



The Elway Poll

An independent
nonpartisan
analysis of
public opinion
trends in
Washington and
the Northwest

JANUARY 7, 2010

Economy Dominates Citizen Agenda for Legislative Session

When the economy is bad, the economy is the issue; when the economy is good, something else is the issue. So says a fundamental law of politics. Or as James Carville put it more succinctly in the 1992 Clinton campaign, "It's the economy, stupid."

State voters' agenda for the legislature illustrates this political "law." The economy is bad and it dominates the list of issues voters want the legislature to focus on when it convenes next week. The only time the economy has *not* been the voters' #1 issue in the last 11 years was in the budget surplus years of 2000-2001 (it was virtually tied for #1 in 2002), and 2006-2008.

But the economy has never taken over the agenda like it does this year. In fact, we have asked this same question at the start of the last 16 legislative sessions and no issue has ever had such a high response rate. Half of the voters interviewed for this *Elway Poll* volunteered an economic issue as "most important." The question was open-ended—respondents were not given a list but answered in their own words.

The economy and government spending have been ranked #1 and #2 in importance for the last 2 sessions. Health care and education traded places this year at #3 and #4. Transportation, the top issue at the beginning of the decade and as recently as the 2008 session, has all but disappeared as a "top priority."

Voters' expectations are not high, however. When asked how confident they were that "significant progress" would be made on their most important issue:

56% of those who named the economy as the #1 issue said they were "not at all confident" (22%) or "not very" (34%) that significant progress will be made.

69% of those who named government spending as their top issue were "not at all" (39%) or "not very confident" (30%) or that "that significant progress will be made in this session on that issue."

Those who named health (the #3 ranked issue) care were more optimistic:

58% were very (9%) or "somewhat confident (49%) that significant progress can be made this session.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE LEGISLATURE 2000-2010

Figures are percentages who named an issue in that category. More detailed responses on p.3

Shading indicates top-ranked issue for each year.

Cell Entries = %	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Economy	49	43	18	15	16	24	41	29	30	16	7
Gov't Spending	25	23	7	12	18	24	12	26	13	5	21
Health Care	14	10	16	13	15	16	11	8	5	7	8
Education	11	15	20	31	23	23	27	27	17	30	25
Taxes	10	6	15	11	17	17	12	13	13	9	18
Social Services	6	9	5	4	8	8	6	5	6	7	12
Crime	5	1	3	3	5	2	2	2	2	6	6
Transportation	2	10	33	20	20	10	17	24	33	37	24
Environment	2	1	6	5	4	4	3	3	4	15	11
Energy	1	2	4	2	4	*	*	*	*	*	*

Waste, Size of Gov't Blamed for Budget Problems

State government officials here and across the country are blaming the economy for the terrible condition of their state budgets. Most voters here aren't buying it. The economy gets the blame from only 28% of these survey respondents. This is up substantially from 2 years ago but up only slightly since last year.

Waste and overspending by state government is still seen as the "most significant reason why state government is short of money," but the proportion of voters who think so has dropped from 43% to 31% since last year.

On the other hand, the proportion of those who think state government is "too big and tries to do too much" has nearly doubled from 10% to 17%. So fewer people think state government is wasting money, but more think state government is just too big. The combination of those two factors is 48%, down slightly from 53% last year.

Given a choice, most voters (56%) wanted the legislature to emphasize spending cuts to balance the state budget, while 1 in 4 (26%) think the emphasis should be on "raising taxes to minimize cuts in state programs" and 17% would not choose between the two options.

Even though most voters want to focus on spending cuts, only 29% expect that cuts alone will balance the budget. Most (59%) believe that some taxes will have to be raised in order to cover the budget gap.

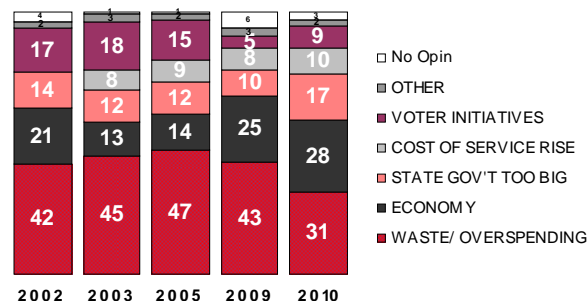
This is not much changed from last year, when, 58% wanted to emphasize cuts but 54% believed that cuts would not be enough to balance the budget.

Not surprisingly, respondents who blamed the budget gap on spending or the size of government were much more likely to emphasize cuts over taxes—by about 6:1. However, even those who blamed the budget gap primarily on the economy were more likely to favor cuts over taxes, but only by 42-38%.

Primary emphasis on spending cuts over tax increases was favored by those who named as their top legislative priority: the economy (56%), government spending (66%). Those who named health care were split (46% for cuts; 42% for taxes). Only among those who ranked education #1 was there a plurality for raising taxes to avoid program cuts (44% to 40%).

NOTE: A total of 23% blamed the budget problems on government spending or the size of government and ranked government spending or taxes as the #1 legislative priority. This number is consistent with analysis of voting on tax limitation measures and other attitudes over the years, which consistently arrives at a number around 25% for the hard-core anti-tax, distrust-government constituency in the state.

