

# THE 2010 UTAH PRIORITIES SURVEY: THE TOP ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF UTAH VOTERS FOR THE 2010 ELECTION

## The Top 10 Issues for 2010

1. Jobs and the economy
2. Government Spending
3. Kindergarten through 12th grade education
4. Healthcare
5. The ethics of elected officials
6. Taxes
7. Energy issues, including utilities and gasoline prices
8. States' rights versus the federal government
9. Environmental issues, including air quality and pollution
10. Immigration

The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

Douglas Matsumori, Chairman  
M. Bruce Snyder, Vice Chairman  
Stephen J. Kroes, President

10 West Broadway, Suite 307  
Salt Lake City, UT 84101  
(801) 355-1400 • [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org)

In this special election year, Utahns are less confident that the state is heading in the right direction than they were two years ago. Their concerns about some issues, like energy and transportation, have eased since 2008. However, other issues are now of greater concern, including the economy, government spending, the ethics of elected officials, and states' rights versus the federal government.

As the introduction to the 2010 Utah Priorities Project, this report provides a summary of the findings of a statewide Dan Jones and Associates survey assessing which issues are most important this year and how voters feel about Utah's economy, society, and politics. The full report is available online at [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org). The goal of this survey is to determine the most important public policy issues for voters, their level of concern about each issue, and to provide details about why voters care about some of the major issues. The survey was not designed to gather voters' prescriptions for solving these problems, but rather to provide a solid list of priority issues for candidates and voters to focus on through this election cycle.

## HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

The 2004 and 2008 Utah Priorities Surveys began by asking a small sample of 200 people what they would say is the most important issue facing the state of Utah. Those 200 open-ended answers were then analyzed and grouped into major topic areas. Using these topic areas, Utah Foundation and Dan Jones and Associates compiled a list of 19 issues that were consistent across the two surveys and have relevance today.

The 2010 Utah Priorities Survey asked registered voters to rate each of these 19 issues by their level of concern about the issue. It also asked respondents questions about whether Utah is headed in the right direction, the quality of

## The 2010 Utah Priorities Project

During this election season, Utah Foundation is working to focus political dialogue on the issues that matter most to Utah voters. This project begins with this survey to rank the major issues and set the agenda for Utah Foundation's research and activities this year.

The Utah Priorities Project website ([www.utahpriorities.net](http://www.utahpriorities.net)) will serve as a library of information on the top issues and will facilitate dialogue about these issues. Through partnerships with KSL TV and Radio, the Deseret News, and the Hinckley Institute of Politics, this project will also feature live and online discussions, forums, candidate debates, and other featured coverage of these issues.

**For the complete report on these survey results, please visit our website at [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org).**

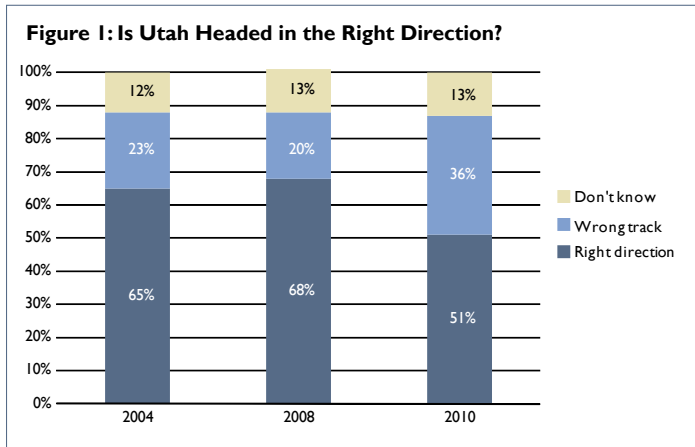
life in Utah, and details about their level of concern for areas within selected issues. The survey was administered to 604 respondents statewide.<sup>1</sup> The majority of respondents, 38%, were from Salt Lake County, 19% from Utah County, 12% from Davis County, 7% from Weber County, and the remaining 25% from a sampling of other counties around Utah.

### HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

The 2010 Utah Priorities Survey began by asking Utah voters if they feel Utah is headed in the right direction or if it has gotten off on the wrong track. A slight majority (51%) responded that the state is “headed in the right direction.” This is a much lower percentage of respondents than in the 2004 and 2008 surveys (65% and 68%, respectively). Nearly half the state either feels the state is on the wrong track (36%) or they don’t know (13%).

