



JOURNAL

A Public Policy Monthly from the Citizens League

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The MAP 150 Poll: Citizens set us on the road to a stronger Minnesota



Minnesota Anniversary Project

An agenda for putting the public back in public policy

by Stacy Becker

In 2008, Minnesota celebrates its sesquicentennial—its 150th anniversary as a state. To mark this historic event, the Citizens League designed the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) with an unorthodox idea in mind: give Minnesotans a greater role and responsibility in designing and implementing public policy solutions, and our state will start producing the results and innovation it badly needs. Right now, Minnesotans contribute by investing their taxes. But they are not seen as able to contribute much else except for a thumbs up or down at the ballot box. (Unless of course you're a Citizens League member!) Even worse, media pundits talk as if people are ignorant, stupid, or apathetic, or all of the above.

In its 54-year history, the Citizens League has shown that citizens acting in non-partisan roles can deliver solutions that experts cannot on their own. The Citizens League's new mission and principles are all about rebuilding civic capacity in public policy. The research we've done over the past year confirms what we thought: that the limited role of citizens at the table keeps us from solving our most important policy challenges.

With a redefinition of policy-making and citizens' roles, citizens have the ability to infuse policy-making with badly needed common sense and can-do thinking. By overlooking this capacity, Minnesota misses three unique opportunities.

First, citizens have information that is otherwise lost in policy-making. They know first-hand how poli-

cies play out in their everyday lives. For example, senior citizens know the difficulty of trying to untangle Medicare Part D. Immigrants told us that many of their kids are bored in school—the opposite of conventional belief. And there's a reason people don't understand their property taxes—following the money is like trying to find the start and end of the same noodle in a spaghetti bowl.

Second, citizens are themselves policy-makers in their roles as parents, employees, neighbors, etc. They make countless decisions as they go about their everyday lives (for example, how far to commute, whether to smoke, whether to work hard in school) that have an impact on broader society. Without people to carry them out, public policies are just more words on paper. Policies

that are not built on this recognition are doomed to be ineffective.

Third, it seems that it's up to citizens to model civil public discussions, because it isn't happening very often in our politics or media. Citizens can demonstrate how respectful conversations between diverse points of view can lead to productive policy solutions.

The purpose of the Minnesota Anniversary Project, or MAP 150, is to create new civic problem-solving capacity in Minnesota by tapping the potential of citizens.

Citizen Involvement a la MAP 150

The Citizens League has always believed in the power of citizens. So we've put our resources, leadership, and reputation on the line to prove this with the Minnesota

The purpose of MAP 150 is to create new civic problem-solving capacity in Minnesota by tapping the potential of citizens.

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CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens



Awaiting election returns at Election Night Policy and a Pint. Almost 250 people attended this first-ever event, co-sponsored by the Citizens League, 89.3 The Current and Minnesota Public Radio News.

Thank you to the volunteers who have helped make the Minnesota Anniversary Project happen!

MAP 150 Facts Unfiltered working group

Cal Clark
John Farrell
Diane Tran
Sarah Idowu

MAP 150 Steering Committee

Glenn Dorfman
Jennifer Godinez
Tom Horner
Jill Larson
Stacey Millett
Carrie Thomas
Andrea Walsh

Member survey phone bankers

Greg Davidson
Steve Eiken
Bob Scroggins
Evan Stanley
Al Vredevand

Member survey reviewers

Todd Graham
Tim Huebsch
Laurence Reszetar

Congratulations to the winners of the 2006 Civic Leadership Awards



Ben Cox is a relatively new member and a relentless promoter of the Citizens League. He has stepped up every time we asked for his help; he truly exemplifies the mission and spirit of our organization.



Tom Swain is a longtime civic activist and Citizens League member. Recently elected mayor of Lilydale, he continues to inspire other civic leaders to live up to his example.

The mission of the **Jane Addams School for Democracy** is to "free and cultivate the talents, cultures and interests of people from diverse backgrounds in order to add their energy and wisdom to the public wealth." They serve as an inspiration to the Citizens League—and an example of what the Citizens League hopes to achieve.

New members, recruiters, and volunteers

New Members

Brett Anderson
Judy Blaseg
Nate Christopherson
June Cunningham
Tom Daniel
Linda Davis
Marian Deegan
Carol Eastlund
Katie Eukel
James and Mary Fisher
Daniel Gilchrist
Lauren Gilchrist
Brighid Hansen
Bill Hoffman
Catherine Jordan
Kate Kelsch
Al Kluesner
Marco Lanz
Acooa Lee
Scott Leitz
Bruce and Carolyn Leslie
Mark Mahon
M. Matthew Musel
Louis Newman
Paula Pentel
Andrew Toftey
James F. and Mary Ann Van Houten
Lori-Ann Williams

Decision Resources

Fannie Mae Foundation
Friends of the St. Paul Public Library
General Mills Foundation
Grassroots Solutions
Greater Twin Cities United Way
Himle Horner Incorporated
Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc.
Hubert Humphrey Job Corps Center
Larson, Allen, Weishair & Company
M.A. Mortenson Company
Marshall and Ilsley Bank
Spring Hill Center—General Endowment Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation
Minnesota Association of Realtors
St. Paul Harding Senior High School
St. Paul Travelers Foundation

Recruiters

Peter and Sally Anson
Cindy Colson
Peter Heegard
Anne Hunter
Michael Schmidt
Nena Street
Janet and Harry Sutton, Jr.
Tom Swain
Judy Titcomb

Firms and Organizations

Advance Consulting LLC
Arc Greater Twin Cities
Best Buy Co., Inc.
Cincinnatus, Inc.
Coldwell Banker Burnet Relocation

Volunteers

Paul Carter
Cal Clark
Jon Commers

For more information about the Minnesota Anniversary Project—including the results of the MAP 150 Policy Survey and video clips of interviews conducted over the summer—visit www.map150.org



Here lie the expert-based policy processes: R.I.P.

Citizens get it—when will we?

by Sean Kershaw

“Engage!”

When Captain Jean Luc Pickard boldly utters this command from the bridge, the Starship Enterprise doesn't just move forward—it goes *somewhere*.

But when the policy world asks citizens to engage, the engine sputters. *Vote! Volunteer! Talk amongst yourselves!* The effect on citizens? Nothing bold: just a slow and deadly *disengagement*.

A common ground strategy

During the past year I've argued for the need to reconnect citizens with policy-making. Many in politics and the press blame this disconnect on citizen apathy, but the results of our Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) poll are more hopeful. Citizens want to be involved in policy-making on issues that affect their lives, but the traditional avenues of civic and political participation don't work any longer. We need to create new ways of achieving the common good.

Minnesota's 150th anniversary in 2008 offers us a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do so: to rebuild civic capacity in Minnesota.

