



To: Interested Parties
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Re: Conservative Republicans open to clean energy
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As the 2016 election approaches, Americans will be evaluating key issues, including the issue of energy. In recent years, when voters have been asked which party they would trust more to handle energy issues, they have preferred the Democratic Party, though by limited margins.¹

New research that we have conducted suggests that **support for clean energy is strong** both with the overall electorate and with the conservative Republicans that form a core constituency for many Republican elected officials.

During August of 2015, we conducted a live-interview telephone survey of 1200 registered voters nationwide, with an oversample of 500 Republican voters. In this survey, we found that voters – including Republicans – are open to a number of policies and messages on clean energy. The research was commissioned by ClearPath, a private foundation created by conservative entrepreneur Jay Faison to build support for market-driven solutions on clean energy issues.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Support for clean energy is broad**, and voters are most supportive of clean energy because of the economic, security, and health benefits it can provide.
 - In particular, conservative Republican voters believe that we should support clean energy in order to **promote energy independence**.
- Most voters -- including **most conservative Republicans** -- **think the climate is changing and that human action is probably contributing** at least a little to the change.

¹ ABC News/Washington Post poll, March 2014; NBC/Wall Street Journal poll, February 2013; Pew Research Center poll, December 2012.

- While Republicans tend to view mankind’s impact as more limited, most nonetheless think that human activity is playing a role in climate change, and the percent saying they think the climate is not changing is in single digits.
- **The best messaging on clean energy de-politicizes climate and emphasizes the wide array of benefits that clean energy provides.** In contrast with messaging that calls for significant government regulation and intervention, voters -- including both independent and conservative Republican voters -- gravitate more to a message that promotes clean energy as a way to thoughtfully manage the potential risk of climate change.

SUPPORT FOR CLEAN ENERGY IS HIGH, DRIVEN BY DESIRE FOR ENERGY INDEPENDENCE, INNOVATION, LESS POLLUTION

We asked voters: **“Would you say you support or oppose taking action to accelerate the development and use of clean energy in the United States?”** Overwhelmingly, voters said they supported the idea, with 84% of voters overall saying they supported accelerating clean energy development and use. This included 72% of Republicans and 68% of conservative Republican voters supporting the idea. Fewer than one out of five conservative Republicans said they opposed taking action on clean energy.

We then presented voters with a variety of different reasons why someone might or might not support clean energy, and we asked respondents to tell us if they agreed or disagreed with each reason. Of these, three frames stood out as the most powerful.

Roughly nine out of ten voters -- including eight out of ten conservative Republicans -- said they agreed with each of the following, including *majorities* of conservative Republicans saying they “strongly agree” with each:

- **“We should accelerate the growth of clean energy so that America is less dependent on energy from the Middle East.”** -- 88% of voters, including 79% of conservative Republicans, agree. **64% of conservative Republicans strongly agree.**
- **“We should accelerate the growth of clean energy so that American innovation can create economic growth and jobs at home.”** -- 89% of voters, including 77% of conservative Republicans, agree. **54% of conservative Republicans strongly agree.**
- **“We should accelerate the growth of clean energy so that America can have cleaner, healthier air and less pollution at home.”** -- 91% of voters, including 80% of conservative Republicans, agree. **52% of conservative Republicans strongly agree.**

Voters want clean energy because they believe that it will lead to reduced pollution, economic growth, and less dependence on foreign energy sources.

VOTERS SUPPORT BASIC RESEARCH, AND CLEAN ENERGY PORTFOLIO STANDARDS

Supporting the idea of clean energy in the abstract is a winning message with voters. When talking about the specific *policies* that can undergird that message, there are many elements - - rooftop solar, net metering, basic research, portfolio standards -- that garner significant support from across the political spectrum.

- Some 85% of voters overall say that “we should **support homeowners who lease rooftop solar panels from private companies** to power their own homes and not fine them for doing so.” Conservative Republicans are just as likely as voters overall to say they support (84%) or *strongly support* (58%) this message.
- We also found eight out of ten voters (80%) and two thirds (66%) of conservative Republicans saying they support the idea that “where utilities have a monopoly on providing power to consumers, they should be **required to have clean energy as one of the sources of power** they generate.”
- Furthermore, seven out of ten (71%) voters and nearly six out of ten (58%) conservative Republicans say they support the idea that “we should **increase government funding for basic research into clean energy technology** without picking winners and losers, launching a ‘space race’ style effort to reach new energy frontiers.”