### UTAH’S QUALITY OF LIFE

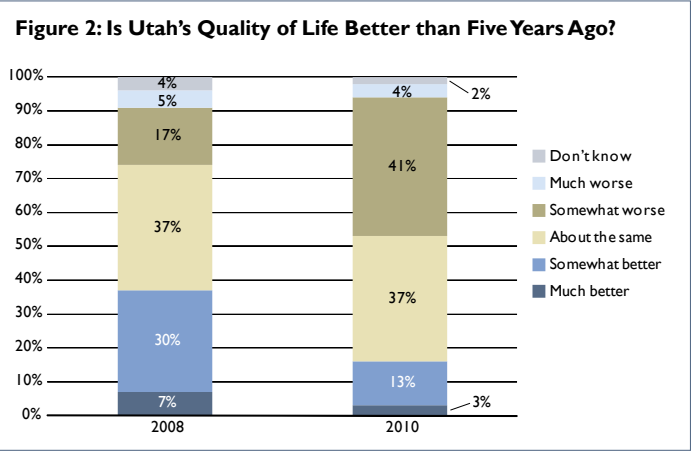
Respondents were asked to rate the overall quality of life in Utah compared to five years ago. Figure 2 shows mixed results for 2010; not surprisingly, the percentage of respondents who feel Utah’s quality of life is “somewhat worse” is noticeably higher today than it was in 2008. A minority of voters (16%) feel the quality of life in Utah is somewhat or much better, and slightly more than a third (37%)



feel it is about the same. The largest block of respondents (45%) feel Utah’s quality of life is somewhat or much worse. These sentiments likely reflect the strains placed on individuals and the state by the economic recession.

### THE TOP 10 ISSUES FACING UTAH

In order to assess the most important public policy issues for Utah voters, survey participants were asked to rate each issue on a scale of one to five, five meaning they are very concerned about the issue. Three issues in the 2010 survey received a mean score above 4.00 (jobs and the economy, 4.29; government spending, 4.20; and K-12 education, 4.09). This is different from 2008, when only one issue had a mean score above 4.00 (energy issues, 4.10). Figure 4 shows the differences between the 2008 and 2010 surveys, including issues that did not make the top 10 list in 2008. This graph shows how voters’ concerns have shifted since 2008. Concerns significantly diminished about transportation and traffic, population growth, and energy issues. However, concerns about jobs and the economy, government spending, and K-12 education have increased. Three issues are new to



the survey in 2010 but clearly are high priorities this year (ethics of elected officials, states’ rights, and federal lands in Utah).

- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about jobs and the economy include: residents with lower educational attainment; residents with household members attending postsecondary schools in Utah; those with lower annual household incomes; Utah County residents and residents who do not live along the Wasatch Front.
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about government spending include: residents with lower educational attainment; those with a more conservative political ideology; Utah County residents and residents who do not live along the Wasatch Front.
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about kindergarten through 12th grade education include: younger residents; those with a more liberal political ideology; those with children under age 18 living in the home; homemakers; residents who are unemployed; and residents of Salt Lake and Utah Counties.
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about healthcare include: Democrats; those with no children under age 18 living at home; residents who are retired or who are employed part-time; and those with annual household income less than \$40,000.
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about the ethics of elected officials include: residents age 55 and older.

Issue	Not at all concerned			Very concerned		Mean Score
	1	2	3	4	5	
1 Jobs and the economy	1%	4%	14%	29%	53%	4.29
2 Government spending	3%	5%	15%	25%	52%	4.20
3 Kindergarten through 12th grade education	5%	7%	15%	19%	53%	4.09
4 Healthcare	6%	6%	20%	26%	42%	3.92
5 The ethics of elected officials	5%	7%	19%	26%	41%	3.91
6 Taxes	3%	7%	26%	29%	34%	3.85
7 Energy issues, including utilities and gasoline prices	1%	9%	28%	32%	30%	3.81
8 States' rights versus the federal government	8%	10%	21%	22%	39%	3.74
9 Environmental issues, including air quality & pollution	6%	12%	27%	29%	25%	3.56
10 Immigration	8%	16%	22%	21%	33%	3.55

