

UTAH PRIORITIES GUBERNATORIAL SURVEY

A COMPARISON OF CANDIDATES' AND VOTERS' TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2012

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey revealed that Utahns are most concerned with jobs and the economy, public education, and energy issues, issues that nearly all the gubernatorial candidates are very concerned with as well.
- Republican candidates were most concerned with jobs and the economy, K-12 education, energy issues, states' rights, and state government spending.
- The Democratic candidate also prioritized jobs and the economy and K-12 education, but felt partisan politics was a higher priority than state government spending and energy issues.
- Republican candidates are very concerned with states' rights (5.00), an issue of much lower concern to Republican voters (3.75), and even lower by all voters (3.45).
- Republican candidates also focused on access to public lands (4.67), this was a much lower priority for Republican voters (3.36), and lower still for all voters (3.23).
- The top ten priorities of Democrats were mirrored quite closely by the top priorities of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, but were ranked differently.

The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

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Utah Foundation recently released The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey, which provides a summary of the findings of a statewide Dan Jones & Associates survey assessing which issues are most important this election year and how voters feel about Utah's economy, society and politics. For the first time, Utah Foundation also requested that the gubernatorial candidates complete part of this survey. All of the Republican and Democratic candidates and two of three third-party candidates completed the survey.

The candidates were asked to complete two main sections from the 2012 Utah Priorities Survey.¹ The first gauged their feelings on quality of life in Utah, and the second asked them to prioritize 19 policy issues that were previously identified by voters as important in the upcoming election.² This allowed Utah Foundation to not only compare the views of voters to candidates, but the priorities of each as well. This report is not an endorsement of any party or candidate, but is merely provided to educate and inform voters and the delegates to each party's state nominating convention.

UTAH'S QUALITY OF LIFE

The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey asked respondents to rate the overall quality of life in Utah compared to five years ago. Figure 1 shows that the results for 2012 were mixed. The percentage of respondents who thought the quality of life in Utah was much or somewhat worse was 39%. This is an improvement from 45% in 2010. The percentage of respondents who thought the quality of life in Utah was somewhat or much better was 18%. This is a slight improvement from 16% in 2010. There was also some variation between political parties. Independents were most likely to think the quality of life was somewhat

The 2012 Utah Priorities Project

During this important election year, Utah Foundation is working to focus political dialogue on the issues that matter most to Utah voters. This is a project Utah Foundation undertakes during each gubernatorial election year. It begins with a survey of voters to rank the major issues and set the agenda for Utah Foundation's research and other activities this year.

The Utah Priorities Project website (www.utahpriorities.net) will serve as a library of information on the top issues and will facilitate dialogue about the issues. Through outreach to many media outlets and a partnership with the Hinckley Institute of Politics, this project will also feature issue forums, candidate debates, candidate profiles, and other coverage of these issues.

Figure 1: Utah's Quality of Life by Voters' Party

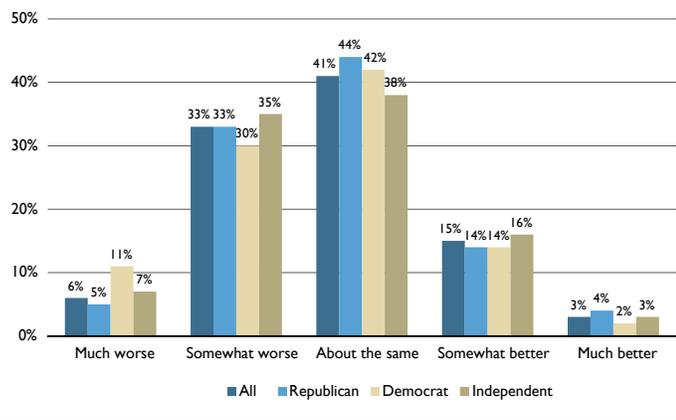
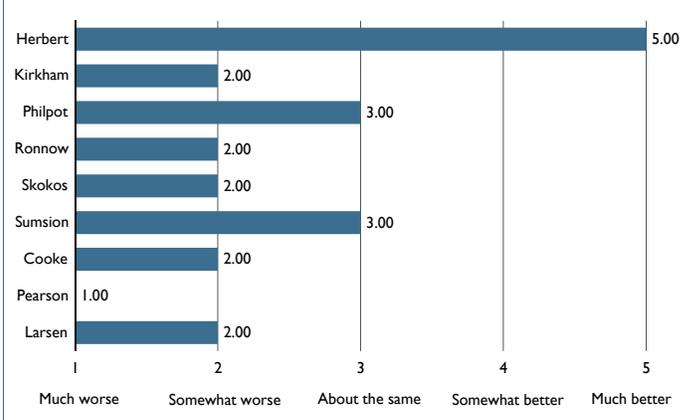


