



eForum Results

The Pulse of Small Town and Rural America

VIEWPOINTS, OPINIONS AND THINKING FROM AMERICA'S HEARTLAND



WITH SUPPORT FROM THE
W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

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About NADO and the NADO Research Foundation

Building on nearly four decades of experience, the **National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)** serves as the national voice of regional development organizations serving primarily small metropolitan and rural America. The association promotes federal policies and programs that encourage a regional approach to community and economic development. NADO helps its members pursue their goals by providing effective advocacy at the federal level, producing timely and useful information, and offering opportunities for professional and organizational growth. In 1988, NADO established the Research Foundation to provide enhanced research, education and training for regional development practitioners and policymakers.

NADO members—known locally as councils of government, economic development districts, local development districts, planning and development districts, regional councils and regional planning commissions—provide administrative, professional and technical assistance to more than 2,000 counties and 15,000 municipalities.

NADO members work closely with local communities and governments within their regions in a variety of areas, including transportation planning, transit services, aging services, disaster mitigation planning, revolving loan funds and business assistance, infrastructure development, business recruitment and retention, housing, and various environmental programs. A policy board of local elected officials, business leaders and citizen representatives typically governs each regional organization. Associate members of NADO include state agencies, local governments, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses and individuals.

For more information, visit the NADO Web site at www.nado.org.

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to apply knowledge to solve the problems of people. Cereal industry pioneer W.K. Kellogg established the Foundation in 1930 to “help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations.” Since its beginning, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has continuously focused on building the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to solve their own problems. The Foundation currently provides support programs engaged in health, food systems and rural development, youth and education, and philanthropy and volunteerism.

Visit www.wkkf.org for more details on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

About the eForum

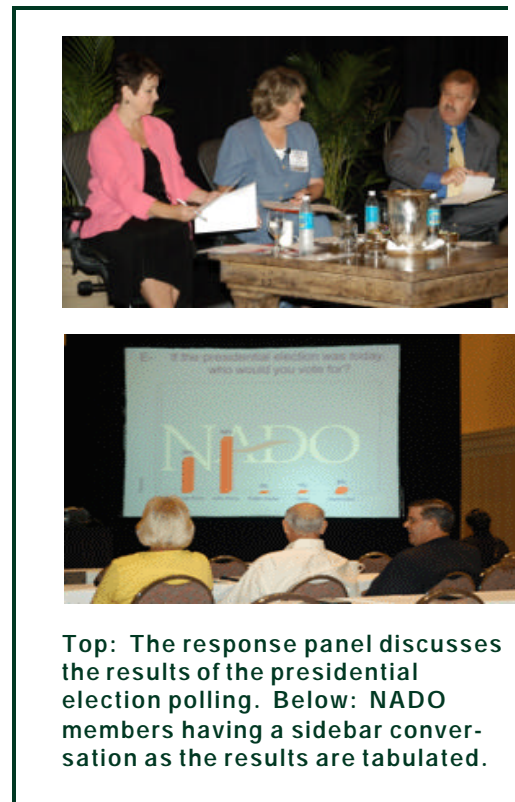
As a constituency representing one-fourth of the nation's population, the rural voice is frequently underrepresented in national policy discussions. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the NADO Research Foundation conducted a timely and informative eForum to gain a renewed understanding of the prevailing opinions of leaders from across America's heartland. Most importantly, the findings are important to the efforts of NADO and the NADO Research Foundation to increase awareness at the national level of the needs, challenges and opportunities facing America's small towns and rural communities.

The eForum, dubbed the "Pulse of Small Town and Rural America," served as a plenary session at NADO's August 2004 training conference in Orlando, Florida. More than 200 regional development professionals and local government officials, equipped with electronic keypads for instantaneous feedback, were led through a series of questions. The questionnaire was divided into five major sections: demographics and profile of participants; views on national politics and economy; strategies for economic development; opinions on federal policies; and insights into the grassroots advocacy efforts of regional development organizations.

