

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SPENDING CAP IN CONNECTICUT

Conducted for
The Connecticut Health Foundation

February 2001

by



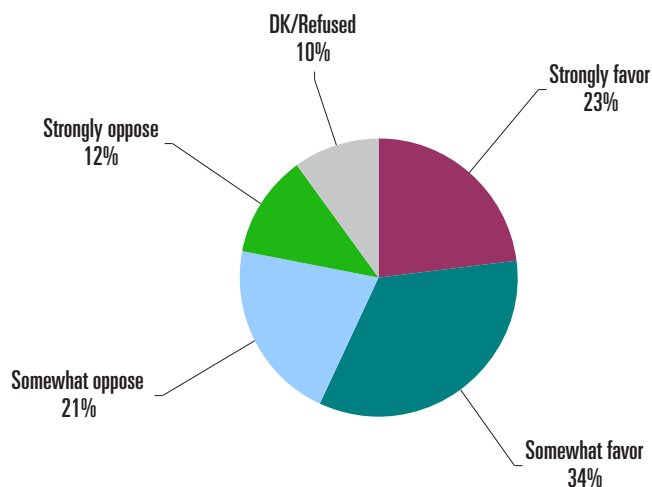
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The Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut conducted a poll of 503 respondents on behalf of the Connecticut Health Foundation. Interviews were conducted with randomly selected adults between the dates of January 23rd and February 4th. The survey was modeled after the spending cap section of a 1994 Hartford Courant/UConn Connecticut Poll. The survey explores attitudes towards the Connecticut's state spending cap.

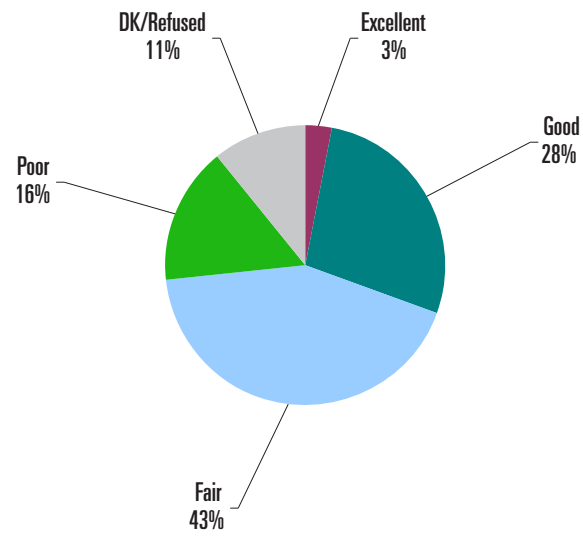
In assessing these results it should be noted that public opinion regarding government spending issues are highly correlated with the perception of the economy. Current measures of economic perception, including the Connecticut Consumer Confidence Index and other attitudinal measures show that the public views the economy as being in a state of flux. Significant changes in the perceived direction of the economy going forward would, very likely, alter public attitudes towards the spending cap.

Respondents expressed contradictory opinions regarding the cap on annual state government spending. A majority strongly or somewhat favored the spending cap (57%). On the other hand, most respondents did not give particularly positive answers when asked to rate the spending cap in terms of actually holding down state spending. Only 3% said the cap was doing an excellent job and 28% said the cap was doing a good job of accomplishing this, while slightly more than four in ten (43%) rated it as fair and another 16% rated it as poor. In fact, 55% of respondents favored making changes to the spending cap to allow additional spending in certain areas. Republican respondents were more likely to favor a spending cap. While 32.3% of Republican respondents strongly favored the cap, 18.6% of Democrats and 23.2% Independents reported similar feelings

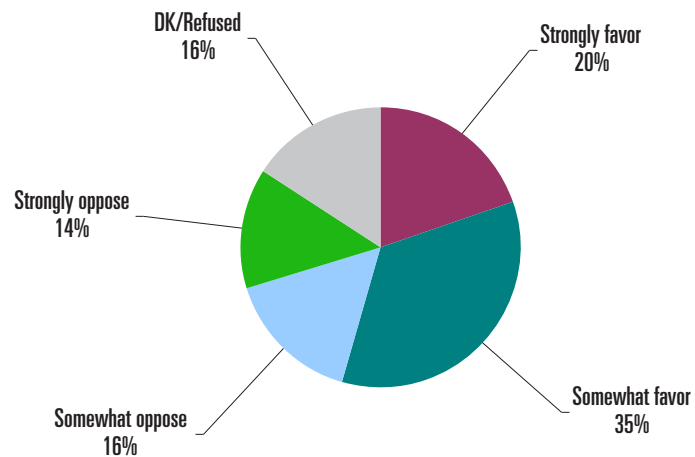
As you probably know the State of Connecticut has a spending cap on how much state government can spend each year. The cap limits future increases on total state spending to the inflation rate or increases in personal income, whichever is higher. Generally speaking, do you strongly favor the spending cap, somewhat favor it, somewhat oppose it, or strongly oppose it?