Figure 2: Is Utah's Quality of Life Better than Five Years Ago?



or much worse (42%), compared to Democrats (41%) or Republicans (38%). Interestingly, Independents also were most likely to think quality of life was much or somewhat better (19%), compared to Republicans (18%) and Democrats (16%). This is because Independents were least likely to think quality of life was about the same (38%), compared to Democrats (42%) and Republicans (44%).

There was also variation in opinion about quality of life between the gubernatorial candidates. Figure 2 illustrates that Governor Gary Herbert (R) gave the highest possible rating to quality of life, saying it was much better than five years ago. This is consistent with the notion that incumbents focus on their accomplishments and other positive events that occurred during their tenure; in so doing, they hope to raise their chances of re-election.

Conversely, challengers focus instead on things that need to be improved, which is shown through the responses on quality of life by the challengers. Morgan Philpot (R) and Ken Sumsion (R) both felt quality of life was about the same, while the remaining Republican candidates (David Kirkham, Lane Ronnow and William Skokos) all felt it was somewhat worse. Peter Cooke, the lone Democrat running for Governor, also felt quality of life was somewhat worse. Ken Larsen (Libertarian) felt quality of life was somewhat worse and Kirk Pearson (Constitution) felt it was much worse.

THE TOP ISSUES FACING UTAH

The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey assessed the most important public policy issues for Utah voters. Survey respondents were asked to rate each issue on a scale of one to five, five meaning they are very concerned about the issue and one meaning they are not at all concerned. Three issues in the 2012 survey received a mean score above 4.00 – jobs and the economy (4.19), K-12 education (4.02) and energy issues (4.01). These three issues were also given the highest mean scores by Republican voters – jobs and the economy (4.25), energy issues (4.13) and K-12 education (3.99). Democratic voters gave seven issues a mean score of 4.00 or above – environmental issues (4.34), partisan politics (4.26), healthcare (4.25), jobs and the economy (4.09), K-12 education (4.09), higher education (4.09)

Figure 3: The Top Ten Issues for 2012 by Party

All voters	Mean score	Republican voters	Mean score	Democratic voters	Mean score
Jobs and the economy	4.19	Jobs and the economy	4.25	Environmental issues	4.34
K-12 education	4.02	Energy issues	4.13	Partisan politics	4.26
Energy issues	4.01	K-12 education	3.99	Healthcare	4.25
Healthcare	3.98	Healthcare	3.86	Jobs and the economy	4.09
Taxes and government spending		Taxes	3.83	K-12 education	4.09
Taxes	3.72	Immigration	3.76	Higher education	4.09
State government spending	3.69	States' rights	3.75	Poverty	4.03
Higher education	3.64	State government spending	3.71	Energy issues	3.97
Environmental issues	3.61	Crime	3.64	Gay rights	3.77
Partisan politics	3.57	Utah's housing market	3.56	State government spending	3.64
Poverty	3.56				
Immigration	3.55				

