

# Chief exec gets poll 'thumbs up'

By Grace Holman  
Leader Staff Writer

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County apparently is happy with the combined county-city government, with a chief executive for both rather than a mayor.

But, while 87 percent of the respondents to the Anaconda-Deer Lodge Opinion Survey said the county should continue to elect a chief executive, 54 percent said that official should not have the veto. And, a surprising number of respondents named problems, while others had suggestions for those in public office.

That notion — to keep the chief executive but essentially as a figurehead — has been expressed by voters.

Since 1976, the issue of giving the chief executive the veto has been "soundly turned down" by voters when placed on a ballot, a commission member said.

The county wants "a weak chief executive, with no power," said Cheryl Beatty, the current and first elected chief executive under the consolidated government.

Dr. Kenneth Weaver, director of the Local Government Center at Montana State University, Bozeman, was in Anaconda Jan. 4 to describe the results of a telephone survey conducted last fall on behalf of the A-DLC Local Government Review Commission. At a special meeting that evening, he said the survey represents a reliable and

valid expression of the prevailing opinion of county residents when it was conducted Oct. 21-27.

Weaver, always quick to label what he termed academic opinion or thinking, said of the A-DLC residents' wanting a chief executive with no authority, "as an academician issues, this drives me crazy."

The chief executive position is seen as similar to that of the former mayorial position, with the official allowed to vote in case of a tie but with no veto authority.

A slightly less percentage — 84 — believe the chief of law enforcement should continue to be elected, with a slightly higher percentage, 14 compared to 10 for the chief executive, believing the chief law enforcement officer should not be elected.

The question, "If you were an Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Commissioner, which problem would you give most attention to?" generated one of the bigger surprises.

Sixty-four percent of the respondents named a problem — unemployment and lack of jobs, for example — with only 14 percent saying they could not think of a problem.

Most persons will acknowledge problems exist, but will decline or be unable to name specific ones, Weaver said.

And the problem named, an eco-

(See *Chief exec*, Page 6)

# Chief exec ...

(Continued from Page 1)

economic issue, was a surprise. "Most persons do not think of the government playing a role in the economics," Weaver said. "But, obviously, here the community expects the government to take a part."

The response, with 40 persons stating more jobs are needed, and, secondly, that unemployment is an issue the government should address, raises an issue for the county, Weaver said.

Along with this issue, 12 persons said the commissioners should be involved in the county's economy and economic development.

And, despite the brouhaha over "welfare reform," only one person said individuals should work for welfare.

In keeping with this trend in thinking, 14 persons said commissioners should be concerned with creating new business, with two advocating new industry, and one saying, "no more fast food."

In questions to determine thinking on the quality of service for county departments, a few surprises were uncovered.

Traditionally, everyone loves — or likes — the county sheriff; no one likes or loves the tax collector or treasurer.

Law enforcement received approval, with 58 percent saying this service is good, 34 percent saying it is adequate.

Surprisingly, 36 percent said road and bridges are doing a good job, 41 percent saying the department does an adequate job.

"Most people don't really know what roads and bridges departments do. They think of the potholes, and say (the departments) are not doing a good job," Weaver said.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the overwhelming 64 percent who believe the treasurer's office is doing a good job, with 25 percent saying it is doing an adequate job.

"This is the office that sends out property tax statements each November, the office where you stand in line to pay an outrageous fee to register cars," Weaver said.

Weaver also said the 92 percent approval of emergency services is impressive, asking the council for the full range of such services, which is fire, ambulance, police and 911.

Weaver noted that the survey was constructed to elicit responses regarding an office, not a person, with many county offices being somewhat ab-

stract to many residents, a factor which created some of his surprise at the level of acceptance.

Noting 64 percent of respondents saying county candidates should not be identified by political party, Weaver commented that of Montana's 56 counties, all but four conduct partisan elections. This indicates that Montanans do not have as much information as some might believe, he said.

In response to the question of possibly increasing the number of commissioners from the current five to seven, 70 percent said to stay with five. Whether an issue of cost or other thinking cannot be determined, Weaver said.

Weaver expressed minor concern for demographics of the respondents, with 41 percent in the 60 or older age category and 34 percent in the 40-59 category. Three percent, or 12 respondents, were under age 20, with 21 percent, or 76 respondents, age 20-39. Although he said responses from more younger persons might be desirable, the age spans apparently reflect the demographics of A-DLC.

Although 76 percent of the respondents said their home is Anaconda, many persons contacted in West Valley or Georgetown routinely name Anaconda as home, council members told Weaver when he noted the disproportionate percentages between Anaconda and the county's rural communities.

The survey dates, Oct. 21-27, probably caused another disproportionate factor: 64 percent of the respondents were women, with one unknown, and 35 percent men.

Oct. 21-27 was the opening of hunting season.

Problems were identified by 224 different respondents, with some naming more than one problem, adding 45 problems to the total listed.

Although government received a definite adequate rating (with some rating A-DLC government as "good"), government received some specific ideas on how to improve. With the exception of two who said A-DLC needs a new or change in the city county manager-executive, all others were named by one person.

Problems listed ranged from "not enough young people in government" to the need for leadership. One respondent admonished the chief executive "to stay out of other jobs," another commented the "com-

mission can't agree," and a third advised the commission not to interfere with city departments. Another respondent said the commissioners do not have time to do their job. And, while one would add a firemen, another would "get rid of all in government."

Responses to a query about government responsiveness also elicited advice for the commissioners: listen to citizens, quit fighting, act on problems more quickly, keep the public both aware of meetings and more informed. Each was listed by one person, and one said the commissioners should be available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for questions.

Schools and the Superfund site also drew comments, and some ire. Schools and education were listed as a problem by 10 persons, with specific problems all concerning spending: schools too expensive, superintendent overpaid and overspending on schools.

Two listed the Superfund site as a problem, with two saying, "get the golf course going," with one saying more support of the golf course should exist, while another expressed concern for the affect of the golf course on property taxes. Contamination of the Olds Works area was a concern to one, and another said the people should have more input on how ARCO spends money.

Respondents' comments on financial aspects included additional advice for the commission: lower the tax base and stop spending too much; and companion thoughts, spend money wisely and provide adequate services at low cost.

Teenagers were on the minds of some respondents, with addition of activities and things to do listed by five persons, with teenage drinking a problem listed by 10 and teenage vandalism and crime listed by five. One each listed crosswalks, and kids at noon and a juvenile problem.

Law enforcement was said to be the "poorest department" by one person, with problems, however, listed as alcohol and drug abuse, by 12 persons, with one person saying a drug education program is needed; and animal control, listed by 10 persons; law enforcement and crime were listed by one person each. Other problems listed, with one person naming each, include traffic regulation, drunk drivers, traffic regulations and unregistered vehicles.

Regarding the city's infra-

structure, 14 listed the street lighting, with two giving specifics, lighting of Third Street and repair of the street light on Fourth and Main (listed by two), and lighting near the hospital. Two persons named the sewer system while two others listed solid waste as a problem.

Numerous miscellaneous problems were listed, with two saying A-DLC needs a recycling program and two citing problems in the welfare department, with another saying more case workers are needed and another wanting to see the number on welfare reduced.

Others suggested getting gambling into Anaconda, addition of a recreation program and a bus between Anaconda and Butte with another citing a need for increased transportation. One suggested the county "all go in one direction/not be divided," while another respondent named elderly people as problems.

Also listed as areas with problems were the judicial, city records, rundown neighborhoods and the recreation department, each named by one person.

One respondent suggested a