**Figure 4: Statewide Concerns, 2008 and 2010**

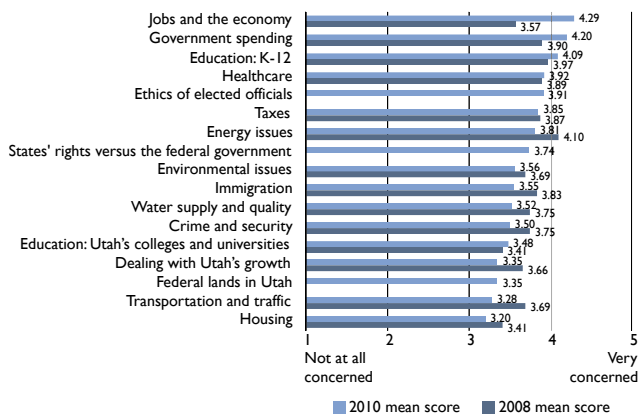


Figure 5 shows some of the nuances in the public's level of concern for K-12 education today compared with 2004 and 2008. The number of people "very concerned" about K-12 education fell dramatically between 2004 and 2008, causing the issue to rank second in 2008 rather than first. Even though the percentage of people "very concerned" about K-12 education increased in 2010, the issue ranked third overall. This is because more respondents rated jobs and the economy and government spending as a four or a five than K-12 education.

**DETAILS ON THE TOP ISSUES**

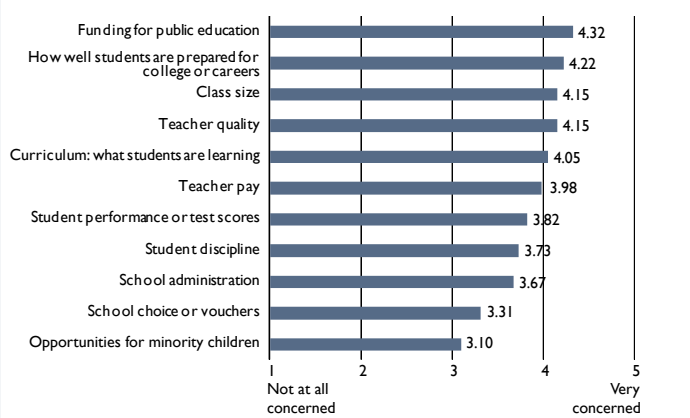
Throughout the remainder of the survey, respondents were asked follow-up questions about K-12 education, working in Utah, Utah's economy, personal finances, taxes, and public spending. These follow-up questions provide insight on why each issue matters to voters. The following sections describe the results of these questions.

**K-12 EDUCATION**

Voters were asked to rate eleven additional aspects of Utah's K-12 education system. Of the eleven aspects, five had mean scores above 4.00, indicating a very high level of concern. The highest concern is funding for public education (4.32), followed by how well students are prepared for college or careers (4.22), class size (4.15), teacher quality (4.15), and curriculum (4.05). This list is almost identical to the rankings of K-12 education issues from the 2008 survey. The only difference is that the level of concern for teacher pay fell, while the level of concern for curriculum rose above a 4.00.

- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about funding for public education include: those with a more

**Figure 6: Concerns About K-12 Education Issues**



liberal political ideology; homemakers; and residents from Salt Lake County.

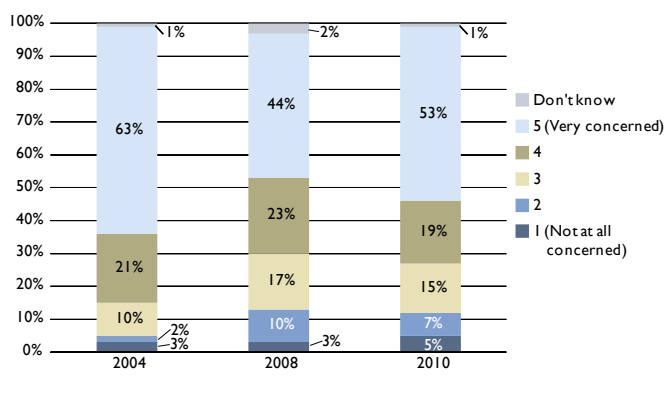
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about how well students are prepared for college include: younger residents; single residents; and homemakers.

