

STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET:

AMERICANS WORRY ABOUT INCOME AND ECONOMY

Findings from a survey commissioned by the Northwest Area Foundation

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

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:

- **More than 1/3** 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 people's characteristic "American grit" and hope. And most say they personally want to do more to help.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

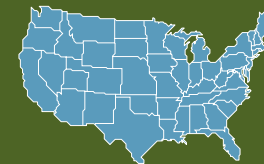
Jobs and health care continue to rank at the top when people think about what they want their elected officials to be working on. Seventy-nine percent say that keeping and attracting firms that can provide good-paying jobs is a "top" or "high" priority – unchanged from 2007. Seventy-seven percent, meanwhile, say that improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs is a top or high priority.

Fifty-three percent of Americans 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 AMERICANS WHO SAY THIS SHOULD BE A "TOP" OR "HIGH" PRIORITY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Keeping and attracting more businesses that have good-paying jobs	79%
Improving access to health care and dealing with health care costs	77%
Creating more affordable housing	54%
Improving public transportation	44%

2008



UNITED STATES

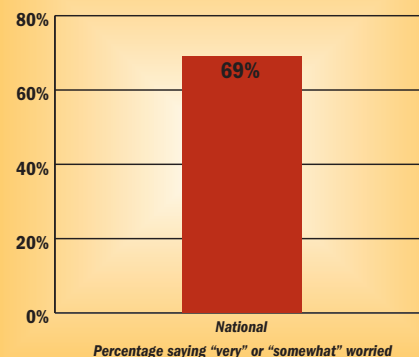
A BRIEFING PAPER FOR POLICYMAKERS

ANXIETY FOR THE FUTURE

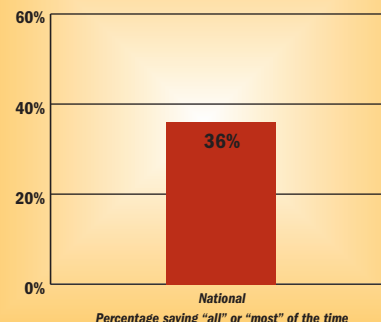
More than half of Americans report that they're anxious about the economy both now and in the future. Fifty-six percent say their local economies are doing "only fair" or "poor."

Almost seven in 10 Americans 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?

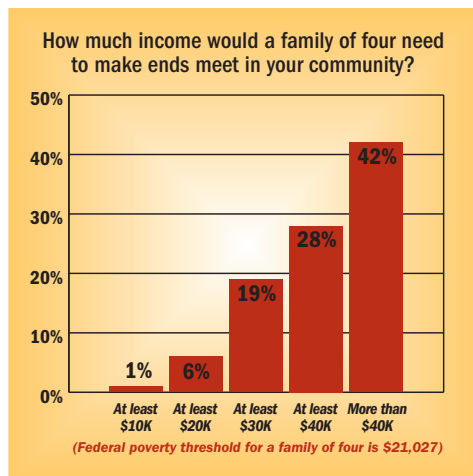
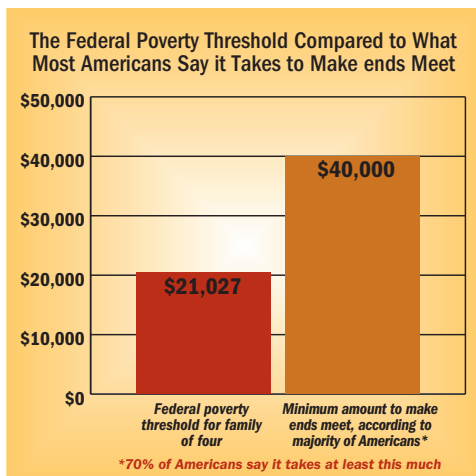


HOW MUCH TO GET BY?

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, seven in 10 Americans say that it takes at least \$40,000 for a family of four to make ends meet in their community. (This continues a slight increase in the percentage of Americans saying this. In 2006, 64 percent of Americans said it took at least this much to get by.)

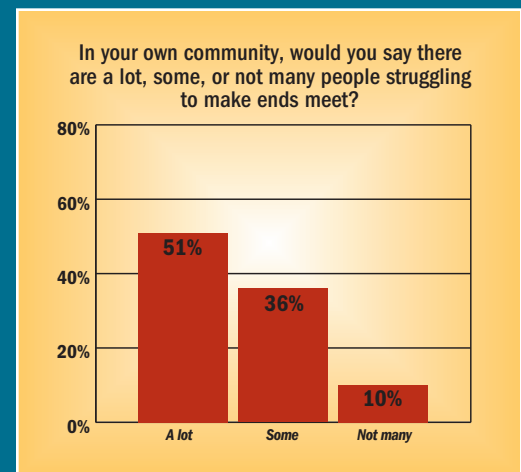
People whose incomes are higher are more likely to say that \$20,000 per year is not enough, but even among Americans earning less than \$25,000 per year, only 13 percent say \$20,000 is enough to get by.



AMERICANS KNOW NEIGHBORS STRUGGLING – AND ARE CONCERNED

More than half (52 percent) of Americans say they personally know someone who works two or more jobs yet still struggles to make ends meet, and 51 percent say that in their community “a lot” of people are struggling. Four in 10 say they “regularly” cross paths with people struggling to get by.