REPUBLICAN VOTERS WANT TO DEPOLITICIZE CLIMATE AND SEE VALUE IN CLEAN ENERGY BEYOND ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

The issue of the environment and climate change will no doubt be raised on the campaign trail in 2016. Overall, 73% of voters told us that they think the climate is changing and that mankind probably plays some kind of role in contributing to that change, whether a little or a lot.

Most Republicans do believe that the climate is changing and that mankind is probably contributing to that change. Some 56% of Republicans (54% of conservative Republicans) say that the climate is changing and that mankind is either “contributing a lot” to the change or “probably contributing a little” to the change. Less than a third of Republicans (29%) think that the climate is changing due purely to natural cycles, and only 9% think that the climate is not changing at all.

Democrats have a consistent message focused on the urgency of the climate problem and the need for left-of-center solutions, including more government regulation. We tested how five potential conservative messages matched up against a standard Democratic message on the issue.

The most successful counters to the left's climate change message was **not** a message that dismissed the importance of climate or suggested there's no reason to focus on the issue; instead, **the most successful contrasts depoliticized climate and emphasized the other benefits of clean energy.**

For each message, we contrasted a potential right-of-center clean energy or climate message against a summary position typical of that used by the left: "Candidate A says climate change is an urgent challenge and therefore we need to strengthen the EPA's restrictions on carbon emissions and significantly subsidize clean energy."

- When the contrasting "Candidate B" message promotes expanding clean energy **"regardless of the debate over climate, because it will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce air pollution, and improve public health,"** the message wins three out of four voters, including over eighty percent of conservative Republicans.
- When framed as **"even if we aren't certain what the climate will be decades from now we should accelerate clean energy now to minimize the risk of serious climate change effects or the need for harsh regulation,"** this message defeats the "Candidate A" message by over a two-to-one margin while still retaining the support of three quarters of conservative Republicans.
- Acknowledging the challenge of climate change and promoting **"an approach that is market-based instead of one driven by more top-down government regulation"** divides the overall electorate in the contrast with "Candidate A," but hangs on to very large proportions of Republicans (69%).
- A message that says **"the science around climate change is not at all clear, so the government should focus on other, more important issues"** somewhat predictably does less well with independent voters, winning over only 34% of them in contrast with "Candidate A." What may be surprising, however, is that this message also does less well with *conservative Republicans*, with a third of conservative Republicans breaking away to support the left.
- Finally, when contrasting Candidate A's climate message with a message that suggests **"it does not matter what the United States does about clean energy, because countries like China will never curb their carbon emissions,"** not only does Candidate B lose that contrast by a thirty-seven point margin, they lose 40% of conservative Republicans to the left's messaging on the issue, making this the least successful contrast both overall and with conservatives.

For whom would you be more likely to vote? (VS CANDIDATE A DEM CLIMATE MESSAGE)	OVERALL	INDEPENDENTS	GOP	CONS GOP
Candidate B says we should expand the use of clean energy regardless of the debate over climate , because it will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce air pollution, and improve public health .	76%	75%	83%	82%
Candidate B says even if we aren't certain what the climate will be decades from now , we should accelerate clean energy now to minimize the risk of serious climate change effects or the need for harsh regulation.	65%	67%	76%	75%
Candidate B says climate change is a challenge , and we need an approach that is market-based instead of one driven by more top-down government regulation.	47%	48%	69%	72%
Candidate B says the science around climate change is not at all clear, so the government should focus on other, more important issues .	36%	34%	62%	64%
Candidate B says it does not matter what the United States does about clean energy, because countries like China will never curb their carbon emissions .	29%	31%	49%	53%

Voters of all stripes, it seems, support accelerating the development and use of clean energy, and Republican voters support policies that can achieve that goal. Republicans and conservatives do not gravitate toward the left's messaging and policy prescriptions on these issues, but do support center-right messaging and ideas that promote clean energy and do so without further polarizing the debate over climate change.

METHODOLOGY

From August 24-27, 2015, Echelon Insights - in partnership with North Star Opinion Research and Public Opinion Strategies - fielded a live-interview telephone survey to both cell and landline telephones, completing 1200 interviews with registered voters nationwide and completing additional interviews with Republican voters in order to reach an oversample of 500 Republicans. This oversample was then weighted back to the appropriate sample proportion in the overall results. Forty percent of all interviews were conducted with respondents on a cell phone. The margin of sampling error is +/- 2.8% for the overall sample and larger for subgroup analysis, at the 95% confidence level.