

THE 2004 UTAH PRIORITIES POLL: THE TOP ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF UTAHNS FOR THE 2004 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

As Utah heads toward the initial stages of the 2004 election season, Utahns are feeling optimistic about the state's future. However, Utahns continue to be concerned about the future of Utah's public education system, the economy, water supply and quality, health, crime, and a number of issues.

In about eight months, Utahns will elect a new governor for the first time in twelve years. Although Utahns feel confident about the direction that Utah is headed, the state faces many issues and challenges that will need to be effectively managed by Utah's future governor. To help voters understand these issues and challenges, Utah Foundation has created an ambitious new project called *Utah Priorities*. See the highlight on this page for a description of the *Utah Priorities* project.

The 2004 *Utah Priorities* poll was conducted to prioritize and delve into the issues that Utahns think the next governor can and should do something about. The poll results reflect the issues registered voters in Utah considered to be of greatest concern. However, most of the poll questions *do not distinguish* how voters side on each of the issues. Respondents were asked how concerned they were about certain issues but not their opinions on potential solutions.

UTAH'S MOST PRESSING ISSUES

The 2004 *Utah Priorities* poll found that a clear majority of Utahns feel that the state of Utah is headed in the right direction (65% right direction, 23% wrong direction, 12% don't know). Utahns' general optimism for the state is significantly higher than the national mood.

In a January 2004 CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, 55% of Americans felt satisfied with the direction of the country and 43% felt dissatisfied. However, it is evident in other responses that Utahns are unsure

about their personal and state economic futures. Nine of the top ten issues revolve around either personal economic security or the state's ability to fund programs.

Asked to identify the most important issues facing Utah today, measured on a scale of one to five with one as "low priority" and five as "high priority," respondents named public education as the highest priority with an average priority rating of 4.39. Public education was closely followed by jobs and the economy (4.18), followed by water supply and quality (4.06). In addition to these top three concerns, those polled were asked about their level of concern on fifteen different

issues. Figure 1 shows the complete results of how Utahns prioritize those issues and challenges facing Utah.

With the recent and ongoing economic recession, it may be surprising

Utah Priorities: Campaign Information Reform

Throughout this election year, Utah Foundation will work to provide information, analysis, and thoughtful research on the issues that matter most to you as you consider the future of Utah. The project began with a poll conducted by Dan Jones and Associates to understand which issues are of greatest concern to voters. Utah Foundation will use this information to guide its research agenda for 2004 and has created a new issues information website at www.utahpriorities.net.

The website will become a library of information on the issues identified in this report and will provide email updates to keep you informed on research and news about the issues and how the candidates for governor are addressing these issues. Candidates have agreed to participate in the program by providing policy statements and answering questions about how each would solve these problems if elected.

Please visit the Utah Priorities website at www.utahpriorities.net to learn more about this service and to sign up for email-only Research Briefs, news updates, and candidate information.

For the complete report on this topic and other reports, please visit our website at www.utahpriorities.net or www.utahfoundation.org

Figure 1: The Top Ten Issues

	Low Priority			High Priority		Don't Know	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Public Education	3%	2%	10%	21%	63%	1%	4.39
2. Jobs & Economic Development	2%	4%	15%	31%	47%	1%	4.18
3. Water Supply & Quality	2%	5%	18%	32%	42%	1%	4.06
4. Health Care							
Children's Health Issues	2%	6%	22%	30%	39%	1%	3.99
Other Health Care Issues	3%	6%	25%	27%	39%	1%	3.93
5. Crime, Security, & Safety	1%	8%	27%	31%	33%	0%	3.87
6. Higher Education	3%	7%	25%	30%	34%	1%	3.85
7. Taxes	3%	9%	24%	28%	35%	1%	3.84
8. Dealing with Growth in Utah	4%	7%	26%	31%	30%	1%	3.79
9. Environment							
Environment & Air Quality	3%	8%	27%	31%	30%	1%	3.77
Hazardous Waste	6%	12%	27%	25%	29%	1%	3.59
10. Parental Rights	8%	14%	29%	21%	25%	2%	3.42

to some that public education is a larger issue to Utahns than jobs and the economy. According to a national November 2003 NPR Poll, 44% of the respondents declared that jobs and the economy was the top issue, whereas public education was a distant fourth at 16%. Nationally, Americans felt that affordable health care (23%) and moral values (17%) were of greater concern than education.

Also somewhat surprising is the concern that respondents expressed for water supply and quality. Given that Utah has been in a drought for the past five years, it seems that conservation campaigns have been effective in heightening awareness among Utah residents.

Beginning in March, Utah Foundation will publish research briefs on the top ten issues identified in this poll. We will begin with issue number ten and work our way to the most important issues as the election nears. Also, in-depth reports on the top three issues will be released by Utah Foundation beginning in the summer.

