



## MEMORANDUM

To: NELP

From: Matthew Shelter  
Kiley & Company

Date: February 4, 2011

RE: Key Findings from Illinois Statewide Survey

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### Introduction

*This memo summarizes the key findings from our recently completed survey of 702 registered voters in the state of Illinois. The survey was conducted by telephone between Jan. 27 and 30, 2011. The average interview required 14 minutes to complete. The margin of error for the survey is +/-4%.*

- 1. Illinois voters are almost unanimous in their view that the state's economy is still in bad shape, and relatively few voters see any sign of improvement in the near term.**
  - Fully 90% of Illinois voters describe the state's economy in negative terms, with more than half (60%) saying it is in "poor shape" (30% say it's in "not so good" shape).
  - Only about a quarter of all voters (28%) believe the state's economy is likely to improve in the coming year. Most of the electorate believes economic conditions will either remain the same (35%) or continue to deteriorate (35%).
  - In addition, nearly two-thirds of all voters (65%) feel that the cost of living in Illinois has risen faster than wages over the last 12 months, compared to just 11% who believe the rise in wages has outpaced inflation (21% say the changes in both have been "about the same").

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- When asked to volunteer their idea of “the minimum level of income that a family of four in your region of Illinois needs to earn in a year in order to make ends meet,” voter estimates range far above the \$16,500 figure that is the current annual salary of a minimum wage worker employed full-time. Only 2% of voters cite a figure of \$20,000 or less, and only 5% volunteer a figure in the \$21,000-\$30,000 range. Voters are much more inclined to cite figures in the \$31,000-\$40,000 range (15%); the \$41,000-\$50,000 range (23%); or in excess of \$50,000 a year (37%) as the minimum necessary for a working family in Illinois to get by.

**2. There is very strong voter support for raising the minimum wage in Illinois to \$10.50 by the year 2013. Majority support extends across all regions of the state.**

- By a 71% to 28% margin, Illinois voters favor a proposal “to raise the minimum wage in annual steps to \$10.50 by the year 2013.”

*-- Voters are much more likely to “strongly favor” this proposal (44%) than to “strongly oppose” it (17%).*

- Support for raising the minimum wage is high throughout the state: 77% of voters in Cook County and 71% in Northwestern Illinois support an increase, as do 69% of voters in the Collar Counties, 65% in Central Illinois and 63% in Southern Illinois.
- Nearly nine-in-ten Democrats (88%) and 70% of Independents support an increase in the minimum wage, while Republican voters express slightly more opposition (53%) than support (46%) for a wage hike.
- A majority of voters at all income levels support raising the minimum wage. Support is highest among those making less than \$75,000 a year (77% favor an increase).
- Women (77%) are somewhat more likely than men (64%) to favor an increase, and African-American voters (80%) are somewhat more likely than whites (68%) to do the same.

- Most Illinois voters believe a minimum wage hike would either help the statewide economy (40%), or at least do no harm (29%). Only about a quarter of all voters (26%) feel a wage hike would hurt the statewide economy.
  - Support for raising the minimum wage is sustained even after voters hear the arguments advanced by opponents of such a move. When voters are presented with a balanced summary of the arguments for and against a minimum wage increase, they continue to favor the proposal by essentially a two-to-one margin (65% to 33%).
- 3. There is widespread voter support for making annual adjustments to the minimum wage to keep pace with the rising cost of living, and a majority of the electorate favors bringing the minimum wage for tipped workers up to the same level as for all other workers.**
- More than three-in-four Illinois voters support a key element of the proposed increase in the minimum wage: indexing future increases to the rate of inflation. By a margin of 77% to 21%, voters favor “adjusting the minimum wage each year to keep pace with the cost of living.”
    - 48% of voters “strongly favor” this proposal, compared to just 11% who “strongly oppose” it.
  - More than three-in-five voters (61%) also favor a proposal to bring the minimum wage for tipped workers – who currently earn 60% of the full minimum wage – up to the same standard minimum wage that applies to all other workers.
- 4. Roughly 1-in-3 Illinois voters say they would be more inclined to support a state legislator who voted in favor of increasing the minimum wage, or less inclined to support one who voted against an increase.**
- We asked voters a pair of questions measuring the relative importance of the minimum wage as a voting issue.
  - Close to one-third of all voters (32%) say they would be *more inclined* to support their own state legislator for reelection if that person voted *in favor* of increasing the

minimum wage, while 20% say they would be less inclined to support a legislator who cast a pro-minimum wage vote.

- Alternately, 36% of voters say they would be *less inclined* to reelect their own legislator if he or she cast a vote *against* increasing the minimum wage, while 18% say such a vote would make them more inclined to support their legislator.

-- *24% of voters say that 2010 gubernatorial candidate Bill Brady's call for freezing or cutting the state's minimum wage made them "less likely" to vote for him, compared to 15% who say it made them "more likely" to support him.*

**5. The strongest messages in support of raising the minimum wage are that it is just too low for this day and age; that working families dependent on a single income need help; and that no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty. The public also strongly believes that, in an era dominated by excessive corporate bonuses and bailouts, it's long past time to give working families a raise.**

- We tested a dozen arguments in support of raising the minimum wage, splitting our sample so half the respondents heard one set of six messages, and the other half heard a different set of six messages.

- The most persuasive messages closely parallel those that scored highly in our Maryland survey:

-- *That at its current level of \$8.25, the minimum wage is badly outdated and too low for the current cost of living.*

-- *That for displaced workers who have been forced to take low-wage jobs or rely on one income to get by, raising the minimum wage would provide a major boost.*

-- *That an increase in the minimum wage would be one of the most effective ways to get the Illinois economy moving.*

- Illinois voters also respond to a more populist message; 66% say they would be more inclined to support an increase in the minimum wage after hearing that "corporate executives and Wall Street bankers give themselves bigger and bigger bonuses every year, but then turn around and say we can't

afford to increase the minimum wage...it's time that Illinois' low-paid, hard-working families get a long overdue raise.”

- Close to two-thirds (65%) of all voters say they would be more inclined to support the proposed increase after hearing a statement noting that “the current minimum wage of \$8.25 is just too low for this day and age.” A closely related idea – that the current minimum wage “is badly outdated [and] would be more than \$10 an hour today if it had kept up with the rising cost of living over the past 40 years” – elicits a positive response from 63% of all voters.
- 65% of voters say they would be more inclined to support an increase after hearing that “some of the only jobs available for many people in the current economy are low-wage jobs [and] it’s important to make sure these jobs pay at least the bare minimum needed for someone to get by and pay their day-to-day bills,” and 62% say they are more inclined after hearing that “because of high unemployment, more families are having to make do with just one income [and] raising the minimum wage would provide a big boost to working families that are in this situation and struggling to make ends meet.”
- 64% of voters respond positively to the idea that “no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty, but with the minimum wage where it is now, a full-time workers makes just \$16,500 and a family with both parents working earns just \$33,000, which is not enough to get by in a state like Illinois.”
- A similar proportion of voters (62%) say they are more supportive of an increase after hearing that “raising the minimum wage is one of the most effective steps we can take to get our economy moving again [by putting] more money in the hands of workers at the lowest end of the wage scale, who are the most apt to put it right back into the economy in the form of consumer spending on basic necessities.”
- After hearing positive messages, voter support for raising the minimum wage returns to its initial level: 72% to 27% in favor, with more than half of all voters (51%) saying they “strongly favor” an increase.