



## **PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES**

*Turning Questions Into Answers.*

### **OHIO: RENEWABLE ENERGY AND PUBLIC OPINION**

*Public Opinion Strategies conducted this survey of 600 registered voters throughout the state of Ohio on September 18-20, 2007. The margin of error associated with a sample of this type is  $\pm 4.0\%$ .*

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

##### **Eight-in-ten Ohioans support setting a renewable energy standard for utilities in the state.**

- Specifically, 80% of the state's voters say they support "setting a standard for renewable energy in Ohio, which would require utilities to obtain twenty percent of our electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar by the year 2025." Nearly half (49%) say that they *strongly* support setting such a requirement for utilities. A mere 16% oppose this idea. A few key distinctions among sub-groups:
  - ✓ Support stands at 74% or higher in every region of the state.
  - ✓ Support is just as high in rural areas (80%) and small towns (81%) as in large cities (84%).
  - ✓ Three-quarters or more of every income group support a renewable energy standard.
  - ✓ While there is a partisan dynamic, support is strong across the political spectrum. Fully 89% of Democrats, 76% of Independents and 71% of Republicans back this idea.
  - ✓ Among the critical group of swing voters who are undecided as to which party's candidate they would vote support for State Legislator, a renewable energy standard is just as popular (76% support).
  - ✓ Voters in Senate districts which are up in 2008 overwhelmingly support the standard (77% of those in GOP held seats and 72% of those in Democrat-held seats). Likewise support is strong in both GOP held House seats (77%) and Democrat held House seats (82%).
- By a nine-to-one margin, voters say their Legislator's support of a renewable energy standard would be a positive in their vote decision. A majority (54%) of the electorate say they are more likely to vote for a legislator who "voted in favor of legislation setting a renewable energy standard," while only 6% are less likely and 37% say it makes no difference in their vote decision. This positive view is held by a majority of constituents of GOP legislators *and* Democrat legislators (data is within margin of error).
- In addition, supporters of the renewable energy standard overwhelmingly say that if the renewable energy standard were to become law, they would want the law enforced. Fully 87% of those who support the renewable energy standard agree with a statement saying that "utilities should be fined if they do not meet the renewable energy standard" (60% strongly agree).

##### **More broadly, a tremendous majority of Ohio voters prefer that the state address its energy needs by increasing energy efficiency and the use of clean energy, rather than building new coal-fired or nuclear power plants.**

- Eight-in-ten voters prefer to address Ohio's current energy situation by "increasing energy efficiency and using more clean energy sources like wind and solar power" rather than by "building new coal-fired power plants in Ohio" (14%). Overwhelming majorities of voters across the state and of every

demographic and partisan group side with a renewable energy approach to address the state's energy needs, including 72% of Republicans, 78% of Independents and 88% of Democrats.

- Similarly, when faced with the same choice but juxtaposing nuclear power versus renewable sources, voters overwhelmingly choose the latter again. Fully 78% prefer addressing the state's energy situation by increasing energy efficiency and using more clean energy sources, rather than by "building new nuclear power plants in Ohio" (19%). Again, clean energy is preferred by every single key voter sub-group in the state.

**In fact, voters go so far as to say that building new coal-fired power plants or new nuclear power plants ought to be a "last resort" for the state.**

- Three-quarters (74%) of the electorate agree that "building new coal-fired power plants ought to be a last resort, because of the pollution and health impacts associated with burning coal" (52% strongly agree).
- Similarly, 70% agree that "building new nuclear power plants ought to be a last resort, because of the hazardous waste and potential security risks" (51% strongly agree).
- A majority of voters in every region of the state and of all key voter groups agree that more coal-fired or nuclear plants should be a last resort strategy.

**An overwhelming majority say they would be willing to pay higher energy prices to increase the use of clean energy.**

- Perhaps the most compelling finding from the survey is that 91% of Ohioans say they would be willing to pay higher energy prices in order to increase the amount of the state's energy needs which are met by renewable energy. Given a range of amounts, more voters choose the highest possible increase in their own bills than any other option as one can see below:

Willing to pay how much more to increase renewable energy use in Ohio:

35%	Willing to pay \$10 more per month
24%	Willing to pay \$5 more per month
9%	Willing to pay \$2 more per month
22%	Willing to pay \$1 more per month or less

**91% total willing to pay more each month in higher energy bills for greater use of clean energy**

- Willingness to pay higher energy bills is ubiquitous across the state, as fully 89% of the lowest income households and 91% of typically cost-sensitive seniors say they would be willing to pay more in order to increase the amount of Ohio's energy needs met by renewable energy sources. More than eight-in-ten customers of the major utilities in the state say they would be willing to pay more to increase the use of wind and solar power meeting their energy needs.
- This consensus among the electorate may not be so surprising, knowing that voters perceive clean energy as a stabilizing force for energy prices. More than three-quarters (78%) agree with the idea that "increasing our use of abundant, clean sources of energy like wind and solar power will provide more stable energy prices for consumers in the long run" (46% strongly agree).

*In summary, there is overwhelming support across the political spectrum and across the state for a renewable energy standard. In fact, voters indicate they would be positively impressed with a Legislator who supports the standard and would take this into account at the ballot box. More generally, Ohioans express an overwhelming preference for increasing the use of clean energy and investing in energy efficiency in the state. By nearly a six-to-one margin, they reject an approach to meeting Ohio's energy needs that relies on building more new coal-fired or nuclear power plants, suggesting this instead should be a last resort in the state's strategy. Moreover, voters are willing to "put their money where their mouth is" by paying higher energy prices.*

The survey was conducted by Lori Weigel, a partner with Public Opinion Strategies, the largest Republican polling firm in the nation with offices in Washington, Denver and Los Angeles. Public Opinion Strategies' clients include 55 Republican Members of Congress, 8 Governors, 18 U.S. Senators and numerous Fortune 500 companies. Weigel serves as the political pollster for *Rocky Mountain News* and *News4* in Denver. The firm is the GOP partner on both the *NBC/Wall Street Journal* and National Public Radio media polls.