All candidates	Mean score	Republican candidates	Mean score	Democratic candidate	Score
Jobs and the economy	4.89	Jobs and the economy	5.00	Jobs and the economy	5.00
State government spending	4.89	K-12 education	5.00	K-12 education	5.00
Energy issues	4.78	Energy issues	5.00	Partisan politics	5.00
States' rights	4.56	States' rights	5.00	State government spending	4.00
K-12 education	4.33	State government spending	5.00	Energy issues	4.00
Taxes	4.33	Access to public lands	4.67	Higher education	4.00
Access to public lands	4.33	Higher education	4.50	Taxes	4.00
Higher education	4.22	Immigration	4.50	Healthcare	4.00
Immigration	4.22	Transportation and traffic	4.50	Environmental issues	4.00
Utah's housing market	3.89	Taxes/Healthcare (tie)	4.33	Poverty	4.00

and poverty (4.03). Some of these trends were also reflected in the priorities of the candidates.

Figure 4: Statewide Concerns by Party of Candidate

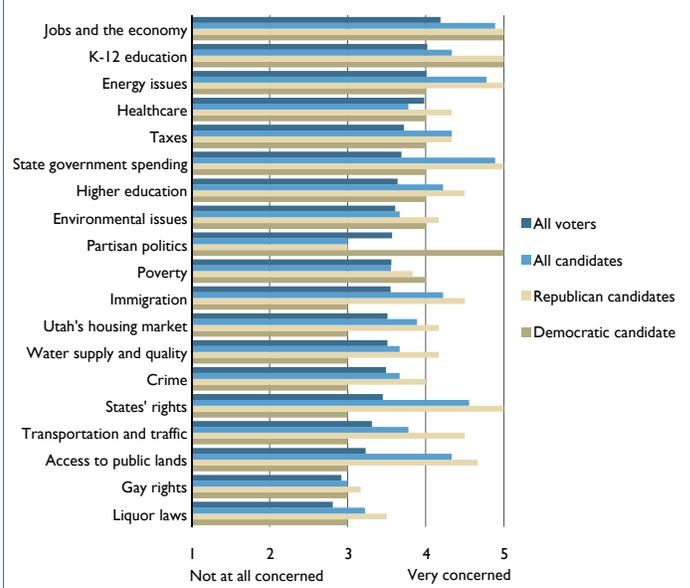


Figure 5: Statewide Concerns, Governor Gary Herbert (R)

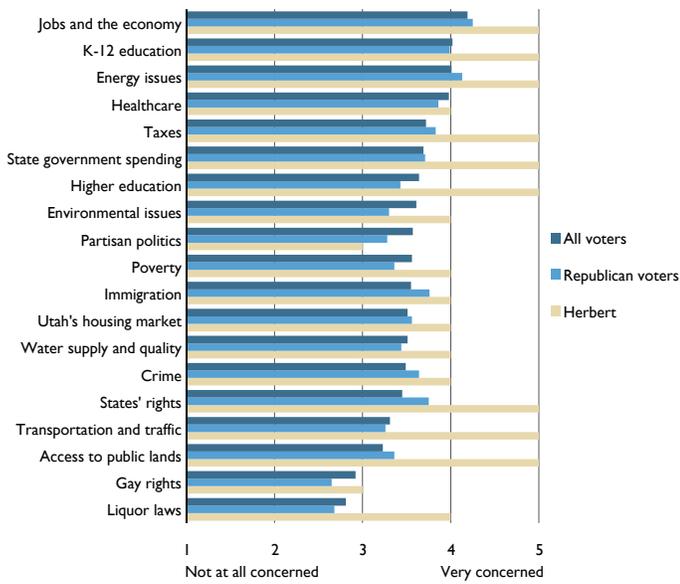


Figure 7: Statewide Concerns, Morgan Philpot (R)

