



*Instilling hope, creating opportunity, and generating prosperity*

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**Recession-Weary Washingtonians Struggle With Basic Food, Shelter, Utility and Medical Costs  
National poll reveals loss, sacrifice; nearly half don't know where to go for help; optimism remains**

RENTON, WA. (September 17, 2009) – A recession that has seen an unprecedented collapse of financial institutions, ongoing home foreclosures and rising unemployment has pounded Washington with job loss, reduced work hours and scaled-back lifestyles. A national poll of more than 4,000 adults shows Washington families have cut their spending, taken in friends or relatives because of financial need, and lent or given money to those in need. Washingtonians without a college degree and those in rural areas are most likely to report job loss or hourly reductions. Commissioned by the [Northwest Area Foundation](http://NorthwestAreaFoundation.org), the poll shows over two-thirds of respondents in the state see more people struggling to make ends meet than a year ago, mostly because of circumstances they believe are beyond their control.

Sixty-one percent of Washingtonians say they've had to cut back on spending. More than half, 57 percent, report the change in spending habits will be permanent. In the past year, families reported:

- **Thirty percent had problems paying for basic necessities like their mortgage, rent or heating.**
- **Fifty-five percent say they've cut down on the amount they've spent on food.**
- **Forty percent have cut back on saving for retirement.**
- **Twenty-eight percent have had a friend or family member stay with them because of lack of funds.**
- **Twenty-nine percent have had trouble affording medical care.**

Compounding those challenges, 45 percent of people in the state say they would not know where to go in their community for help, and 48 percent say they are not familiar with government assistance such as food stamps. For a second year in a row, people are worried that their paychecks won't be enough to meet their bills, a response that may be related to reports of job insecurity:

- **Thirty-one percent say someone in their household has been laid off or lost a job.**
- **Thirty-five percent say someone in their household has had their work hours cut.**

Washingtonians also reported:

- **A majority says it takes at least \$40,000 a year to meet basic needs of a family of four, which is almost twice the federal poverty level of \$21,834 – the fourth year in a row a majority has expressed this belief.**
- **Sixty-five percent say two people earning \$10 per hour is not enough to make ends meet for a family of four.**

"Americans told us that things are even tougher for their families than the official unemployment and poverty rates suggest," said Kevin F. Walker, president and CEO of the Northwest Area Foundation. "They also say



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elected officials need to join them in finding solutions. Public policy is a critical tool in moving low-income people – and our nation – toward prosperity that lasts.”

Forty-five percent of respondents said the government is doing too little to help. Their priorities for lawmakers are ranked as follows: attracting and keeping good-paying jobs, making medical care more accessible, making college and vocational education more affordable, and making sure there is a safety net for those on the verge of losing their homes to foreclosure. Overwhelmingly people in Washington said that when they vote, they will think about how well the candidate would help those struggling to make ends meet.

Despite the tough times, Washingtonians resolve is strong. Fifty-six percent say they are hopeful about the national economy, and 83 percent say they believe the number of people struggling to get by in their community can be reduced. Eighty-two percent say they are willing to volunteer to help, and 50 percent say that someone in their household has lent or given money to someone who was in need.

“The results of this poll demonstrate not only the depth of the financial issues people are facing but the desire of citizens in our communities to help find new solutions that help people out of poverty, said Carol Gregory, Director, Burst for Prosperity. This positive public will should be used by policy makers and others to collaborate on solutions that truly help people advance up the economic ladder. A true safety net for families is financial security.”

For the full report, and to download topline, policy briefs, executive summaries and charts, visit [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

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The Burst for Prosperity Initiative, an initiative of Children’s Home Society of Washington, seeks to reduce poverty in Washington State by researching and testing innovative models informed by the community that transform systems to help people achieve financial independence.

The Northwest Area Foundation is dedicated to supporting efforts by the people, organizations and communities in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity. These states were served by the Great Northern Railway, founded by James J. Hill. In 1934, Hill’s son Louis W. Hill established the Foundation. To learn more, visit [www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org).

The Foundation commissioned Lake Research Partners to conduct a national survey to explore local perceptions of the struggle to make ends meet in one’s own community, attitudes toward the roles of local elected officials, and ways in which to address this struggle. The telephone survey was conducted among 4,004 Americans age 18 and older, from June 18 – July 13, 2009. A total of 800 interviews were conducted nationally, and oversamples of 400 interviews were conducted in each of the following eight states: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The oversamples were weighted down to reflect their true proportion in the country. The margin of error for the national results is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points. Previous national polls were released in March 2006, March 2007 and April 2008.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 2005-2006 survey included a national sample of 800 interviews, with oversamples of 200 interviews in each of eight states. The 2007, 2008 and 2009 surveys were conducted among a national sample of 800 adults, with oversamples of 400 interviews in each of eight states.