Civic realism

Interviews by our MAP 150 journalists and our statewide poll show Minnesotans still have a strong sense of individual and civic optimism. More than 60 percent polled believe that citizens should play a greater role in solving problems in areas like healthcare and education; 54 percent believe that citizens “have more to offer to help solve problems but are not given a chance.”

But they're frustrated by traditional opportunities for engagement. And contrary to conventional wisdom, partisanship and time aren't the biggest barriers: it's the belief that “there is too much discussion and not enough concrete action.” Are we listening at the Citizens League?

And we have profound differences as Minnesotans. Issues such as immigration and the role of government in morality

We see the goal of MAP 150 much like the Citizens League's own goal: building a (new) common ground to do the common good (better).

cleave significant fault lines. Income groups differ on the role of personal responsibility in public policy (high-income households favor more personal responsibility in healthcare), and their comfort with the status quo (low-income households are more interested in chucking the status quo in education.) As Tom Horner says, Minnesota is only purple from 30,000 feet. Up close we're still pockets of red and blue.

Policy realism

This call to engage citizens is not based on a fuzzy notion that engagement is “nice.” Engagement is necessary if we're going to find enduring solutions to our policy priorities. We need to redefine how we do so. Our current process is failing for three reasons.

First, we've evolved an expert-based culture of policy-making that separates knowledge and experience about a problem from the ability to solve it. We routinely ask citizens for input (through surveys, focus groups and empty engagement opportunities), and then turn to a separate group of experts to solve the problem.

But experts' solutions don't necessarily work in the real world. Education experts may know what kids need to learn, but parents, teachers, and students may know better how to *motivate* students to learn. Health care experts may know what makes us healthy, but doctors and patients may know better what makes us choose a healthy lifestyle. Separating the process of

defining problems from the act of solving them diminishes the effectiveness of our solutions.

Second, our engagement processes rarely bring diverse groups (by ideology, race/ethnicity, geography, or age) together. We increasingly associate with people like us—exaggerating these differences. We won't find the common good in isolation.

And finally, we have forgotten that citizens have opportunities and resources to solve problems: in their everyday roles as parents, employees, and community members. If we expect people to engage only as voters and volunteers, we'll fail. We need to create the right incentives for citizens to make better choices in their daily lives and real roles and responsibilities.

A new “Minnesota Mandate”

We see the goal of MAP 150 much like the Citizens League's own goal: building a (new) common ground to do the common good (better).

This new Minnesota Mandate will be based on a belief that citizens are capable of solving problems; that their knowledge and life experiences are relevant; and that as active citizens they can look beyond individual interests and differences to build powerful policy solutions that will serve as a model for future generations.

The common good isn't out there in the ether. We create the common good when diverse citizens overcome their differences to solve a common problem and build a better Minnesota. The common good isn't a given; we have to achieve it and we have to believe it's achievable.

Now that we have our mandate, let's go forth, boldly, into this new world and work together to do the common good better. ●

Sean Kershaw is the Executive Director of the Citizens League, and can be reached at skershaw@citizensleague.net or 651-293-0575x14. You can also comment on this Viewpoint at Sean's blog: www.citizensleague.net/blogs/sean.

Anniversary Project

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"The policies change when you change, when **you** make a daily commitment to do (the right thing). Why not reward people for doing the right thing?"

—Jessica Cast, Anoka



Anniversary Project. The work of the past year has affirmed this belief, as we experienced first-hand the hopefulness, high expectations, and individual and civic pride that has made this state so successful.

During the initial phases of MAP 150, the Citizens League conducted video-taped interviews of citizens throughout Minnesota; convened focus groups of immigrants who are newcomers to our civic culture and of established public leaders; gathered research on public policy trends and issues; and completed an innovative statewide scientific survey on public policy priorities and civic engagement. Our goal was to find out if people are hopeful about their future, how they view the role of citizens in creating a better future, and what their policy priorities are for this future.

The findings of this work highlight significant civic challenges for all of us as Minnesotans:

- The status quo isn't sufficient. Doing more of the same to achieve our policy priorities simply won't work.
- Our current processes for developing solutions promote the excessive partisanship and gridlock that prevents problem-solving.
- We need to rethink some fundamental roles and responsibilities, for citizens, governments, businesses, and other institutions—and the politics we need to achieve better outcomes.

What is different about MAP 150? It's not that there aren't already plenty of opportu-

nities for citizens to weigh in. As one interviewee noted, sometimes policy makers can't seem to make a move or a decision without consulting citizens—through endless neighborhood meetings, public hearings, referenda, etc... But often these processes are simply looking for citizens to

Through MAP 150 we will explore new and more productive ways for citizens to contribute. How would policy-making be transformed? Frankly, we don't know for sure because it has never been done before. But models do exist.

Consider the open source architecture of

Our goal was to find out if people are hopeful about their future, how they view the role of citizens in creating a better future, and what their policy priorities are for this future.

affirm some already decided course of action. "What would you like for dinner?" is a very different question from "Do you want cheese on your hamburger?" Citizen engagement is not very engaging right now.

MAP 150 envisions a different type of citizen involvement. The MAP 150 steering committee suspects that one reason our public systems are in disarray is because we carry an outmoded definition of how a "good" citizen gets involved. The current opportunities for civic involvement may be part of the problem. They are boring, too time consuming, exclusionary, or unproductive. Our current methods of "engagement" simply don't work in people's busy daily lives.

Wikipedia, the free, user-created online encyclopedia, for example. This system, in which anyone can contribute information, produces very high quality results because people are allowed to contribute what they know, and serve as checks and balances on each another.

Another example is the trend toward patient-directed care in medicine. It used to be that the doctor was the boss and the patient did as he was told. Patient-directed care is reforming medicine by allowing the patient to be an equal partner. The doctor listens to the patient and the patient's values, and the patient is allowed to make decisions about his care. Sounds simple, but it's a mighty change.

Did You Know? By 2020, the number of people age 65 and older will exceed the number of children under 14 for the first time.

Source: Minnesota State Demographer



“The middle class, we’re the power in a sense. I think we should be out there creating change.”

—Mike Miller, Morris

We’re all familiar with one very common model: the market. People make choices and create information every time they buy a good or service, which helps direct future production and innovation.

All of these models replace top-down, expert-only processes with processes that recognize the value and capacity of the user (the encyclopedia reader, the patient, the consumer) and place greater responsibility for outcomes on that user. In doing so, they create greater value for the individual—and for society.

Identifying priorities

MAP 150’s statewide poll showed that most Minnesotans feel confident about their ability to create a good future for themselves and their families (See related poll article on page 12). But when it comes to public systems, the political process, and their employment security, Minnesotans express considerable doubt about the future. According to the survey, 55 percent are concerned about the affordability of health care, and 66 percent feel that the quality of our public education system is in trouble. A significant majority, 60 percent, feel that insurance company profits are a more significant reason for rising health care costs than the lack of personal responsibility for staying healthy. A majority think that there is too much power in the hands of large corporations. Nearly one in two believe that their job can be outsourced, and 61 percent feel that the average working person has less job security than 20 or 30 years ago.