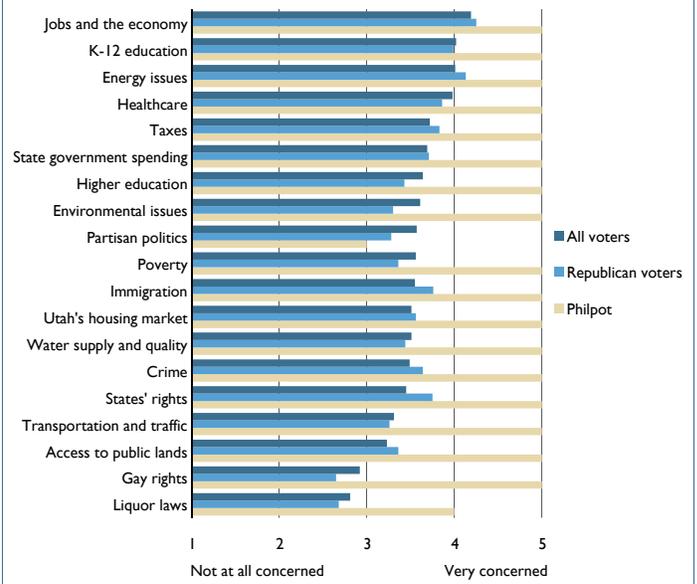


Figure 6: Statewide Concerns, David Kirkham (R)

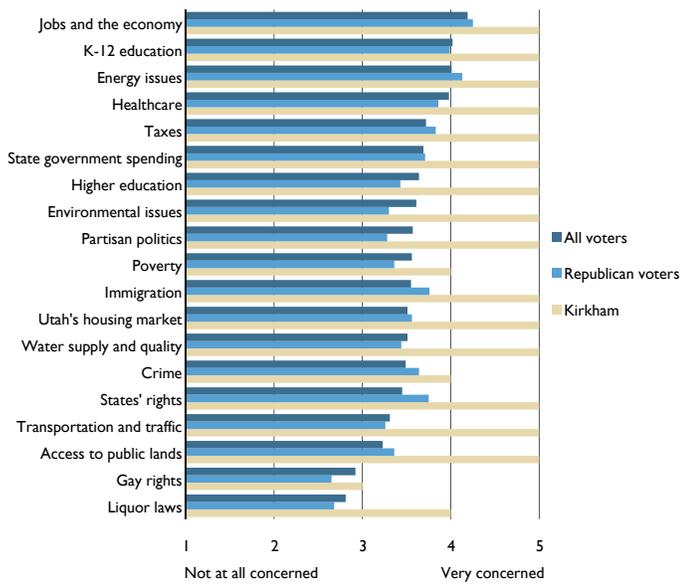
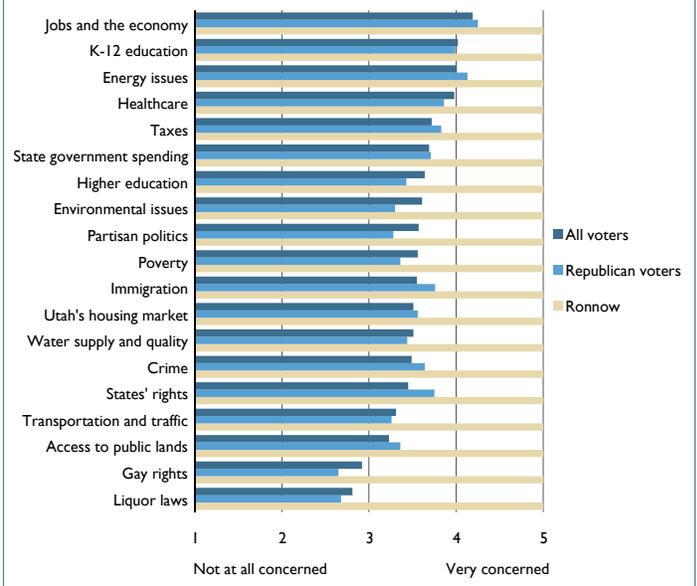


Figure 8: Statewide Concerns, Lane Ronnow (R)



