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State Voters Give Legislature Failing Grade

In Addition, Voters Not Sure When Legislators Are Actually Working

LANSING, Mich. — Voters just aren't happy with the performance of the current Michigan state legislature. In fact, when asked to assign a letter grade to evaluate the legislature, 63 percent of state voters gave them a "D" or a failing grade. In addition, responding to a separate question, only 48 percent of the electorate believes that state legislators are working when not in session.

According to the latest Rossman Group/MIRS/Denno-Noor survey, only one percent of the electorate gives the state legislature an "A," just seven percent would give them a "B," 27 percent a "C" grade and 28 percent a "D." More voters gave the legislature a failing grade – 35 percent – than any other.

"Only 8 percent of Michigan voters would put the state legislature on the Honor Roll with an 'A' or 'B,'" said Kelly Rossman-McKinney, CEO of The Rossman Group. "Presumably, voters would give their own legislators a better grade than the legislature as a whole, but these results clearly indicate that the voters of Michigan do not have great confidence in the work being done in Lansing."

The question was worded as follows:

"What grade would you give the Michigan legislature? Would you give them an A, B, C, D, or a failing grade?"

"On top of the normal anti-incumbency sentiments prevalent among voters, the saga in Michigan over the FY 2008 budget, government shutdown, new taxes, tax increases, tax repeals and the replacement tax have left voters scratching their heads," said John T. Reurink, president of Michigan Information & Research Service Inc. (*MIRS* newsletter). "Lansing has some image work to do."

"Although males tend to be more reticent than females in approving legislative performance, our survey showed that voter dissatisfaction with the legislature was slightly higher among women (37 percent gave the legislature a failing grade) than men (33 percent)," added Reurink. "Younger voters, those between the ages of 18 and 35, were the least punitive in their attitudes toward the legislature's performance (21 percent) of any age group. Geographically, failing grades for the legislature scored the highest in Macomb County (42 percent) and the non-Detroit portion of Wayne County (42 percent)."

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The statewide survey was conducted by Denno-Noor Research in partnership with The Rossman Group and Michigan Information & Research Services, Michigan's leading daily legislative and state government newsletter. The Rossman Group was recently named Lansing's Most Effective Public Relations Firm by a survey of political insiders, and MIRS was recently voted the preferred newsletter of Lansing's political insiders.

Voters were also asked if they thought that state legislators were working even when they weren't in session. The question was worded as follows:

“Which statement do believe is more accurate (ROTATE):

- 1) *Our elected officials are only working when they are in session at the State Capitol voting on bills and meeting in committees, (OR)*
- 2) *Elected officials are working when they are not in session at the State Capitol because they are meeting with voters, local business people and other groups.”*

“Sadly, The survey's findings indicate that 40 percent of Michigan voters believe that legislators are working just when at the State Capitol, while a less than half believe they are also working back in the district,” said Rossman-McKinney. “This is a double whammy for lawmakers: voters are failing them for the work they believe legislators *are* doing in Lansing, while giving them little credit for doing any work back in the district. That could mean double trouble for those legislators seeking re-election.”

“On the issue of legislative work away from the State Capitol, out-state voters were more likely to believe that lawmakers work back in the district than those in the metro-Detroit area,” added McKinney. “Given the general lack of exposure southeast Michigan legislators get in the state's largest media market, this geographic differential is not a revelation.”

“Although it's historically true that voters have had higher praise for their own elected officials than other Michigan legislators, we are approaching a different era,” added Reurink. “In 2008, legislators are going to find convincing folks back home that they deserve re-election a much tougher sell.”

Methodology:

This survey was part of the Rossman Group/MIRS/Denno-Noor Quarterly Survey of the Michigan electorate. Six hundred respondents were surveyed between November 30 and December 3, and the participation was stratified based on census data and past voter behavior. A screen was employed to include only those participants who said they intended on voting, either at the polls or by absentee ballot, in the November 2008 Election. The margin of error is plus/minus 4 percent.