

Energy Opinions Differ By Affiliation

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TOPEKA, KS.—The U.S. economy is still trying to rebound out of the worst recession since the Great Depression. In light of this, public opinion reports indicate the public feels the most important issue for the federal government to immediately address is reducing unemployment and creating jobs. Federal government priorities are viewed differently from both sides of the political aisle. Interestingly, the most important issue to Republicans for the federal government to address is reducing the budget deficit. Additionally, Republicans place much higher importance on reducing illegal immigration.

While most energy products are global commodities, there is still an insistence on behalf of the public that the United States should become as energy independent as possible. Public opinion indicates the most important energy issues for the federal government to address are reducing U.S. dependence on foreign suppliers and developing renewable energy resources. A national survey indicates the public does have concern about greenhouse gas emissions, but clearly the public believes having a secure, domestic and affordable energy supply must come first.

Perceptions surrounding energy priorities differ by political party (Figure 1). While all parties feel it is extremely important to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and develop renewable energy resources, Republicans place a greater emphasis on developing domestic oil (59 percent) and natural gas (51 percent) resources than Democrats (32 and 40 percent, respectively) and independents (43 and 46 percent, respectively). Democrats and independents are more likely to view renewable energy

resources as a means to become less dependent, while Republicans see oil and natural gas development as a priority.

Americans agree that reducing U.S. dependence on foreign suppliers is the top energy priority for the federal government to address. What respondents disagree on is how to achieve reduced dependence. Interestingly, while the public at large is evenly divided between an approach that only includes renewables (45 percent) and a holistic approach that includes renewables and traditional energy sources (46 percent), the only differentiating factor between the two groups is political party.

As mentioned previously, Republicans are more likely to place greater importance on developing the U.S. domestic traditional fuel supply, while Democrats and independents see renewable resources as the energy priority. Interestingly, independents do not share the same enthusiasm as Democrats with regard to only using renewable energy to achieve energy security.

Most of the public understands the continued need for traditional energy sup-

plies and supports increased access to domestic oil and natural gas resources. Seventy-one percent of respondents support increased domestic access and only 21 percent oppose. Support for increased access is strongest in nonmetropolitan areas (80 percent support) and among Republicans (83 percent support). However, while Democrats and independents do not share the intensity of support found among Republicans, the majority of these parties also back (61 and 71 percent, respectively) increased access to domestic oil and natural gas resources.

Decreasing dependence on foreign suppliers of oil will be a critical priority for the federal government to address in the 112th Congress. While Democrats and independents would like to see renewable energy sources exclusively used to achieve this goal, the overwhelming support for increased domestic access to oil and natural gas resources indicates an understanding that in the current environment, that is not feasible without increased costs to the consumer and potential detrimental economic affects. □

FIGURE 1

