



Take the survey about how to spend money? It can't hurt

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Like many of you, I can be pretty cynical about government, especially how our leaders are spending our hard-earned dollars.

Surely they could do a better job. Surely they don't need as much money, or they could use the money we give them in better ways.

We live in a representative democracy and elect people to make these decisions for us, but many of us find the decisions aren't in tune with what we want. Some of us call, write or e-mail our representatives in government to tell them what we think; many of us just silently seethe as we fork over the cash in the form of property taxes, income taxes, sales taxes, fuel taxes, fees, etc.

I find most of my dissatisfaction directed at the federal level, but surely the state and city government could do a better job, too.

At the city level, we're actually being asked our opinion now.

In a fairly quick manner, we can sit at our computer and complete a survey on JournalStar.com to tell city leaders what we think their priorities should be in spending our money.

We can rank major categories and give what percentage each should get of city dollars; there's even a place to comment, for example, that although we rank police protection No. 1, we wouldn't spend as much time on traffic enforcement.

We also can say what areas we think need more funding and what areas could be cut.

As a journalist, I'm fairly suspicious of politicians saying they want public input.

Sure they do. I've been around long enough to see how things work.

But, wait, maybe they actually do want our opinion.

They went to all the trouble of getting funding from the Lincoln Community Foundation for the project and enlisted the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center and UNL Bureau of Sociological Research to conduct a scientific phone survey to get public input.

And now everyone is invited to fill out the online survey or attend a town hall meeting. If you don't have a computer, you can even pick up a printed survey at one of Lincoln's libraries.

Why would Mayor Chris Beutler and his team bother if they already had decided how to spend city money next year?

The cynic in me says maybe it's just a big show to get people involved and think they have a say, then city politics will function as it always has behind closed doors.

But maybe, just maybe, there will be an invaluable community conversation about what our priorities should be in Lincoln, about what we want our dollars spent on.

And maybe the next budget will reflect some of that input, and Lincoln's government will function more the way we as residents want it to function.

There is a chance to have your say, and that chance is now. It couldn't hurt.

Come to JournalStar.com today and take a few minutes to weigh in.

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