Rural West Conference Montana Survey: "Giving Voice to Montanans"

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Survey Rationale

- Assess public opinion on rural west issues
- Focus on Rural West Conference Panel topics
- Montana as exemplar of rural west:
  - highest proportion of rural residents in the west (2010 Census)
  - 2nd lowest median HH income in region
  - 5th largest proportion of Native American residents in U.S

Survey Fundamentals

- Telephone survey of Montana adult residents
- Interviewed February 1-28, 2016
- Sample: cell phones, RDD & listed landlines
- 923 completed interviews
- Interviews conducted by Social & Economic Sciences Research Center, Washington State University
- Weighted to reflect population demographics: age, sex, ethno-racial background, and education

The Framework: Five Sections

- Montana's Qualities & Its Leaders
- Health Care and Access
- Natural Resources & Public Lands
- Tribal Law and Policy
- Rural Homelessness

Montana's Qualities & Leaders

- FUNDAMENTAL TENSIONS:
  - Nature & Environment Most Highly Valued: 49%
  - Jobs & Economic Growth Biggest Issues: 37%

- OPTIMISM: MONTANA "ON THE RIGHT TRACK": 64%

- LEADERS DOING WELL: 61%-75% JOB APPROVAL
- SUPPORT SURPLUS TO PROGRAMS, NOT TAX CUTS

- RURAL RESIDENTS:
  - Value Jobs More, Environment Less
  - Less Optimistic

Health Care and Access: Care

- Most Have Some Health Coverage: 89%
  - … but 17% Did Not See A Doctor Last Year Due to Cost
  - … and 24% Delayed Care For a Reason Other Than Cost
  - Problems Worst in Small Towns (46% Net), Least In Cities (35% Net)

Health Care and Access: Policy

- ACA Health Reform Viewed Unfavorably by 64% To 31%…
  - … 72% Rural Montanans Are Unfavorable
  - … 55% Urban Montanans Are Unfavorable

- However… Montana Medicaid Expansion Viewed Favorably by 36%
  - Additional 27% Favor Covering All Montanans
  - Most Rural Residents Favor Expansion or Universal Coverage (56% Net)

Health Care and Access

- Opportunities for Disabled Residents Seen Positively: 73% "Excellent" Or "Good"
  - Credit to People in The Community: 58%
  - Blame Goes to Government: 56% (Net)

- Meth Abuse: 42% "Extremely Serious"
  - Worse in Rural (46%) and Small Towns (44%)

- But No Agreement on Policy Response:
  - Education (31%), Dealer Penalties (17%), Treat/Rehab (16%), Law Enforcement (13%), User Penalties (5%), Limit O-t-c Drugs (4%)

Natural Resource Policy

- Divisions Over Resource Use & Control
- Complex Views – or Contradictory

- Climate Change Serious: 54%
  - Urban Concerns Are Greater: 60% To Rural 47%

- Development Over Environment:
  - Not Enough Resource Development: 58%
  - Disagree Too Much Environmental Damage: 57%
  - Enviro Laws Too Strict, Limit Devel: 56%
  - Urban – Rural Splits Are 16-20%

Natural Resources: Lands

- Support Transfer of Federal Land to State: 59%
- Malheur Occupiers Should Be Arrested: 45%
  - Malheur Occupiers Should Be Supported: 37%
  - Opinion is Polarized: 64% “Strongly” Hold Their View

- How Federal Land Should Be Managed:
  - Protect Land & Wildlife: 36%
  - Development – Farming & Ranching: 23%
  - Increase Recreational Opportunities: 17%
  - Development – Oil, Gas, Mining: 10%

Natural Resources: Energy

- Federal/State Energy Production Policy:
  - Both oil/gas/coal and wind/solar/renewables: 50%
    - Renewables (33%) preferred to Fossil Fuels (7%)
  - Split over Renewables: Urban 40%, Rural 24%
- Carbon Emissions Rules: Whose Policy?
  - State Should Produce Its Own Plan: 71%
  - Sue the Federal Government? 17%
  - Allow the Federal Government to Develop the Plan? 13%
- Opinion Split on Fracking: 47% Support / Oppose
  - Higher Rural Support: 53% compared to 41% Urban

Tribal Law and Policy

- Sovereignty Viewed Negatively:
  - Does Not Work Well: 62%

- Water: State Compact with CSKT Tribes: 63% Approve
- Transfer of Kerr Dam on Flathead Lake to CSKT: 59%
  - Rural Residents are Less Supportive by 10-13%

- Land: Repurchasing Ancestral Lands Approved: 78%
- Coal Development on Tribal Lands Approved: 73%

- Resources: Tribes Control Right Amount (48%)
    - Remainder Split Over Too Much (28%) or Too Little (24%)
- Tribes' Resource Needs Balanced With Other Users: 51%

Tribal Law and Policy

- K-12 Education about Native American Culture & History:
  - Covers the Right Amount: 52%
  - Doesn't Cover Enough: 39%

- Opportunities for Native Americans:
  - Less Than Other Montanans: 41%
  - About the Same as Other Montanans: 38%
  - More than Other Montanans: 22%
    - Rural Residents See More Equality (48%)
    - Urban Residents See More Lack of Opportunity (49%)

- Lack of Opportunity for Other Groups:
  - Poor Residents (67%), Rural Residents (48%)
  - Farmers and Ranchers (22%), City Residents (5%)

Housing and Homelessness

- Serious Community Problem? 27% Extremely/Very
  - Urban Concern High: 39%
  - Concern Low in Small Towns (23%) and Rural (17%)
- Serious Statewide Problem? 35% Extremely / Very
  - Covers the Right Amount: 52%
  - Doesn't Cover Enough: 39%
- Personally Know Homeless Person: 42%
  - Higher in Cities and Towns (45%) than Rural Areas (35%)
- Progress in Dealing with Homelessness
  - About the Same 58%; Making Progress 23%; Losing Ground 20%
    - Urban Residents See More Progress (29%)

Housing and Homelessness

- No Agreement on Cause:
  - Lack of Access to Treatment 19%
  - Low Wages (14%) and Unemployment (13%)
  - Lack of Affordable Housing (11%)

- No Agreement on Responsibility:
  - State (27%), Local (18%) or Federal Government (10%)
  - Families of Homeless People (10%)
  - Churches (9%) or Local Non-Profits (8%)

- Support for Government Spending on Housing: 61%

- Not NIMBY? IMBY? High Support for Low-Income Housing within One Mile: 70%

Conclusions

- Optimism and State's Qualities Are Valued
- Inherent Tensions Regarding Development & Environment Prompted by Economic Concerns
- Challenges in Health Care, Resolving Resource Policy, Idea of Tribal Sovereignty, Homelessness
- Apparent Contradictions in Goals, Tensions Over Potential Solutions
- State Control Preferred, But State Policy Unsettled

Next Steps

- Additional Attitudinal, Demographic, and Geographic Analyses
- Comprehensive Report on the Rural West Conference Montana Survey
- Ideas for Analysis from Conference Panels and Participants
- Ideas for Future Rural West Surveys

Next Steps

- Demographic and Geographic Analysis
- Delving Deeper:
  - Do Disabled Montanans View Their Communities As Accessible?
  - Recent and Long-Term Residents' Views of Development Policy
  - Western Montanans' Views of CSKT resource issues
- Comprehensive Report
- Data Availability
- Ideas for Additional Analysis? Future Surveys?