Poll: Plurality say government causes poverty

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What started as a poll about Obamacare turned into revealing information about what Illinoisans think causes poverty.

The Paul Simon Institute at Southern Illinois University asked 1,000 Illinoisans about whether they think the Affordable Care Act should be repealed. While those answers were mixed, the pollsters got information that led them to ask a second question: "Thinking about the causes of poverty in your area, please tell me one major reason that people are poor." They found that 41 percent, a plurality, said that government causes poverty.

"Poor people are not lazy but their not stupid either. If you pay them more not to work than to work, they're going to think twice about taking that job," CATO Institute Senior Fellow Michael Tanner said. "It often pays more to be on welfare in the short-term than it does to take that job."

When asked about what the government could do to help, the most common response was to create jobs. Of the respondents who said that education was the leading cause of poverty, the most common reason for that answer was the poor quality of public schools.

Tanner said that raising the minimum wage sounds appealing, but those expecting raises need to remember that businesses don't have to pay anything for someone they don't hire.

"The minimum wage is always zero," he said. "You simply cannot require anybody to pay more for the worker than the value-added that worker provides."

The poll was taken in the second week in March.