The most pressing concern is controlling taxes, especially property taxes. It’s not that people aren’t willing to pay taxes; some are willing to pay even higher taxes for their policy priorities. They just don’t see what they’re getting for the money.

Beneath these concerns about health care, education, and taxes runs an undercurrent of vulnerability: these are fundamental systems that underpin our society. Government, employers, and the health care industry are some of the key institutional anchors in our lives, and trust in them is weakening. It’s one thing to be proudly self-reliant in a structured, dependable system. It’s another when that system cannot be trusted or counted on to be there when you need it, or the rules keep changing.

aren’t meaningful—that they produce just talk and no action.

While survey respondents were very positive about our capacity to solve problems as Minnesotans, more than 50 percent said citizens can do more to help solve these public problems. And while Minnesotans believe government has a role in solving our most pressing concerns, 40 percent said that government in Minnesota is almost always wasteful and inefficient.

Moreover, Minnesota’s demographic profile is changing in ways that our institutions have yet to come to grips with. Soon and for the first time, our state will have more seniors than children; our population is becoming more diverse; our communities are changing—some by

Government, employers, and the health care industry are some of the key institutional anchors in our lives, and trust in them is weakening.

Nowhere was this expressed more vehemently than in people’s views of politics. Minnesotan after Minnesotan spoke of polarization, a lack of leadership, and a lack of true choices in the current political system. Many said that they thought their concerns would be ignored if they did try to get involved. There was a clear sense that the current avenues for participation

overwhelming new population growth and others by declining populations. Fault lines have emerged in our social fabric. Minnesotans are deeply split on issues like immigration and the role of government in protecting morality, and along economic and class lines.

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Did You Know?

In 2004, health care spending in Minnesota totaled \$31 trillion—that’s 14 percent of gross state product.

Source: Kaiser StateHealthFacts.org

Anniversary Project

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"The greater our diversity becomes, which is a good thing, the harder the communication and the passing on of morals and values."

—Reverend La Andriamihaja, Minneapolis



Our civic infrastructure has not grown to accommodate these changes. Instead, politics as usual is making things worse. Political processes are being used to further polarize and divide people grappling with

longer-term more transformative change. We'll work with groups of citizens in partnership with political, community, and business leaders to address the following four questions. We'll apply our mission

This is rational, but it doesn't make use of our civic potential.

Minnesotans recognize that they have individual responsibilities to the broader society. The challenge is in imagining what a system of shared responsibility looks like in today's world. In part, this means a political system that is responsible back to its citizens: a system that encourages the expression of diverse views and is open to new policy solutions.

What can students teach us about how school and community needs to change so that we see dramatic improvements in student achievement?

Public education has a fundamental role in any democracy—in building the capacity of people to be good citizens. But Minnesotans are at a tipping point about K-12 education. On a whole host of indicators, anywhere from one-third to nearly one-half see our education system as getting worse. These concerns are coupled with an increasing openness to reforms: for the first time, a strong majority of Minnesotans are open to vouchers, and nearly two-thirds are looking for more school choices that fit their kids' individual learning needs. Nearly two-thirds are prepared to spend more money.

And despite the fact that Minnesota and the nation have been debating what to do about education for decades, real education outcomes have barely improved.

What is lost in all of the expert-led discussions are the students. The talk is of vouchers, referenda, school district consolidation, school year calendar, curricula,

How can we integrate the confidence and ability Minnesotans use in solving their individual problems into solving public problems?

and uncertain about change—not to solve the issues these citizens care about. The Citizens League is deeply troubled by this, as the people of Minnesota should be. But we take our lead from citizens who believe that Minnesota can solve its problems.

The question for MAP 150 is, how can we integrate the confidence and ability Minnesotans use in solving their individual problems into solving public problems?

MAP 150 policy agenda

In the next eighteen months, in time to celebrate Minnesota's 150th birthday in May 2008, the Citizens League will experiment with new forms of policy-making in areas Minnesotans care about most. We know that the processes have to be interesting, meaningful, and produce real results—in a word, different. In each case though, we intend to develop short-term practical solutions and to set the stage for

and principles to real life problems—and to our own practices.

How can politics become more functional in solving citizens' shared problems?

The competition of ideas is a good thing. The search for common ground is not a struggle to force everyone to think the same way. It is the search for meaningful and civil forms of public discussion so that we can learn from one another and challenge ourselves to reach for new and better solutions. Today empty conflict dominates, pitting people of varying beliefs and values against one another.

Many Minnesotans feel alienated from current political processes: 44 percent think that most Minnesota elected officials don't care what they think. Faced with civic processes that seem to be about talk and no action, and with increasingly busy demands on their time, Minnesotans choose to invest this precious time in their families and immediate friends and neighbors.

Did You Know? Between 2010 and 2020, 80 percent of Minnesota's population growth will come from communities of color.

Source: Minnesota State Demographer



"The government should get rid of all lobbyists. Whether they're for me or against me. What's a special interest for you is not a special interest for me."

Darla Moore, Hibbing

standardized tests, English as a second language. Rarely do we talk about what will motivate students to excel. Rarely do we ask these future leaders what they think about one of our most critical public systems. Rarely do we recognize the importance of learning that takes place outside the formal educational systems, and the role that these institutions play in improving public education outcomes. Asking these questions will bring desperately needed insight and fresh ideas into a stale and unproductive discussion.

How can we make our health care system more affordable and secure, regardless of a person's work situation?

Far too many Minnesotans find our health care system to be a source of vulnerability: 39 percent say the possibility of losing their insurance if they lose or change jobs is a major problem for them, and 28 percent say that paying the cost of a major illness is a major problem. Minnesotans believe that health care is of such paramount importance that it shouldn't be dependent on employment status. Sixty-nine percent believe that people deserve good health care and that government should provide a safety net if people can't get coverage through their employer. More than three-fourths think it is unfair that good health care benefits are linked to the size of your employer.

Minnesotans are skeptical of the health care industry when it comes to cost control. But they are not simply casting blame; they know that they too bear responsibility. Minnesotans want costs under control,

with an emphasis on prevention. Minnesota's healthcare system needs to be based on the principles of quality, not volume; prevention, not sickness; and the fundamental relationship between patients and doctors, not administrative bureaucracy, and on access for all.

How can we remove the mystery from how our taxes are used?

Over the years, Minnesota's tax system has become confusing, overly complicated, and to some, increasingly unfair. The system of transfers between units of governments makes it virtually impossible to

plish meaningful systems reform. This is a clear area where citizens need to weigh in. Take a look at so called "truth-in-taxation" notices. They provide the information experts think citizens should know, not the information that is meaningful or useful to citizens.

