

## SITKA 2012 TAX DAY PENNY POLL RESULTS

The federal budget would look very different if residents of Sitka, Alaska could decide how their federal tax dollars were spent. Fifty-one Sitka residents participated in a Tax Day penny poll on April 14 to let their federal representatives know how they want their tax dollars spent.

To encourage participation by a broad range of community members, the penny poll was held at Kettleon Memorial Library. Participants represented diverse interests, including educators, health care professionals, small business owners and employees, fishermen, public service employees, students and retirees.

The Tax Day penny poll received media coverage both locally, in the Daily Sitka Sentinel, and nationally.

Voters were given 10 pennies to distribute among 16 jars, each representing a federal program. An equal number of military and non-military categories were included in the poll to mirror current the federal budget, which is split almost evenly between military and non-military programs (<http://www.warresisters.org>).

Categories included:

**Military:** Coast Guard, Drones Program, War 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, Libraries, Food security, Infrastructure (buildings, roads, energy distribution, water and sewage systems that support the economy and society), Arts and Culture, Environmental Protection, World Hunger/Health

Participants could also use their pennies to vote for tax increases for the wealthy. Currently, tax breaks for the wealthy reduce funds that could be used to support government programs.

A total of 473 pennies were distributed among the 16 jars as shown in the table below.

<b>RANK</b>	<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE PENNIES</b>
1	Education	17.6
2	Environmental Protection	14.0
3	Healthcare	12.3
4	Arts and Culture	11.0
5	Libraries	10.0
6	World Hunger/World Health	8.7
7	Food Security	6.8
8	Veterans' Benefits	5.3
9	Coast Guard	5.1
10	Infrastructure	5.1
11	War in Afghanistan	1.3
12	Homeland Security (defense portion)	1.1
13	Military Operation & Maintenance	1.1
14	Military Bases in Foreign Countries	.8
15	Nuclear Weapons	.2
16	Drones Program	.2

In addition, voters allocated 7.8 percent of their pennies to express support for tax increases for the wealthiest Americans.

Education, Healthcare and Environmental Protection received the highest number of votes. The development and production of nuclear weapons and the drones program were the least popular programs.

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

If Sitka residents had their way, only 15% of total budget outlays would go to military spending, while 85% would go to non-military programs. Currently, 47 percent of the President's FY 2014 budget, or \$1,334 billion, is allocated to military programs.

Veterans benefits and the Coast Guard garnered the largest number of penny poll votes among military programs. The President's proposed FY 2014 budget includes a 10% increase in Veterans Benefits relative to FY 2013 levels to \$146 billion. The Coast Guard operates under the Department of Homeland Security and its mission includes both a military and non-military role. Its budget would be reduced from \$11 billion in FY 2013 to \$9.8 billion in 2014 based on the President's proposed budget.

The war in Afghanistan received only 6 pennies, or 1.3 percent. The President's FY 2014 budget allocates \$3.8 billion for Overseas Contingencies Operations, including \$3.4 billion for the war in Afghanistan, despite the planned withdrawal of U.S. of combat troops (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb>).

Poll results suggest that Sitkans see national security better served by supporting humanitarian aid programs that increase the health and well-being of people worldwide. U.S. foreign assistance programs help people help themselves, strengthen U.S. economic security, defend against global health threats and create the basis for respect and good-will toward the United States in countries around the world. Penny poll participants allocated nearly 8.7% 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 ([http://www.care.org/getinvolved/advocacy/budget\\_factsheet.asp](http://www.care.org/getinvolved/advocacy/budget_factsheet.asp)). President Obama's FY 2014 budget provides \$48.2 billion for development and humanitarian assistance through USAID and other international programs for health, food security and to address the environmental, economic, and social ramifications of global climate change. Altogether, international humanitarian aid will decrease by 7% in 2014 (<http://www.interaction.org/document/weekly-public-policy-update-april-8-12-2013>).

The federal budget provides minuscule funding for arts, humanities and cultural programs. In contrast, Sitka residents allocated 11% of the federal budget to arts and culture. The President's proposed FY 2013 budget calls for a small increase in spending for arts and culture over 2013, to \$154.5 million (<http://chronicle.com/article/ArtsHumanities-Endowments/138471>)

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