Chuck Fluharty, Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute, served as the moderator of the eForum. Throughout the event, Fluharty and a panel of rural policy experts offered insights into the findings and views of the audience. Colleen Landkamer, Commissioner of Blue Earth County in Minnesota, offered the viewpoint of a county official. Trish Weedn, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils, looked at the results from the perspective of a former state legislature and current lobbyist for regional councils. Al Delia, Associate Vice Chancellor at East Carolina University, brought a powerful mix of academic analysis and "real world" political experience to the discussion.

We thank the conference participants and response panel for their outstanding insights and participation in this important initiative.

// Suburban wealth is driving campaigns so rural advocates need to look at this closely, especially since projections show the two coasts with a 50 percent population increase over the next 10 years," Chuck Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute



Top: The response panel discusses the results of the presidential election polling. Below: NADO members having a sidebar conversation as the results are tabulated.

Summary Report

With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the NADO Research Foundation conducted a national focus group of 210 regional development professionals and local government officials at the association's annual meeting in Orlando, Florida on August 30. The interactive eForum, dubbed the "Pulse of Small Town and Rural America," explored the participants' views on national politics and the economy, federal policies and programs, and strategies for regional economic development and grassroots advocacy. Following is a summary report of the eForum results.

Profile of Participants

The eForum involved the participation of 210 representatives from regional planning and development organizations who predominantly serve small metropolitan and rural America. The occupational makeup of responders was evenly divided with 30 percent as executive directors of regional organizations, 28 percent as professional staff of regional organizations and 26 percent as local government officials. The group also included a handful of officials from state government, universities and community nonprofit organizations.

The interactive eForum, dubbed the "Pulse of Small Town and Rural America," explored the participants' views on national politics and the economy, federal policies and programs, and strategies for regional economic development and grassroots advocacy.

Participants hailed from all regions of the country, with 60 percent of eForum respondents living in the Southeast region. In describing their home region, 77 percent of respondents indicated their region was small metropolitan or rural. Another 15 percent said their region was a mix of urban-rural, with eight percent labeling their region as major or mid-size metropolitan.

The gender of the group was 63 percent male and 37 percent female. The age breakdown was 47 percent over age 55, 26 percent between ages 46-55, 27 percent ages 45 or below. More than 30 percent of participants hold a masters degree and 36 percent have a bachelors. Eight percent earned a doctorate level degree and 20 percent have an associates degree, graduated high school or have a GED equivalent.

In describing their political philosophy, 60 percent responded they were moderate while only eight percent claimed to be liberal and 29 percent choose the conservative label. This seems consistent with the stereotype of rural

citizens as generally more conservative than their urban counterparts. While nearly 70 percent of the group described themselves as moderate or conservative, 55 percent reported their political affiliation as a Democrat. Only 30 percent classified themselves as Republican, with nine percent tapped as Independents and six percent saying they had no political affiliation.

Views on National Politics and the State of the Economy

A majority of regional economic development practitioners and policymakers believe the national economy is headed in the wrong direction, according to the NADO Research Foundation eForum results. While 63 percent of the 210 participants responded that the national economy is headed down the wrong track, 56 percent of respondents indicated that their own region's economy is headed in the right direction.

As eForum panelist Al Delia of East Carolina University explained to the audience, "This is consistent with the old story that voters routinely hold a low opinion of Congress as an institution, yet incumbent lawmakers are re-elected at an astonishing rate each cycle. The same appears to hold true with the views of the national economy versus the outlook at home."

The same dichotomy held true when asked, what direction, in general, they felt the nation and their region were headed. Sixty-three percent felt the nation is headed in the wrong direction, however, 69 percent also reported their region is on the right course.



"We need to build a stronger connection with our urban counterparts because the issues and challenges are mostly the same. It's just the solutions are a bit different,"
Colleen Landkamer, NACo First Vice President.

When asked who they would vote for if the presidential election was today, Democratic nominee John Kerry won by a landslide. Kerry garnered 58 percent support against 36 percent for President George Bush. Since 2000, the group's support for President Bush has declined significantly. President Bush received 45 percent of the participants vote in 2000, with 52 percent voting for Al Gore.

