

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Support for Policies to Curb Warming Slips as Economy Takes Toll**

**MOST RESIDENTS STILL FAVOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE BUT PARTISAN SPLIT WIDENS**

SAN FRANCISCO, California, July 29, 2009—Solid majorities of Californians favor state policies to curb global warming, according to a survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) with support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. But in a year that has seen both a worsening recession and state budget crisis, residents' support for urgent action on climate change has slipped and a partisan divide on the issue has widened.

Most residents (66%) support the 2006 California law (AB 32) that requires greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020. Support has declined 7 points from July 2008 (73%) and 12 points from 2007 (78%). The decline is sharpest among Republicans (57% 2008, 43% today).

While most see global warming as a threat (47% very serious, 28% somewhat serious) to the economy and quality of life in the state, the percentage of residents who categorize the threat as very serious has declined over the past two years (54% 2007, 52% 2008, 47% today). Residents are divided over whether the state government should take action to reduce emissions right away (48%) or wait until the economy and state budget situation improve (46%). In July 2008, when the plan to implement AB 32 was being discussed, a majority (57%) said the government should adopt it right away rather than wait (36%).

"Californians clearly support policies to improve the environment," says Mark Baldassare, president and CEO of PPIC. "But in the current economic climate their support has dropped a notch."

Baldassare also notes the partisan rancor over climate change in Congress—where the House of Representatives has passed the first federal global warming bill—that may affect attitudes in the state.

"On environmental issues where we saw more consensus in California, we're now seeing more partisanship, and that may reflect the national debate."

The survey finds partisan divisions on a number of questions related to climate change:

- **Effects of global warming:** Californians are nearly as likely today (61%) as they were last year (64%) to say the effects of global warming are already occurring, and they are more likely to say so than adults nationwide (53%), according to a March Gallup poll. Across parties today, solid majorities of Democrats (76%) and independents (61%) agree, compared to just 36 percent of Republicans. And one in three Republicans (34%) say global warming will never happen, an increase of 10 points since last year (24%).
- **Belief that government should regulate emissions:** While 76 percent of residents and majorities across party lines think the government should regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power

plants, cars, and factories, Democrats (86%), and independents (79%) are far more likely to think so than Republicans (54%).

- **A cap and trade system:** While a plurality of Californians (49% support, 40% oppose) support a cap and trade program to curb emissions, there is a sharp partisan split over the idea of buying and selling emissions permits: 57 percent of Democrats favor it and 55 percent of Republicans oppose it. Independents are divided (47% support, 44% oppose).
- **Carbon tax:** Californians are more in favor (56% support, 35% oppose) of taxing companies for their emissions but are sharply divided along party lines on this issue as well, with 73 percent of Democrats in favor and 60 percent of Republicans opposed.

However, Californians across party lines favor the requirement that automakers reduce emissions from new cars (90% Democrats, 81% independents, 55% Republicans). They also support proposals that utilities be required to increase use of renewable energy sources (91% Democrats, 85% independents, 71% Republicans), buildings be required to be more energy efficient (86% Democrats, 77% independents, 63% Republicans), industrial and commercial facilities be required to reduce emissions (91% Democrats, 81% independents, 63% Republicans), and local governments change land use and transportation planning so that people can drive less (87% Democrats, 79% independents, 62% Republicans).

## EXPAND OFFSHORE DRILLING? 51 PERCENT SAY YES

For only the second time since PPIC began asking the question in 2003, more Californians support expanding oil drilling off the coast than oppose it (51% favor, 43% oppose), the same as last year (51% favor, 45% oppose).

On the question of building more nuclear power plants, Californians are divided (46% favor, 48% oppose), as they were last year (44% favor, 50% oppose).

There is considerably more support for addressing the country's energy needs and reducing dependence on foreign oil in other ways. An overwhelming majority (82% favor, 16% oppose) say automakers should be required to improve fuel efficiency, and support is nearly as high (79% favor, 18% oppose) for increasing federal funding to develop wind, solar, and hydrogen energy technology.

## SATISFACTION WITH AIR QUALITY INCREASES

Californians' views about air quality have seen a significant shift. Twenty-three percent describe regional air pollution as a big problem, an 11-point drop since last year (34%) and the smallest percentage since PPIC began asking the question in June 2000. Today, residents in the Central Valley (36%), Los Angeles (30%) and Inland Empire (27%) are more likely to characterize air pollution as a big problem. This is a drop of 17 points in Los Angeles and 15 points in the Central Valley from last year. Among racial/ethnic groups, the percentage of Latinos who say air pollution is a big problem is down 15 points (30% today, 45% 2008).

