PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

MEMORANDUM

TO: LARRY WARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MICHIGAN CONSERVATIVE ENERGY FORUM

FROM: LORI WEIGEL, PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

DATE: JANUARY 14, 2014

RE: NEW MICHIGAN POLLING SHOWS STRONG SUPPORT FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

Public Opinion Strategies recently completed a survey of 600 voters throughout Michigan regarding their perceptions of renewable energy and energy efficiency.[1] Voters express overwhelmingly positive views of specific proposals to engage in energy efficiency and increasing use of renewable energy. Voters believe this is an area in which the state must take the lead given perceived gridlock at the federal level. In fact, voters view state legislative candidates who support such bold policy initiatives favorably, and there is virtually no political downside to doing so. These dynamics hold true across the partisan spectrum, as majorities of conservative GOP voters espouse support for all of the policy initiatives tested.

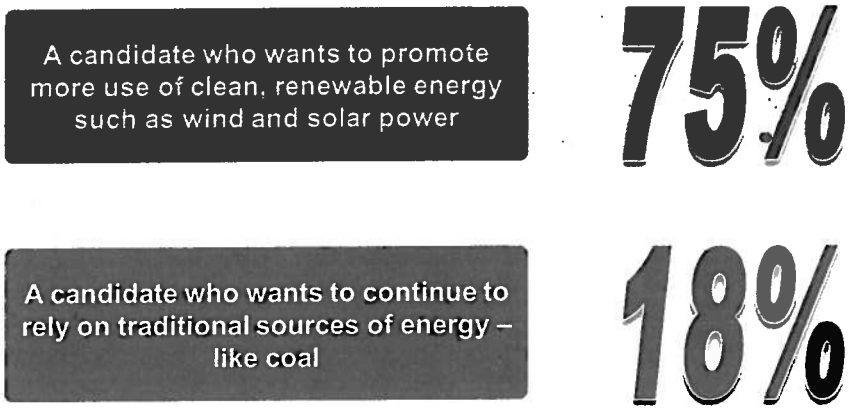
Specifically, the survey found:

- **Voters look positively on Michigan leaders who move the state toward a cleaner energy future.** While generally voters believe that energy ought to be a national priority, they are so concerned about the gridlock they see in Washington that they want leadership at the state level. More than four-in-five agree that *"Washington can't seem to get anything done these days. So if we want to move toward a better energy future, Michigan needs to boldly lead in transitioning away from older energy sources toward cleaner, renewable energy."* This includes 70 percent of Republicans who agree.

- **In addition, the electorate is favorably impressed if a state legislative candidate does espouse a shift in current practices and policies.** When asked to choose between two candidates with very different positions on clean energy policy, there is no contest as to which one every sub-group of Michigan voters chooses:

[1] **Methodology:** Public Opinion Strategies conducted a telephone survey of N=600 voters throughout the state of Michigan. The survey was conducted December 9-11, 2013 and has an overall margin of error of +4.0%. Sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. The sample is proportional throughout the state by county and demographically representative of the electorate. Interviews were conducted both on traditional land lines and cell phones. The survey was accompanied by four focus groups of center/right voters in the Grand Rapids and suburban Detroit metro area. Public Opinion Strategies is the largest Republican polling firm in the nation. They count 75 GOP Members of Congress, 15 U.S. Senators and 6 Governors as their clients. They currently co-conduct the NBC Wall Street Journal poll as well as quarterly surveys for CNBC.

"In thinking about elections for State Legislature in your area next year, for which of the following candidates would you be most likely to vote..."



GOP voters respond similarly – in fact, they are twice as likely to say they would vote for the pro-clean energy candidate (60 percent) as one who advocates for traditional energy sources (28 percent).

- **Voters will back candidates who demonstrate support for clean energy policy.** Unlike social issues, federal health care laws, or the economy; relatively few voters view energy as a litmus test. In fact, only two percent of the voters – and a similar two percent of Tea Party supporters - espouse anti-renewable energy positions in the survey *and* indicate that they would vote against a candidate whose position differed from their own.