Top Issues of Republicans

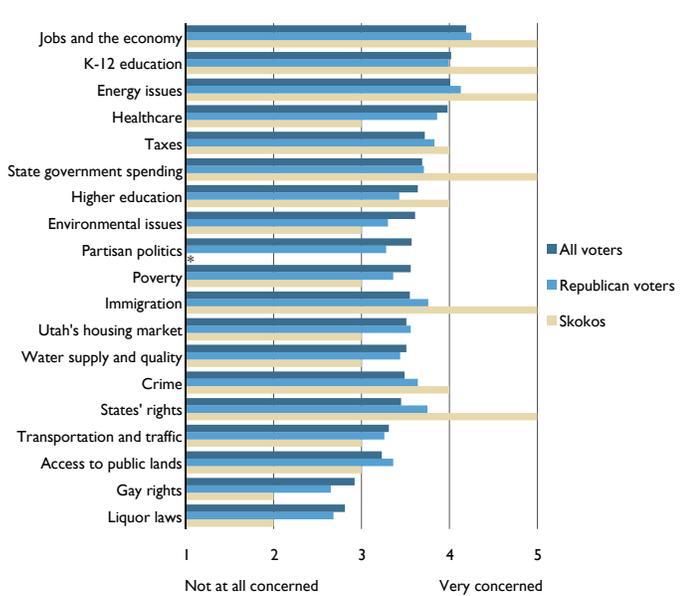
As stated previously, the top three issues of Republican voters were jobs and the economy (4.25), energy issues (4.13) and K-12 education (3.99), followed by healthcare (3.86) and taxes (3.83). The top three issues were also of great importance to the Republican gubernatorial candidates, who gave a mean score of 5.00 to jobs and the economy, K-12 education and energy issues. However, state government spending and states' rights also received mean scores of 5.00 by the Republican candidates, but were rated much lower by Republican voters (3.75 and 3.71 respectively), and even lower by all voters (3.69 and 3.45).³

Another issue of great importance to Republican candidates was access to public lands (4.67); however, this was a much lower priority for Republican voters (3.36), and lower still for all voters (3.23). In fact, this issue ranked as sixth most important to Republican candidates, but only 13th for Republican voters and 17th for all voters. This is

especially interesting since many Republican lawmakers placed a high priority on attempting to gain control of federal lands during the 2012 Utah Legislative Session. The Legislature passed and Governor Herbert signed HB 148, also known as the "Transfer of Public Lands Act," which calls for the federal government to cede control of about 22 million acres of land in Utah.⁴ Despite the focus Republican lawmakers and gubernatorial candidates have placed on this issue, the survey results show that this is not a priority for voters in Utah.

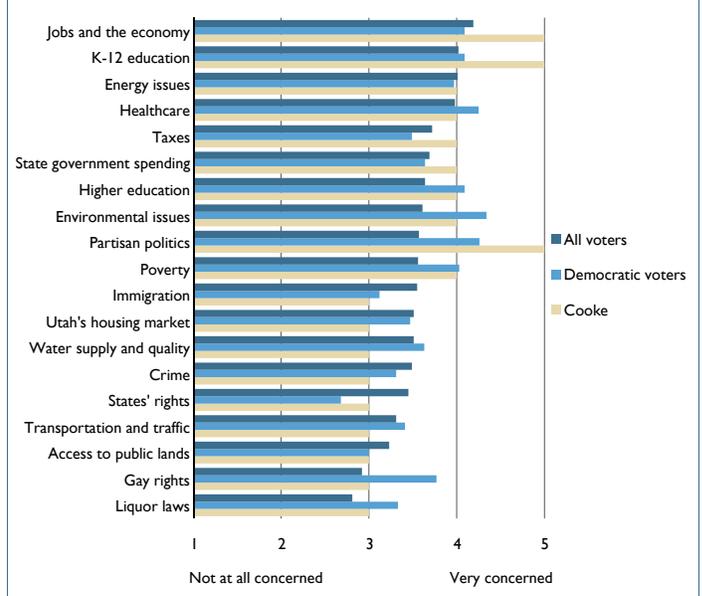
The remaining top issues for Republican gubernatorial candidates were higher education (4.50), immigration (4.50), transportation and traffic (4.50) and taxes (4.33). Republican voters also ranked taxes (3.83) among their top ten issues, but did not prioritize higher education or transportation and traffic. Taxes (3.72) and higher education (3.64) were top ten issues for all voters combined. Republican voters also included crime (3.64) in their top ten priorities and were the only group to do so.