**WORKING IN UTAH AND UTAH'S ECONOMY**

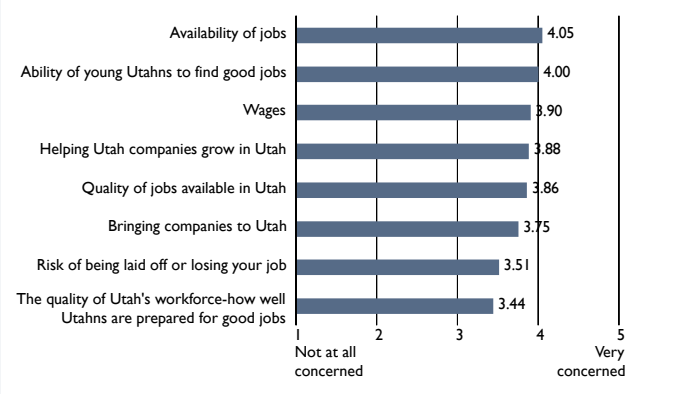
The 2010 survey revealed that "jobs and the economy" is the issue of most concern to Utah voters. In the follow-up section, survey respondents were asked two separate questions about this issue—one relating to concerns about working in Utah, and one relating to concerns about Utah's economy. In regards to working in Utah, the availability of jobs and the ability of young Utahns to find good jobs were the only two issues with mean scores at or above 4.00. However, it is interesting to note the close range of scores; most issues received a mean score between 3.50 and 4.00. This indicates Utah voters are quite concerned with all of these issues.

- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about the availability of jobs in Utah include: residents with lower educational attainment; those who have children in public schools; those who are employed part-time; homemakers; and those with annual household income less than \$40,000.
- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about the risk of being laid off include: residents with lower educational attainment; those whose political ideology is more

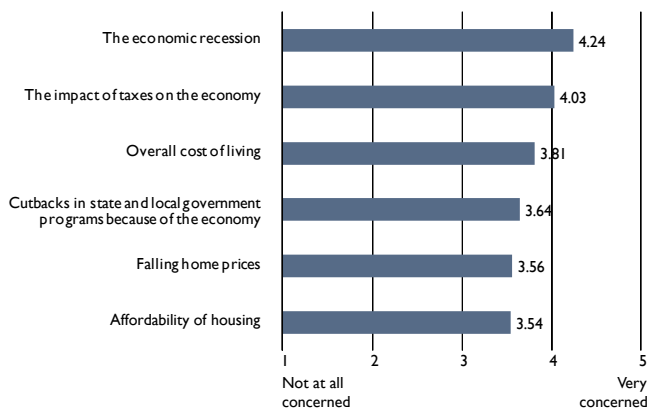
**Figure 5: Concerns About Education, 2004, 2008, and 2010**



**Figure 7: Concerns About Working in Utah**



**Figure 8: Concerns About Utah's Economy**



liberal; single residents; homemakers; people who are employed part-time; those with annual household income less than \$40,000, and Utah County residents.

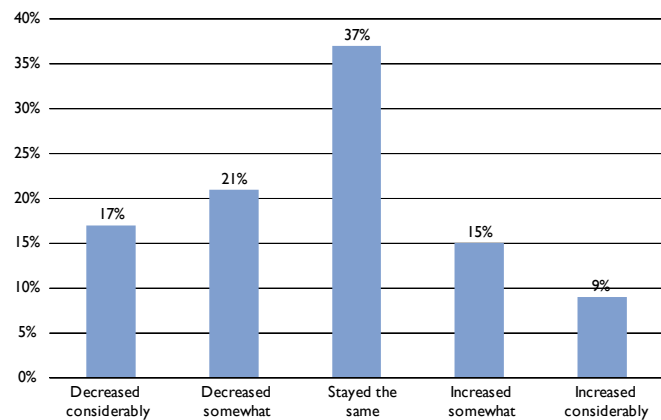
In regards to Utah's economy, concern about the economic recession received the highest mean score (4.24), followed by the impact of taxes on the economy (4.03). The issues of least concern relate to housing; falling home prices and the affordability of housing received the lowest mean scores of the six issues (3.56 and 3.54, respectively). However, all of the issues received mean scores above 3.50 on the five-point scale.

- Demographic groups more likely to say they are very concerned about the economic recession include: residents age 65 and older; those with lower educational attainment; those who have lived in Utah for a longer time; those with lower annual household incomes; Utah County residents and residents who do not live along the Wasatch Front.

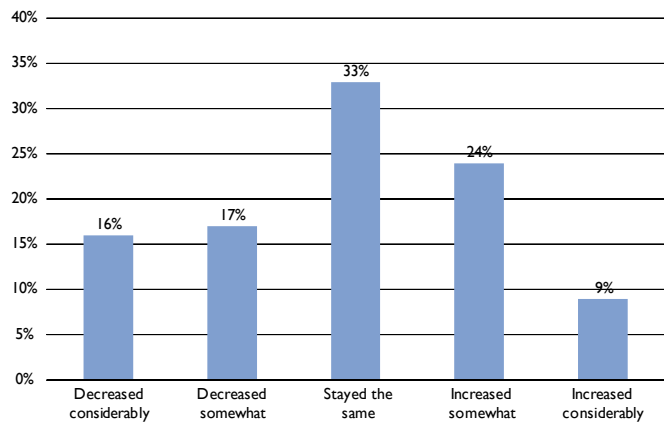
**PERSONAL FINANCES**

In order to better understand how the economic recession has impacted Utah voters financially, survey respondents were asked questions about how their personal finances have changed in the past two years. Figure 9 shows that the personal debt level of a slight plurality of Utahns (38%) has decreased somewhat or considerably since 2008. A quarter (24%) of survey respondents stated their debt