Opportunities for Members

As specific strategies are developed to pursue each of these four questions, we could use your ideas and feedback. There is no question about it—MAP 150 is inventing as it goes. And once the strategies get under-

The search for common ground is not a struggle to force everyone to think the same way. It is the search for meaningful and civil forms of public discussion so that we can learn from one another and challenge ourselves to reach for new and better solutions.

understand where tax dollars are going, or who should be held accountable for their use. Eight in 10 Minnesotans are looking for more clarity in how their taxes are spent.

Nowhere do we share responsibility more than in our tax system. Taxes support the common goals we wish to achieve, and if it's not clear how tax dollars are being used, it is more difficult to accom-

way, we'll need various types of assistance from members. In the meantime, go to www.map150.org and send us your ideas. Refer friends and colleagues to the website and ask them to send their ideas as well. MAP 150, like Minnesota, is for *all* of us. ●

Stacy Becker is the MAP 150 Project Director

Did You Know? In 2004, Minnesota spent \$10,019 per K-12 pupil compared to a national average of \$9,414.

Source: *School Matters*, a service of Standard and Poor's

What's on the minds of regular Minnesotans? This summer the Minnesota Anniversary Project sent four journalists from the University of Minnesota out across the state to talk to citizens about the issues that are important in their lives. People commented thoughtfully on what it means to be a citizen, on whether there's common ground, and how much they trust politicians. They shared their most pressing concerns. In the four essays that follow, our MAP 150 journalists reflect on what they heard and what they learned while talking with the citizens of our state.

Stacy Becker, MAP 150 Project Director



Meet the experts: Minnesotans defy the stereotype of the uninformed, apathetic voter

by Alan Butterworth

There are probably few better summer jobs than that of a MAP 150 journalist. Under different circumstances I might almost have paid for the opportunity to travel throughout Minnesota and talk with people about their concerns, hopes, and fears. I never realized that my semi-nomadic existence would lead me from Dubai to Bahrain, via England and China, to Minnesota. As a relative newcomer to the state, I appreciated the chance to put places to the names of towns I'd only heard others talk about.

In one memorable interview toward the end of the summer, my colleague Laurie Stern and I spoke with retired pharmaceutical salesman Bill Miner from Duluth. As we sat on the shore of Lake Superior under clear summer skies, I asked Miner what he thought could be done about his particular concern. It is a question that usually elicited a surprisingly wide range of responses—from a dumbfounded throwing up of hands to sincere and often improvised efforts to reinvent entire systems from the ground up. Miner's reply caught me off guard with its economical insight: "We need to talk more about our concerns."

Driving back to Grand Rapids that night with one eye on the lookout for errant deer, I reflected on his comment and realized that, in theory at least, we already have the ideal place for discussing the issues most important to us: the mass media. But there appears to be a gulf between what gets talked about in the media and the key concerns citizens voiced to us all summer. We commonly read and hear about a few so called hot button issues: abortion, gun control, gay marriage, immigration, and the war on terror.

When we asked people what they thought about the political system and of the politicians who are supposed to work to solve their issues, it was evident that many had lost their faith in these institutions.

And yet these were not the issues the citizens we interviewed talked or cared about. Their worries fell a lot closer to home.

From the Mercado Central commercial hub on Lake Street in Minneapolis to northern Minnesota's Iron Range a common theme emerged. When we asked people what they thought about the political system and of the politicians who are supposed to work to solve their issues, it was evident that many had lost their faith in these institutions.

Steven Wooldridge, a private business consultant living in Plymouth, told us about what he sees as a damaging lack of civility in politics.

"I think that the level of partisanship has become so extreme as to almost make the institution dysfunctional," Wooldridge said. He sees politicians as often more concerned with the preservation and

entrenchment of power than with doing what is needed to attend to the future of the country.

Adrian Kemp, a teleconference manager living in North Minneapolis, described his frustration with what he called "camera-shot" leaders who only visit the communities they represent when there is a photo opportunity.

"Ninety percent of the individuals that represent this north side community, I have never physically seen," Kemp said.

Education was a recurrent anxiety and many people we spoke with were worried about the long-term implications of underfunded schools for the future of the state. Louise Millis of Minnetonka voiced a view we heard repeatedly from Minneapolis to Grand Rapids: Property taxes should be raised to pay for smaller class sizes. "I do think you have a vested interest if you own property to support the schools and the community you live in," Millis said.

These comments are just a small illustration of the great diversity of wisdom, insight, and experience I found talking to Minnesotans this summer. I discovered that everyone is an expert in their own lives, finely attuned to the circumstances that affect them directly, and nobody we spoke with fit the stereotype of the uninformed, apathetic voter. Our task as journalists for the MAP 150 project was, in essence, to listen. And the thing that became most apparent and gratifying to me was that people relished the chance to talk—and perhaps more importantly—to be listened to. ●

Alan Butterworth is a graduate student in mass communication at the University of Minnesota.



What I learned from my summer job as a MAP 150 journalist

by Laurie Stern

I became a journalist because I trust in the Jeffersonian notion of democracy and information. As I wrote in my cover letter to the Citizens League when I applied for this assignment, I truly believe that people need good information to make decisions in a democracy. My goal has always been to use storytelling and reporting to advance the public policy discussion—even just a little.

Right now I am a graduate student and freelance producer, but from 1984 to 1995 I covered statewide issues as a producer, reporter, and news manager for KARE, WCCO, and KTCA.

In the newsroom we called them VOX POPs or sometimes, MOS, “man on the street,” little sound bites from regular people to punctuate or to flesh out a thin story. It’s not that we didn’t care what people said—but their thoughts were not the point of the story.

Their thoughts and opinions *were* the point of our MAP 150 questions:

“What would you fix if you could fix one thing?”

“So there’s more crime in your neighborhood? Why is that? Who should work on that?”

“Where do your values come from?”

“Do you feel well represented? Why not?”

People had so many responses; it was like they’d been saving them, waiting for someone to ask. They enjoyed thinking about solutions and possibilities. Not one person mentioned abortion, and only one—someone at the Republican state convention—mentioned gay marriage. Nobody said their taxes were too high. Most people told us they would be willing to pay higher taxes if they knew and approved of where the money was going.

Our MAP 150 jobs began in early June when, by coincidence, both political parties held their state conventions. We thought those would be good places to test drive our equipment and our questions. We thought the partisan responses might serve as goal posts, setting limits for the interviews to come.

Nobody said their taxes were too high. Most people told us they would be willing to pay higher taxes if they knew and approved where the money was going.

Two distinct perspectives emerged. Among Republicans it was the erosion of traditional values like self-reliance and hard work. Democrats worried about the erosion of the social safety net.

Citizens set us straight. Self-reliance and the social safety net are not contradictory; if anything they are linked. The social safety net is in place to enable self-reliance. In most cases people took responsibility for their predicaments. (A typical exception—the National Steel retiree whose pension was cut by two-thirds when the company declared bankruptcy.) They talked about government programs not as entitlements but as things to tide people over in tough times.

