

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** JIM HOBART, PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES  
**SUBJECT:** KEY FINDINGS FROM A RECENT STATEWIDE SURVEY IN MONTANA  
**DATE:** FEBRUARY 7, 2023

---

### METHODOLOGY

Public Opinion Strategies recently completed a statewide survey of 500 registered voters in Montana. The survey was conducted January 30-February 1, 2023, and voters were reached by live interviewers on landlines and cell phones, as well as via text-to-web. The survey has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.38\%$ .

### KEY FINDINGS

- ***Montana voters decidedly say placing more of an emphasis on free speech would be a positive for the state's colleges and universities.***

Fully 63% of voters say placing more of an emphasis on free speech would be a positive, while just 6% say it would be a negative for the state's colleges and universities. Twenty-nine percent (29%) say it would make no difference.

Intensity is strong on this issue, with 41% of voters saying it would be very positive for the colleges in the state.

This sentiment extends across partisan lines, with 65% of Republicans, 64% of Democrats, and 56% of Independents saying more of an emphasis on free speech would be a positive for Montana colleges and universities.

- ***There is very strong support for a potential amendment that would protect the constitutional rights of the public, students, and faculty at public colleges and universities.***

Voters were read the following potential amendment language and asked if they would vote yes or no:

*An amendment to the Montana State Constitution that the legislature may enact laws requiring the board of regents of higher education to adopt and maintain policies that protect the constitutional rights of the public, students, and faculty at public colleges and universities.*

A significant majority (71%) of voters said they would vote yes, compared to only 18% who would vote no. Ten percent (10%) of voters are undecided.

It is rare to see a potential amendment start with this high a level of support, and also rare for undecideds to be this low on a constitutional amendment. Each of these is a very positive sign for the amendment's chances of passage were it to be on the ballot.

There is also solid bipartisan support for the potential amendment, with 85% of Republicans, 64% of Independents, and 55% of Democrats saying they would vote yes.

Support is also north of 55% or higher with voters across age groups, in each of the state's media markets, and with voters of every education level.

- ***There is minimal appetite for additional regulations that would also regulate what is researched and taught on Montana campuses.***

Voters were read the following statements on how to handle free speech and college campuses in Montana and asked which they agreed with most:

*We need a constitutional amendment that would allow the Montana legislature to protect the constitutional free speech rights of students and professors at colleges and universities.*

*No adjustments to free speech policies are needed for Montana's colleges and universities.*

*We should allow the Montana legislature to not only protect free speech as they see fit, but also regulate what is researched and taught on campus as well.*

Roughly one half (49%) most agreed with the need for a constitutional amendment to protect free speech rights, while just over one third said that no adjustment to free speech rights are needed. Only 13% support additional regulations on what is researched and taught on Montana campuses.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Voters see placing more of an emphasis on free speech as a definite positive for the state's colleges and universities.

This translates into very strong support for the proposed amendment that would protect the constitutional rights of the public, students, and faculty at public colleges and universities.

Support crosses partisan lines, is strong across the state, and is high with all gender/age groups.

Were it to go to the ballot, the proposed amendment would stand an excellent chance of passing.