The support for the Kerry candidacy is consistent with the participants overwhelming concern with the direction of the nation, and the national economy in particular. While the famous “red and blue map” for the nation puts the rural vote solidly in the Bush camp, the eForum polling of regional development stakeholders shows a modest erosion in support for the incumbent.

Representatives of the presidential candidates should pay attention to these results, as 99 percent of participants responded that they plan to vote in the November election.

97 percent of eForum participants voted in the presidential election and 92 percent went to the polls for the 2002 mid-term congressional elections.

Representatives of the presidential candidates should pay attention to this results, as 99 percent of participants responded that they plan to vote in the November election. As individuals involved in public service and economic development the result was expected. In 2000, 97

Regional Development Leaders as Grassroots Advocates

Recognizing the important role that federal policies and programs have on local communities, an overwhelming majority of eForum participants are active grassroots advocates. For example, more than 55 percent indicated that federal advocacy is incorporated into their organization’s strategic business plan.

When asked how frequently they contact their congressional delegation each year, 39 percent of the eForum audience reported they

contact their delegation 10 or more times each year. Another 31 percent said they reach out to their federal lawmakers between four and nine times annually. Only six percent indicated they never contact their congressional representatives, with 24 percent communicating with their delegation only one to three times each year.

Most advocates regularly use means other than meetings to communicate with federal lawmakers and their staffs. Only seven percent meet face-to-face with their delegations in Washington each year, with three percent reporting they travel “inside the beltway” for meetings seven or more times within the year. An impressive 63 percent visit their delegation at least one to three times annually.

More than half of the group reported they now use email as a primary means to contact members of Congress. More importantly, 36 percent of the group was savvy enough to send messages to the lawmakers private email and nearly 20 percent send notes directly to staff.



Economic Development from a Rural Perspective

Inadequate public infrastructure is viewed as the most significant road block to economic development in small town and rural America, according to eForum participants. The remote nature of rural regions and weak local educational systems rounded out the top three greatest hurdles to job creation and growth in smaller communities. Participants also ranked limited access to venture capital and business development financing as a significant problem.

According to participants, agriculture and manufacturing remain the primary economic engines of their regions. The retail and service sector was ranked third. These findings contrast with national economic data which shows that retail jobs and tourism are a growing source of rural employment.

When asked to identify the primary assets of their regions, 22 percent of attendees indicated their region had a trained and qualified workforce and 16 percent responded they had quality land for agriculture or natural-resource based industry. Other assets included access to metropolitan area, diversity of local residents and access to natural amenities.

Participants were clear that a diversified economy, with a mixture of industry clusters, is the best strategic approach for rural regions. The group was overwhelming in its opposition to pursuing only the development of a specific industry cluster. Fifty percent supported a mixture of an industry cluster within a diversified regional economy, while 47 percent believed their region should pursue the development of a diversified regional economy.

However, eForum participants were divided on their views of targeted strategies. A slim majority of 52 percent believed gaming and gambling is not a viable economic development strategy for their region. Nearly 40 percent felt unfavorable about the development and attraction of prisons and correctional facilities as a viable job creation strategy. However, 23 percent gave the concept strong support and 38 percent gave it moderate support.

Participants were clear that a diversified economy, with a mixture of industry clusters, is the best strategic approach for rural regions. The group was overwhelming in its opposition to pursuing only the development of a specific industry cluster.

Meanwhile, 51 percent strongly agreed and 39 percent moderately agreed that the attraction of the baby boomer generation is a viable development strategy. Interestingly enough, rural leaders still view agriculture-related production and industry as an important part of their future. More than 60 percent believe agriculture is still a viable economic option for their region, with another 27 percent giving it moderate support.



Participants view the results in real time.

Participants were divided on the issue of “big-box development” such as Wal-Mart complexes. Twenty-five percent were in strong agreement with the concept as a development strategy, while 40 percent somewhat agreed and 34 percent were in strong disagreement. The group gave solid support to the emerging strategy of redeveloping brownfield sites. Thirty-five percent gave the idea strong support and 34 percent gave it moderate support. Only 24 percent did not view brownfields redevelopment as a viable approach.