PRIORITY RANKINGS

1. Public Education

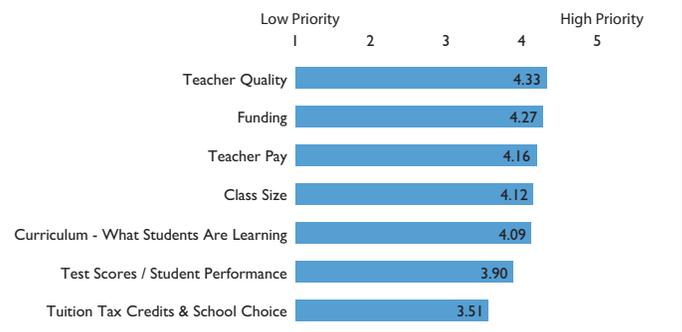
Public Education is the issue Utahns care most about. On a 1-5 scale, with one as “low priority”, 63% of those polled gave this issue a “5” or high priority. When follow-up questions were asked, respondents were concerned about the aspects of public education shown in Figure 2 in order from highest to lowest.

Of those polled, 38% form their opinions about public education through the information provided by media outlets. Another 35% base their opinions on their experience with their neighborhood schools. It is also interesting to note that teacher quality and pay were more of concern than class size.

2. Jobs & Economic Development

47% of those surveyed rated this issue a “5.” Follow up found that the creation of new jobs and Utah’s wage rates were of the greatest

Figure 2: Issues Within Public Education



concern. Programs and incentives to attract new businesses to the state also were a concern.

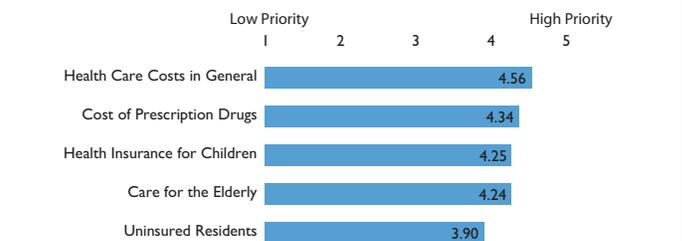
3. Water Supply and Quality

Water supply and quality ranks third on the list of issues of concern. Of those surveyed, 42% said water supply and quality was a “high priority” for them.

4. Health Care

Health care, including children’s health issues, ranks fourth with 39% of those polled giving the issue a “5.” Follow up questions found that respondents were concerned with the issues listed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Issues Within Health Care



5. Crime and Security

Crime and Security is the fifth most concerning issue to Utah voters. Within this category, 58% said the safety of children was their highest concern. Following this, 40% said that becoming the victim of identity theft was their most pressing concern.

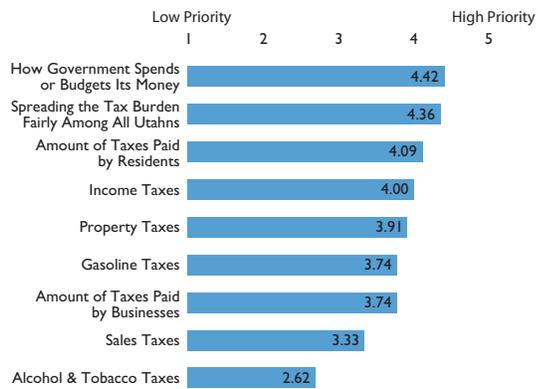
6. Higher Education

Higher Education ranks as issue number six. The ability of graduates to find jobs and tuition costs for students tied as the issues of greatest concern. These were followed by the quality of education and funding for higher education. Last on the list were enrollment caps.

7. Taxes

Taxes rank seventh on the list of issues. A variety of follow up questions were asked to determine what aspects of taxation most concerned registered voters in Utah. That list from highest to lowest is shown Figure 4.

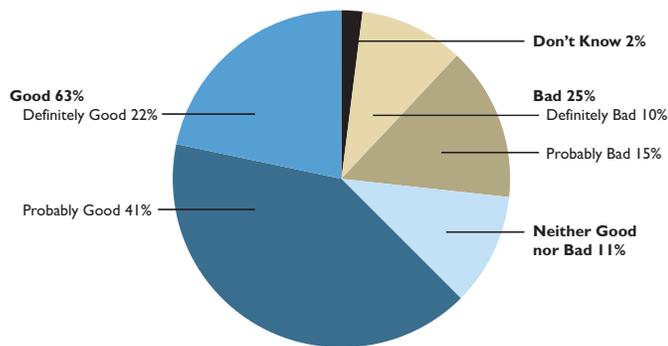
Figure 4: Issues Within Taxes



8. Dealing with Growth in Utah

Dealing with growth in Utah is issue number eight. Of those surveyed, 30% gave this issue a “5.” Follow up questions found that 63% feel that growth in the state is definitely or probably good while 25% feel that it is definitely or probably bad. When asked about the rate of growth, 41% felt the state was growing too fast while 55% felt Utah was growing at about the right pace. The majority of respondents, 66%, felt that accommodating the growth through building schools, roads and other infrastructure was of greater concern than trying to control growth. Finally, those polled were more concerned about new move-ins to the state than about Utah’s birth rate.