Figure 9: Statewide Concerns, William Skokos (R)



* Scored as a concern level of one (1) by candidate.

Figure 11: Statewide Concerns, Peter Cooke (D)



were issues of great concern. He gave the following seven issues a score of 4.00, indicating that each was an area of concern: energy issues, environmental issues, healthcare, higher education, poverty, state government spending and taxes.

Cooke's priorities differed with Democratic voters and all voters combined in a few ways. First, Democratic voters listed gay rights (3.77) as a top ten issue, but Cooke did not, giving it a score of 3.00. Conversely, he listed taxes as a priority, whereas this issue did not make the list of top ten issues for Democratic voters (3.49). The difference with all voters centered on the issue of immigration which ranked 10th with a mean score of 3.55, but was not a priority for Cooke (3.00).

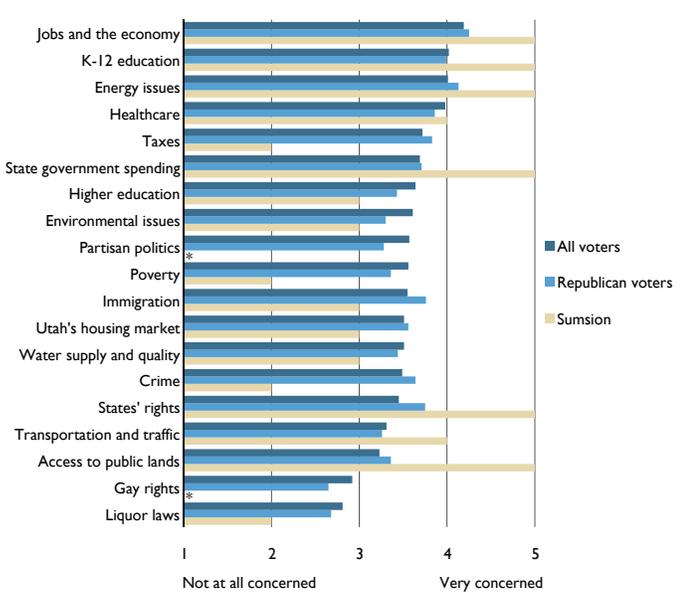
In addition, when asked if there were other issues facing Utah that were also important, Cooke stated, "Saving Hill Air Force Base is another "5" for me, because it is such a critical part of northern Utah's economy. I have also worked very hard on veterans' reintegration issues and would give that the highest rank as well." This reflects his background as a Major General in the U.S. Army and his emphasis on military and veterans affairs. Neither Hill Air Force base nor veterans' affairs is a priority for voters.

Top Issues of Third Party Candidates

Kirk Pearson, one of the Constitution party's gubernatorial candidates, indicated that eight issues were of great concern (5.00) – access to public lands, energy issues, higher education, immigration, state government spending, states' rights, taxes, and Utah's housing market. He also noted that jobs and the economy (4.00) was an important issue. Like the Republican candidates, his priorities of states' rights and access to public lands differs from the sentiments of voters. In addition, Pearson gave seven issues the lowest score of 1.00, indicating he is not at all concerned with them: environmental issues, gay rights, healthcare, liquor laws, partisan politics, poverty, and transportation and traffic. Four of these were top issues for voters: healthcare, environmental issues, poverty, and partisan politics.

