

# As the President Prepares to Address Congress, Americans Call on Policymakers to Make National Debt a Top Priority

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*The February 2017 Fiscal Confidence Index, Modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 60 (100 is Neutral)*

**NEW YORK** — As President Trump prepares to address a joint session of Congress on Tuesday evening, voters are calling for more focus on the national debt, according to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation’s February Fiscal Confidence Index, a monthly measure of public attitudes about the nation’s long-term debt and the efforts elected leaders are making to address America’s fiscal challenges. The Fiscal Confidence Index, modeled after the Consumer Confidence Index, is 60 (100 is neutral), indicating that voters remain deeply concerned about America’s fiscal outlook and want policymakers to put the nation on a more sustainable fiscal path.

According to the survey, nearly three-quarters (73%) agree that the national debt should be one of the President and Congress’s top three priorities, including half (51%) who agree strongly. The slight increase in optimism seen in last month’s Fiscal Confidence Index has largely subsided, as the February index fell back to the December level.

“As President Trump outlines his policy priorities to Congress tonight, it’s clear that voters want the national debt to be part of his agenda,” said Michael A. Peterson, President and CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation. “A sustainable fiscal foundation is an essential component of economic growth. Voters understand that getting our fiscal house in order is a top priority if we are to achieve economic prosperity for all Americans.”

The Fiscal Confidence Index measures public opinion about the national debt by asking six questions in three key areas:

- **CONCERN:** Level of concern and views about the direction of the national debt.
- **PRIORITY:** How high a priority addressing the debt should be for elected leaders.
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Expectations about whether the debt situation will get better or worse in the next few years.

The survey results from these three areas are weighted equally and averaged to produce the Fiscal Confidence Index value. The Fiscal Confidence Index, like the Consumer Confidence Index, is indexed on a scale of 0 to 200, with a neutral midpoint of 100. A reading above 100 indicates positive sentiment. A reading below 100 indicates negative sentiment.

### **Fiscal Confidence Index Key Data Points:**

- **The February 2017 Fiscal Confidence Index value is 60.** (The January value was 67 and the December value was 60.)
- The current Fiscal Confidence Index score for CONCERN about the debt is 54, indicating deep concern about the debt. The score for debt as a PRIORITY that leaders must address is 27, indicating that Americans want elected leaders to make addressing long-term debt a high priority. The score for EXPECTATIONS about progress on the debt is 97. The Fiscal Confidence Index is the average of these three sub-category scores.
- For a description of the complete methodology, see the Appendix below.

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation commissioned a poll by the Global Strategy Group and North Star Opinion Research to survey public opinion on the national debt. The nationwide poll included 1,000 U.S. registered voters, surveyed by telephone between February 20 and February 23, 2017. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%. The poll examined voters' opinions on the national debt, political leadership, and America's fiscal and economic health.

Detailed poll results can be found online at: [www.pgpf.org/FiscalConfidenceIndex](http://www.pgpf.org/FiscalConfidenceIndex).

### **About the Peter G. Peterson Foundation**

*The Peter G. Peterson Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that is dedicated to increasing public awareness of the nature and urgency of key fiscal challenges threatening America's future, and to accelerating action on them. To address these challenges successfully, we work to bring Americans together to find and implement sensible, long-term solutions that transcend age, party lines and ideological divides in order to achieve real results. To learn more, please visit [www.pgpf.org](http://www.pgpf.org).*

### **APPENDIX: Fiscal Confidence Index Methodology and Questions**

- The Fiscal Confidence Index is released monthly by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation.
- The Fiscal Confidence Index value is based on six questions in three categories.
- As is done with the Consumer Confidence Index, the first step in calculating the Fiscal Confidence Index is determining the "Relative Value" for each question. This calculation is made by taking the positive response for each question and dividing it by the sum of the positive and negative responses. Each question was asked on a four-point scale, and answers were weighted according to intensity, with the strongest responses counting twice as much as the middle responses ("much" better or worse answers count twice as heavily as "somewhat" better or worse answers).
- The scores for the Concern, Priority, and Expectations categories are determined by averaging the scores derived from the two questions in each category.

- The Fiscal Confidence Index value is converted from the Relative Value to place it on a scale on which 100 indicates equal positive and negative sentiment, while values below 100 indicate negative sentiment and values above 100 indicate positive sentiment.
- The questions are as follows:

### CONCERN (54)

Thinking about our national debt over the last few years, would you say your level of concern has increased or decreased?  
? Is that a lot or just a little?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
Increased a lot	45%	40%	39%
Increased a little	22%	23%	26%
Decreased a little	9%	10%	12%
Decreased a lot	6%	8%	4%
(No change)	16%	19%	17%
(Don't Know/Refused)	2%	2%	2%
INCREASED (NET)	67%	62%	65%
DECREASED (NET)	15%	17%	17%

When it comes to addressing our national debt, would you say things in the United States are heading in the right direction or do you think things are off on the wrong track?  
? Do you feel that way strongly or just somewhat?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
Right direction-Strongly	16%	15%	11%
Right direction-Somewhat	17%	22%	19%
Wrong track-Somewhat	14%	17%	19%
Wrong track-Strongly	33%	24%	33%
(Neither/Mixed)	10%	13%	13%
(Don't Know/Refused)	10%	10%	6%
RIGHT DIRECTION (NET)	33%	37%	29%
WRONG TRACK (NET)	47%	41%	52%

### PRIORITY (27)

Some people say that addressing the national debt should be among the president and Congress' top 3 priorities. Do you agree or disagree?  
? Do you feel that way strongly or just somewhat?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
Strongly agree	51%	47%	49%
Somewhat agree	22%	27%	28%
Somewhat disagree	11%	12%	11%
Strongly disagree	9%	9%	9%
(Don't Know/Refused)	6%	5%	4%
AGREE (NET)	73%	74%	76%

DISAGREE (NET)	21%	21%	20%
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And when it comes to our national debt, do you think it is an issue that the president and Congress should spend more time addressing or less time addressing?

? Would you say a lot (more or less) time or just a little?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
A lot more time	55%	51%	51%
A little more time	25%	29%	29%
A little less time	6%	5%	5%
A lot less time	3%	4%	4%
(The same amount of time)	5%	5%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	6%	6%	4%
<b>MORE TIME (NET)</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>LESS TIME (NET)</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>9%</b>

### **EXPECTATIONS (97)**

And thinking about our national debt over the next few years, do you expect the problem to get better or worse?

? Is that much (better or worse) or just somewhat (better or worse)?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
Much better	16%	13%	15%
Somewhat better	20%	31%	25%
Somewhat worse	22%	21%	22%
Much worse	29%	24%	24%
(No change)	5%	4%	6%
(Don't know/Refused)	8%	7%	8%
<b>BETTER (NET)</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>WORSE (NET)</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>46%</b>

And when it comes to our national debt, are you optimistic or pessimistic that the United States will be able to make progress on our national debt over the next few years?

? Would you say you are very (optimistic or pessimistic) or just somewhat?

	<b>February 2017</b>	<b>January 2017</b>	<b>December 2016</b>
Very optimistic	28%	26%	25%
Somewhat optimistic	26%	33%	28%
Somewhat pessimistic	14%	16%	18%
Very pessimistic	23%	16%	19%
(Neither/Mixed)	6%	5%	6%
(Don't Know/Refused)	4%	3%	4%
<b>OPTIMISTIC (NET)</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>PESSIMISTIC (NET)</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>37%</b>

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