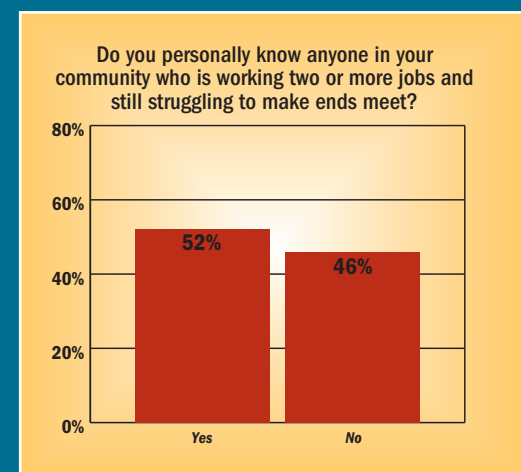
Eighty-six percent of Americans say that helping people in their community who are struggling to make ends meet is a concern. Almost half (48 percent) say it is a “top” concern.



POVERTY A NEGATIVE FOR COMMUNITY

“Public awareness about the issue of poverty has been improving. But the real challenge for those of us working on the issue is to have more of the general public understand that everyone is impacted by poverty where it exists. There is a tendency on the part of many to believe that poverty doesn’t touch their lives – when in fact it does. Elected leaders need to help people understand that poverty does affect everyone. If we have human resources that are not gainfully employed and contributing to the economy, that is a negative for the whole community.”

– Minn. State Rep. Morrie Lanning (R)

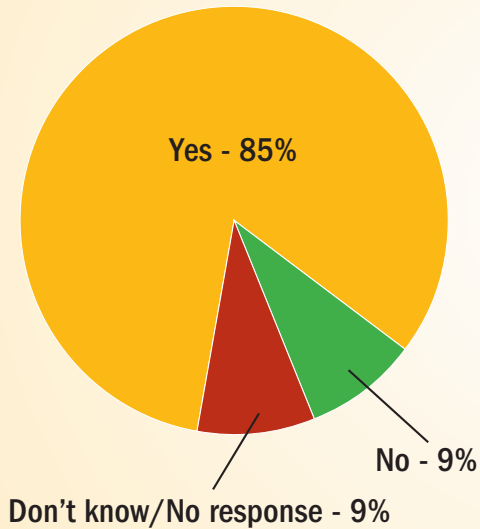


OPTIMISM THAT PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

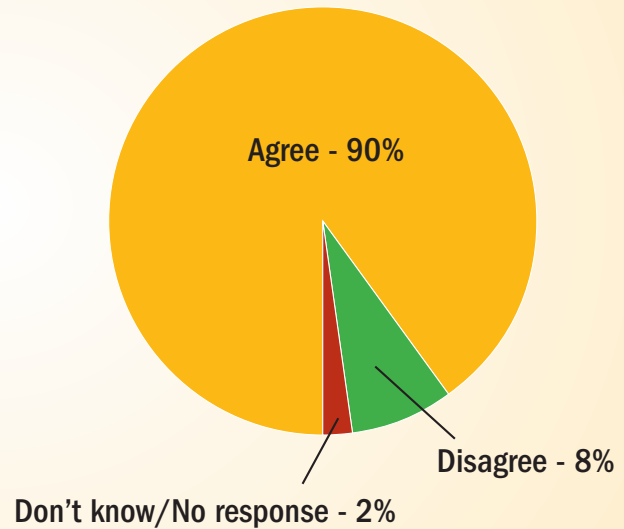
Despite their anxiety about their personal finances and that of their local economies, most Americans continue to say they believe that the number of people struggling to make ends meet in their communities can be reduced. Three out of four say the number of people struggling to get by could be reduced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

Americans not only see the possibility for poverty reduction in their communities, but they see the willingness too. Eighty-nine percent agree (51 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?

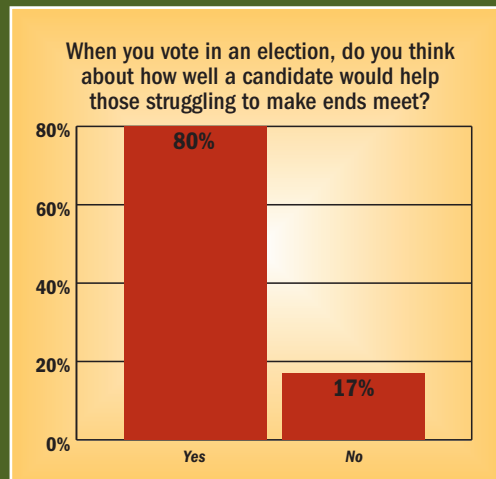


I would like to do more to help people struggling in my community.



PEOPLE SEE IMPORTANT ROLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The share of Americans who say that, when they vote, they plan to take into account how well a candidate would help those struggling continues to go up. Eight in 10 Americans say they take this into account, up 10 percentage points over just two years ago. Nine in 10 say it is “somewhat” or “very” important for local elected officials to work to help people who are struggling. Sixty-four percent say it is very important, a rise of four percentage points over last year.



“The stress that families face when they can’t make ends meet cuts at the very fabric of our society and the bonds that hold us together. We all have a stake in ensuring the economic security of even our most vulnerable neighbors. As legislators, we have a responsibility to provide opportunities for individuals and families to thrive. We need to support systems that build wealth, not strip wealth.”

– Ore. Speaker Jeff Merkley (D)

ECONOMY BY THE NUMBERS

25.3% Households with annual income below \$25,000

5.3% American workers holding two or more jobs

2.4% Loans with payments late by 60 days or more

1.7% Loans in foreclosure

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

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS SURVEY

- **7 in 10** people are worried about the economic well-being of their community.
- **70%** say it takes twice as much to get by than the government's "poverty threshold."
- **80%** of Americans say they think about how well candidates will help those struggling to make ends meet when they go to the voting booth.
- **80%** say they are almost certain to vote in November.
- **9 in 10** personally want to do more to help people struggling in their community.

IMPORTANT FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO WORK ON POVERTY

More than half (52 percent) of Americans say their local officials are working "very" or "somewhat" hard on reducing poverty, and seven in 10 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?

90% 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?

51% 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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