Fellow journalist Alan Butterworth and I did more than 100 interviews in congressional districts 3, 5, 6 and 8. The interviews ranged in length from three minutes to more than 30. Common concerns did emerge. Those concerns correlated a bit with geography and more with personal circumstances. For instance, we didn’t hear complaints about gas prices in Minneapolis, but in Rogers, Elk River, and Onamia it was the first thing on people’s minds.

If people were comfortable personally—if they had good-paying jobs with benefits—they wanted to talk about the war in Iraq or the environment, especially about global warming. But many of the people we interviewed didn’t feel secure. And almost everybody we spoke to worried about education.

Suburban seniors and urban parents said cutbacks in after-school programs contribute to rising crime rates. Everyone thought classrooms have too many kids, especially because children with special needs demand attention from stressed-out teachers. One suburban mother quit work to stay home but learned she could no longer afford extracurricular activities for her kids. One working mother said long commutes were taking a toll on family life and she thought schools should help pick up the slack.

And that’s just K-12. There were as many complaints about the cost of higher education. Rising tuition rates are strapping young people and their parents. We also heard about jobs, the cost of health care, transit, and crime.

The policy implications are huge and confusing. I’m glad it’s not my job to sort them out. I can only report that the task is urgent because people are giving up on their elected representatives, and we can’t afford that in a democracy.

The accelerating pressures and pace of everyday life make people feel isolated, alone with their problems, and hopeless. They don’t have enough time. Still many of those interviewed said they would be more engaged if they knew how to get a foothold in a process that would make things better.

I left local TV news partly because it began to care more about the marketplace and less about the democracy. For me, the MAP 150 interviews confirmed a hunger for information that empowers the citizen. ●

Laurie Stern is a graduate student in mass communications at the University of Minnesota and a producer and writer at Hard Working Pictures in St. Paul.



You can learn a lot at a convenience store

by Rhonda Loverude

Have you ever walked up to a stranger and inquired about his or her personal views on, say, public policy? I am talking about chatting up random strangers (in this case, Minnesota residents) regarding fairly touchy topics.

Sound scary? As a journalist, you have to do this quite often. What if I asked you to teach a class of 150 college students? Speaking in front of sometimes bored young adults two to three times per week? Sound scarier? I am fortunate enough to have had both of these “scary” experiences.

The bulk of my job for MAP 150 was interviewing “regular” Minnesotans about their views, feelings, and concerns about public policy issues. I interviewed people as young as 18 and as old as 79. Everyone had something to say. Much of what was said was, frankly, wonderfully compassionate and daringly honest. My favorite interviews were with college-age young adults. Not because I am comfortable around this age group from five years of teaching; I enjoyed hearing their true beliefs which can often be hidden in the confines of a classroom. Was I scared? A little bit. But a theatre major in my undergrad work helped me “act” like a seasoned journalist. I believed that if I approached people honestly, confidently, and with a smile, I would encounter amazing interviewees. It also helped to keep my “Three Most Embarrassing Moments in Life” in my back pocket as a bartering tool.

Although I am often around young adults as an instructor, I was constantly pleased and impressed by the 18 to 24 year olds I interviewed. Whether they were in college was irrelevant; this was a group of Minnesota citizens who have long felt ignored. They were thrilled to have someone ask their opinions. And I was thrilled to find young adults who are informed about and engaged in public policy.

I asked Samantha White, 19, one of four young interviewees working at a convenience store near Mystic Lake Casino, if she thought casinos were beneficial to the community. Her emphatic reply: yes. “They offer a lot of jobs and they pay a lot of money if you work there. ...All of my friends work there.”

I was constantly pleased and impressed by the 18 to 24 year olds I interviewed. This was a group of Minnesota citizens who have long felt ignored. They were thrilled to have someone ask *their* opinions.

Asked her how she felt about gambling in general, she offered a mellow open response. “Whatever floats your boat. If you want to do it, do it. I mean, some people win lots of money. It’s not my thing. I’m not very lucky, so I don’t do it. But hey, if you have the money to spend, why not?”

Paige Overby, 19, moved to Prior Lake from Chanhassen about a year ago with her family and goes to college in Wisconsin. I asked her how the casinos affect the economy of Prior Lake?

“I would say it’s a positive for sure. I go to school in Wisconsin and students will drive two hours to go to Mystic Lake. It brings people here.”

A political science major, Overby is interested in what is occurring in her community, legally speaking. When I asked if there’s a law or public policy that she thinks is absurd, Overby smiled.

“Well, I have a couple that I like. I like the seatbelt one (law). I honestly dislike the 21-year-old drinking thing. I mean, I’m 19 years old. Of course, I’m not 21, but I just feel there are people that are responsible enough to drink when they’re 18. I like the strictness that drinking and driving is getting. What I really don’t like are the cigarette taxes. ...I haven’t seen any decrease in smoking. I worked here before the tax and after the tax.”

The cigarette fee didn’t make Overby quit smoking, she said, but she has switched to cheaper brands.

Asked if, at age 19, she should be involved in public policy debate, Overby confidently replied, “I think it’s important for us to have a voice. But if a 19-year-old isn’t interested in something, they’re not going to pursue it. I think it’s better that if you’re not educated in the scheme of things, that you kind of keep quiet because if you’re misinformed, you have the wrong information. I don’t even know how to get involved. I’m just trying to make money so I can go to school. It’s a little early for 19 year olds (to be involved in policy decisions) but this is cool, I mean, you’re giving us a chance to speak. No one asks us.”

I stopped a minute and reflected on her words. “No one asks us.” How completely grateful I was at that moment to be interviewing four young adults at a convenience store.

“We’re the future.” Overby added. “I mean, I know that’s a cliché, but we are the ones who are going to be following all the rules you guys are going to be making. And we’re going to be changing the rules as we want them. We’re going to be living it.”

I blame the following on the fact that I teach Mass Media and Popular Culture: As I left my four fabulous interviewees, I was humming Whitney Houston lyrics “I believe the children are the future. Teach them well and let them lead the way...” As unbelievably corny and cheesy as that was, I thought, “man, with just four interviews, I’ve been reduced to near tears and hokey song lyrics.” Most of all, I felt hope for our communities, our states, our countries, and our world for the first time in a long time. ●

Rhonda Loverude teaches Mass Media and Popular Culture at the University of Minnesota and is working on a Ph.D. in journalism and mass communication.



A journey inside the hearts and minds of everyday Minnesotans

by Hao Sun

First to tell, I've been living in Minnesota for only a little more than two years. Before I came here, I had been a journalist for the official Xinhua News Agency in China and its Pakistani bureau for more than five years. Given this, my involvement in a project exclusively about the state of Minnesota might seem a little improper, or at least weird to others. But working for MAP 150 offered me a great opportunity to know more about Minnesota as a quasi-Minnesotan instead of as a total outsider. Also, being a non-American sometimes helps me better understand what the American people think about their lives and the things going on around and far from them in a more objective manner.