**Figure 9: Changes in Utahns' Personal Debt over the Last Two Years**



**Figure 10: Changes in Utahns' Personal Savings Over the Last Two Years**



level had increased, while 37% stated it had remained the same. Figure 10 shows evenly divided results for personal savings. Over the past two years, personal savings decreased for one-third of Utahns, stayed the same for one-third, and increased for one-third.

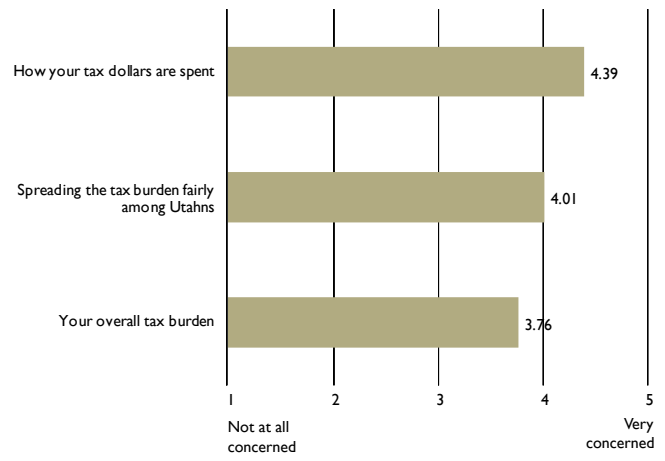
- Demographic groups more likely to say their level of personal debt has increased include: residents age 18 to 34; those with children under age 18 living at home; and those who are unemployed or who are self-employed.

**TAXES**

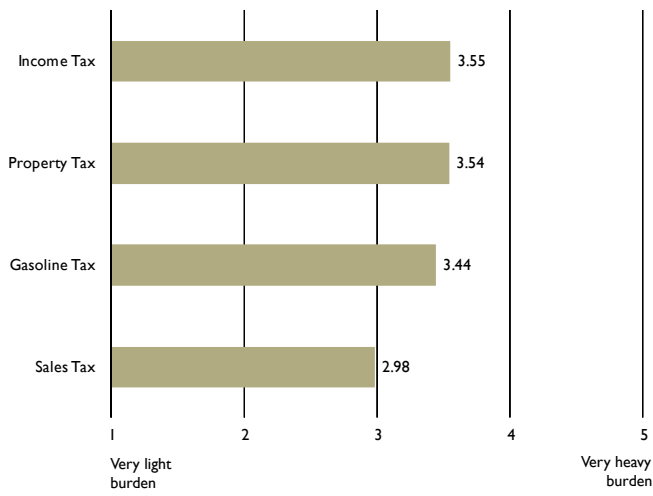
The 2010 survey asked respondents about their level of concern on three issues related to taxes. The issue with the highest level of concern is how tax dollars are being spent (4.39). Voters also maintain a high level of concern about spreading the tax burden fairly among Utahns (4.01). It is interesting to note this score is considerably lower than the 4.36 it earned in the 2004 survey. Finally, "your overall tax burden" received a mean score of 3.76.

A second question related to taxes asked respondents to rate how heavy they perceive the tax burden to be from each of four major taxes. Results show the income tax is perceived to cause the heaviest burden, with a mean score of 3.55. The property tax ranked second with a score of 3.54, followed by the gasoline tax, 3.44, and the sales tax, 2.98. In 2008, the property tax ranked first, followed by the gasoline tax, the income tax, and the sales tax.

