

# **Preliminary Report**

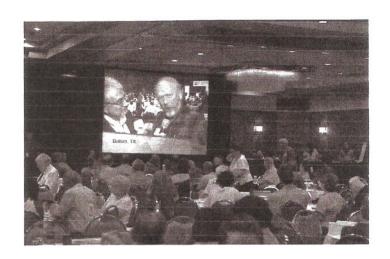
National Town Meeting
June 26, 2010
www.usabudgetdiscussion.org

More than 3,500 people gathered on June 26<sup>th</sup> across nineteen cities and 40 volunteer-organized community conversations around the United States to find common ground on tough choices about our federal budget.

The national discussion engaged a broad cross-section of the American public, reflecting the demographic, geographic and political diversity of the United States. Satellite and webcast link-ups connected cities across the country to create a truly nationwide conversation.

America Speaks: Our Budget, Our Economy is a project of America Speaks, a non-partisan, non-profit organization with the mission of providing Americans with a greater voice in the most important decisions that affect their lives.

This project was made possible by contributions from The Peter G. Peterson Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



## **Greatest Hopes**

Early in the day, participants were asked to share their greatest hopes for the future. Thousands of ideas were submitted into the laptop computers at each table. Among the most common hopes identified were:

- Equality of opportunity for future generations: "Future generations should have the same opportunities we have"
- We have a "free country that allows individuals to maximize their own potentials"
- "Every child has the opportunity to get a quality education"
- Secure prosperity for future generations
- · That we have ensured a sustainable environment: "Leave the world in a better place"

# Who Participated?

Early on, participants were asked to use their polling keypads to share their demographic information.

Gender	6/26	Census	Ethnicity	6/26	Census	Household Income	6/26	Census
Female	49%	51%	African American/Black	16%	12%	Less than \$25,000	17%	23%
Male	51%	49%	Asian/Asian American	3%	4%	\$25k - \$50k	21%	25%
Iviaic	0.70		Caucasian/White	68%	65%	\$50k - \$75k	20%	19%
Age			Latino/Hispanic	5%	15%	\$75k - \$100k	16%	12%
17-24	10%	18%	Native American	1%	1%	More than \$100k	26%	21%
25-34	9%	17%	More than One	5%	1%			
35-44	9%	18%	Other	3%	1%			
45-54	18%	18%				Satisfied with Tone		
55-64	29%	14%	Political Leaning			Of Political Dialogue		
65 and better	25%	16%	1 – Liberal	26%		Very satisfied	1%	
oo and bottor			2	18%		Satisfied	3%	
			3 – Moderate	23%		Neutral/Undecided	8%	
			4	13%		Dissatisfied	31%	
			5 - Conservative	20%		Very dissatisfied	58%	

# **Economic Recovery**

Before taking on the long-term fiscal challenges facing the country, participants spent time talking about the economic recovery and their greatest concerns.

The most common responses across the country included:

- Unemployment and lack of jobs
- Debt and deficit both for the government and personally
- Pace of recovery is too slow "It's far from over and fixed"
- Too much spending and involvement by government
- · Increasing gap between rich and poor
- Lack of support for small business
- People are very discouraged about the economy and don't fully trust our elected officials to fix it

So far this year, do you think economic conditions are getting better, worse or about the same?	%
Better	4%
Somewhat better	30%
About the same	25%
Somewhat worse	19%
Worse	23%
How supportive or unsupportive are you of Congress spending more on programs like this if that spending increases the budget deficit?	
Supportive	32%
Somewhat Supportive	19%
Neutral	11%
Somewhat Unsupportive	12%
Unsupportive	26%
Do you think the government should be doing more or less to strengthen the economy?	
More	61%
About the Same	14%
Less	25%

42%

85%

27%

23%

Polling on Values to Guide Tough Choices: To begin the budget discussion, participants discussed the "core values that should guide our decisions about our country's fiscal future."

On a scale of 1-7, what are the	core values	that should guide decisions about or	ur country	's fiscal future?	
Taking care of current generations	3%	1 – Share the burden of reducing the deficit equally	9%	1 – The government is responsible for taking care of our most vulnerable people	13%
2	4%	2	7%	2	18%
3	6%	3	7%	3	15%
4	43%	4	13%	4	21%
5	22%	5	20%	5	12%
6	15%	6	24%	6	13%
7 – Taking care of future generations	6%	7 – Place a greater burden for reducing the deficit on those that are more capable	20%	7 – Individual responsibility to take care of oneself	8%

Tough Choices: Deciding, Reflecting and Committing: Participants engaged in a three-part activity that helped participants consider the tradeoffs between options by working towards a goal of reducing the annual deficit by \$1.2 trillion in 2025. After making initial choices, the tables discussed ways to align their choices with their values and how, if at all, they wanted to modify their choices to meet the target.