Views of Federal Policies and Programs: Impacts at the Local Level

“Federal policies are increasingly taking away funds vital to our success -- the best example is EPA’s denial of administrative costs under the brown-fields program, resulting in our regional councils and others declining federal funds,” said Trish Weedn of the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils

Almost three quarters of the group believes federal policies and programs benefit urban and suburban areas at the expense of rural areas. In fact, the focus group felt foreign countries fared better than rural areas when it came to federal initiatives. These responses were part of a series of questions about the groups perception of various federal issues.

Almost 80 percent believe the war on terrorism has had an unfavorable impact on domestic spending. And 47 percent feel the cost associated with wars abroad has played the greatest role in increasing the federal debt in recent years. Further, 58 percent responded that federal policymakers, in general, fail to consider the unique and specific needs of rural America when establishing laws, policies and programs. Almost 50 percent of participants reported that federal policies have an unfavorable impact upon their regions.

When asked about the economic impacts of federal policies on their regions, nearly one-quarter of respondents each said that agriculture and infrastructure investment decisions had the biggest impact. Surprisingly, military and energy policies rounded out the top three. Social Security, healthcare, welfare support and international trade also received substantial votes as federal policies with a major impact on their regions.

While 31 percent responded that recent tax relief packages have had a moderate or very favorable impact on their regions, 42 percent said they were not favorable and 14 percent said they had no impact. Correspondingly, nearly 70 percent felt the rising federal deficits were unfavorable to their region. And the perception of 67 percent of the group was that U.S. international trade policies were unfavorable to their regions in the past five years.

The issue of unfunded federal mandates resonated with the group, as 81 percent rated it as a major or moderate concern. This is consistent with the response that 62 percent strongly agree that federal officials are shifting more funding responsibilities for social service and economic assistance programs to state and local governments.

The eForum respondents said that federal policies had the greatest economic impact on infrastructure and agriculture in their regions (22 and 24 percent respectively). Interestingly, almost 60 percent ranked inadequate public infrastructure as the first or second biggest roadblock to economic development in their region. When asked how USDA should reallocate the nearly \$4 billion annual that would potentially be available if the World Trade Organization's plan for member countries to reduce federal subsidies for agriculture production is achieved, a resounding 59 percent said it should be dedicated to rural infrastructure programs. There was also general agreement that a national, bipartisan commission was needed to examine and recommend new policies and programs to enhance rural America. More than 86 percent were very or moderately supportive of the idea.



Protecting the Homeland, Ranking Venture Capital, and Examining Access to Advanced Technology

Only 55 percent of the eForum respondents feel their regions are more prepared in the event of a terrorist attack than before September 11, 2001. Only 3 percent believe they are less prepared while 42 percent sense the same level of preparedness than prior to 9/11.

In addition, only 50 percent of participants replied that first responders and local officials in their region are pursuing a regional approach to homeland security preparedness. This represents a low margin considering the benefits of collaborations and cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries.

In evaluating federal business development programs, more than 72 percent very much or moderately agreed that programs, such as the EDA's Revolving Loan Fund program and USDA's Intermediary Relending Program, are important tools for helping create and retain jobs in rural America. However, 65 percent rated access to venture capital in their region as very poor, with 29 percent saying it was only moderately good.

Even in today's high-tech world, nearly 50 percent believe their region has insufficient access to high-speed broadband to sustain and expand private industries.

EFORUM QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

1. Which of the following NADO regions do you currently live in?

10% East region
60% Southeast region
15% Southwest region
11% Midwest region
4% West region

2. What is your gender?

63% Male
37% Female

3. What is your age?

1% Under 25
9% 26 – 35
17% 36 – 45
26% 46 – 55
47% Over 55

4. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

9% Graduated high school / GED
11% Associates degree
36% Bachelors degree
31% Masters degree
8% Doctorate level degree
4% Other

5. Which of the following best describes your professional position?

22% Local elected official
4% Local government official (non-elected)
30% Executive Director of region
28% Professional staff of region
1% Federal employee
4% State government employee
1% University official
2% Community nonprofit employee
8% Other

