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The full General Assembly should vote on Insure Tennessee: Vanderbilt Poll

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – An overwhelming percentage of registered voters in Tennessee want Insure Tennessee to move out of committee and face a vote by the entire state legislature.

The new Vanderbilt Poll also indicates that not only do a majority want a vote, but also that they support Gov. Bill Haslam's plan to expand insurance coverage to 280,000 low-income people without health insurance in the state.

Meanwhile, Haslam continues to be hugely popular among every subgroup in Tennessee, with his approval standing at 67 percent. His support cuts across all parties: self-identified Republicans (75 percent), Democrats (60 percent), Independents (68 percent) and Tea Party members (70 percent).

[The State Legislature](#) has a 55 percent approval rating – unchanged from November 2014.

The Vanderbilt Poll is conducted in November prior to and then in May after each session of the Tennessee General Assembly, in order to gauge how closely the concerns of citizens align with their representatives in Nashville. The poll, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

Other findings of the poll, conducted April 23-May 9, indicate nearly two-thirds of voters said the legislature failed to spend enough time on what the voters considered priorities, more than half believe terminally ill individuals should have the option to end their life, an overwhelming majority favor requiring police to wear video cameras, nearly half support legalization of the medical use of marijuana, and three-quarters want motorcycle riders to continue to be required to wear helmets.

The poll also found that only 44 percent of registered voters supported the act passed this year that allows Tennesseans to have guns in public parks.

On the issue of health care, of 1,001 registered Tennessee voters, 78 percent want the full legislature to vote on whether to enact Insure Tennessee. That includes 83

percent Democrats, 73 percent Republicans, 82 percent Independents and 68 percent Tea Party members.

Sixty-four percent say they favor Insure Tennessee versus 19 percent opposed. It is most popular with Democrats (85 percent). Republicans favor the program by a 49 to 28 percent margin. Even Tea Party members narrowly favor it at 42 percent for and 40 percent opposed.

“There is a major disconnect between the thinking of Tennesseans and the action of our state legislature,” said [John Geer](#), Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science and co-director of the Vanderbilt Poll. “There is across-the-board support for Insure Tennessee and even more support for letting the full legislature vote on the bill. Yet there does not seem to be much interest among our legislators to discuss and vote on this bill supported by Gov. Haslam – who himself remains wildly popular.”

Even though Insure Tennessee failed to make it out of the Senate Health Committee in 2015, it can be considered in a special session or the next session of the General Assembly in January 2016.

The Vanderbilt Poll last put the question of expanding health care for low-income Tennesseans to voters in November 2014 when 56 percent of those polled said they supported expanding Medicaid to provide medical care for people living on low incomes. That was before Haslam announced the Insure Tennessee plan and called a special legislative session to consider the proposal.

“Overall, there is more support among registered voters for Insure Tennessee than there was for the issues we asked about related to relaxing gun control in the state,” said [Josh Clinton](#), professor of political science and co-director of the Vanderbilt Poll. “In fact, only members of the Tea Party – who are 15 percent of the registered voters in the state according to our most recent poll – were noticeably more supportive of the gun legislation that was passed than they were of Insure Tennessee.”

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Across the board, Tennesseans disapproved of the way legislators used their time. Sixty-three percent of those polled said the legislature did not spend enough time on issues they cared about, while 25 percent disagreed. Democrats were the most dissatisfied at 72 percent, followed by Independents (68 percent), Tea Party members (59 percent) and Republicans (56 percent).

The voters listed as their priorities: economy (44 percent), education (24 percent), health care (19 percent), immigration (7 percent) and guns (3 percent).

RIGHT TO DIE

Doctors should be permitted to assist people with painful, incurable diseases to painlessly end their lives, said 55 percent of voters surveyed, versus 39 percent who were against it. Democrats were the most likely to approve of the right to die (67 percent) while Republicans were the least likely at 47 percent.

Thirty-one percent said the law should offer no circumstance under which physician-assisted suicide was acceptable. Nearly two-thirds supported some sort of option for ending one's life due to health concerns. In particular, 28 percent think it should be all right if the patient requests it. Slightly less (25 percent) believe a patient and the patient's family must agree before a patient can be allowed to die, and 12 percent believed gravely ill people should be able to die by any method they desire.

MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAW

The state law requiring all motorcycle riders to wear a helmet has the support of three-quarters of the registered voters in the state. Twenty-two percent of those surveyed said they would support a bill to overturn the law and allow riders over the age of 21 to ride without a helmet.

CAMERAS ON POLICE OFFICERS

Eighty-six percent of Tennessee voters said they would like on-duty police officers to be required to wear small video cameras. Eleven percent opposed the idea.

MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

Tennessee voters continue to warm to the idea of medical marijuana, with 48 percent saying it should be allowed, up from 42 percent when the same question was asked in November 2014. Support for legalization for personal use dipped slightly, from 29 to 24 percent. Twenty-five percent of voters wanted to keep marijuana completely illegal.

