



News Release

NATIONAL/STATE POLL REVEALS WIDESPREAD BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR REFORMS TO PUBLIC SECTOR UNION BENEFITS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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Bozeman — States continue to grapple with the three-year fiscal crisis that has involved intense battles over everything from public employee pensions and benefits to collective bargaining. On September 20, 2011, at a conference headlined by Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, the Manhattan Institute presented the first comprehensive national poll voter attitudes on public sector unions and state budgets, conducted by pollster Douglas E. Schoen. The results show widespread bipartisan support for reforms that decrease spending and that do not increase taxes.

In addition, Montana Policy Institute provided specific questions for the poll to dig a little deeper for voter opinions in a state with strong fiscally conservative credentials but also a history of public support for unions.

Montana voters differ somewhat from national averages with less support for reducing certain benefits and reforming pension systems for current and future public employees to help resolve state fiscal problems. But they strongly oppose measures to increase taxes in order to balance state budgets and do not feel that the current system adequately represents taxpayer interests.

“The Montana results are predictably split about public sector unions’ role in budget shortfalls and how much and what types of reforms are needed. But it’s clear that voters want to hold the line on taxes, empower state government workers to have more control over their retirement benefits, and see taxpayer interests better represented at the bargaining table,” said Montana Policy Institute president Carl Graham.

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The results paint a vivid picture of how both Democrats and Republicans can move forward on legislation and the restructuring of union contracts as they battle shrinking revenues in their states.

Poll results show:

Voters are mixed in their attitudes about the need to cut state spending and reduce benefits for current and future public employees, but not for retirees. Voters strongly resist any tax increases.

- A majority of voters, 52 percent, reject the idea of paying more taxes to keep public employee benefits at their present levels if Montana faces budget problems.
- A similar majority, 56%, reject the idea of accepting service cuts to keep public employee benefits at their current levels if Montana faces budget problems.
- However, by a margin of 65 percent in favor to 29 percent in opposition, voters say that retirees should not have to contribute more towards their pension and health care benefits because of budget problems.

Voters also believe that the basis of the entire public employee pension system needs to be dramatically reformed.

- A strong majority, 72%, of voters favor giving current public employees a choice between participating in a defined contribution plan or a defined benefit plan.
- An even larger majority, 79%, favor empowering state employees with more flexibility to increase their pension investment choice and portability.
- Most voters, 56%, would like to see public employees moved from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan.

Voters are prepared to accept some restrictions on collective bargaining to address fiscal problems. There is also evidence that voters view some of the outcomes from the collective bargaining process as counter-productive to a well-functioning public service, as demonstrated by the fact that voters see teacher tenure as a hindrance to improving public education.

- A majority of 51 percent say that public employee unions gain too much influence when they lobby for and help elect the same officials with whom they will bargain for wages and benefits.
- While Montana voters are split on the need for collective bargaining with public workers, sixty nine percent say that taxpayers are not being adequately and fairly represented by state government in collective bargaining negotiations.
- A decisive 64 percent of voters favor phasing out tenure for teachers because it protects bad teachers from being fired while making it harder to bring in new and better teachers, clear evidence that the outcomes of the collective bargaining process are often not in line with creating more responsive government.

The national and state poll results are available at
<http://www.publicsectorinc.org/events/CSLL092011.html>

To schedule an interview with Douglas E. Schoen, please contact Kasia Zabawa at 646-839-3342 or at
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Douglas E. Schoen has been one of the most influential Democratic campaign consultants for over thirty years. A founding partner and principle strategist for Penn, Schoen & Berland, he is widely recognized as one of the coinventors of overnight polling. Schoen was named Pollster of the Year in 1996 by the American Association of Political Consultants for his contributions to the President Bill Clinton reelection campaign.

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