

Pee Dee Poll: Economy, health care costs top concerns in Pee Dee

May 17, 2008

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SCNOW.com.

Pee Dee residents think the economy and health care costs are among the top problems facing their communities, according to a joint poll by Francis Marion University and the Morning News.

Rising prices, namely of gasoline and food, were cited by 16 percent of respondents in the poll as the No. 1 problem in their areas.

In addition, 15 percent of people surveyed said employment is the top problem in their area, while 8 percent mentioned the economy in general.

Of the people surveyed, 85 percent said they are concerned about paying for future medical costs for themselves and their families.

While 62 percent of people surveyed said they have good or excellent access to doctors, 54 percent would rate their community's health care as poor or not very good.

In addition, crime and drugs were named as the top community problem by 16 percent of survey respondents.

Interstate 73, proposed to run through northeastern South Carolina on its route from Michigan to Myrtle Beach, received the support of 64 percent of poll respondents. Eighteen percent opposed it, while another 18 percent said they were unsure.

When asked about the proposed Santee Cooper Coal-powered plant at Kingsburg in southern Florence County, 55 percent of those surveyed said they support it, while 21 percent oppose it and 24 percent were unsure.

This is the first year for the FMU-Morning News poll, which was conducted by Crantford & Associates LLC Market Research.

“This effort began with a spirited discussion between the editors of the (Morning News) and the administration of the university, during which it was generally concluded that everyone purports to know what people across the Pee Dee think, but no one really bothers to ask,” Francis Marion University President Dr. Fred Carter wrote in an e-mail.

Morning News editor Harry Logan said he is pleased to partner with FMU to learn people's thoughts and concerns on a wide range of issues.

He said the poll, although conducted in an election year, is not a political poll.

“We hope that from the poll results we can focus on and write about issues that people think are affecting them and their lives,” Logan said in a statement. “We can also use the information to help focus public policy debate as well.”

The pollsters used phone banks to contact 704 residents drawn from a sample of about 100 each from Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion, Marlboro and Williamsburg counties.

The percentage of women surveyed compared with the men is slightly higher than the ratio of the Pee Dee’s male-female population breakdown in the most recent U.S. Census data, from 2000.

Of the poll respondents, 56 percent were women, and 44 percent were men. According to the census, women make up 52.8 percent of the region’s population, and men constitute 47.2 percent.

Carter said the poll will continue into future years on a “systematic basis” through baseline polls each spring and intermittent polls held according to circumstances and events.