

Deliberative Poll Says: Waste Not, Want Not



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Results of the Deliberative Poll from a couple of months ago were revealed yesterday and they seemed to track the feelings Californians express in more standardized polling.

The poll was conducted over a weekend in Torrance with 400 citizens, a sampling of the voter population, taking part. The participants were polled at the beginning of the exercise. Over the course of the weekend they took part in breakout groups, meeting occasionally as a committee of the whole to hear discussions on four separate issues from experts in State-Local Reform, the Initiative Process, Representation and Taxation & Fiscal Policy. They were then polled at the end of the weekend.

For the purposes of this column, I will focus on the Taxation and Fiscal Policy section since I served on the expert panel in that category.

A message gleaned from the polls on the taxation issue might be: Waste Not, Want Not.

The voters from the beginning of the poll to the end declared that government wastes money. They concluded that four out of every ten dollars is wasted, an extraordinarily high figure.

If the voters think that much money is wasted then why would they give more money to government? Apparently, they do not want to.

On the whole, they were adverse to new taxation. Of the eight methods to raise revenue only one received majority support. The voters at the deliberative poll seemed to be saying -- *if you stop wasting our money you*

won't need more of it.

The one issue that garnered majority support was "re-assessing non-residential property more frequently than now." Although it did not get more than 50-percent support there was also a dramatic increase from the beginning of the session to the end for lowering the two-thirds vote to raise taxes to 55%. At the start of the poll lowering the vote requirement received 32%, at the end - 50%.

That seems a strange outcome since most tax proposals were opposed. Over the last three decades, four times voters have had an opportunity to vote on a two-thirds for legislative tax increases and have endorsed it every time, including passing Prop 26 on taxes/fees less than a year ago.

I was not part of the discussions in the break away sessions on these issues and don't know how the pros and cons were laid out.

From the beginning, the deliberative poll emphasized raising taxes or making it easier to raise taxes in the tax section of the poll. As I recall, of the original 17 or so questions that had been formulated for the poll on taxation, about 14 were designed to raise taxes or make it easier to raise taxes by lowering the voter requirements to pass a tax.

The question about re-assessing commercial property might get attention on top of the news coverage last week that Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa encouraged a split roll property tax for business.

However, despite the results of the poll, I expect they would be trumped by California's unemployment rate. Raising property taxes on businesses will hit small and minority owned businesses hardest. These job creators would undoubtedly be adding to the unemployment rolls or would not take a potential worker off of unemployment if they got hit with a new property tax.

Once the reality of a split roll set in with voters, it would probably end up like the other tax questions on the poll - with less than majority support.

You can find all the poll results [here](#) .