

U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette "e-Dear Colleague" Circulation of Conservation Poll Results, May 25, 2011

From: e-Dear Colleague

Sent: Wednesday, May 25, 2011 9:49 AM

To: E-DEARCOLL_ISSUES_A-F_0000@ls2.house.gov

Subject: Economy, Energy, Environment: Dear Colleague: Westerners Believe Environmental Protections and Strong Economy Can Co-exist

Westerners Believe Environmental Protections and Strong Economy Can Co-exist

From: The Honorable Diana DeGette

Sent By: marc.rigas@mail.house.gov

Date: 5/25/2011

Dear Colleague:

I write to bring your attention to a recently released poll, in which westerners weigh in on what many characterize as the battle between the environment and the economy. The poll finds that the majority (77%) of Westerners actually rejects that supporting economic development or the environment is mutually exclusive. Rather, the majority believe that we can enjoy a protected environment that contributes to our quality of life and a strong economy.

Westerners are often caricatured as extremists willing to forsake the environment in pursuit of the all-mighty dollar or willing to throw aside economic success to preserve our outdoors. The authors found that westerners value clean air, clean water and the proximity of hiking and fishing opportunities. They not only cite such amenities as the thing they like the best about their state, but often times the very reason they live where they do.

Westerners know that our energy resources are finite and our uniquely Western landscapes are fragile. We know that our identity is intertwined equally with both.

Please see the summary for the poll below. If you or your staff would like to see the full poll or receive a hard copy, please go to:

http://www.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewestsurvey_e.html

Sincerely,

DIANA L. DEGETTE
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Taking the Pulse of the Mountain States:
Results of 2011 Bi-Partisan Poll of Western
States' Voter Attitudes on Conservation, the Environment
And Renewable Energy in
Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming**

This survey of 2200 voters throughout five Western states (Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming) was conducted by the bipartisan research team of Lori Weigel at Public Opinion Strategies (R) and David Metz of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) in order to examine Western voters' attitudes toward a range of conservation and environmental issues. The survey explored how views of conservation relate to perceptions of state government, budget issues, and the economy in each state. The survey was designed to create a benchmark assessment of core beliefs and broad values that relate to conservation, although a handful of current policy questions and trade-offs were explored as well.

The results of the survey demonstrate that Western voters share broad values when it comes to the environment, despite differing views of state government, budgets, and state leadership. Voters in these five states are more likely to point to something related to the outdoors – be it mountains, wide open spaces, public lands, clean air, or other natural features -- as the thing they like most about living in their particular state or the West more broadly. This is followed closely by their ability to participate in outdoor recreational activities. In fact, nearly nine-in-ten say they would prefer spending a day outdoors to spending a day in a city.

Voters in these five states attach a great deal of importance to having clean water, clean air, natural areas and wildlife as a fundamental ingredient in the good quality of life in their state. Two-thirds of these Western voters view those things as an aspect of life that is fragile and needs to be cared for and protected, rather than as an enduring feature of life that is unlikely to change.

This underlying sense of guarding a fragile yet important part of their lives appears to play a role in how Western voters respond to a range of environmental issues. Two-thirds believe the current laws protecting land, air and water should be strengthened, or at least better enforced. Even when provided with an economic rationale for reducing some of these standards on major employers such as agriculture and construction, three-quarters of Western voters believe the current laws should stand as they are.

In fact, voters in these five states tend to reject the concept that the economy and the environment are in conflict with one another. They overwhelmingly believe that environmental standards and a strong economy are consistent with one another, rather than having to choose one over the other. One area where they see the potential for job growth is increasing the use of renewable energy sources, as two-thirds perceive this to be a job creator for their state. That said, two-in-five blame “too many” environmental regulations for costing their state jobs.

Overall, Western voters indicate more positive impressions of solar and wind power as energy sources than they do for coal or oil. However, this is one area where there is a notable exception: Wyoming residents are generally positive toward *all* energy sources tested. Across all five states, though, voters indicate that they would dramatically increase the amount of their state’s electricity needs being produced by renewable sources. They reject the idea that these power sources are too unreliable, and a majority in every state says it is time to start replacing coal with these other energy sources. Once informed of the actual proportion of electricity generation coming from renewable sources in their state, a majority would be willing to pay at least ten dollars more per month to increase the use of renewable energy in generating electricity.

Air quality ranks as a top tier environmental concern in all of these states, and particularly in Utah, where a majority of 52% volunteered the issue as the most pressing environmental concern in the state. Climate change and global warming, on the other hand, rank below 11 other issues as an environmental problem facing their state. The latter is the most politicized issue tested in the survey, with attitudes about whether to take action on global warming varying dramatically along party lines.

Voters are solidly in support of the EPA requiring reductions in carbon emissions from sources like power plants, cars and factories in an effort to reduce global warming. Our past research would lead us to conclude that voters see auxiliary benefits to addressing carbon emissions and a broader benefit to air quality from such a policy.

The political landscape in which voters are reacting to these issues is one of a unique combination of skepticism and optimism, which varies from state to state. Montana, Wyoming and Utah voters are more positive about the direction of their state, while Coloradans and New Mexicans are evenly divided over how things are going in their states. New Mexicans are the most likely to think their state government is run by a few big interests and are least trusting of state government, yet they express a great deal of confidence and optimism in Governor Martinez (slightly higher than the positive sentiment hovering around new Governors in Colorado and Wyoming).

While many of these states are more financially sound than their neighbors, budget deficits and cuts in funding to state parks and environmental protections are still viewed as serious problems. One of the most resounding affirmative responses in the survey is agreement that “even with state budget problems, we should still find the money to protect” their state’s land, air and water.

To see the full poll including methodology and results by state please see:

http://www.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewestsurvey_e.html

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