Three things struck me the most during my three months of interviews. First, almost all of the people we contacted were more than willing to tell their stories and share what was on their minds. This was beyond my expectation, largely because of my past experience working as a journalist in some developing and underdeveloped countries where people, for various reasons, refrain from speaking out freely.

Second, most of the people we talked with were eager for more opportunities to do something good for their communities and for the state of Minnesota. It was obvious to me that people do care about more than just the issues that affect their families. The ideal of pursuing a greater good was shared by many, if not all, of those we spoke with, no matter their ethnicity, party affiliation, religious belief, or cultural preference. This was nowhere truer than on the issue of education. Almost everyone we spoke to said they would spend reasonably more money on a better education system for their kids, their "hope of the future."

Third, people responded to our questions with intelligent thoughts rather than vehement and vain complaints. People can contribute a lot when they're included and consulted instead of forgotten—as many interviewees say they have been by most politicians. So it is time for those holding public office to mend relations between government and ordinary citizens and to regain people's trust.

We do share things in common. Why not set aside our differences, stubbornness, narrow-mindedness, and ignorance we've held tight to and build on those things that we can achieve together?

My experience during the summer reinforced some thoughts about how this could be done.

Let citizens' voices be heard! To me, this is what democracy is all about.

Very few people in power seem to care what's on the mind of a factory worker or an elementary school teacher when talking about anything other than family issues. MAP 150 is trying hard to find the true meaning of democracy and to return it to the people. As a journalist my role was to listen to people's voices with sincerity and integrity rather than search for evidence I could use to support my own opinions. I truly believe that the people, and only the people, are the opinions that count.

Let intelligent thoughts be heard!

It is reckless to say that only highly educated people are capable of intelligent thought. Unfortunately, political systems in much of the world, including the U.S., run under an elite-decide-all flag. Regular citizens often have some great ideas about life, ideas which are deeply rooted in their hearts and bones. In public policy, we need active involvement from individual citizens because every single policy will ultimately affect either improve or deteriorate some people's lives. So everyone is a stakeholder, and in many cases they understand the situations better than professional policy makers do.

So why not solicit input from ordinary people? I heard some fantastic thoughts on certain public issues during my interviews, and I became aware that regular people are smart. So give them a chance to speak their minds—intelligently.

Let common ground be found, not ignored!

Who trusts politicians? During our interviews, we heard Democrats say they can't trust Republicans and vice versa. Divisiveness was mentioned frequently. But is that the only thing we have? No, of course not! What happens to our neighbors and in our communities and our cities will certainly impact our own lives, whatever political stand we hold. It would be a pity to let common ground take a back seat to personal interest, or more accurately, to individual preference. We do share things in common. Why not set aside our differences, stubbornness, narrow-mindedness, and ignorance we've held tight to and build on those things that we can achieve together?

"What's your understanding of common ground?"

I'm so captivated, even now, by this single question that I actually asked it in every interview. Here are two of the responses I heard:

"Common ground is always there...I should be the person to look for it."

"Americans have learned how to live together with 'uncommon ground'."

These two seemingly opposite answers turn out to lead to the same destination: it is possible to ground our lives on something we share in common. That is exactly how public policies should function.

I heard too many great ideas and comments to quote in this short article. I'm one hundred percent sure, however, if you visit the MAP 150 website and watch the video clips and listen to the voices of Minnesotans, industrious and intelligent, you will feel the way I do.

I wish I could do more to help build a better Minnesota. Maybe I can in the near future. How about you, my fellow Minnesotans? ●

Hao Sun worked as journalist in China and South Asia for six years. He is studying for a master's degree at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota.



On the road to a stronger Minnesota

Our Minnesota poll shows our state's citizens care and they're ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work

by Erin Sapp

Is Minnesota on the right track? Is it still the land of opportunity? Are citizens eager to have a voice, or is "civic engagement" just too boring? Can we, as Minnesotans, solve our problems, or have we become too divided to solve much of anything?

The Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) set out to answer these questions and to redefine how we engage Minnesotans in finding solutions to the issues they care about most. We began this project in January with two premises: the status quo wasn't working to resolve our most important policy issues; and citizens need to be part of the process of finding new and better solutions. By re-engaging citizens in policy-making, we believe we can produce better public policies that serve the common good better.

Over the summer, the MAP 150 steering committee and staff consulted experts and community leaders. Our MAP 150 journalists branched out across the state to gather stories from hundreds of Minnesotans. And we collected and analyzed facts and data on issues and civic engagement.

Then came the moment of truth: using this information and input we crafted a statewide poll.

There have been plenty of polls over the years asking citizens what issues they care about, their opinions about individual policies or initiatives, and their political party affiliations. What these polls haven't asked, however, is how Minnesotans feel about the political process and citizenship in general. How do they want to engage with policy and politics? What do they expect from government and politicians in return for their participation? From their fellow citizens? Just how big is their appetite for participating in the public-policy process? How do their views impact the Citizens League's efforts to change public policy?

In September we conducted a statewide telephone survey of more than 800 Minnesotans. The survey included nearly 140 questions and took an average of 36 minutes to complete. One thing we learned

They don't view government or elected officials as effective problem solvers. And they feel an increasing vulnerability in the face of a changing economy.

among many was that Minnesotans are eager to talk about these issues. Of those contacted, fewer than 5 percent declined to participate; 70 percent of the respondents actually made an appointment to speak with an interviewer later so that they could put some real thought into their answers.

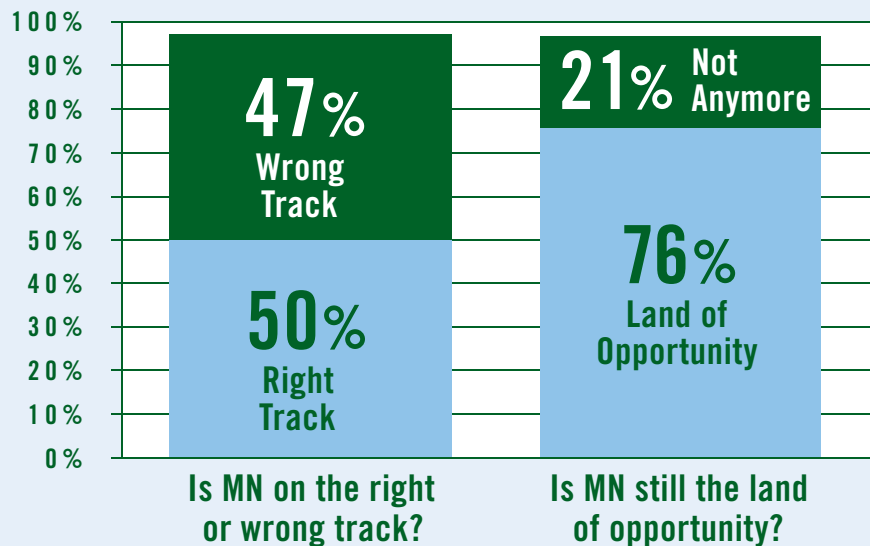
What does this all add up to? The results of the poll point to what Citizens League members have believed all along: Minnesotans care about public policy and they are ready to become agents of change.

