

STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET:

MINNESOTANS WORRY ABOUT INCOME AND ECONOMY

Findings from a survey commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation

IN THIS SURVEY, Minnesotans say they are worried about their pinched wallets, overworked neighbors and struggling local economies.

86% say they'll vote this November, and most say their choices will be influenced by what local elected officials are doing to help those struggling to make ends meet:

- **Almost 3 in 10** worry all or most of the time that their income won't pay the bills this year.
- **More than 1/2** say their local economies are "only fair" at best.
- **Most** believe their local elected officials should take specific action on poverty.

At the same time, the survey results point to Minnesotans' characteristic "American grit" and hope. And most say they personally want to do more to help.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

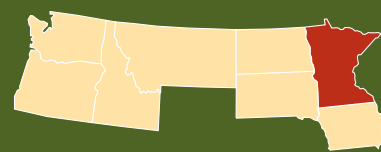
Jobs and health care continue to rank at the top when people think about what they want their elected officials to be working on. Seventy-seven percent say that keeping and attracting firms that can provide good-paying jobs is a "top" or "high" priority. Seventy-two percent, meanwhile, say that improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs is a top or high priority.

Sixty-seven percent of Minnesotans say they are "very" or "somewhat" likely to agree to pay \$50 more in taxes if the money went to programs in their own community helping people who are struggling to make ends meet.

PERCENTAGE OF MINNESOTANS WHO SAY THIS SHOULD BE A "TOP" OR "HIGH" PRIORITY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Keeping and attracting more businesses that have good-paying jobs	77%
Improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs	72%
Creating more affordable housing	43%
Improving public transportation	31%

2008



MINNESOTA

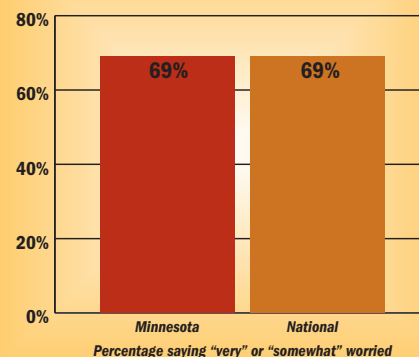
A BRIEFING PAPER FOR MINNESOTA POLICYMAKERS

ANXIETY FOR THE FUTURE

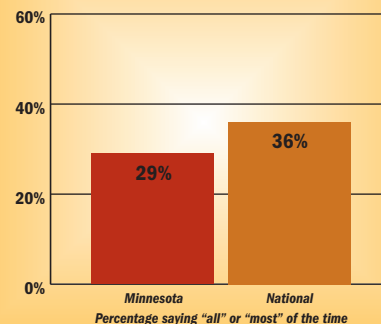
More than half of Minnesotans report that they're anxious about the economy both now and in the future. Fifty-three percent say their local economies are doing "only fair" or "poor."

Almost seven in 10 Minnesotans say they are "very" or "somewhat" worried that their local economy might get worse in the next five years. More than one-third say they worry "all" or "most" of the time that their own family's income will not be enough to make ends meet.

How worried are you that your local economy might get worse in the next year?



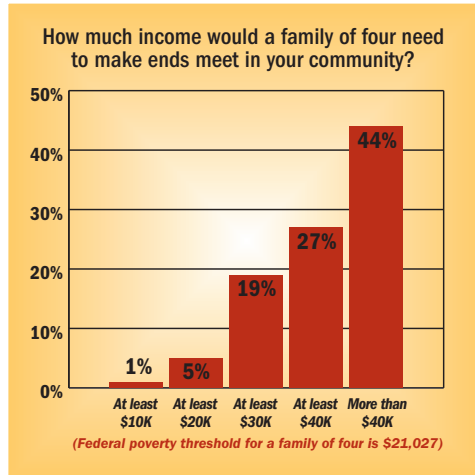
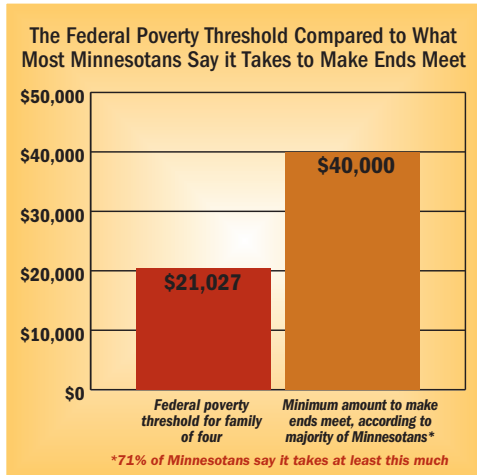
How often do you worry that your total family income will not be enough to meet your family's expenses and bills?



HOW MUCH TO GET BY?

