

April 19, 2010

Senator Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

The federal budget would look very different if your Sitka constituents could decide how their federal tax dollars were spent.

One hundred forty-eight Sitka residents participated in a Tax Day penny poll on April 15 to decide how they want their tax dollars spent. The poll was designed to engage the community in a discussion of federal budget priorities and trade-offs.

To encourage participation by a broad range of community members, the penny poll was held at our local library. The poll was staffed by community members representing diverse interests—educators, health care professionals, small business owners, public service employees, members of non-profit organizations and members of the Sitka assembly. Advanced publicity likewise emphasized the inclusive nature of the poll.

The Tax Day penny poll received media coverage both locally, in the Daily Sitka Sentinel, and nationally, in The Nation magazine online (TheNation.com).

Voters were given 10 pennies to distribute among 14 jars, each representing a federal program. An equal number of military and non-military categories were included in the poll to mirror the current federal budget, which is split almost evenly between military and non-military programs (<http://www.warresisters.org>). Categories included:

Military

- Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Operation and Maintenance (supply and maintenance of military units, bases and weapon systems)
- Nuclear Weapons
- Military Bases in Foreign Countries
- Homeland Security (defense portion)
- Veterans' Benefits
- Interest on the National Debt (portion created by military spending)

Non-Military

- Healthcare
- Education
- Housing
- Infrastructure (buildings, roads, energy distribution, water and sewage systems that support the economy and society)
- Arts and Culture

- Environmental Protection
- World Hunger/Health

A total of 1,475 pennies were distributed among the 14 jars as shown in the table below.

RANK	PROGRAM	NUMBER of PENNIES	PERCENTAGE
1	Education	264	17.9
2	Healthcare	235	15.9
3	Environmental Protection	209	14.2
4	Arts and Culture	162	11
5	World Hunger/Health	141	9.6
6	Infrastructure	121	8.2
7	Veterans' Benefits	102	6.9
8	Housing	95	6.4
9	Interest on the National Debt	40	2.7
10	Military Operation & Maintenance	35	2.4
11	Homeland Security (defense)	33	2.2
12	Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	18	1.2
13	Military Bases in Foreign Countries	11	.8
14	Nuclear Weapons	9	.6
Total		1475	100

Education, Healthcare and Environmental Protection received the highest numbers of votes. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, support for military bases in foreign countries and nuclear weapon research, development and production were the least popular programs.

Results of the poll indicate that Sitka residents disagree with current federal budget priorities in a number ways.

If Sitka poll participants had their way, only 16.8% of total budget outlays would go to military spending, while 83.2% would go to non-military programs. Veterans' benefits garnered the largest number of penny poll votes among military programs. In the proposed FY 2011 budget, Veterans' Benefits will decrease relative to the FY 2010 level.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan received only 1.2% of penny poll votes. The actual federal budget percentage is nearly five times that amount. To date, Congress has allocated \$138.6 billion in FY 2010 funding for the wars, a 7.8% decline from the FY 2009 funding level of \$150.4 billion. However, President Obama has requested an additional \$33 billion in supplemental funding for these wars. If passed, this will result in a total FY2010 spending level greater than the FY2009 funding level (Congressional Research Service, March 2010).

In contrast with proposed FY 2011 federal budget allocations, arts and culture and international humanitarian aid programs received significant percentages of tax monies from participants in the penny poll.

Sitka penny poll participants allocated 11% of the federal budget to arts and culture. The actual federal budget provides minuscule funding for arts, humanities and cultural programs. In the Obama Administration's proposed FY 2011 budget, funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts is cut by 6 percent each, and funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services is cut by 5.7 percent.

Penny poll participants also allocated 9.6 percent of the federal budget for international humanitarian aid. Currently, the United States spends less than 1 percent of its federal budget on poverty-focused assistance to other countries. That makes the U.S. the smallest contributor among major donor governments (www.care.org). In the Obama Administration's FY 2011 budget, global health initiatives for AIDS relief and malaria prevention receive proposed additional funding over FY 2010 levels.

Sitka is facing difficult financial choices as a result of reduced local tax revenues and reductions in state resources. As our elected representative, we ask you to allocate our tax dollars to support the needs of our community, families and businesses.

As your constituents, we are advising you of our budget priorities in anticipation of the upcoming vote on President Obama's \$33 billion supplemental funding request for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We urge you to vote against the supplemental funding bill, and against any further funding for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the exception of funding to bring home U.S. troops immediately, and to pay reparations for the damage we have done to the people of those countries.

Our first priority is Education, Healthcare and Environmental Protection, and we ask that you use your influence and vote to make these your highest budgetary priorities.

We look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

Sitkans for Peace and Justice