- **Michigan voters assert repeatedly a desire to transition Michigan away from coal and toward renewable sources of energy.** On multiple questions, survey respondents repeatedly indicate a preference for clean, renewable sources of energy:

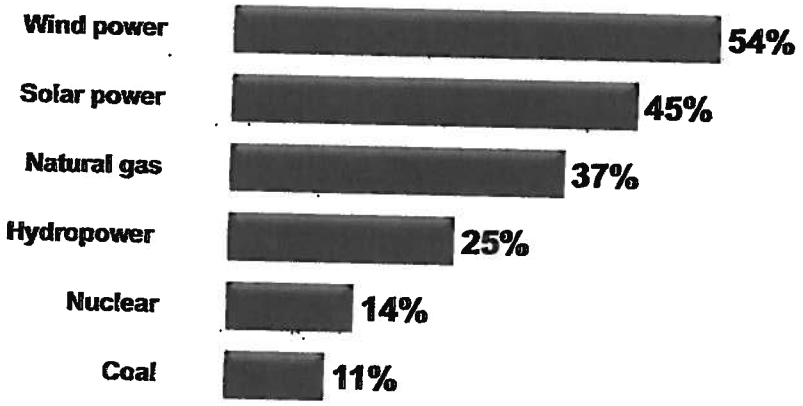
    - Three-quarters (75 percent) say that "we should start replacing coal with other energy sources like wind and solar power." A majority of 54 percent say they strongly agree with this view. Agreement is solid across the partisan spectrum, including among 61 percent of Republicans, 75 percent of independents and 86 percent of Democrats.

    - Michigan voters, including conservative voters, described wind energy in overwhelmingly positive attributes, including as "clean," "safer," "(an) opportunity," "renewable," "the future," and something that "will have to be part of the mix of our energy solutions."

    - Therefore, it is not surprising that when voters were asked which sources of energy they would want to encourage in Michigan, wind energy topped the list, as seen in the following graph:

Sources of Energy Want to Encourage

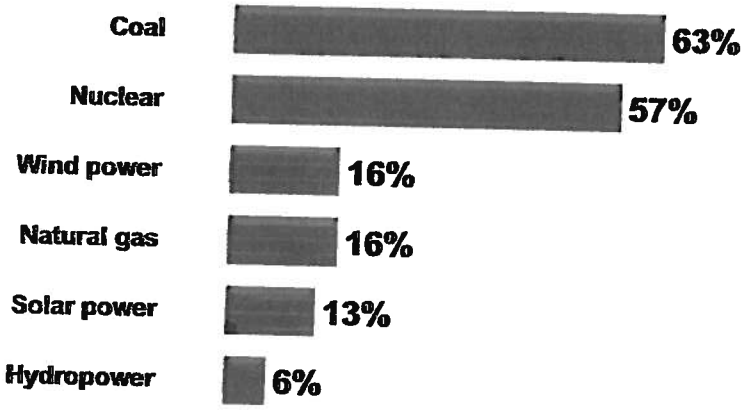
"Which one of the following sources of energy would you want to ENCOURAGE the use of here in Michigan? ***IF RESPONSE GIVEN THEN ASK:*** *And which would you NEXT most want to encourage the use of?"*



- Conversely, the electorate would prefer to discourage the use of coal as a source of energy as depicted here:

Sources of Energy Want to Discourage

"Which one of the following sources of energy would you want to DISCOURAGE the use of here in Michigan? ***IF RESPONSE GIVEN THEN ASK:*** *And which would you NEXT want to discourage the use of?"*

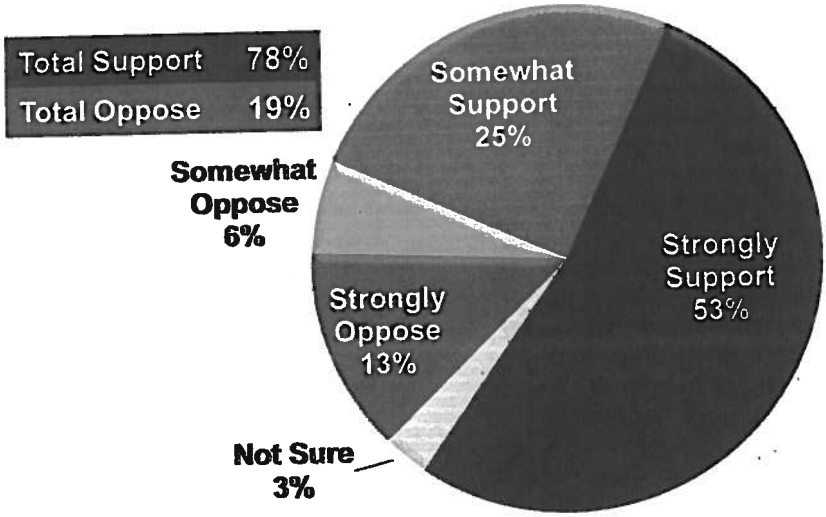


- Coal tended to be associated with "dirty" and "old," and voters were often surprised to hear the proportion of Michigan electricity produced at coal-burning power plants.

- **State voters demonstrate very strong support for a renewable energy standard.** Fully 78 percent indicate support for "a policy to require Michigan's electric utilities to transition away from generating electricity mostly from coal, and instead have at least thirty percent of our electricity come from renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydropower energy by the year 2035." Fewer than one-in-five (19 percent) oppose the policy. Nine-in-ten Democrats (90 percent), 74 percent of independents, and two-thirds (66 percent) of Republican voters support the policy.

