

Poll: Cities do better than state in spending tax money



retweet



By Bill Bertolino
The Arizona Guardian

Most Arizona voters say they trust city government more than the state Legislature when it comes to managing their tax dollars, according to a recent poll.

The poll, which was released last week, comes at a time when lawmakers have introduced a flurry of bills that seek to control how cities and towns operate and spend their tax revenue.

Conducted by veteran Republican pollster Margaret Kenski, the survey asked 500 likely voters "in which level of government do

you have the most confidence to balance its budget?"

By a 2-1 margin, 40 percent of the respondents chose cities and towns as doing the best job of budget balancing. About 21 percent of those polled had confidence in the state Legislature, while county governments fared the worst, with 14 percent of voters saying they trust them balance their spending plans.

"I guess the hope would be that it is given weight, but the reality is that I don't know that it will," said Chandler Mayor Jay Tibshraeny, a former longtime senator and majority whip. "There is just a lot of what appears to be anti-city legislation to further curtail cities' efforts. That's troubling to me because for the most part, cities are well-run and I think most people would say they are probably better-run than the state."

The poll was commissioned by the League of Arizona Cities and Towns, and was taken Jan. 4-13, before most state Legislation was filed, particularly those measures that aim to take away local control. Earlier this month, bills passed Senate committees that would cap the number of employees Phoenix and Tucson could hire and how much they could pay them. The cities would also have to roll back spending to 2007 levels.

Another bill would require every city and town with populations above 200,000 to take nearly every municipal service out to a competitive bid. The intent would be to increase privatization of these services.

The primary sponsor of those bills, Sen. Frank Antenori, suggested that if voters really do trust municipal governments more than the state, then lawmakers should sever all state revenue and let the cities set their own tax policies.

"Because the fact is you have cities that are involved with state shared revenue and they impact the economic viability of the state because some of them set up policies that hurt the economy," the Tucson Republican said. "So if they want to become autonomous and self-sufficient, then they might have an argument."

State shared revenue is a voter-approved measure that allows cities and towns to receive 15 percent of the income taxes collected by the state. In exchange for the cash, municipalities are prohibited from imposing local income taxes or luxury taxes.

In the same poll, 66 percent of the respondents said they definitely would or probably would support keeping the arrangement that would guarantee revenue sharing. About 24 percent said they definitely would not or probably would not support the measure.

Another question in the poll asked respondents to rate the "job performance" of all levels of government on how they spend tax money. Cities ranked highest, followed by the county governments and the state Legislature.

"I think what this poll shows is that overwhelmingly people are very happy with what is going on," said Ken Strobeck, executive director of the League of Arizona Cities and Towns. "And the message is: If it's not broken let's not try to go in and make major changes."

The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Last Updated on Wednesday, 23 February 2011 08:24

