

Poll Shows Pulse of Montana Voters

Respondents Give Answers on Economic, Political and Business Issues

The Power Base (P-Base) is an annual scientific poll of 600 Montana voters on a variety of business and political issues with a margin of error of 4.1%. The poll is commissioned by the Montana Chamber of Commerce and other business groups to determine what regular Montanans think about important economic issues facing our state. Here are some of the results:

Economic Development

The unemployment levels are a top concern for Montanans. 40% listed it as the top problem facing our state, and the next highest problem, health care, was a third of that level at 15%. Montanans want to get back to work, and they are looking for businesses, not government, to provide the jobs.

As in prior surveys, the P-base shows Montanans want to see more business growth, especially in high wage businesses like the natural resource industries. For example, 78% of Montana voters want the state to encourage more timber harvesting, 76% want more oil & gas development, 71% want more coal development and 70% want more mining. Almost two-thirds of Montanans say the state Land Board should go forward with the Otter Creek coal tracts leasing as well, which is an issue the Board will take up at its December 21st meeting.

“The message from the survey is clear: Montanans want to see the state move towards long-term, sustainable growth by increasing natural resource development, improving our business climate, and creating more good-paying jobs,” said Jon Bennion, Government Relations Director for the Montana Chamber.

Montanans are still pessimistic about the national economy. 53% of voters believe the U.S.’s economy is on the wrong track as opposed to 24% who think we are on the right track. Voters believe the state’s economy is better off with 41% saying we’re on the right track versus 34% saying wrong track.

Health Care

Respondents in the poll expressed significant satisfaction levels with their own health care insurance. Almost three-quarters of those polled (74%) said they were satisfied, while only 15% said they were dissatisfied. Half of Montanans want Washington, D.C. to scrap the current health care proposals and draft new legislation that would address rising costs.

Concerns of Voters

The P-base is also a good opportunity to see what financial concerns are on the minds of voters. For the fourth straight year, health care costs continue to be a top concern at 24% and high taxes came in second at 18%. Additionally, addressing the unemployment situation is the top issue (18%) voters want addressed in the coming elections, and health care (17%) is a not-so-distant second concern of voters at 15%. 59% said government in general is getting too involved and spending too much money, while only 31% said government wasn’t doing enough on issues like education, health care and the environment.

Elections

When it comes to candidate endorsements, voters respect candidates who get stamps of approval from business groups, like chambers of commerce, agriculture groups and more.

When asked whether a Montana Chamber endorsement of a candidate would influence their voter, 51% of voters said it would have a positive effect compared with only 16% who said it would have a negative effect (35% net positive). Even more popular are agriculture groups with 68% positive to only 7% negative (61% net positive). Trial lawyers (-40% net negative), environmental groups (-18% net negative) and labor unions (-9% net negative) scored low in the poll.

When asked about the upcoming elections for the Montana state legislature, voters are more likely (46%) to want to replace their local legislator rather than re-elect them (34%). Additionally, Republicans have a slight edge going into the legislative elections. 32% prefer GOP candidates for the legislature while 25% prefer Democrats.

“Candidates for the legislature need to focus on the economy, jobs, and growing the business sector,” explained Bennion, “Voters are worried about how much the government is trying to do, so candidates need to offer solutions that center around responsible development of our natural resources, controlling government deficits, and free enterprise.”

Toplines for the poll are posted at the Montana Chamber website at:

www.montanachamber.com. For more information, please contact Jon Bennion, Government Relations Director at (406)697-0568, or jon@montanachamber.com.