Survey shows people want basic services, willing to pay for them

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By Don Heinzman • ECM Publishers

A study by the League of Minnesota Cities reveals that people value their basic community services and are willing to pay higher taxes for them — different than what political parties would have you believe.

Republican Party legislators want their constituents to believe that the body public opposes increasing state taxes and favors cutting aid to cities.

That’s not what the league found after having intense discussions with 740 people in 12 communities around the state.

They found that people want basic services like police, fire ambulance, streets, water and libraries and are willing to pay for them with property taxes. Moreover, they believe the state should make sure all communities can provide these basic services with sufficient funds, even by granting state funds.

This flies in the face of the Minnesota Legislature which has been cutting local government aid and refusing to raise revenues on the state level. On the contrary, 84 percent of those surveyed said state government should provide state aid to make sure that all citizens have quality services no matter where they live.

The community conversation was conducted last year and is part of a five-part program, including research, awareness building, policy development and legislative action.

People also told the league they aren’t too anxious to consolidate services, if it means slower response time or assistance they believe is important — like response of fire and police departments.

On the other hand, they don’t mind if their community’s emblem is on the fire truck as long as it arrives on time and puts the fire out.

While respondents are reluctant to have taxes increased, they prefer to see local government cut costs, use more volunteers and outsource some services to private companies.’

A third of those questioned prefer to see local taxes increased while 18 percent favored increasing private fees. They prefer increasing property taxes for basic services that benefit everyone in the community.
They, however, favor increasing fees for specific users such as for swimming pools, golf courses and parks.

Recognizing people in communities are aging, they favor services that help them like affordable housing, recreation, meal service and access to transportation.

These findings are important because so many local, county and state policy-making positions will be up for election and reelection in November.

Candidates need to be elected to represent the true views of the people rather than ones who represent non-compromising and unrealistic views of what the people say they want.

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