About one in four Californians (24%) are very satisfied with the air quality in their region today, a 7-point increase from last year and a new high since PPIC first asked the question in 2006.

Yet, 42 percent of residents say they or an immediate family member suffers from asthma or respiratory problems, similar to last year and 5 points higher than in July 2003 (37%). Central Valley residents (51%) are the most likely to say this, followed by those in the Inland Empire (44%), Orange/San Diego Counties (42%), Los Angeles (40%), and the San Francisco Bay Area (40%). Among blacks, 61 percent say they or a household member has one of these health conditions, compared to less than half of Latinos (46%), Asians (41%), or whites (40%). Californians are divided on whether they think air pollution is a more serious health threat in lower-income areas than other areas in their region (48% yes, 46% no).

Residents are still supportive of toughening air pollution standards in four areas:

- Diesel engine vehicles, such as truck and buses (76% yes, 21% no)
- Commercial and industrial activities (75% yes, 21% no)
- New passenger vehicles, such as cars, trucks, and SUVs (71% yes, 26% no)
- Agriculture and farm activities (56% yes, 36% no)

## **GOVERNOR'S APPROVAL RATING HITS NEW LOW, OBAMA'S DIPS**

The PPIC Survey, which began before an agreement was announced on the state budget on July 20 and concluded just afterward, finds Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's approval rating at a record-low 28 percent. Approval of a California governor has not been this low since August 2003 (26% approve, 67% disapprove), when then-Governor Gray Davis was facing a recall and budget standoff with the legislature. The governor's approval rating for handling environmental issues has also declined (35% approve, 43% disapprove) since last July (46% approve, 36% disapprove).

The legislature's approval rating, at 17 percent, has also sunk to a record low.

A record-low 14 percent of Californians say the state is headed in the right direction. Just 18 percent expect good financial times, close to the record lows of 15 percent (June 2008, July 2008).

President Obama's approval rating (65% vs. 27% disapprove) remains high but has dipped since May (72% approve, 20% disapprove). Most Democrats (87%) and independents (65%) approve of the president, as do majorities across regions and demographic groups. But a majority of Republicans (64%) disapprove. Most Californians (58%) approve of Obama's handling of environmental issues, but they are divided along party lines (75% Democrats, 59% independents, 27% Republicans).

## **MORE KEY FINDINGS**

- **Wildfire worries top list of concerns about warming** — page 9  
 Asked about specific possible effects of global warming, Californians are most likely to express concerns about wildfires (59%) and droughts (55%).
- **Californians shift views on federal government action** — page 21  
 Last year, 66 percent of Californians said the federal government was not doing enough to address global warming, compared to 48 percent today. Opinions of state and local government action to address warming have changed less dramatically.
- **Gas prices down, but residents still feel pain at the pump** — page 22  
 Californians (69%) are less likely than last year (76%) to report that gas prices are a financial hardship. But large majorities of some groups do, particularly Latinos (85%) and residents with annual household incomes under \$40,000 (83%). And although the percentage of Californians who drive to work alone has declined 12 points since 2002, commuting patterns among employed Californians (63% drive alone, 16% carpool, 9% take public transit) are similar to last year.
- **Support for more efficient use of transportation resources, water** — page 23  
 Three in four residents (77%) say the state should focus transportation planning dollars on expanding public transit and using the existing network more efficiently, up 10 points since August 2004 (67%). Just 18 percent say the state should focus on building freeways and highways. Regarding future water needs, half (50%) prefer that the state focus on conservation and efficient use of the current supply, while 43 percent favor building storage systems and increasing the water supply.
- **Concerns about water increase** —page 27  
 Air pollution and vehicle emissions still top the list when Californians are asked to name the most important environmental issue, as they have in the past (20% today, 23% 2008). But 18 percent name water supply and drought as most important issue, up 13 points from last year.

## **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

This is the 100th PPIC Statewide Survey, a series that has generated a database of the responses of more than 214,000 Californians. It is the ninth survey on the environment since 2000 and is part of an annual series conducted with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The survey is intended to inform policymakers and encourage discussion about environmental issues. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,501 California adult residents reached by landline and cell phones throughout the state. Interviews took place from July 7–21, 2009, and were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Korean. The sampling error for all adults is  $\pm 2$  percent. For subgroups it is larger. For more information on methodology, see pages 25–26.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

PPIC is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett. As a private operating foundation, PPIC does not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office.

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