans on terms better than what is available to the public?		d. is a leader in an organization that may receive tax dollars?	
Very important	78.5%	Very important	62.0%
Somewhat important	12.0%	Somewhat important	21.8%
Not very important	4.3%	Not very important	5.0%
Not at all important	2.8%	Not at all important	5.0%
Don't know	2.5%	Don't know	6.3%
b. is a lobbyist or is related to a lobbyist?		e. receives a gift, not from a family member, that is worth more than \$500?	
Very important	73.5%	Very important	52.8%
Somewhat important	13.8%	Somewhat important	25.3%
Not very important	2.3%	Not very important	11.5%
Not at all important	5.0%	Not at all important	7.5%
Don't know	5.5%	Don't know	3.0%
c. owns real estate or investments that may benefit from government projects or regulations?		f. has another job or other sources of income?	
Very important	70.0%	Very important	46.8%
Somewhat important	17.8%	Somewhat important	28.5%
Not very important	3.5%	Not very important	13.8%
Not at all important	3.5%	Not at all important	7.8%
Don't know	5.3%	Don't know	3.3%