Figure 5: Is Growth Good for Utah?



9. Environment

Environment ranks ninth on the list. Environment includes two sub-issues: air quality and hazardous waste. Of those polled, 30% gave air quality a “5,” and 29% gave hazardous waste a “5.” When asked which aspects of hazardous waste concerned them the most, respondents stated the actual storage of hazardous waste was of the greatest concern. Transporting the waste to Utah and general environmental concerns ranked a close second and third. Respondents were also asked if Utah’s image would be damaged were hazardous waste stored here. 53% said definitely, Utah’s image would be damaged and another 23% said it probably would be damaged.

10. Parental Rights and the Utah Division of Child and Family Services

Parental rights and the Utah Division of Child and Family Services is tenth on the list with 25% of those surveyed giving this issue a “5.” A follow up question regarding a specific well-publicized case of Child and Family Services intervention found that 51% of the respondents were “very concerned” about this issue.

POLLING RESULTS FROM CACHE AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

At the request of Utah Foundation, Dan Jones and Associates designed the poll sample to ensure that the concerns of voters in Cache and Washington counties could be compared to the Wasatch Front. Figure 6 shows how Cache and Washington counties compare with the rest of the state in how they prioritize the issues. It is no surprise that higher education ranks near the top for Cache County residents given the significant economic, political, and demographic role Utah State University has in Cache County.

Results from Washington County deviate the most from statewide results. Water supply and quality was the top ranking issue in Washington County and is reflective of the hot, dry local climate and the more severe local impact of the drought. Taxes and immigration were also a significantly higher priority while health and higher education concerns were considerably lower. These differences are likely due to the significantly different demographics between Washington County and the rest of the state with Washington residents being older and more wealthy.

Figure 6: Comparison of Issues by Region

Rank	Cache County	Washington County	Statewide
1	Public Ed	Water	Public Ed
2	Higher Ed	Public Ed	Jobs
3	Water	Jobs	Water
4	Children's Health	Children's Health	Children's Health
5	Jobs	Taxes	Health
6	Health	Crime	Crime
7	Growth	Growth	Higher Ed
8	Environment	Immigration	Taxes
9	Crime	Health	Growth
10	Taxes	Higher Ed	Environment
11	Hazardous Waste	Parental Rights	Hazardous Waste
12	Parental Rights	Environment	Parental Rights
13	Transportation	Abortion	Transportation
14	Abortion	Hazardous Waste	Immigration
15	Immigration	Guns	Abortion
16	Guns	Transportation	Guns
17	Gay Rights	Gay Rights	Gay Rights

The reported results are based on randomized telephone interviews with 605 registered Utah voters, aged 18+, and conducted January 2004. For results based on the total sample of registered Utah voters, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of sampling error is ±4 percentage points. Poll respondents are representative of the registered voting population in Utah. Dan Jones along with Utah Foundation developed the survey questions for the Utah Priorities project.

Recent Utah Foundation Research On These Issues

Each of these reports is available online at www.utahpriorities.net or www.utahfoundation.org.

	Issue Number	Date	Title
Public Education	660	September 2003	Charter Schools: Can They Survive in Utah?
	658	July 2003	Utah Statewide School Testing Results: 2002, Including an Analysis of Technology in Utah Schools
	655	January 2003	School Choice: Experiences With Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits in Other States
	653	September 2002	Utah at the Crossroads: Challenges for K-12 Education in the Coming Ten Years
	649	March 2002	Utah Statewide School Testing Results: 2001
	651	May 2002	The Status of Private Schools in Utah
Jobs and Economic Development	641	March/April 2001	Utah's Statewide Testing Results: 2000
	664	February 2004	Economic Recovery? A Comparison of Indicators for Utah and The United States Since March 2001
	656 647	February 2003 February 2002	The National Recession: Its Impacts on Utah and the Mountain West Economic Recessions, Taxes, and Utah: Lessons Learned From the Past
Water Supply and Quality	650	April 2002	Creating an Oasis, Part Two: Water Consumption, Pricing and Conservation in Utah
	647	February 2002	Creating an Oasis: Water Development and Funding in Utah
Health Care	659	August 2003	Utah's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): How Well Are We Doing?
	637	November 2000	Utah's Implementation of the State Children's Health Insurance
	636	October 2000	Household Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in Utah
Higher Education	654	December 2002	Utah's Regional Competitiveness For Non-Resident Higher Education Students
	645	November 2001	Setting the Price of Higher Education in Utah
Taxes	662	December 2003	State Government Debt in Utah: Rapid Growth in Recent Years
	661	October 2003	Utah State Government Growth: 1991 to 2002
	657	May 2003	Redistributing Utah's Tax Resources: Burdens and Benefits Around the State
	644	July 2001	Property Taxes in Utah and the 50 States
	643	June 2001	How do Utah's Taxes and Fees Compare to Other States?
	640	February 2001	Federal Expenditures in Utah: FY 1990 to 1999

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