

Important Issues for Vermont in the Coming Decade

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Introduction

Several major events have affected the United States between March 2001 and March 2002 including the World Trade Center/Pentagon bombings, the Anthrax scare, the current economic recession, and the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Clearly, these national events to a greater and lesser extent have affected the lives of people in Vermont. However, it is less clear how these events have affected Vermonter long-term concerns for the future of the state in this coming decade.

This report examines whether or not the issues of highest concern among Vermonters have changed over the past year. The findings will indicate not only what issues Vermonters see as being most important in the state, but will also indicate to some extent how national events affect the concerns of the population.

Data and Methods

The data used in this report were collected by the University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies as part of the annual "Vermont Poll." The poll was conducted between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on February 19, 2002 and ending on March 1, 2002. The polling was conducted at the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample for the poll was drawn through random digit dialing and used all of the telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as the sampling frame. There were 734 respondents to the Vermont Poll. Only registered voters over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont.

Results and discussion

In March 2002 the economy and jobs were clearly Vermonters highest concern as can be seen in Table 1. While the economy and jobs were also at the top of the list in 2001 the percent of the population concerned with the issue almost doubled since the previous year.

Table 2: Top five responses of Vermonters of the most serious issue facing the state in the coming decade

2002		2001	
Issue	Percent	Issue	Percent
Economy and jobs	22.5%	Sprawl and land use	13.3%
Education	12.9%	Economy and jobs	11.6%
Sprawl and land use	9.7%	Education	11.4%
Environment	8.8%	Health care	9.8%
Taxes	7.9%	Taxes	7.8%
Health care	7.9%		

For the most part Vermonters were concerned with the same issues this year as they were last year. Sprawl and land use continues to be a serious long-term concern for people in the state. Taxes and health care were mentioned by equal numbers of the population, and remained as one of the top five concerns for the coming decade. The only issue that was among the top five mentioned more this year and not last year was the environment.

Surprisingly, national defense, terrorism, and the war in Afghanistan were mentioned by relatively few Vermonters as a serious concern for the state. About 2.3 percent of Vermonters said they were most concerned with terrorism and the war in Afghanistan. It is possible that Vermonters view these issues as national problems and problems that specifically face Vermont.

Other issues that were mentioned in 2002 were Act 60 (3.2%), housing (2.8%), government (2.6%), farming (2.5%), and civil unions and rights (2.5%).