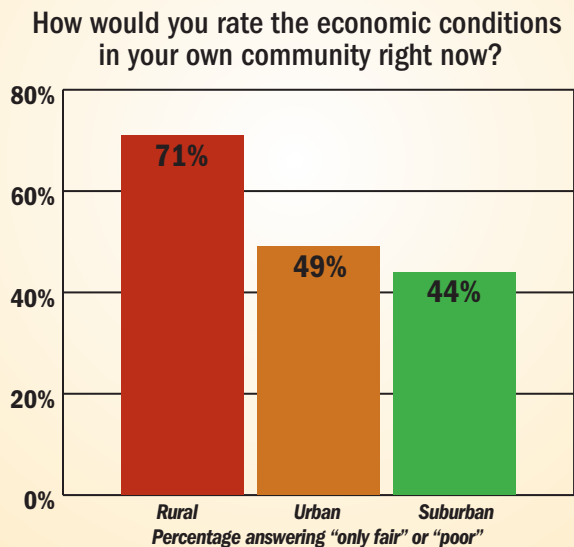
People continue to say it takes almost twice as much to get by as the federal government says it does. For a family of four with two adults and two children, the federal “poverty threshold” is \$21,027, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007). That means that a family whose yearly income is less than that is, according to the government, “in poverty.”

However, 71 percent of Minnesotans say that it takes at least \$40,000 for a family of four to make ends meet in their community. Forty-four percent say a family of four needs more than \$40,000 to get by – an increase of eight percentage points since last year (36 percent).



RURAL MINNESOTANS RATE LOCAL ECONOMY FAIR TO POOR

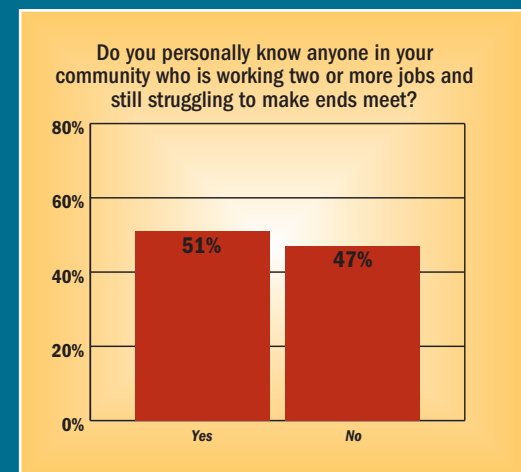
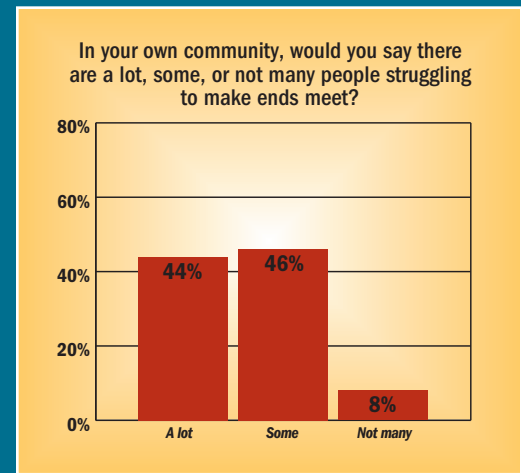
More than half of Minnesotans say the economic conditions in their own community are only fair or poor. Those in rural Minnesota (71 percent) are much more likely to say their local economies are fair or poor, compared to those in urban (49 percent) or suburban (44 percent) areas.



MINNESOTANS KNOW NEIGHBORS STRUGGLING – AND ARE CONCERNED

More than half (51 percent) of Minnesotans say they personally know someone who works two or more jobs yet still struggles to make ends meet, and 44 percent say that in their community “a lot” of people are struggling. Thirty-five percent say they “regularly” cross paths with people struggling to get by.

Eighty-seven percent of Minnesotans say that helping people in their community who are struggling to make ends meet is a concern. Forty-one percent say it is a “top” concern.

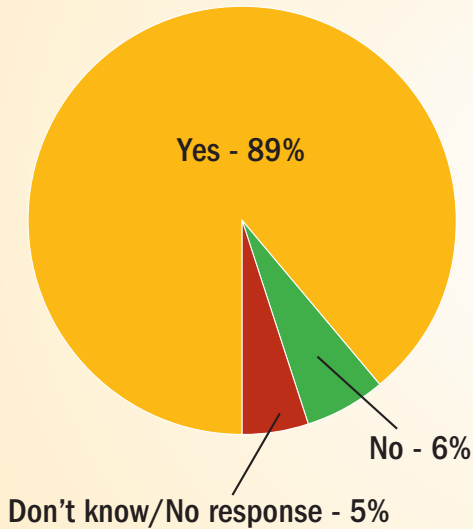


OPTIMISM THAT PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

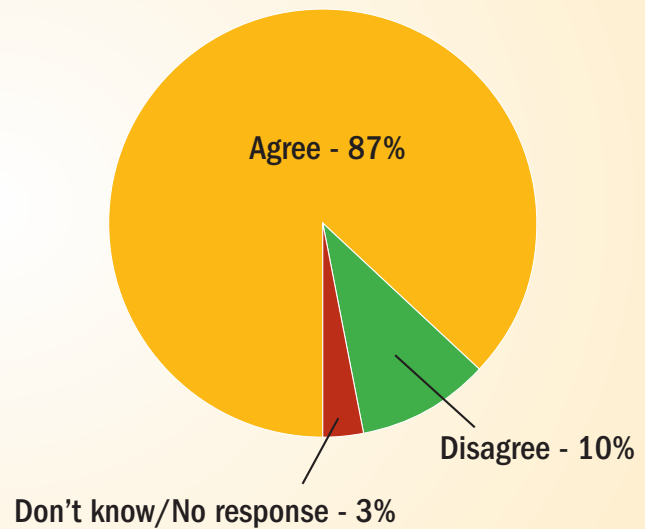
Despite their anxiety about their personal finances and that of their local economies, most Minnesotans continue to say they believe that the number of people struggling to make ends meet in their communities can be reduced. Almost eight in 10 (79 percent) say the number of people struggling to get by could be reduced “some” or “a lot.”