Ken Larsen, the Libertarian gubernatorial candidate, indicated that state government spending (5.00) and jobs and the economy (5.00)

Figure 10: Statewide Concerns, Ken Sumsion (R)



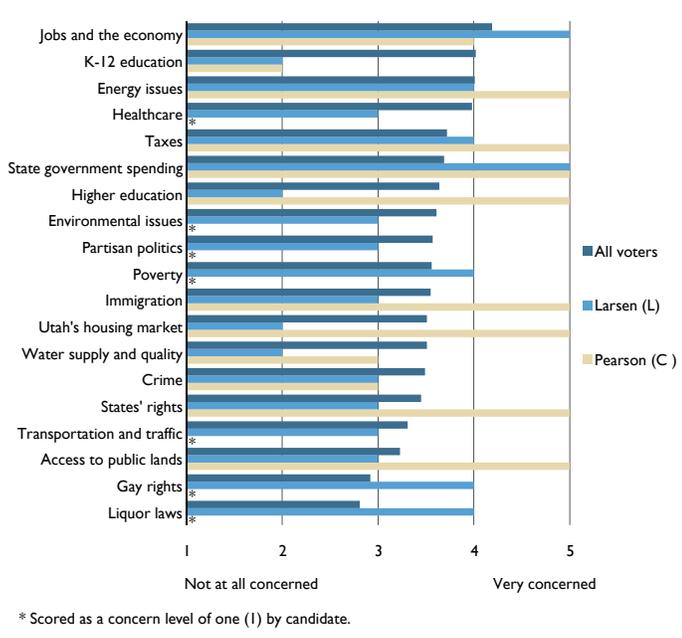
* Scored as a concern level of one (1) by candidate.

Top Issues of Democrats

The top three issues of Democratic voters were environmental issues (4.34), partisan politics (4.26) and healthcare (4.25). They gave four other issues a mean score above a 4.00 as well – jobs and the economy (4.09), K-12 education (4.09), higher education (4.09) and poverty (4.03). Rounding out the top ten issues for Democrat voters were energy issues (3.97), gay rights (3.77) and state government spending (3.64). Democratic voters were the only group to place gay rights in their top ten priorities.

The top ten priorities of Democrats were mirrored quite closely by the top priorities of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Peter Cooke, but were ranked differently. Cooke indicated that jobs and the economy (5.00), K-12 education (5.00) and partisan politics (5.00)

Figure 12: Statewide Concerns, Third Party Candidates



were the issues of greatest concern to him. These were followed by energy issues (4.00), taxes (4.00), poverty (4.00) liquor laws (4.00) and gay rights (4.00). The main differences between Larsen’s priorities and those of voters are regarding gay rights and liquor laws, which voters gave the lowest scores of all 19 issues (2.92 and 2.81 respectively). In addition, Larsen assigned a score of 2.00 to four issues: higher education, K-12 education, Utah’s housing market, and water supply and quality. Two of these were top issues for votes: K-12 education and higher education.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The only candidate who did not complete the survey by the time of publication was Brandon Nay of the Constitution party.
- 2 The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey began by asking a sample of 400 people two open-ended questions: 1) What would you say is the greatest issue facing Utah? and 2) What is the next greatest issue? Responses from this survey were then analyzed and grouped into 19 major topic areas, from which the larger survey was created and administered.
- 3 Because several of the Republican candidates rated so many issues as very important (5.00), the mean scores are very high for all of their top ten issues.
- 4 H.B. 148 Enrolled, <http://le.utah.gov/~2012/bills/hbillenr/hb0148.htm> (3 April, 2012).

This research report was written by Utah Foundation Research Director Morgan Lyon Cotti, Ph.D., with assistance from President Stephen Hershey Kroes. Comments or questions should be directed to Dr. Lyon Cotti or Mr. Kroes at (801) 355-1400 or by email at morgan@utahfoundation.org or steve@utahfoundation.org.

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