### Polling on Deficit Reduction Options

Raise the 12.4% payroll tax gradually to 14.4% by 2025

Create personal savings accounts within the system

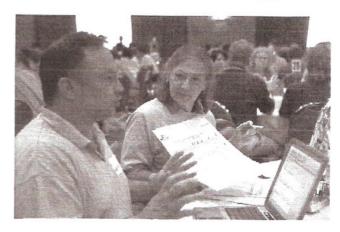
Raise the limit on taxable earnings so it covers 90% of total earnings in America

	oming on Bonon readers of	
H	Health Care: Medicare and Medicaid:	
	<ul> <li>Reduce spending by 5%</li> </ul>	27%
	<ul> <li>Reduce spending by 10%</li> </ul>	16%
	<ul> <li>Reduce spending by 15%</li> </ul>	19%
	No change	38%
S	Social Security:	
	<ul> <li>Raise age for receiving full benefits to 69 years of age</li> </ul>	52%
	the state of the state of the few all but the legged wage corners	30%
	Ol	of inflation 32%
	<ul> <li>Raise the 12.4% payroll tax gradually to 13.4% by 2025</li> </ul>	25%

No change
 All Other Non-Defense:

Reduce overall spending in this category by 5%	26%
<ul> <li>Reduce overall spending in this category by 10%</li> </ul>	16%
<ul> <li>Reduce overall spending in this category by 15%</li> </ul>	27%
No change	32%
110 Grange	0270
Defense:	
<ul> <li>Reduce overall spending in this category by 5%</li> </ul>	16%
Reduce overall spending in this category by 10%	18%
Reduce overall spending in this category by 15%	51%
No change	15%
Raising Existing Taxes	
<ul> <li>Raise personal income taxes by 10% for everyone</li> </ul>	20%
Raise personal income tax rates by 20% for everyone	8%
Raise personal tax rates by 10% for everyone in the top two tax brackets	18%
Raise personal tax rates by 20% for everyone in the top two tax brackets	48%
Create an extra 5% tax for people earning more than \$1 million a year	68%
Raise the tax rate on capital gains and dividends	
	48%
Trained and top desperate infection tax rate to 1070 incini 0070	59%
No change	44%
Reduce Deductions and Credits	
Limit the value of itemized deductions to 28%	44%
Convert the mortgage interest deduction into a credit	42%
Limit the deduction for state and local taxes, real estate, and personal property	
	27%
Limit corporate depreciation for equipment	51%
End the business deduction for domestic production	16%
No change	45%
Reform the Tax Code:	
Use 90 percent to lower tax rates and 10% to reduce deficit	5%
Use 80 percent to lower tax rates and 20% to reduce deficit	9%
Use 70 percent to lower tax rates and 30% to reduce deficit	36%
No change	
140 Citalige	50%
Create New Taxes	
<ul> <li>Create a 5% Value Added Tax</li> </ul>	27%
Create a carbon tax	64%
Create a securities transactions tax	61%
No change	35%
	30 /0

- Some Additional Options Generated by Participants
  Reduce overall defense spending by more than 15%
  Remove the limit on earnings subject to Social Security payroll tax
- Reform the tax code by moving to a flat tax Single-payer system should be another option for health care



How Did the Meeting Work? America Speaks was designed and facilitated using the unique 21st Century Town Meeting® format developed by America Speaks, a national non-partisan non-profit organization. America Speaks is well known nationally and internationally for engaging over 150,000 citizens in complex public issues, including New Orleans recovery, designing of the World Trade Center site after 9/11, and social security reform.

To increase participation and input, participants were seated in small groups of 8-10. A skilled facilitator worked with each small group throughout the day to ensure each person had an opportunity to be heard. The meeting's lead moderators presented discussion questions to the group and the ideas from each discussion were collected through networked computers stationed at each table. A team of data analysts reviewed the comments from all of the tables simultaneously and reported the common ideas back to the group.

Then, using keypad polling devices, the participants reviewed and prioritized these ideas in order to develop clear messages to national leaders. The results from the polls were reported instantly to the group via large video screens. Polling was used both to gather demographic information and to give participants the opportunity to prioritize their comments.

In order to ensure that information presented to the public was as unbiased as possible, America Speaks worked with a diverse National Advisory Committee to solicit comments and feedback. Prior to discussing and making choices, participants listened to presentations about the issues, reviewed an Options Workbook, and discussed them one-by-one at their tables.



### **Participating Sites**

This preliminary report contains results from the following 19 participating sites: Albuquerque, NM; Chicago, IL; Columbia, SC; Dallas, TX; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; Augusta, ME; Casper, WY; Des Moines, IA; Detroit, MI; Grand Forks, ND; Jackson, MS; Los Angeles County, CA; Overland Park, KS; Louisville, KY; Missoula, MT; Portsmouth, NH; Richmond, VA; Silicon Valley, CA. The final report will also include results from 40 volunteer-organized community conversations around the United States.

<u>Please Note</u>: This preliminary report does not include the results from the final participant discussions that created messages to leaders and identified next steps, as well as final polling of participants' experience of the meeting. Complete results from the AmericaSpeaks: Our Budget, Our Economy Meeting will be available on the project website: <a href="www.usabudgetdiscussion.org">www.usabudgetdiscussion.org</a>. AmericaSpeaks will present the priorities that emerge from the National Town Meeting to Congress and the White House, as well as the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform and the Bi-Partisan Policy Center's Debt Reduction Task Force.