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• Special to the Daily Leader HAYS – Most Kansans think their state is a good place to live, though not as many as in 2009, and, by a significant margin, more think the economy is “poor” or “very poor.” These are among findings of the 2010 Kansas Speaks survey by the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University. Between June 21 and Sept. 10, more than 4,000 Kansas households were contacted by mail and by phone and 1,002 completed the survey. The survey has a 3.1-percent margin of error.

The full report, Kansas Speaks 2010, in pdf form, is available through a tab on the Docking Institute home page, www.fhsu.edu/docking/.

In 2010, 58.5 percent of respondents rated Kansas as an “excellent” or “very good” place to live. In 2009, that was 64.2 percent. The percentage of Kansans who rate Kansas as “fair” to “very poor” went from 8.4 percent in 2009 to 13.1 percent in 2010. On the economy, people who think the economy is at least “good” dropped by 12.2 percent (from 52.5 percent in 2009 to 40.3 percent in 2010). At the same time, the percentage who regard the economy as “fair,” “poor” or “very poor” rose from 47.5 to 59.7.

Kansans are also more concerned that economic conditions pose a threat to their or their families’ welfare. Overall, only 11 percent are “not concerned” about an economic threat, as opposed to 15.1 percent in 2009, but those who are “very concerned” are up to 40 percent (from 28.7 in 2009).

“The 2010 edition of Kansas Speaks has again provided interesting and valuable information about Kansans’ policy preferences and their opinions of Kansas government, also showing that many of these opinions have changed since last year,” said Dr. Gary Brinker, director of the Docking Institute.

He said that Docking researchers this year implemented a new address-based sampling technique together with a mixed mode of data collection using both phone interviews for addresses with listed phone numbers and a mail questionnaire for households with cell phones and unlisted numbers.

“This new method allows virtually all Kansas residents to have an opportunity to participate,” he said.

“The results suggest that the poor economy has had a significant impact on Kansans’ perceptions of their quality of life, opinions on energy, taxation and health care policies, and evaluations of elected public officials,” he said. “We hope that readers interested in the state of Kansas will find the results informative and that public officials will use the results to help them make decisions that reflect the will of their constituents.”

Other interesting results from the 2010 Kansas Speaks survey:

- o Last year, respondents were more likely to report higher satisfaction with Democratic leaders' efforts to improve the Kansas economy; this year, they were more satisfied with Republican leaders' ideas for improving the economy.

- o Satisfaction with Gov. Parkinson in 2010 tended to be moderate among most respondents, while satisfaction with Gov. Sebelius in 2009 was polarized, with respondents tending to be either highly satisfied or highly dissatisfied.

- o Most respondents favor keeping taxes as they are. Of respondents favoring tax increases, most preferred to increase the sales tax, while very few favored increasing property taxes.

- o When asked about changing taxation policies, respondents were most likely to favor increasing taxes on large corporations and the top income earners and decreasing taxes on small businesses.

- o Republican respondents were more likely to favor decreasing taxes on top income earners and large corporations. Democratic respondents were more likely to favor increasing taxes on these groups.

- o Satisfaction with elected state officials tended to be lower in 2010 than in 2009.

- o The more strongly respondents identified with the Republican Party, the more likely they were to be satisfied with their U.S. senator.

- o Just over half of respondents wanted to decrease state spending, but reduced spending was much more a preference among Republican respondents.

- o Most, 92.5 percent, want state funding for social services increased (46.4 percent) or kept the same (46.1 percent).

- o Most (52.8 percent) want K-12 education funding increased even though the number of those who want to cut K-12 funding is higher than 2009 (8.4 percent from 6.7).

- o Although support for higher education declined slightly in 2010, almost two-fifths favored increasing public funding for higher education.

- o Support for oil and coal development was stronger in 2010 than it was in 2009, with most respondents believing the economic benefits outweigh the environmental impact.

- o Respondents were highly supportive of having a state law that requires Kansas citizens to provide proof of legal residence to any law enforcement officer who asks for the proof, with 69 percent saying they would at least "somewhat support" and 54 percent saying they would "strongly support" such a law. Only 18.4 percent of respondents said they would oppose such a law. The more strongly respondents self-identified as Republican, the more likely they were to

support such a law.

o Two-thirds of respondents said they believed health care costs would be higher as a result of the recent federal health care legislation. Republican respondents were more likely to think so than Democratic respondents. However, respondents in 2010 were more likely to report satisfaction with Kansas' healthcare system than in 2009.

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