**Figure 11: Concerns About Taxes**



**Figure 12: How Much Burden Is Imposed by These Taxes?**



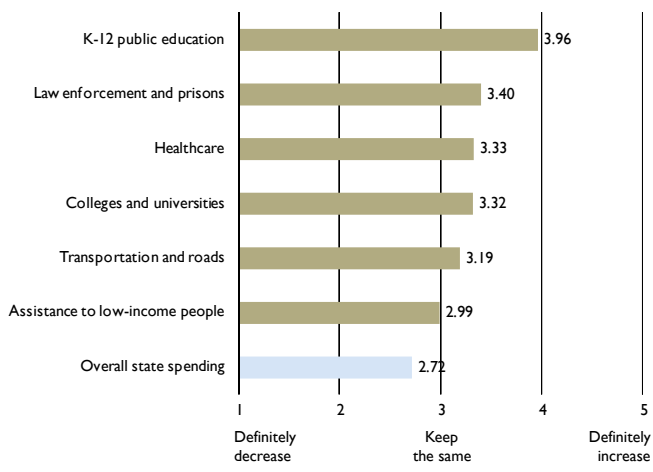
Curiously, these ratings are opposite to what statistics show about the actual tax burden on Utahns. A 2007 Utah Foundation research brief showed that Utah’s heaviest tax burden comes from sales taxes, with income taxes second, property taxes third, and gasoline taxes falling far behind in the actual burden placed on Utahns.<sup>2</sup> Both the 2008 and the 2010 surveys seem to confirm the notion that more visible taxes are considered more burdensome.

**PUBLIC SPENDING**

In regard to public spending, respondents were asked to indicate whether they think state and local government spending in six areas should decrease, stay the same, or increase. A one-to-five scale was used, with one meaning definitely decrease, three meaning keep the same, and five meaning definitely increase.

This question shows a clear list of voter preferences for state spending. K-12 education is the only area with a mean score close to 4.00, indicating that most voters feel spending should increase. Mean scores for the next two areas, law enforcement and prisons (3.40) and healthcare (3.33) are considerably lower. Even so, voters feel that there should be increased spending in these areas. Overall state spending received a mean score just below, but very close to the midpoint, indicating that more voters believe overall spending should slightly decrease.

**Figure 13: Preferences for Spending on Major Programs**



- Demographic groups more likely to say public spending for K-12 education should definitely increase include: younger residents; Democrats; those with children under age 18 living in their home; homemakers; and residents with annual household incomes between \$60,000 and \$79,999.

**FUTURE SURVEYS AND OTHER WORK ON THESE ISSUES**

Because the level of concern for these issues is heavily influenced by economic, political, and social climates, Utah Foundation will be conducting a series of follow-up surveys between now and the end of October. In these follow-up surveys, Utah voters will be asked to rate the overall issues, as well as rate aspects of the top 10 issues that were not covered in this initial survey. This will provide greater insight on why each issue matters to voters, provide an up-to-date ranking of the issues, and allow candidates to remain focused on current voter concerns.

In addition to further survey work, Utah Foundation is partnering with the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah to hold forums and candidate debates on these issues. Utah Foundation will also publish research reports providing further information on the top five issues. Media partnerships with KSL TV and Radio and the Deseret News will also produce additional focus on these issues throughout the election cycle, including online discussions and information available at KSL.com and DeseretNews.com.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Surveys were conducted by phone during February 23 – March 2, 2010. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 4.0% and the data are weighted for age and religion.  
<sup>2</sup> Utah Foundation research brief, “Utah’s State and Local Tax and Fee Burdens,” May 24, 2007. [http://www.utahfoundation.org/briefs/2007\\_01\\_tax\\_burden.html](http://www.utahfoundation.org/briefs/2007_01_tax_burden.html).

## MAJOR SUPPORTERS OF UTAH FOUNDATION

### PLATINUM

Questar Gas  
Rio Tinto  
Rocky Mountain Power

### GOLD

George S. and Dolores Dore Eccles Foundation  
Intermountain Power Agency  
Merit Medical Systems  
Regence BlueCross BlueShield  
Union Pacific

### SILVER

American Express  
Bank of American Fork  
Energy Solutions  
Intermountain Healthcare  
MountainStar Healthcare

Parsons  
Utah Transit Authority  
Wells Fargo  
Wheeler Machinery  
Workers Compensation Fund

### BRONZE

Deloitte  
Central Utah Clinic  
Garbett Homes  
Granite Construction  
Key Bank  
Parsons Behle & Latimer

Ray Quinney & Nebeker  
Sandy City  
Staker & Parson Companies  
Utah Valley University  
Zions Bancorporation

This research report was written by Research Analyst Laura Summers with assistance from Research Analyst David Newell. Ms. Summers may be reached for comment at (801) 355-1400. She may also be contacted by email at: [laura@utahfoundation.org](mailto:laura@utahfoundation.org).

The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change. For more information, please visit [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org), or call us at (801) 355-1400.

NON PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 6418	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____

