

STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET:

MONTANANS WORRY ABOUT INCOME AND ECONOMY

Findings from a survey commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation

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

Over **80%** 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.**
- **Nearly 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 Montanans' characteristic "American grit" and hope. And most say they personally want to do more to help.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

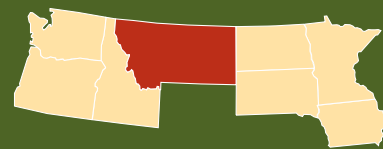
Jobs and health care continue to rank at the top when people think about what they want their elected officials to be working on. Seventy-seven percent say that keeping and attracting firms that can provide good-paying jobs is a "top" or "high" priority. Sixty-six percent, meanwhile, say that improving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

Sixty-one percent of Montanans 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 MONTANANS 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	66%
Creating more affordable housing	54%
Improving public transportation	27%

2008



MONTANA

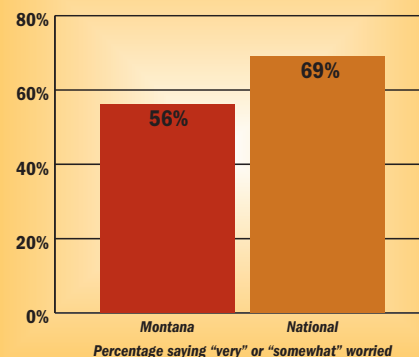
A BRIEFING PAPER FOR MONTANA POLICYMAKERS

ANXIETY FOR THE FUTURE

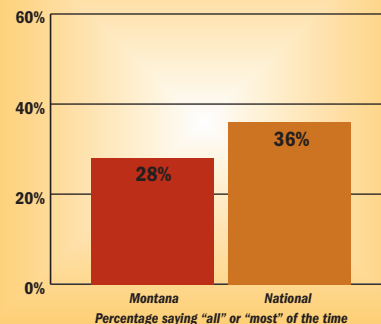
More than half of Montanans report that they're anxious about the economy both now and in the future. Forty-eight percent say their local economies are doing "only fair" or "poor."

Fifty-six percent of Montanans say they are "very" or "somewhat" worried that their local economy might get worse in the next five years. Twenty-eight percent 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?



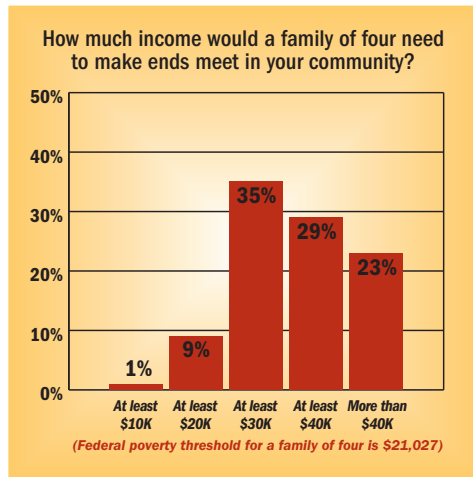
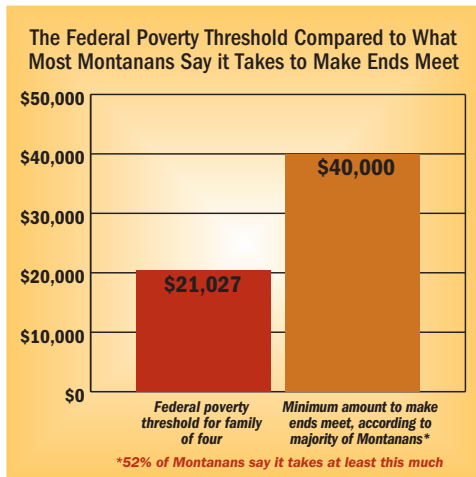
How often do you worry that your total family income will not be enough to meet your family's expenses and bills?



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.”