Views of 30% Renewable Energy Standard by 2035

"If there was a policy to require Michigan's electric utilities to transition away from generating electricity mostly from coal, and instead have at least thirty percent of our electricity come from renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydropower energy by the year 2035, does that sound like something you would support or oppose?"



- **In fact, if it were up to Michigan voters, the standard would be far higher.** Michigan voters say that if it were up to them, an average of 57% of their energy would come from renewable sources. Conservative and independent voters explained their support for these policies due to the numerous benefits they ascribed to renewable energy during the focus groups, including:

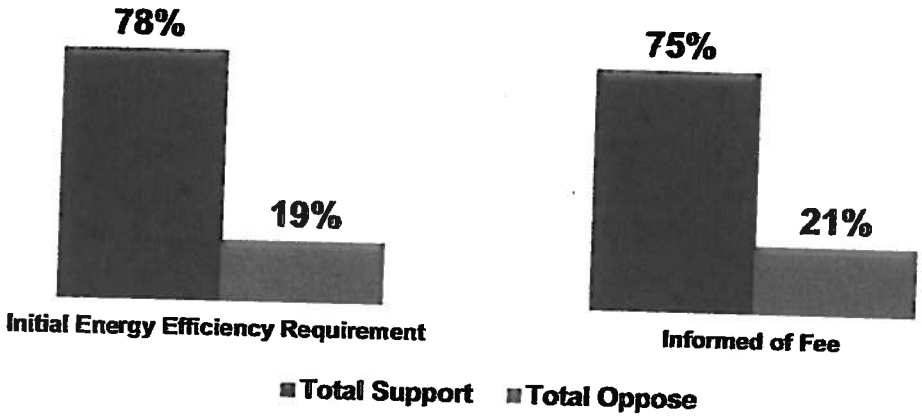
  - Benefit to clean air/reducing pollution;
  - The related benefit to public health (most strongly advocated by respondents who told us they have children with asthma);
  - The benefit for the environment;
  - The benefit to the state economy and jobs in a sector they see as promising and full of opportunities, and
  - Related to this, they perceive a benefit in creating energy in Michigan and not elsewhere.

- **Support for energy efficiency is even stronger.** Fully 84 percent indicate support for requiring *"Michigan's electric utilities to provide more programs through which customers can affordably make energy efficiency upgrades to their homes and businesses."* A majority of 51 percent register strong support. Only 14 percent of the state's electorate indicates opposition to the policy, with a mere 7 percent strongly opposed, and another 2 percent unsure of their views on this.

- **Support for energy efficiency is wide spread and broad-based.** A majority of all key sub-groups in the state indicate support for an energy efficiency requirement, including...
    - 81 percent of women and 88 percent of men;
    - 95 percent of Democrats, 82 percent of independents, and 74 percent of GOP voters;
    - 66 percent of self-identified Tea Party voters;
    - 82 percent of "swing" legislative voters;
    - 85 percent of voters under age 35, 86 percent of 35-44 year olds, 83 percent of 45-64 year olds, and 84 percent of seniors;
    - 88 percent of Detroit media market residents, 88 percent in the Northern/U.P. markets, 80 percent of Grand Rapids market residents and 80 in the Flint market;
    - 94 percent of African Americans and 84 percent of white voters; and
    - More than three-quarters of every income category.

- **Support for the energy efficiency requirement does not waiver when voters are informed of the fee on energy bills associated with the program.** When told that *"here in Michigan energy efficiency programs have been financed through a fee of one dollar and fifty cents per month on every electricity bill since 2008. Knowing this, do you support or oppose requiring Michigan's electric utilities to provide more programs through which customers can affordably make energy efficiency upgrades to their homes and businesses?"* Support remains solid, as one can see in the graph below, as three-quarters of the electorate supports the measure even after hearing about the personal financial impact.

Reaction to Energy Efficiency Requirement
Initially and After Being Informed of the Associated Fee



Notably, many individuals in the focus groups indicated having benefitted from energy efficiency programs and rebates. They were among the strongest proponents of the program and rejected the idea it was a tax. "It is a tax only on people who refuse to do anything (toward becoming more energy efficient)," stated one conservative Grand Rapids woman.

- **In summary, Michigan voters espouse strong support for bold state action to transition to renewable energy and greater energy efficiency in the state.** These views transcend party lines, geographic areas, and other demographic distinctions. Moreover, they benefit the candidates which champion them, as voters see a great need for leadership at the state level given dysfunction in DC.