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NORC Survey of Americans' Views on Deficit Reveals Clear Majority Want Their Representatives in D.C. to Work With Others to Get Things Done, Compromise if Necessary

Unemployment is seen as the biggest problem, 51 percent of respondents said it was O.K. to cut spending on national defense in order to reduce the budget deficit

12/18/2012, Bethesda, MD. – Today, the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago released new survey results, *2012 NORC Presidential Election Survey: Americans' Views on the Deficit*. Results from the survey suggest that a large majority of Americans are more concerned about jobs and unemployment than they are about the budget deficit. And not surprisingly, Republicans and Democrats have somewhat different budget priorities, yet a clear majority of Americans (79 percent) want their representatives in Washington D.C. to work with others to get things done.

“As the 2012 presidential election campaign reached its final weeks, we designed this survey to find out what Americans think about the policy issues that the president and new Congress will face, including the fiscal cliff, and what course of action they think we should take to deal with it,” said Kirk Wolter, Senior Fellow and Executive Vice President, Survey Research with NORC at the University of Chicago. “We found that a majority of Americans overwhelmingly prefer that their own representatives in D.C. work with others and make compromises, even compromises that include policies that they dislike.”

The public did not see the budget deficit as the most important problem facing the U.S. right now. According to the survey, when asked about problems facing our country:

- 91.8 percent of respondents said that unemployment is a very important problem
- 74.1 percent of respondents said that the budget deficit is a very important problem
- 55.8 percent of respondents said that inflation is a very important problem

“Quite simply, the public has other economic concerns besides the deficit. I can’t say I am surprised, given that unemployment has exceeded 5 percent for nearly five years,” said Dr. Mark Hansen, Hutchinson Professor in Political Science and Senior Advisor to the President at the University of Chicago. “When we drilled down into people’s views on the budget we found the public has other interests there as well. The public supports cutting defense spending and raising the taxes of the well-to-do to address the deficit, but the public cares more about keeping the taxes of ordinary Americans down and spending on domestic programs up than it cares about the deficit.”

When asked about government spending, the federal budget deficit and job creation:

-58.5 percent prefer federal government spending and holding down taxes to encourage job creation, even if it adds to the federal budget deficit

-41.5 percent said it was more important to have the federal government cut the federal budget deficit, even if it meant increasing taxes and discouraging job creation

This survey did not assume that the public wishes to reduce the deficit so respondents were presented with a series of budget tradeoffs. They were asked whether they are willing to increase the taxes paid by ordinary Americans, cut spending on domestic programs like Medicare, education, and highways, or cut spending on national defense in order to cut the federal budget deficit.

According to the survey:

- 35.1 percent said it was ok to increase taxes to cut the federal budget deficit

- 28.5 percent said it was ok to cut spending on domestic programs to cut the budget deficit

- 51.5 percent said it was ok to cut spending on national defense to cut the budget deficit

While 35.1 percent of respondents support a general increase in taxes to cut the federal budget deficit, 60 percent of our respondents favor increasing the income tax rates for households with more than \$250,000 in annual income. A scant 6 percent propose to reduce the top tax rates.

Background and Methodology

This nationally representative survey of 1,125 adults was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with the following experts:

- Professor Mark Hansen, University of Chicago
- Professor Andrea Campbell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Professor Stephen Ansolabehere, Harvard University
- Professor Benjamin Page, Northwestern University

For the full report, please go to: <http://bit.ly/VP400I>

About NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research organization with more than 70 years of leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination. NORC supports a national field staff and international research operations collaborating with governments, educational and nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide data and analysis that support informed decision making in health, education, economics, crime, justice, energy, security, and the environment.