6. Which of the following best describes your political philosophy?

29% Conservative
60% Moderate
8% Liberal
3% None of the above

7. Which of the following best describes your political affiliation?

55% Democrat
30% Republican
9% Independent
0% Green
0% Other
6% No political affiliation

8. Which of the following best describes your home region?

4% Major metropolitan
4% Mid-size metropolitan
10% Small metropolitan
67% Rural
15% Urban-rural mix

9. Did you vote in the 2000 presidential election?

97% Yes
3% No

10. Did you vote in the 2002 mid-term congressional election?

92% Yes
8% No

11. Do you plan to vote in the 2004 presidential election?

99% Yes
1% No
0% Undecided

12. Who did you vote for in 2000 presidential election?

45% George Bush
52% Albert Gore
1% Ralph Nader
1% Other
2% Did not vote

13. If the presidential election was today, who would you vote for?

35% George Bush
57% John Kerry
0% Ralph Nader
1% Other
8% Undecided

14. Generally, do you believe the nation is headed in the right direction or wrong direction?

37% Right direction
63% Wrong direction

15. Generally, do you believe your region is headed in the right direction or wrong direction?

69% Right direction
31% Wrong direction

16. Generally, do you believe the national economy is headed in the right direction or wrong direction?

37% Right direction
63% Wrong direction

17. Generally, do you believe your region's economy is headed in the right direction or wrong direction?

56% Right direction
44% Wrong direction

18. Which of the following is the primary industry in your region?

28% Agriculture
5% Educational institutions
7% Government facilities
5% Health care
0% High-tech businesses
27% Manufacturing
8% Natural-resource based businesses
16% Retail/service sector
4% Tourism
1% Other

19. Which of the following is the second most prominent industry in your region?

21% Agriculture
9% Educational institutions
11% Government facilities
11% Health care
2% High-tech businesses
21% Manufacturing
6% Natural-resource based businesses
13% Retail/service sector
6% Tourism
1% Other

20. Which of the following do you believe is the primary asset and strength of your region?

13% Access to metropolitan area
3% Quality access to health care
8% Quality education systems
22% Trained and qualified workforce
11% Access to natural amenities
10% Quality transportation network
12% Diversity of local residents
16% Quality land for agriculture or natural-resource based industry
5% None of the above

21. Which of the following is the most significant roadblock to economic development in your region?

16% Remote nature of region
2% Poor health care services
18% Weak educational systems
1% Changes in federal ag subsidy policies
9% Restrictions imposed by federal environmental regulations
25% Inadequate public infrastructure
4% Inadequate / affordable housing
8% Structure of state and local tax system
13% Limited access to venture capital and business development financing
5% None of the above

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding of numbers.

22. Which of the following is the second most significant roadblock to economic development in your region?

- 15% Remote nature of region
- 2% Poor health care services
- 14% Weak educational systems
- 3% Changes in federal ag subsidy policies
- 3% Restrictions imposed by federal environmental regulations
- 32% Inadequate public infrastructure
- 5% Inadequate / affordable housing
- 10% Structure of state and local tax system
- 15% Limited access to venture capital and business development financing
- 3% None of the above

23. Do you agree that gambling/gaming is a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 15% Very much agree
- 29% Moderately agree
- 52% Do not at all agree
- 1% No impact

24. Do you agree that the development and attraction of prisons and correctional facilities are a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 23% Very much agree
- 38% Moderately agree
- 38% Do not at all agree
- 2% No impact

25. Do you agree that the attraction and servicing of the baby boomer generation is a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 51% Very much agree
- 39% Moderately agree
- 9% Do not at all agree
- 2% No impact

26. Do you agree that the development of "Big-Box Retailers" (i.e. Wal-Mart) is a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 25% Very much agree
- 40% Moderately agree
- 34% Do not at all agree
- 1% No impact

27. Do you agree that agriculture-related production and industry is a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 62% Very much agree
- 27% Moderately agree
- 10% Do not at all agree
- 2% No impact

28. Do you agree that the redevelopment and reuse of brownfield sites is a viable economic development strategy for your region?