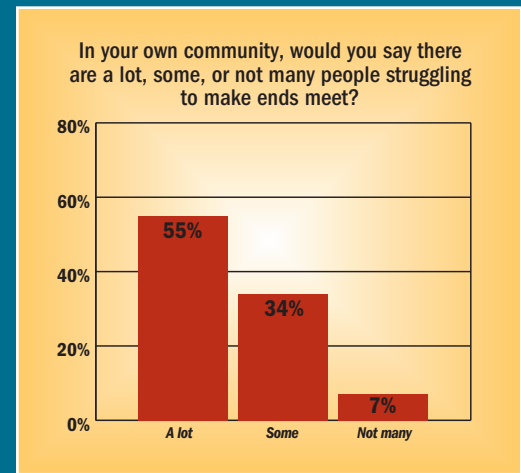
However, more than half of Montanans (52 percent) say that it takes at least \$40,000 for a family of four to make ends meet in their community.



MONTANANS KNOW NEIGHBORS STRUGGLING – AND ARE CONCERNED

Six in 10 Montanans say they personally know someone who works two or more jobs yet still struggles to make ends meet, and 55 percent say that in their community “a lot” of people are struggling. Forty-five percent say they “regularly” cross paths with people struggling to get by.

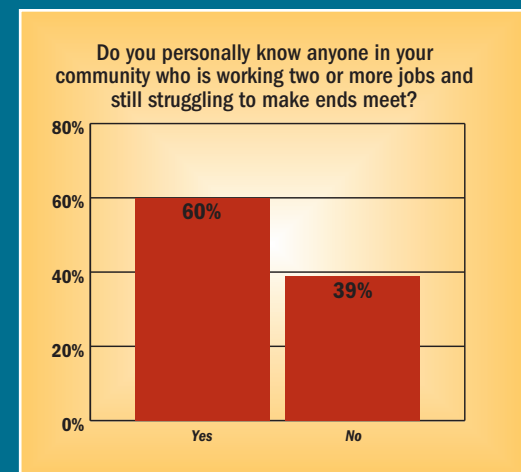
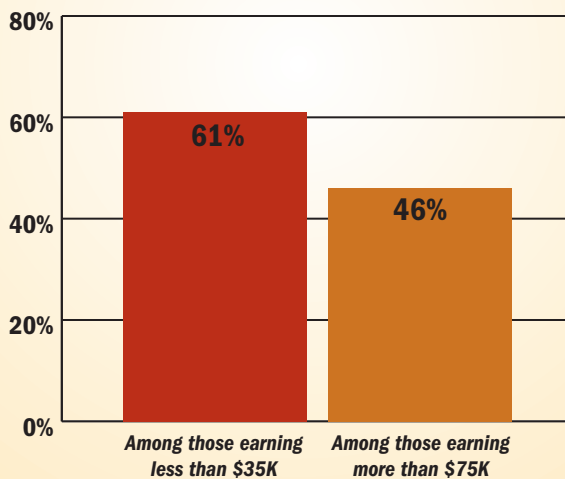
Eighty-eight percent of Montanans say that helping people in their community who are struggling to make ends meet is a concern. Forty-one percent say it is a “top” concern.



LOWER INCOME MONTANANS SEE MORE STRUGGLING

Montanans are more likely than Americans overall to report that they personally know someone who works two or more jobs yet still struggles to make ends meet. Lower-income Montanans (earning less than \$35,000 per year) are more likely to say they see a lot of people struggling than those earning \$75,000 or more (61 percent vs. 46 percent).

Percentage Saying “A Lot” of People Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Community

