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Commissioner - Third District

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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To: Chairman Skelton and Mayor Brewer

From: Commissioner Peterjohn

Subject: 2013 Hugo Wall School Citizens Survey

Recently I received a copy of the "Citizens Survey" issued by the county and city that has a return address of Wichita State University. About a week later, I received a postcard asking me to return the survey form after I filled it out.

This deeply flawed survey deserves a detailed examination about the problems that are contained in its methodology that will not provide useful survey data to elected officials and their staff. I attended the news conference where this survey was presented to the news media at City Hall and I had a number of questions and concerns when reviewing these questions at that time. Now that I've received a copy of this survey and you want my response, I will provide it on the open memo that accompanies this note.

cc: Elected Officials, Managers, & Steering Committee Members

Attachment

Methodological Problems with the 2013 Citizen Survey
By Karl Peterjohn, 3rd District County Commissioner

I. No “undecided” option

This survey does not provide any place for “undecided,” or any other way to express an uncertain response from citizens. Since all of these questions force a response there is a significant chance that citizens who are uncertain will be less likely to respond. This will not be helpful in getting an accurate picture of citizen opinion in our community.

II. Boldface, High Lighting, and Underlining

In Section 2 (I don’t know what happened to Section 1, but my copy begins with this section) begins each question by saying, “Local government should use public resources....,” and then has some words and phrases **boldfaced and underlined** which skews any response making these open ended dozen questions flawed.

Even if these questions did not have the boldface and underlining the vagueness makes the responses meaningless. If you asked Wichita citizens a similar question, “When you shop at your grocery store you should spend your money buying....,” as a question, the answers of “to promote healthy eating by **buying bananas**,” would not generate useful public survey data.

III. Flawed Questions

Section 3 did not boldface or underline the 14 questions in this section. However these 14 questions are also vague or inane. Example: “14. Public dollars should be spent to create green spaces and parks.” Every year the city and county spend millions on our parks.

“11. Our community should assist children whose parents are unable to meet their needs.” The city and county already jointly fund the EMCU to handle the worst of the criminal abuse of children cases. This question is example of the vague and unclear questions in this survey. This question specifically uses words like “assist,” (food, shelter?) or “needs,” (safety, health care?) that are subjective and vague.

Section 4 contains the same boldface and underline problem of Section 2 in its 13 transportation questions. Section 4 is also flawed because all of the questions avoid the key phrase: at what price? If you ask me how many steaks that I would want at 20 cents a pound versus \$20 a pound you will receive a very different answer. Even if you list a specific price, there are still survey problems that make it tricky to generate a useful survey response with these types of flawed questions.

Section 5 contains the same problems as outlined in sections 2 and 4. In fact the explanatory language in this section includes underlined and boldfaced comments that further invalidate by skewing the responses.

Question 3 in this section includes the phrase that is underlined and boldfaced, "...**discourage investment by businesses** that are heavy water users." This question assumes increased usage of water. What if a heavy water user invested to reduce consumption? There is an inherent flaw within this question that should have been removed from this survey.

IV. Utilizes Politically Correct Language That Skews Responses

Section 6 uses the euphemism, "investment," as a synonym for government spending. This also will skew the results from the six questions in this section. Since the questions do not provide any idea of what it cost to achieve the results that are cited within the questions, the results will not provide useful information.

Section 7 repeats the misuse of a similar word, "invested," and, "change in investment," as the politically correct words for expanded government spending implicit in every one of the 10 questions in this section.

Section 8 leaves the amount open ended in all 14 questions contained in this section. Since there are no dollar amounts, specific levies, or anything else that is quantifiable the resulting responses will be excessively subjective due to the flaws contained in this survey.

V. Privacy Concern

Section 9 looks like a census department or data mining form except for question 9. There needs to be a provision that citizen's responses will be kept private.

VI. Comprehensive Plan Committee Concerns Treated As Suggestions

I have been told that several members of the steering committee asked to have input on this questionnaire. I have been told that their requests were not utilized.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion: This is a deeply flawed survey that will not generate worthwhile information for decision makers. The costs incurred in conducting this survey will far exceed any value that is generated.