- 35% Very much agree
- 34% Moderately agree
- 24% Do not at all agree
- 7% No impact

29. Which of the following general economic development philosophies do you believe your region should pursue?

- 3% Cluster development of a specific industry
- 47% Development of a diversified regional economy
- 50% Mixture of a industry cluster within a diversified regional economy

30. Which of the following areas do you believe that federal policies and programs benefit the most?

- 57% Urban
- 14% Suburban
- 6% Rural
- 2% All areas of the US equally
- 21% Foreign countries

31. Do you agree that federal policymakers, in general, consider the unique and specific needs of rural America when establishing federal laws, policies and programs?

- 3% Very much agree
- 26% Moderately agree
- 71% Do not at all agree
- 0% No impact

32. Overall, what type of impact do you believe federal policies have on your region's economy?

- 5% Very favorable
- 35% Moderately favorable
- 58% Very unfavorable
- 2% No impact

33. Which of the following federal policy areas do you believe has the greatest economic impact on your region?

- 24% Agriculture
- 18% Defense / military / energy
- 6% Health care
- 3% Housing development
- 2% Homeland security
- 22% Infrastructure development
- 6% International trade
- 0% Research and development support
- 11% Social security
- 9% Welfare support

34. Which of the following federal policy areas do you believe has the SECOND greatest economic impact on your region?

- 29% Agriculture
- 12% Defense / military / energy
- 10% Health care
- 3% Housing development
- 1% Homeland security
- 21% Infrastructure development
- 2% International trade
- 3% Research and development support
- 9% Social security
- 9% Welfare support

35. Which of the following do you think played the greatest role in increasing federal deficits in each of the past three years?

- 8% Tax relief for businesses
- 13% Tax relief for individuals
- 19% Slumping national economy
- 47% Costs associated with wars abroad
- 7% Costs associated with improving homeland security
- 1% Costs associated with Social Security
- 1% Costs associated with new Medicare prescription drug bill
- 3% Increased spending on discretionary domestic programs
- 2% Other

36. What type of impact do you think the increase in federal deficits has on your region?

- 3% Very favorable
- 11% Moderately favorable
- 75% Very unfavorable
- 10% No impact

37. In the past four years, federal policymakers have enacted a series of tax relief packages. What impact has the tax relief had on your region's economy?

- 10% Very favorable
- 24% Moderately favorable
- 51% Very unfavorable
- 14% No impact

38. What impacts do you believe US international trade policies have had on your region's economy in the past five years?

- 6% Very favorable
- 12% Moderately favorable
- 73% Very unfavorable
- 9% No impact

39. What impact do you believe the next rounds of military base closures will have on your region's economy?

- 5% Very favorable
- 4% Moderately favorable
- 39% Very unfavorable
- 51% No impact

40. Compared to four years ago, do you believe that federal policies and programs have placed more costly unfunded mandates on local governments?

- 66% Very favorable
- 19% Moderately favorable
- 13% Very unfavorable
- 2% No impact

41. Do you agree there is an immediate need for a bipartisan national commission to examine and recommend new policies and programs to enhance the future of rural America?

- 71% Very much agree
- 15% Moderately agree
- 11% Do not at all agree
- 2% No impact

42. Across the country, State Rural Development Councils were formed in the past decade to help coordinate and address rural policy issues at the state level. How effective has your SRDC been in addressing the needs of the rural areas in your state?

11% Very successful
30% Moderately successful
40% Not at all successful
19% No impact

43. The countries in the World Trade Organization (WTO) are currently negotiating a major reform of global agriculture policies, including a significant reduction in federal subsidies for agriculture production in developed countries. For the United States, the potential impact is an immediate 20 percent reduction in the \$18 billion in annual commodity price supports. If there was an opportunity in the 2006 farm bill to reallocate nearly \$4 billion each year, which of the following would you choose?

5% Land conservation
1% Nutrition assistance (i.e. food stamps)
4% Rural housing development
20% Rural business assistance
59% Rural infrastructure development
1% Forestry programs
3% Specialty crops
8% Agriculture research

44. Currently, the USDA's rural development programs are focused on three core mission areas (housing, business-cooperatives and utilities). Do you agree that USDA rural development programs would be more effective as a single block grant program to the states?

