

## Poll shows where Utahns think budget cuts should be made

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By Jed Boal

We already know tough economic times will challenge Utah's economy in the months ahead, but where do you think lawmakers should trim the budget? Tonight we answer that question with an exclusive poll.

Lawmakers need to slash 7 percent of the overall budget this year, and 15 percent next year. As the budget cuts are come, Utahns who depend upon a safety net from the state may be left hanging.

State employees may lose their jobs, and we all might end up paying higher taxes. From schools to roads, everything is on the table. "Trying to decide which programs are going to be saved and which are going to be cut is what keeps me awake at night," said Sen. Allen Christensen, R-Morgan County.

So, how would you prefer the budget shortfalls handled? In an exclusive Dan Jones poll for KSL-TV and the Deseret News, we asked how you would prefer to see the budget shortfalls handled:

- 7 percent called for higher taxes.
- 11 percent say lay off state employees and cut programs.
- 40 percent think we need a combination of tax hikes, program cuts and layoffs.
- 66 percent think we should use state savings, bonding or other short-term fixes.

Medicaid advocates urge lawmakers to dip into the state's rainy-day fund rather than cut programs. "The economic consequences for Utah, as well as the health consequences for people, are just incredible," said pediatrician Tom Metcalf, with the Utah Health Policy Project.

We also asked Utahns to prioritize programs from high to low. Public education and health and human services ranked the highest, while environmental quality and state parks and recreation fell to the bottom of the list:

1. Public Education
2. Health and Human Services
3. Higher Education
4. Public Safety
5. Transportation
6. Corrections
7. Environmental Quality
8. State Parks and Recreation

When you look at that list and try to rank programs, you start to understand just how tough it is to rank them; nothing belongs at the bottom of the list.

The legislative session starts next Monday.