That said, the poll shows there are some important fault lines that divide us: immigration, the role of government in personal morality, and differences that stem from economic class and geography. As a state, our citizens lack consensus on how to tackle these critical issues.

Is Minnesota on the right track? Is it still the land of opportunity? As much as anything, the answers to these two questions framed the responses we heard. Survey respondents told us they believe that as individuals they can be successful, and that they can solve their own problems. And they feel a personal responsibility to do so. They're also confident about their future. Seventy-two percent said Minnesota remains the land of opportunity, and more than half of those folks felt "strongly" so.

Figure 1

Right or Wrong Track?



Did You Know?

If current trends continue, by 2030 long term care will consume 54 percent of the total state budget.

Source: Minnesota Taxpayers Association

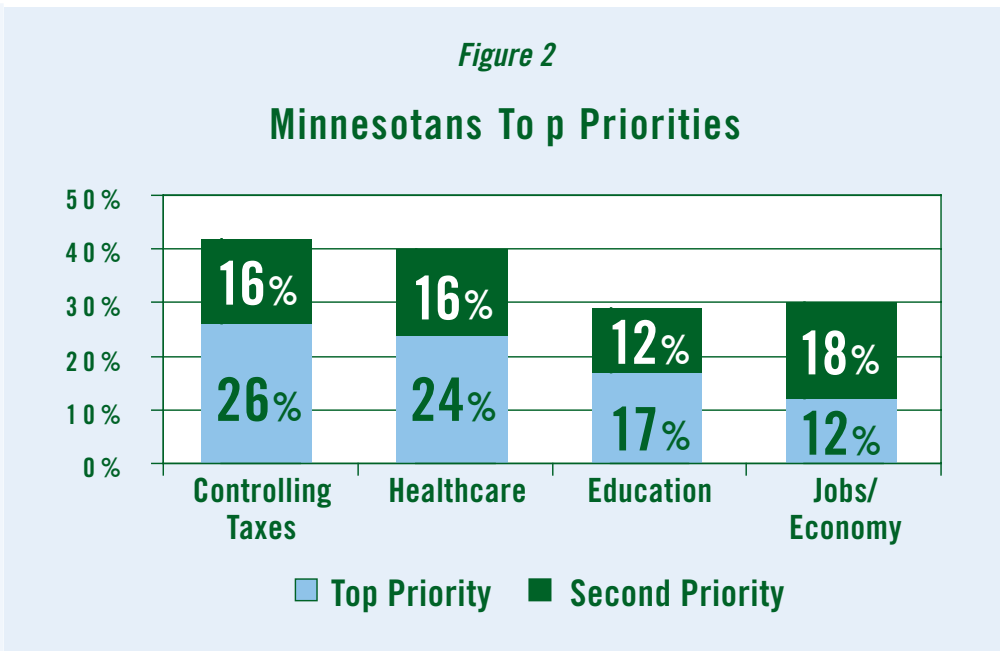
But the respondents were less confident about the direction our state is taking. They don't view government or elected officials as effective problem solvers. And they feel an increasing vulnerability in the face of a changing economy and other factors that are out of their control. They are worried about the affordability of healthcare, especially as they look into the future at jobs that are less secure, and they see that Minnesota's traditional hand-up, public education, no longer meets the needs of our state or our kids.

Minnesotans do agree on what issues are most pressing, but they don't agree on the solutions. They see a strong role for government in crafting those solutions, but at the same time they are losing confidence in government's ability to be effective. Many said they would be willing to pay higher taxes if they believed their dollars would be well spent.

A state of eight

The survey sought to identify what issues, priorities, and views about policy and governance unite different groups of people. What we found was a startling break from the conventional wisdom. Rather than rallying around political parties and their ideologies, our survey showed that Minnesotans tend to cluster around eight voting profiles. Ninety percent of those surveyed fell into one of these profiles; 10 percent simply couldn't be classified.

Government as a social force. People in this group see government as a safety net for those in need, but they think that citizens need to take more personal responsibility for broader community concerns. They see a strong role for government in morality, in closing the wealth gap, and for citizen involvement in government. Religion guides their views about politics and issues. Because they favor individual responsibility, MAP 150 has a real opportunity to tap their community spirit to help create a meaningful process for civic engagement.



Frustrated / Disillusioned. Made up predominantly of young people of all economic classes and genders, this group is disgruntled by the current political system and alienated from both major parties. They are extremely skeptical of the government and large business, and of Minnesota's ability to solve problems. One

way to look at this group would be to see them as "disillusioned." Another view shows that they are paying attention, but they are frustrated with the status quo—it isn't working now and won't work for them in the future. This is exactly the group that John Mayer talks about in his current rock/pop hit, "Waiting on the World to Change." MAP 150 may have a real opportunity to reach this group with new methods of civic engagement. These people vote, and they care. They just don't believe that the current political system works.

Financially Insecure. As the name implies, members of this group are defined by income. They struggle to make ends meet and they are worried about the future. One way to give this group hope is to increase their security, especially on issues like health care.

Libertarians. This group is made up of nearly classic Libertarians who believe in individual responsibility, self-reliance, and community-based problem-solving above all else. MAP 150 has an opportunity to engage these people to help maximize the role of citizens in crafting policy solutions.

Rather than rallying around political parties and their ideologies, our survey showed that Minnesotans tend to cluster around eight voting profiles.

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Did You Know?

After adjusting for inflation, the median family income in Minnesota dropped 6 percent between 2000 and 2005.

Source: Rick Linsk and Maryjo Sylwester, St. Paul Pioneer Press, August 30, 2006

New Minnesotans share their hopes, dreams, and frustrations

By Erin Sapp

Because of the limitations of in the sample size, we couldn't be confident our statewide poll would reach people of color and immigrants. So MAP 150 conducted three focus groups with members of the Somali and Latino communities.

The focus groups confirmed what we heard from other Minnesotans. These newer Minnesotans articulated the same hopes and dreams, and the same frustrations as native-born Minnesotans. They also share the same priorities: affordable healthcare, quality education for their children, and available good-paying and secure jobs. Discussion in the focus groups also provided insight into how individuals in these communities view the state generally, and their experiences within the healthcare and education systems—two of their biggest areas of concern.

Participants in all three groups expressed strong feelings about Minnesota as a land of opportunity, although many voiced the same concerns as poll respondents about the state being on the wrong track. Some have difficulty obtaining health insurance, and many go without it. And, in general, they find the entire health care system confusing and difficult to navigate. With regard to education, they appreciate the quality of education in Minnesota, but many said that their children are bored in school. Often the educators assume that their children need a slow pace, when in reality they would benefit from greater challenges.