26% Very much agree
30% Moderately agree
43% Do not at all agree
1% No impact

45. What type of impact do you believe that increased federal spending on the war on terrorism abroad, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, will have on federal spending for domestic programs, such as education, social services, transportation and community development?

2% Very favorable impact
2% Favorable impact
4% Slightly favorable impact
9% Slightly unfavorable impact
30% Unfavorable impact
49% Very unfavorable impact
3% No impact

46. Do you agree that federal policymakers are shifting more funding responsibility for social service and economic assistance programs to state and local governments?

62% Very much agree
30% Moderately agree
9% Do not at all agree
0% No impact

47. Since 9/11, the federal government has placed a major emphasis on homeland security and emergency preparedness. How would you rate your region's level of preparedness in the event of a terrorist attack?

55% More prepared than before 9/11
42% Same preparedness as before 9/11
3% Less prepared than before 9/11

48. Are key stakeholders in your region, including first responders and local government officials, pursuing a regional approach to homeland security preparedness?

50% Yes
39% No
11% Do not know

49. As part of the 1998 federal highway bill TEA-21 and in accompanying federal regulations issued in January 2003, state departments of transportation are now required to provide an enhanced level of consultation with local elected officials and regional development professionals. How would you rate the current consultation process in your state for rural local officials?

29% Very good process
34% Moderately good process
38% Not good process at all

50. Do you agree that the EDA planning grant program for economic development districts is an important program for improving your region's economy?

85% Very important
11% Moderately important
5% Not important at all

51. Do you agree that federal business loan fund programs (i.e. EDA's revolving loan fund program and USDA's intermediary relending program), are an important tool for helping sustain and expand private sector businesses in rural America?

72% Very much agree
22% Moderately agree
5% Do not at all agree

52. How would you rate the access to venture capital for business development in your region?

6% Very good
29% Moderately good
65% Not good at all

53. Do you agree that your region has sufficient access to high-speed broadband to sustain and expand private industries in your region?

16% Very much agree
34% Moderately agree
49% Do not at all agree

54. The US Department of Agriculture is currently considering changes to the population threshold for several rural development programs. Which of the following do you think is an appropriate population cap (or maximum) for a rural community?

5% 2,500
10% 5,000
18% 10,000
36% 25,000
25% 50,000
3% 75,000
3% 100,000

55. How frequently do you contact your congressional delegation (including congressional staff) each year?

24% 1-3 times each year
21% 4-6 times each year
10% 7-9 times each year
9% 10-12 times each year
30% 13 or more times each year
6% Never

56. How frequently do you meet with your members of congress (including staff) in Washington, DC?

63% 1-3 times each year
7% 4-6 times each year
1% 7-9 times each year
1% 10-12 times each year
1% 13 or more times each year
28% Never

57. Do you use hard-copy mail as a primary method to contact members of congress?

34% Yes
66% No

58. Do you use email as a primary method to contact members of congress (including staff)?

52% Yes
48% No

59. When sending an email to a congressional office, do you send the message to?

18% Public general address for lawmaker
19% Private email address of lawmaker
36% Private email address of staff
27% Do not send emails

60. Does your organization include federal advocacy as part of the organization's strategic business plan?

56% Yes
28% No
16% Do not know

61. Do you personally make financial contributions to candidates for federal office?

43% Yes
57% No

Special Thanks and Acknowledgments

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Chuck Fluharty, Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute, played an enormous role throughout the project. His thoughts and energy as moderator of the forum were amazing.

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Various individuals helped the NADO Research Foundation staff craft the questions that were asked throughout the eForum: Laura Marshall, Joe Dunn, and Erik Pages. Their suggestions and feedback helped us develop a final set of questions that were meaningful and certain to yield interesting results.

We definitely could not have held the eForum without our partnership with the Public Forum Institute. In addition to providing the technology needed to poll attendees, their staff provided helpful insight as the questions were developed. Mark Marich and Jeff Jendel were critical to the successful outcome of the eForum.

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