

## **Pee Dee Poll: FMU professors offer analyses of results**

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By MORNING NEWS STAFF REPORTS  
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Two Francis Marion University professors have offered their analyses of the poll results. Dr. Alissa Warters, an assistant professor of political science, and Dr. Scott Kaufman, an assistant professor of history, are acting as advisers on the poll and had the following thoughts:

### Dr. Alissa Warters:

The bellwether question in the survey was whether the respondent thought his or her family was better or worse off than they were four years ago.

A majority (a combined 67 percent) of respondents stated that they were either “worse off” or “about the same.” This matches the trend in national surveys.

When examining the raw data further, an income bracket disparity becomes apparent for responders. Of those who said they were “worse off,” the large majority were those who made \$39,000 or less a year. This statistic probably highlights the impact that the slowing national and state economies are having on personal finance.

More important are the growing costs of food and gasoline. The lower income brackets are going to feel the economic consequences from these daily necessities costing more before those in the upper income brackets do.

Respondents clearly stated that economic issues are their main worry. When “economy,” “rising prices — gas/food” and “jobs/employment” are combined as a single economic indicator, 47 percent of respondents said this was the major concern for the Pee Dee.

### Dr. Scott Kaufman:

There is a clear correlation between the survey and national polls with regard to medical costs. More than six of 10 poll respondents said they are overly concerned about their ability to pay for future medical costs for themselves and their families. Add to that the number of those who are somewhat concerned, and the number climbs to a whopping 85 percent.

### Kaufman:

A majority of respondents supported building both Interstate 73 through the Pee Dee region and the Santee Cooper coal-fired power plant in Florence County. It would be interesting, however, to see how this breaks down by county.

Looking at the numbers on this issue raises an interesting question — was the support for the power plant based upon a perception that it will bring jobs, lower electricity costs, or

a combination of the two? It is difficult to know with no further statistical examination, but such a correlation will tell much about the state of the economy in the region.

Warters and Kaufman:

While a majority of respondents (65 percent) agreed that public K-12 education in the Pee Dee is not being given enough money by the state of South Carolina, there is an unwillingness to pay more taxes to fund education in the region. If taxes were raised to pay for education in the Pee Dee, most respondents preferred a sales tax instead of an income or property tax.

Warters:

Fifty-two percent of respondents said they didn't think that the state was spending the money for K-12 education properly, which could be the reason why they said they are not willing to pay more taxes to fund education.

I also think this question touches upon a broader question that was not asked — whether the respondents have trust in their government. A question on trust in government would be helpful, especially in trying to further understand how the citizens view the role of government, particularly in terms of how monies are spent.

Kaufman:

I agree on looking into this matter of trust in government. Recent polls have found an enormous lack of faith in the trustworthiness of elected officials in Washington, and it would be interesting to see if there is a similar feeling about officials in the Pee Dee.

Warters:

The fact that the majority of respondents (53 percent) would be more willing to have a sales tax increase over a property tax or income tax increase deserves special attention. This strikes me as interesting because the sales tax is a regressive tax that ends up hurting lower income families, while income taxes are based upon the amount one earns; therefore, higher wage earners will pay more in income taxes, while lower and higher wage earners pay an equal amount in sales tax.

It should be noted that the survey does not differentiate between federal, state and local taxes. Therefore, the respondents are just answering based on what they perceive is their overall tax burden.

Kaufman:

Additionally, there is also a divide between African-Americans and whites over implementing a sales tax to pay for such public projects as education and roads. A majority of whites (63 percent) supported a sales tax to help support education, while only 43 percent of African-Americans supported a sales tax. One of the reasons for this divide may lie in the respondents' income. The survey found that the region has a far greater percentage of African-Americans who make less than \$40,000 a year than whites in that income category. The implication is that African-Americans are more concerned than whites as to how a sales tax will affect their bottom line.