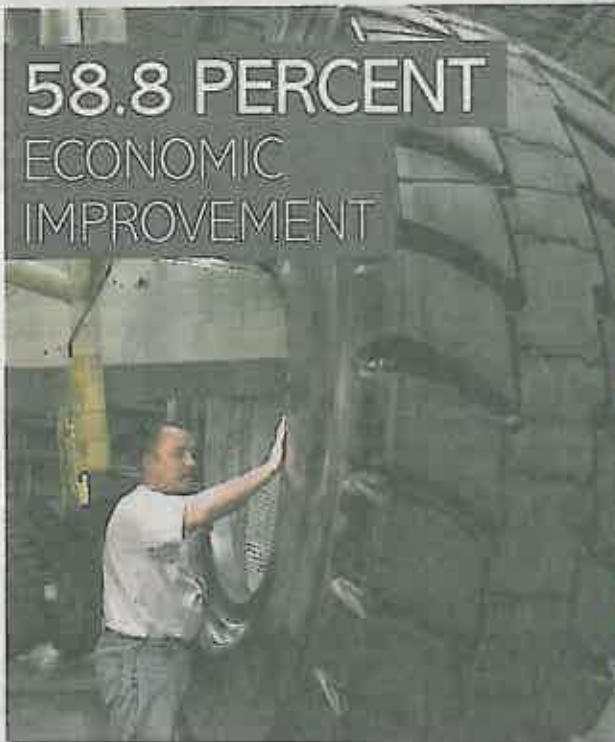


# POLL SHOWS:



**58.8 PERCENT**  
ECONOMIC  
IMPROVEMENT



**37.3 PERCENT**  
HALEY POPULARITY UP

Nearly 60 percent felt that the state's economy is getting better — 58.8 percent, compared to 49.1 percent in February.

While 37.3 percent of voters said they approved of the job Gov. Nikki Haley was doing, among Republicans and independents who lean Republican, her approval rating rose to 60 percent.



**78.1 PERCENT** NO TO CONCEALED WEAPONS

The poll asked whether people with concealed weapons permits should be allowed to carry guns into establishments where alcohol is served, with 78.1 percent saying no.

## Residents express economic optimism in state survey

**By Ron Barnett**

Staff writer

rbarnett@greenvilleonline.com

More South Carolinians believe the economy is improving, and Gov. Nikki Haley's popularity is growing — at least among Republicans and GOP-leaning independents, according to a poll released Tuesday by Winthrop University.

Overall, the respondents were evenly divided on whether they think the Republican governor is doing a good job, with nearly a quarter of them giving no opinion, says the poll, taken April 15-22.

"The general attitude of the public towards the economy is that it's improving, so it's definitely getting to be a better day for a lot of South Carolinians," said Scott Huffmon, a political science professor who heads Winthrop's Social and Behavioral Research Lab, which conducted the poll.

The poll showed that 47.8 percent of respondents believe the state's economy is very good or fairly good, compared to 38 percent in February — an increase of 25.8 percent. Nearly 60 percent felt that the state's economy is getting better — 58.8 percent, compared to 49.1

See PQLL, Page 3A

## POLL

Continued from Page 1A

percent in February.

The poll also measured opinions on the Trayvon Martin case, with 57.2 percent saying George Zimmerman acted irresponsibly in shooting the unarmed teenager in a Florida incident that has gained national publicity.

And it asked whether people with concealed weapons permits should be allowed to carry guns into establishments where alcohol is served, with 78.1 percent saying no.

"I think that tells people outside the South that your stereotype of us is incorrect," Huffmon said. "We're not stupid red-necks. We're responsible gun owners."

Two out of three of the 981 respondents to the poll said higher gas prices have caused them to cut back their spending on other things.

Huffmon said the improved economic outlook, which comes in spite of higher fuel costs, was probably a factor in Haley's improved standing.

Asked if they approved or disapproved of the way Haley is handling her job, 37.3 percent said yes, while 36.5 percent gave her thumbs down.

Among Republicans and independents who lean Republican, 60 percent gave her a positive rating, with 20.2 percent disapproving of her performance.

"I think her ticking up among her party faithful has to do with her prominent national exposure," he said, referring to a recent spate of nationally televised interviews to promote her book "Can't is Not an Option."

"That looks good and people like that," he said. "And yeah, the economy

has improved, so that helped her a few points — probably not as many points as any politician would like, but it's helped her among her party base."

Almost one-fourth (24 percent) didn't express an opinion on Haley's performance, which puts a damper on her overall numbers, Huffmon said.

"Whenever you have that, it's almost impossible for anybody, even if they're very popular, to get above 50 percent," he said. "So her numbers being in the high 30's is mainly a function of nearly a quarter of people having no opinion."

While more than half of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who are registered voters said they approve of the tea party movement (50.9 percent), more than eight in 10 (83.8 percent) don't consider themselves to be members of the tea party.

Less than one-third (32.9 percent) said they believe the country overall is headed in the right direction, while 58.7 percent said it is going the wrong direction.

The perception that the economy is improving was noted in Winthrop's last poll, in February, but it has grown since then, with nearly one-third fewer saying jobs or unemployment are the most pressing issue.

In February, 22 percent said jobs and unemployment were the No. 1 issue nationally. In the new poll, 14.7 percent felt that way.

As a state issue, 36.5 percent said jobs and unemployment was the top concern in February. That had fallen to 26.4 percent in the new poll.

And when people feel more confident about their personal finances, they are more likely to spend money that will help further improve the economy, said Clemson University econo-

mist Bruce Yandle.

"Perceptions matter, I think, particularly when they are based on some real stuff," he said. "When your son or daughter gets a job or you get a job after being laid off, that's real stuff."

The state's unemployment rate has improved from 10.4 percent in March 2011 to 8.9 percent last month, while manufacturing employment is up, construction has improved, and every county in the state saw gains, he said.

"When perceptions are driven by reality, that reduces uncertainty about the future and people tend to relax a little and maybe trade cars or take a vacation," he said.

Yandle, who recently was presented the Adam Smith Award by the Association of Private Enterprise Education, said he believes the economy is "healing itself" and is in fact not in a "recovery" but is in an expansion mode. That's because GDP has risen above the level where it was when the Great Recession started in December 2007.

The housing and construction sector continues to be "terribly sick," however, and uncertainty over what the future will bring in terms of tax policy and regulatory issues are keeping investments below a level that would help the nation reap full benefits of the largest worldwide economic expansion in history, Yandle said.

Nearly eight out of 10 respondents to the poll said they were very or somewhat familiar with the Trayvon Martin case and nearly half said the national media has given too much attention to it.

Of those familiar with it, 57.2 percent felt that Zimmerman acted irresponsibly and "should be held accountable" for Martin's death, while 12.5 percent said he acted responsibly.