Overall, how would you rate the spending cap in terms of actually holding down state spending—excellent, good, fair or poor?



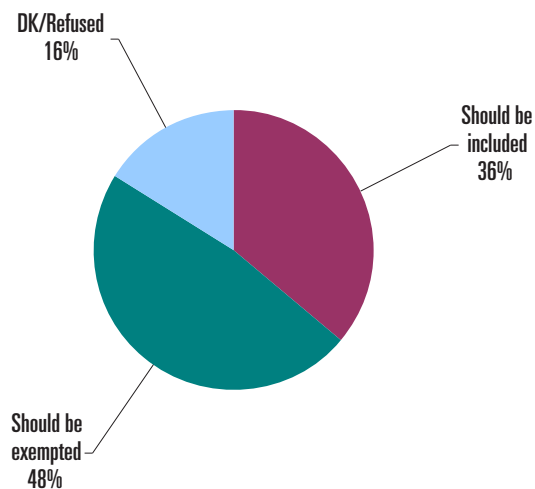
**Some people have suggested making changes to the spending cap to allow additional spending in certain areas. In general would you say you favor or oppose these types of changes to the spending cap?
(PROBE: Strongly/Somewhat, Favor/Oppose)**



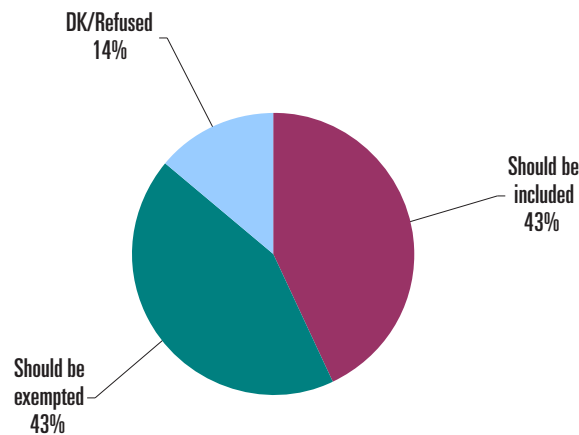
Overall, support for the spending cap over time has moved inconsistently. In 1994, 66% of those with an opinion strongly or somewhat favored the cap as opposed to the 57% that expressed this opinion in the more recent study. At the same time, the percent of respondents giving positive ratings to the spending cap in terms of actually holding down state spending has increased. While 44% gave a ratings of fair each time, only 20% gave ratings of excellent or good in 1994 as compared to 31% who did so in this study. There were significant differences in ratings across the political parties as 41.7% of Republican respondent rated the spending cap as excellent or good, while only 23.6% of Democrats gave an excellent or good response.

Several questions were used to assess Connecticut residents' opinions about what types of expenses should be included or exempted from the state spending cap. When asked whether or not payments on the state debt should be included in or exempted from the state spending cap, 48% said these should be exempted. Forty three percent said new programs required by the federal government or courts should be included in the spending limit and 43% said they should be excluded. Some general differences between party lines can be seen. 42.9% of Republican respondents said payments to the state debt should be included 28.0% of Democrat and 38.0% of Independent respondents reported inclusion. 39.7% of Republicans stated the payments should be exempted as opposed to the 52.2% of Democrats and 48.9% of Independents who showed support to exemption. These opinions reflect a change from 1994, when only 34% of Connecticut residents survey thought payments on the state debt should be exempted from the cap and 38% said federally required programs should be exempted.

