

From: Public Policy Polling

To: Interested parties

Subject: Americans ambivalent on eliminating the estate tax

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According to a new survey from Public Policy Polling for Americans for Tax Fairness, Americans are indecisive about whether or not they support keeping the estate tax. Voters respond very strongly to both supporting and opposing messaging on the tax, making it difficult to nail down their true opinions on the issue. Voters are sympathetic to messaging couching the tax as a punitive measure against small business owners and farmers, while also acknowledging that eliminating the tax would benefit wealthy Americans who do not need relief.

There are a number of concrete takeaways from the survey, however. Support for eliminating the estate tax swings 49 points over the course of the survey, from 75%/25% in favor of repealing the estate tax to just 51%/49% in favor of repeal at the end. In addition, every message polled about “possible concerns about this proposal to eliminate the estate tax” received majority support, indicating that voters are very receptive to potential negative consequences of eliminating the tax. Other noteworthy takeaways include:

- Voters are largely uninformed about the specifics of the estate tax. Just 34% knew that the tax applied to estates of \$5 million or more. The fact that most respondents had little baseline knowledge of the tax going into the poll could explain the divergent and conflicting answers in the messaging questions.
- When framed as a legislative issue to be decided by Congress, the tax is roundly opposed by voters. Americans’ distrust of Congress comes through in their responses, and this could be a good avenue to explore for future messaging. Majorities say that:
 - Congress should prioritize spending the existing revenue from the estate tax for roads and bridges, education and Medicare and Medicaid over eliminating it (55% to 45%);
 - Members of Congress want to eliminate the tax to benefit their wealthy campaign contributors (63% to 37%); and
 - They would be less likely to vote for their member of Congress if he/she voted to both end the estate tax and raise taxes on working families (65% to 18%).

Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree on the wealthy contributors and working families questions.

- Voters' ambivalence is on display when the tax is communicated as punishment for small business owners' success and as government exploitation of death. 54% of Americans advocate eliminating the tax when the tax is described as such. Majority support is seen across all age groups when the tax is couched as taxing death.
- Voters are also sympathetic to the populist overtones of the case against eliminating the tax. For example:
 - 66% have concerns (51% "very serious") that eliminating the estate tax will be paid for by cutting Medicare, Medicaid, college aid, medical research and rebuilding our roads and bridges.
 - 61% have concerns (41% "very serious") that only millionaires and billionaires will benefit from eliminating the estate tax.
 - 60% have concerns (41% "very serious") that eliminating the estate tax would give a \$3 million tax cut on average to the wealthiest Americans.
 - 60% have concerns (40% "very serious") that eliminating the estate tax will increase the wealth gap between the rich and everyone else.
- A majority of Republicans support the first two "concerning" messages above. Majorities in every income group support the anti-wealthy messaging expressed in the opposing statements above.
- One of the most interesting developments is the transformation of the under \$30,000 group over the course of the poll. In the outset, this group overwhelmingly supported eliminating the tax 81%/19%. However, by the end of the poll, these voters opposed waiving it 54%/46%. That's a swing of 70 points.
- The wealthiest voters—those making over \$100,000—also had a similar, though less drastic, reversal. When first asked about eliminating the tax, they supported it 70%/30%. In the final tally, they voted to keep it 53%/47%.

PPP surveyed 689 registered voters from April 7th to 8th. The margin of error is +/- 3.7%. 80% of interviews for the poll were conducted over the phone with 20% interviewed over the internet to reach respondents who don't have landline telephones. The poll was sponsored by Americans for Tax Fairness.