The focus group experience was an important part of MAP 150's efforts to ensure that all voices are heard as we explore new public policy solutions for Minnesota. The bottom line: While our citizens have a diversity of opinions and backgrounds, our dreams for our families and our state are the same.

On the Road

continued from page 13

No Problems. The members of this group are content. While the government and political process work for them, MAP 150 can harness their interest to make institutions and processes even better.

Raise the Drawbridge. This group is characterized by its stance on immigration (they're against it) and the importance of religion in their lives (although they did not identify as evangelicals). They see immigrants as a threat to, and a burden on, Minnesota. They may also have the most in common with immigrants: they live in places where many immigrants have relocated, and they find themselves competing with the new arrivals for jobs. If the MAP 150 process could help them find common ground with their newest neighbors, it could ease their "us versus them" feelings.

Politically Empowered. Those close to the MAP 150 project joke that this group of "super citizens" are all Citizens League members. They are engaged in the current political process and involved in their communities. The overall mission of MAP 150 should appeal to this group of politically engaged individuals.

Welcoming Arms. They are the mirror image of the Raise the Drawbridge group—a perfect opposite on all classifying questions. They believe immigration strengthens Minnesota. Religion is not an important part of their lives. These young, liberal urbanites are more hopeful than the Frustrated group, and they may be receptive to MAP 150's quest to create a meaningful process for citizen engagement, particularly toward creating conversations around immigration.

These profiles, or voting blocs, provide MAP 150 and the Citizens League the first insight into how citizens view their roll in politics and the issues that unite or divide them. They help us to understand how to reach out to people, to engage them in conversation, and they will help us develop a process that gives all Minnesota citizens a voice long after the Minnesota Anniversary Project is finished.

Opportunities for common ground

Despite the various and sometimes opposing profiles outlined above, Minnesotans do agree on some clear priorities for the future. The recent rise in property taxes weighs most heavily on people's minds, followed closely by healthcare, education,

and economic security. Figure 2 shows respondents' first and second choices for the most important issues facing Minnesota today.

Another theme that emerged broadly across profiles was a near indictment of many of our existing systems—tax, health care, education, and politics in particular. The poll also dug beneath the surface and asked respondents what about each of these systems concerned them.

Despite the various and sometimes opposing profiles outlined above, Minnesotans do agree on some clear priorities for the future: property taxes, health care, education, and economic security.

Taxes

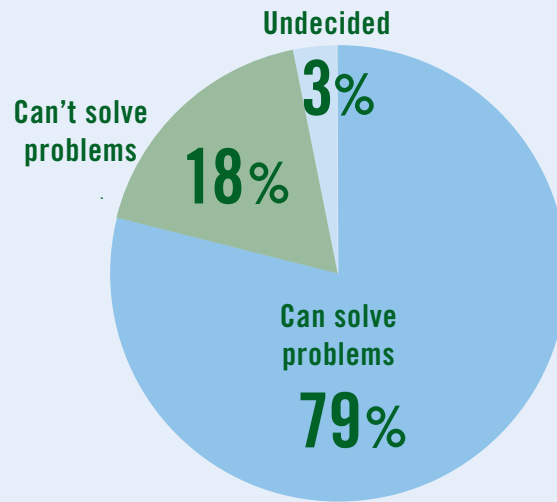
Those polled said quite clearly that they aren't only concerned about the amount of taxes they pay; they want to better understand how their tax dollars are spent. More than 80 percent said that they would feel better about paying taxes if it were clearer how the money was being spent. Taxpayers are investors and Minnesotans want to be able to follow their investments. That said, nearly 60 percent think that state government does a better job than it gets credit for, and a majority are willing to invest more in their state if they can see clear results.

Healthcare

Forty percent of those surveyed ranked healthcare as their first or second most important concern. Affordability is key: cost is too high and Minnesotans don't trust where the dollars are going. They worry whether health care will be affordable and accessible tomorrow. The biggest

Can we, as Minnesotans, find ways to solve our problems?

Figure 3



immediate concerns are long-term care and affordable health insurance. The responses illustrate the vulnerability Minnesotans feel given the current health-care system. There is no consensus on solutions, however. A majority of Minnesotans polled are not yet willing to uncouple insurance from employment, but three-fourths think it is unfair that the quality of health insurance is often inked to the size of one's employer. Respondents view health as a personal responsibility but health care as a community good, and they

Those polled said quite clearly that they aren't only concerned about the amount of taxes they pay; they want to better understand how their tax dollars are spent.

say that the government has a role in making it accessible, equitable, and affordable.

Education

By and large, those polled said that K-12 public education is failing their expectations on nearly every measure tested. But they haven't written off public education and they are willing to invest in innovative solutions to fix it. Two-thirds are willing to spend more money on the right solutions. While there's no overwhelming agreement on where best to invest, Minnesotans clearly want more choice, and most (52%) are ready for a total transformation in order to achieve the results they experienced in the past and have come to expect in the present and the future.

Economic security

While nine out of 10 Minnesotans polled are satisfied with their jobs, they also say that their jobs are more stressful and less secure than a generation ago. They work harder for less security and fewer benefits. Despite this, respondents indicate they are confident about their ability to secure their own future, to pay for retirement, and for their children's education. They also see a clear role for the government to define and develop the economy.

Finding common ground for the common good

Minnesotans have the potential to find common ground. They agree on their top priorities—healthcare, education, economic security, and controlling taxes—and most see their state as a land of opportunity. At the same time, there is major support for change to ensure that Minnesota gets back on the right track.

Individuals are Minnesota's core strength, but citizens also see a strong role for government in providing a safety net. Minnesotans expect and respect personal responsibility. They believe in the "pull yourself up by the bootstrap" road to success. While optimistic about their own futures, Minnesotans are worried that increasing numbers of their fellow citizens are vulnerable to a changing economy.

Minnesota clearly is a state grappling with change. MAP 150 offers a real opportunity to re-engage citizens by creating a process that gives them a meaningful voice in politics and policy while developing an agenda for Minnesota's future. ●

Erin Sapp is the MAP 150 Research Assistant.

More than 200 Citizens League members participated in an unscientific, online version of the MAP 150 Policy Survey. While it's no surprise that those who responded are active in politics and their communities, there were a few surprises.

Citizens League members were less optimistic about the state's future than Minnesotans on the whole:

"In general, do you think Minnesota is heading in the right direction or off on the wrong track?"

Right direction: 24% Wrong track: 67%

"Minnesota is still the land of opportunity for everyone."

Yes: 59% No: 41%

But they believe that Minnesotans can—and should—work together to solve the state's problems:

"As Minnesotans, we can always find ways to solve our problems."

Yes: 78% No: 22%

Read more member' responses at www.map150.org

Did You Know? Seventy percent of Minnesotans without health insurance are employed.

—Minnesota Department of Health Health Economics Program

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