MAIN REASON STATE GOVT SHORT OF MONEY

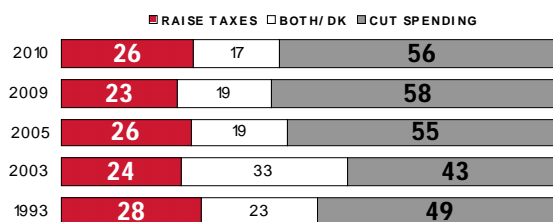


The cost to maintain current state government programs and services is about \$30 billion dollars per year. Last year at this time, there was a potential state budget deficit of about \$9 billion dollars. The legislature covered that \$9 billion gap with cuts in state programs and Federal stimulus money. This year, there is projected to be an additional budget gap. The money coming in will be around \$2.6 billion dollars short of the money needed to run state government. There are any number of possible reasons for this budget situation. In your opinion, which of the following has been the most significant reason why state government is short of money?

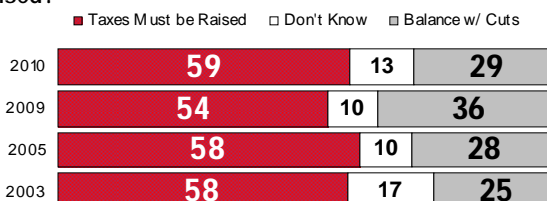
- Waste and over-spending by government
- State government is too big and tries to do too much
- Lack of revenue because of tax limitation initiatives passed by voters
- The cost of providing services is rising faster than the revenue to pay for them
- New programs passed by voter initiatives that did not have new revenue to pay for them
- Lack of revenue because of struggling economy

TO BALANCE BUDGET, LEGISLATURE SHOULD PUT MORE EMPHASIS ON...

- Raising Taxes to Minimize Cuts in State Programs
- Cutting State Government Programs to Avoid Tax Increases



Will the legislature be *able* to cover the budget gap with spending cuts alone? Or will some taxes have to be raised?



Sample Profile

Telephone interviews were conducted with 405 registered voters in Washington state between Dec. 28-30, 2009. The margin of sampling error is $\pm 5\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. This means, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the results would be within ± 5 of the results reported here at least 95 times

REGION

Seattle	12%
King County (outside Seattle)	17%
Pierce / Kitsap Counties	15%
North Puget Sound (Snohomish to Whatcom).....	19%
Western WA (Clallam to Clark).....	18%
Eastern WA	20%

VOTE HISTORY (LAST 4 ELECTIONS)

0-2 Votes Cast	37%
3 Votes Cast	25%
4 Votes Cast	38%

GENDER

Male	50%
Female.....	50%

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Democrat	39%
Republican	18%
Independent.....	44%

AGE

18-35	12%
36-50	22%
51-64	37%
65+.....	29%

EMPLOYMENT

Self-employed.....	10%
Private Sector	24%
Public Sector	16%
Not Employed	14%
Retired	35%

INCOME

\$25,000 or less	14%
\$25 to \$50,000.....	28%
\$50 to \$75,000.....	16%
Over \$75,000	27%
No Answer	15%

The Elway Poll

The Elway Poll is an independent, non-partisan analysis of public opinion in Washington and the Northwest supported entirely by subscribers.

SUBSCRIPTION: An annual subscription is \$250.

PROPRIETARY QUESTIONS: Each month, space is reserved in the questionnaire to allow subscribers to ask proprietary questions. The fee for proprietary questions is \$500 per question. You will receive the results of your question(s) with full crosstabulations within three days.

CROSSTABS: A full set of cross-tabulation tables for any month's survey is available for \$100.

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"Most Important Issues" for the Legislature to Focus On

Survey respondents were asked what they thought were the "most important issues for the state legislature to focus on." The question was open-ended, that is, they answered in their own words and we coded their responses after the fact. The table below presents the tallied coded responses. The BOLD titles are our categories; the lists under each category are the most frequent answers included in that category. The figures are percentages. The codes may not sum to the category total because a respondent could give more than one answer and codes are omitted if fewer than 1% gave that answer.

ECONOMY 49%

Jobs / Employment	27
"The Economy" (non-specific)	16
Helping Business	3
Housing Cost	1
Wages.....	1

GOVERNMENT/SPENDING 25%

Balance the Budget.....	17
Gov't Spending	7

HEALTH CARE 14%

EDUCATION 11%

"Education" (Non-specific).....	5
Funding of Education	4
Specific Education Issues	1

TAXES 10%

Tax Reform	5
"Taxes" (Non-specific).....	3
Income Tax	1
Specific Taxes Issues	1

SOCIAL SERVICES 6%

Elderly / Senior Issues	2
Poor / Homeless	1
Disabled	1
Specific Social Issues	1

CRIME 5%

Law Enforcement	2
Crime (Non-specific)	1
Prison System.....	1

OTHER ISSUES 6%

Transportation.....	2
Environment.....	1
Values / Moral Issues.....	1
Energy.....	1
Infrastructure.....	1
Illegal Immigrants.....	1
Terrorists/ Public Safety.....	1
Union Issues	1
Legalize Marijuana	1

NO OPINION 6%