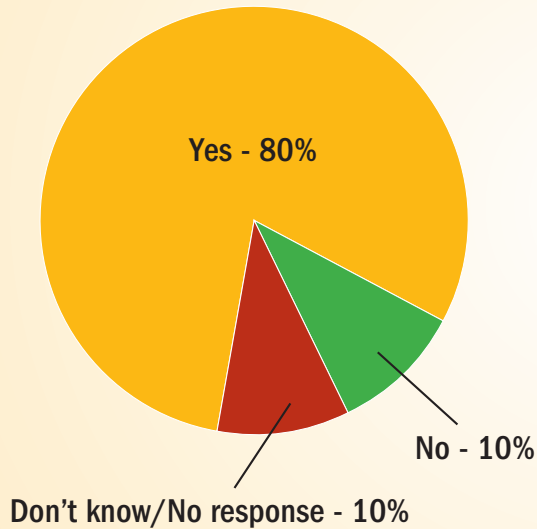


OPTIMISM THAT PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

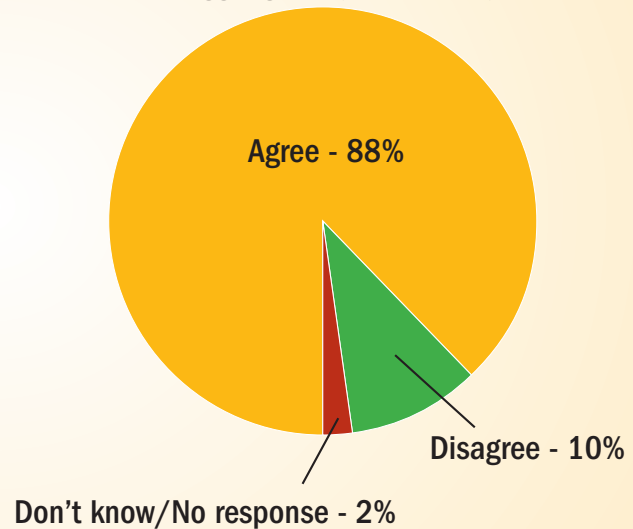
Despite their anxiety about their personal finances and that of their local economies, most Montanans continue to say they believe that the number of people struggling to make ends meet in their communities can be reduced. Seventy-one percent say the number of people struggling to get by could be reduced “some” or “a lot.”

Montanans not only see the possibility for poverty reduction in their communities, but they see the willingness too. Eighty-eight percent agree (38 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?

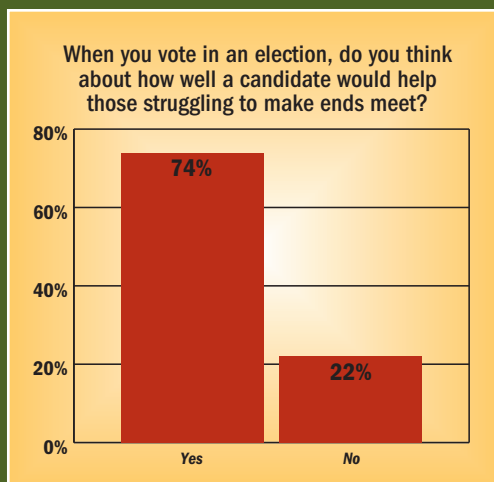


I would like to do more to help people struggling in my community.



PEOPLE SEE IMPORTANT ROLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The share of Montanans who say that, when they vote, they plan to take into account how well a candidate would help those struggling continues to go up. Three out of four Montanans (74 percent) say they take this into account, up 10 percentage points over just two years ago. Almost nine in 10 (87 percent) say it is “somewhat” or “very” important for local elected officials to work to help people who are struggling. Fifty-two percent say it is very important.



“People are much more conscious of the growing divide between wealthy and poor and where they fall in that divide. While the economy is good in Montana, that means some are doing quite well and others not nearly so well. Poverty is not just a happenstance, not an accident. It’s the result of policies that aren’t working quite right. It is the job of elected officials to fix what isn’t working.”

– Mont. State Sen. Christine Kaufmann

MONTANA ECONOMY BY THE NUMBERS

30.0% Households with annual income below \$25,000 (National: 25.32%)

8.2% Montana workers holding two or more jobs (National: 5.3%)

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SURVEY

- **56%** of Montanans are worried about the economic well-being of their community.
- **More than 1/2** say it takes twice as much to get by than the government's "poverty threshold."
- **3 in 4** say they think about how well candidates will help those struggling to make ends meet when they go to the voting booth.
- **84%** say they are almost certain to vote in November.
- **88%** personally want to do more to help people struggling in their community.

IMPORTANT FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO WORK ON POVERTY

Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of Montanans say their local officials are working "very" or "somewhat" hard on reducing poverty, and 74 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?

87% 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?

64% 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.



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Helping communities reduce poverty

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