

Survey: "Partisan Divide" On Energy Issues Is A Myth, Strong Bipartisan Support Seen For Shift To Cleaner Energy

Washington Out of Step With Public? Little Confidence Seen in National Lawmakers Finding Solutions is Evident in Across-the-Board Political Support for Grassroots Drive to Take Back Issue

The common wisdom is wrong: There is no political "fault line" that divides Americans along party lines when it comes to clean energy issues and solutions. Majorities of Republicans, Independents and Democrats agree that the United States should move away from its reliance on dirty energy sources that foul the air and water and toward a future that makes greater use of clean energy sources, according to a major new ORC International survey conducted for the nonprofit and nonpartisan Civil Society Institute (CSI).

A key finding: More than three out of four Americans (76 percent) – including 58 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Independents, and 88 percent of Democrats -- think that the United States should move to a sustainable energy future through "a reduction in our reliance on nuclear power, natural gas and coal, and instead, launch a national initiative to boost renewable energy and energy efficiency."

However, the bipartisan support for clean energy does not mean that Americans think that Washington, D.C. is on the same page with them. More than three out of four Americans (77 percent) – including 70 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Independents, and 85 percent of Democrats -- believe that "the energy industry's extensive and well-financed public relations, campaign contributions and lobbying machine is a major barrier to moving beyond business as usual when it comes to America's energy policy."

As a result, more than eight out of 10 Americans (83 percent) – including 69 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 95 percent of Democrats -- agree with the following statement: "The time is now for a new, grassroots-driven politics to realize a renewable energy future. Congress is debating large public investments in energy and we need to take action to ensure that our taxpayer dollars support renewable energy-- one that protects public health, promotes energy independence and the economic well being of all Americans."

Pam Solo, founder and president, Civil Society Institute, said: **"Our survey is a call to action: Americans across the political spectrum think that it is time for decisive action toward a renewable energy future that will protect public health and provide reliable and cost effective energy. They are ready for leadership and, when offered choices in energy futures, choose an energy path that will protect public health and not sacrifice the quality of our air and water. Americans believe the partisan gridlock can only be challenged by a grassroots-driven process that challenges the undue political influence of the fossil fuel and nuclear power interests."**

Heather White, general counsel, Environmental Working Group, said: **"Dirty energy companies and their lobbyists like to marginalize those of us who are working towards a cleaner energy future for the U.S. But the verdict of this new survey is clear: We are the majority, not the 'fringe' when it comes to how Americans of all political leanings view energy issues. The truth is that those who are clinging to America's dirty energy past are the people who are way out of step with the American political mainstream. The survey shows that Republicans, Democrats and Independents can sit down and hammer out a U.S. energy future that makes sense; it's just that major energy companies are doing everything they can to keep common sense from prevailing."**

Conducted March 22-25, 2012, the new ORC International survey of 1,019 Americans shows that:

- About two out of three Americans (66 percent) – including 58 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of Independents, and 75 percent of Democrats -- agree that the term "'clean energy standard' should not be used to describe any energy plan that involves nuclear energy, coal-fired power, and natural gas that comes from hydraulic fracturing, also known as 'fracking'".
- Even with high gasoline prices today, 85 percent of Americans – including 76 percent of Republicans, 87 percent of Independents, and 91 percent of Democrats -- agree with the statement "energy development should be balanced with health and environmental concerns" versus just 13 percent who think "health and environmental concerns should not block energy development."

- More than two out of three (68 percent) think it is "a bad idea for the nation to 'put on hold' progress towards cleaner energy sources during the current economic difficulty."
- About three out of four Americans (73 percent) agree that "federal spending on energy should focus on developing the energy sources of tomorrow, such as wind and solar, and not the energy sources of yesterday, such as nuclear power." Fewer than one in four (22 percent) say that "federal spending on energy should focus on existing energy sources, such as nuclear, and not emerging energy sources, such as wind and solar."

OTHER KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- More than two out of three Americans (68 percent) – including 60 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Independents, and 74 percent of Democrats -- think that America's "new energy future" should be guided by the "precautionary principle," which would work very much like the Hippocratic oath does for doctors: "The precautionary principle would advocate a conservative approach to the use of technologies that may put public health at risk and create irreversible environmental harm. If there is not enough scientific evidence showing that it is safe, precaution should guide decisions in those cases."
- Eight out of 10 Americans agree that "water shortages and the availability of clean drinking water are real concerns. America should put the emphasis on first developing new energy sources that require less water and result in lower water pollution. "Only 15 percent of Americans think that "America should proceed first with developing energy sources even if they may have significant water pollution and water shortage downsides."
- Two thirds of Americans (67 percent) think that "political leaders should help to steer the U.S. to greater use of cleaner energy sources – such as increased efficiency, wind and solar – that result in fewer environmental and health damages." Under a third of Americans (30 percent) think that "political leaders should stay out of the energy markets and let private enterprise have a free hand in picking energy sources and setting prices."
- More than eight out of 10 Americans (82 percent) – including 78 percent of Republicans, 81 percent of Independents, and 85 percent of Democrats -- agree with the following statement: "Whether they are referred to as 'subsidies,' 'tax incentives' or 'loan guarantees,' the use of taxpayer dollars for energy projects are long-term investments. However, government incentives for energy must benefit public health and economic well-being. Clear guidelines are needed to direct public energy investments by shifting more of the risk from taxpayers and ratepayers and more to the companies involved."
- About three out of four Americans (75 percent) – including 58 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 86 percent of Democrats -- think that "Congress and state public utility commissions that regulate electric utilities should put more emphasis on renewable energy and increased energy efficiency ... and less emphasis on major investments in new nuclear, coal and natural gas plants."
- Despite high gas prices, less than one in five Americans (16 percent) think that "the energy price paid by consumers is the only factor that makes any difference. Production damages, such as from mining, environmental impacts such as pollution, health harms, and other costs associated with energy should be considered less important factors." By contrast, 81 percent of Americans believe that "the price paid by consumers is only part of the cost of energy. We have to look at the whole picture -- including environmental and health damages -- when we talk about what a particular source of energy costs America."
- Nearly six in 10 Americans (56 percent) are now aware of the natural gas drilling process commonly referred to as "fracking." Fewer than three in 10 Americans (28 percent) are "not aware at all" of this extraction process.
- Eight out of 10 Americans (81 percent) who are aware of fracking say that they are concerned – including nearly half (47 percent) who are "very concerned" – about the impact of fracking on water quality.
- About nine out of 10 Americans (89 percent) agree that "U.S. energy planning and decision making must be made with full knowledge and understanding about the availability of water regionally and locally, and the impact this water use from specific energy choices has on their economies, including agricultural production."
- Four out five Americans (80 percent) – including 78 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Independents, and 82 percent of Democrats -- oppose the use by utilities in some states of advance billing – known as "Construction Work in Progress" – to pay for the construction of new nuclear and other power plants. Only 13 percent agree that "ratepayers should pay for electricity they use, and construction of nuclear reactors and other power plants that may come on line in the future."
- Eight out of 10 Americans think U.S. taxpayers and ratepayers should not "finance the construction of new nuclear power reactors in the United States through tens of billions of dollars in proposed new federal loan

guarantees." Three out of four Americans (76 percent) would support "a shift of federal loan-guarantee support for energy away from nuclear reactors and towards clean, renewable energy, such as wind and solar."

For the full survey findings, go to <http://www.CivilSocietyInstitute.org> on the Web.