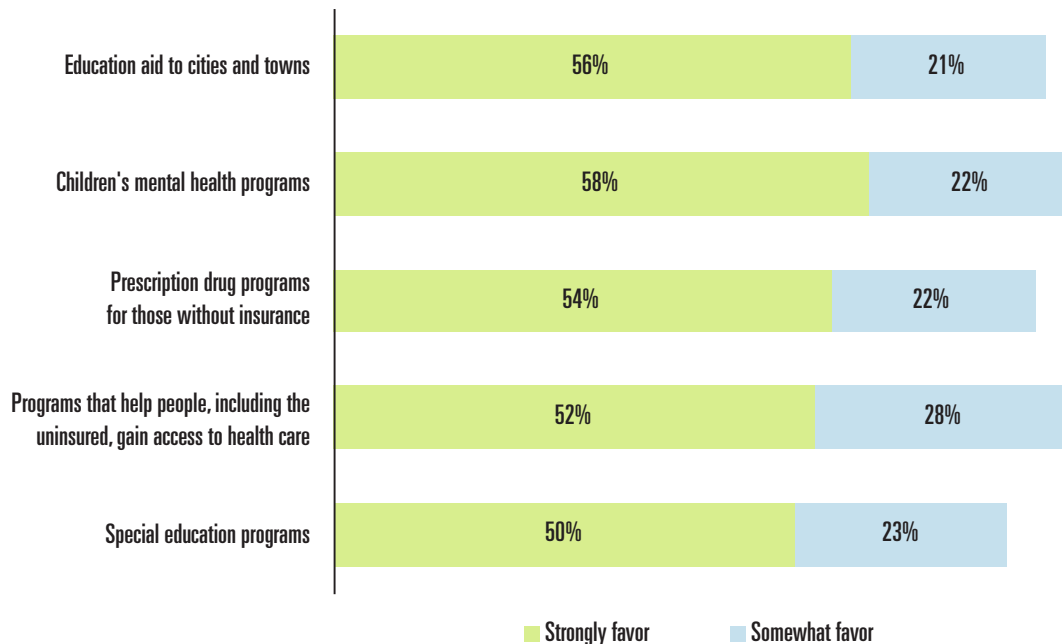
Do you think that payments on the state debt should be included in the total spending limit, so if this area goes up, there would have to be offsetting cuts in other programs, or should payments on the debt be exempted from the total?



How about new programs required by the federal government or the courts, should they be included in the overall limit, or should they be exempt?



The percent of respondents showing support for changing the cap to allow increased spending was even higher when they were asked to make decisions regarding the specific programs for which increased spending would be allowed. Of the respondents who had opinions, 80% said they would strongly or somewhat support changing the cap to allow increased spending on children's mental health programs. Eighty percent would support the change if the money were spent on programs that help people gain access to health care. Similar levels of support were shown for education aid to cities and towns (77%), prescription drug programs for those without insurance (76%), and special education programs (73%).



Overall, little difference of support for changing the spending cap can be seen between men and woman. However, differences among party identification are evident. Democratic respondents generally reported higher strongly favor responses for changing the spending cap among all proposals. When asked to allow for an increase in education aid to cities and towns 62.8% of all Democratic respondents strongly favored such a proposal while 40.0% of Republican reported favoring an increase. 67.7% of Democratic respondents strongly favored changing the spending cap on prescription drug programs for those without insurance while a mere 35.7% of Republicans sampled reported the same response.

Generally, respondents in lower income levels showed more support for increasing the spending cap on various issues. Of all respondents who reported an income of less than \$20,000, 71.2% strongly favored changing the spending cap on prescription drug programs for the uninsured, while only 26.4% of those making over \$100,000 strongly favored the proposal. When asked about allowing for an increase in state spending on special education programs 62.7% of respondents making less than \$20,000 strongly favored the proposal while nearly half (33.3%) of those making over \$100,000 strongly favored an increase.

Respondents were also reminded that Connecticut will be receiving money as a result of lawsuits against the tobacco industry. Almost two-thirds (54%) of those with opinions favored the exemption of the funds from the spending cap, with 35% saying they strongly favored the idea. Just less than a quarter (23%) of respondents strongly opposed the exemption of these funds from the spending cap. Of all respondents making less than \$20,000, 58.8% strongly favored exempting the funds from the spending cap while 24.5% of those making more than \$100,000 showed similar support. Little difference is evident between party lines and gender when asked on this issue.

Respondents' attitudes about the spending cap tended to be related to their income levels. For example, although respondents in different income brackets did not seem to differ in their ratings of how well the cap held down state spending, respondents in higher income brackets were more likely to strongly favor the spending cap in general than were those in lower income brackets. Furthermore, respondents with higher household incomes were much less likely than those with lower household incomes to support changing the cap to allow increases in spending.