Minnesotans not only see the possibility for poverty reduction in their communities, but they see the willingness too. Eighty-seven percent agree (35 percent strongly) that “I would like to do more to help” others who are struggling in the community.

Do you think the number of people struggling to make ends meet could be reduced in your own community?



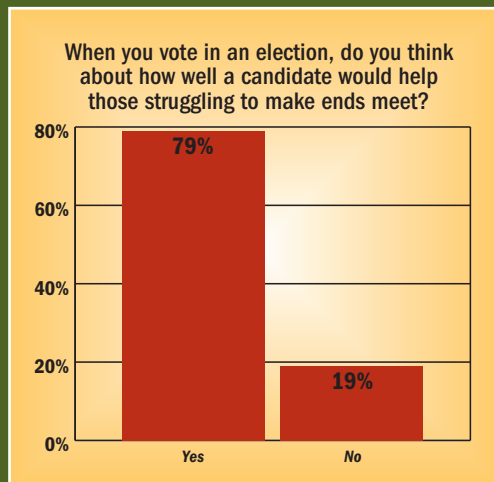
I would like to do more to help people struggling in my community.



PEOPLE SEE IMPORTANT ROLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The share of Minnesotans who say that, when they vote, they plan to take into account how well a candidate would help those struggling continues to go up.

Almost eight in 10 Minnesotans (79 percent) say they take this into account, up 10 percentage points over just two years ago. Almost nine in 10 (89 percent) say it is “somewhat” or “very” important for local elected officials to work to help people who are struggling. Fifty-four percent say it is very important.



“As we traveled the state this past fall and winter I was struck by how in fact many people not in poverty are making the connection between their realities and of those in poverty ... It has been truly amazing to see so many ‘regular’ people putting themselves forward to address poverty ‘right here, right now.’ Whether it’s the retired Vietnam vet volunteering in the overnight shelter or the dentist working a long evening volunteer shift at a free clinic after a full day at his practice, Minnesotans are truly walking their talk in personally addressing poverty in their communities.”

– Minn. State Rep. Carlos Mariani

MINNESOTA ECONOMY BY THE NUMBERS

20.6% Households with annual income below \$25,000

8.4% Minnesota workers holding two or more jobs (National: 5.3%)

1.9% Loans in foreclosure (National: 1.69%)

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mortgage Bankers Association

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SURVEY

- **Almost 7 in 10** Minnesotans are worried about the economic well-being of their community.
- **71%** say it takes twice as much to get by than the government's "poverty threshold."
- **79%** say they think about how well candidates will help those struggling to make ends meet when they go to the voting booth.
- **86%** say they are almost certain to vote in November.
- **87%** personally want to do more to help people struggling in their community.

IMPORTANT FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO WORK ON POVERTY

More than six in 10 (65 percent) Minnesotans say their local officials are working "very" or "somewhat" hard on reducing poverty, and 77 percent say local officials are "very" or "somewhat" knowledgeable about people's struggles trying to make ends meet.

How important is it that your local elected officials work to help people struggling to make ends meet?

89% very or somewhat important

Would you say your local officials are working very hard, somewhat hard, not too hard, or not at all to help people struggling to make ends meet in your community?

65% very or somewhat hard

The Northwest Area Foundation (NWAF) commissioned Lake Research Partners (LRP) to conduct a national tracking survey to explore the public's perception of poverty in one's own community, attitudes toward the roles of local elected officials, and personal ways in which to address the issue. The survey was conducted among 4,000 Americans age 18 and older, from February 8-29, 2008. Eight hundred interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 400 were conducted in each of the following eight states: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The oversamples were weighted down to reflect their true proportion in the country. The margin of error is +/-3.5 percentage points for national and +/-5.0 points for state results. This is the third survey of its kind, replicating studies NWAF and LRP released in March 2006 and April 2007.

For full details on the national poll, including actions people are willing to take to help others, priorities for lawmakers, and optimism for the future, visit www.nwaf.org.

The Northwest Area Foundation's mission is to help reduce poverty long term in its eight-state region: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. These states were served by the Great Northern Railway, founded by James J. Hill. In 1934, Hill's son, Louis W. Hill, established the Foundation.



Northwest Area Foundation

Helping communities reduce poverty

60 Plato Boulevard East
Suite 400
St. Paul, Minnesota 55107
Tel: 651-224-9635
Fax: 651-225-7701
www.nwaf.org

Published April 2008