

Preferences on State Expenditure Cuts Media Release Points Volume 1, no. 4

Ask-Alabama Poll, Fall 2004

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Significant Findings

1. Only 1 of 6 Alabamians agree that the State Government is doing a good or excellent job in handling its money.

- a. 16% believe that the State is handling its revenue in a good or excellent way, while 27% indicate that the State is doing a poor job, and 15% assess the performance as very poor.

By far, most Alabamians have a negative assessment on how well the state is managing its revenues. Less than 2% state that Alabama is doing an excellent job in managing its funds. The State has a long way to go to convince the public that it can be trusted to spend public funds wisely.

2. The public splits down the middle in its assessment on the effectiveness of the current budget cuts in streamlining state government and making it more efficient.

- a. 46% of respondents agree that the state budget cuts have helped make the government more efficient and streamlined while 43% disagree.

Approximately half of the public appear willing to acknowledge that the State made significant cuts during the last budget cycle. For the other half, however, the cuts were not enough, and did not have the impact desired.

3. By a margin of 2 to 1, the public opposes reducing benefits, including health insurance, for state employees.

- a. 41% of the respondents strongly oppose cuts in benefits for state employees. Only 14% strongly support such cuts.

It will be a difficult sell for the Governor and legislative leadership to impose deep cuts in benefits for state agency employees. From the perspective of the fiscal officers of the State, the best that can be hoped for in this special session is that a greater proportion of the growth in benefit costs will be carried by the employees.

4. More than two thirds of the public oppose any significant cutbacks in state services for children and senior citizens.

- a. 73% oppose cuts in services at senior citizen centers.
- b. 68% oppose reductions in senior health care services.
- c. 75% do not favor reductions in funding for child health or nutrition programs.
- d. 68% oppose funding cuts for child recreation or after-school programs.

Programs for senior citizens and children enjoy widespread support among the public, and any attempts to reduce funding for these services by the State would be very unpopular. The paradox is that Alabamians strongly believe that there is considerable waste and mismanagement in State government, but the waste does not occur in those services that directly impact upon the most vulnerable members of our community.

5. 88% of the public would oppose layoffs among teachers in the State as a mechanism to build fiscal health. More than three quarters would also oppose any move to freeze the hiring of State Highway patrol officers.

- a. 73% strongly oppose layoffs among school teachers in the state as a method to cut spending. Only 4% strongly favor such a move.
- b. 56% strongly oppose a return to a hiring freeze on State Highway patrol officers and an additional 20% mildly oppose such a move.

Education and law enforcement are two services that state residents do not want to see compromised as a way to reduce the red ink in the State. There does not seem to be any strong support to alter the education trust fund structure, and attempts to threaten layoffs among state troopers or school teachers would likely backfire.

Poll Facts

Dates of Survey: October 12 - October 27, 2004
Sample Size: 1018
Estimated Margin of Error: Less than +/- 3%
Type of Survey: Random telephone survey of Alabamians 19 or older