

Hart Research Associates

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin and Corrie Hunt
DATE: January 5, 2017
RE: Public Opinion on Energy, the Environment, and Climate

On behalf of the Center for American Progress, Hart Research Associates conducted a telephone survey among 1,002 registered voters nationwide who voted in the 2016 presidential election. This research also included an oversample of 477 voters in states that will draw added media and policy attention due to competitive 2018 Senate races.¹ The nationwide sample and the battleground sample are representative of voters by demographics and by 2016 presidential vote.

Our research found that, notwithstanding deep divisions in the electorate, voters' priorities for the environment, climate, and energy align closely with progressive values. Overwhelming majorities of voters, regardless of their party affiliation, favor protections for clean air and clean drinking water, actions to combat climate change, policies that protect public lands and wildlife for future generations, and the promotion of renewable energy. By similarly wide margins, voters oppose policies that could jeopardize environmental protections, make climate change worse, or threaten public health.

This broad and deep foundation of support for environmental protections and clean energy should garner bipartisan appeal in Congress in debates over energy, climate, and environmental policy. Although voters' initial trust in President-elect Trump's approach to energy and environmental issues divides sharply along party lines, support for his agenda falls significantly as voters across the political spectrum hear arguments from both sides of the debate. Regardless of whether they trust Democrats in Congress or Republicans in Congress or President-elect Trump, voters put a priority on protecting clean air, clean water, and public lands.

Overall, our research finds that those who oppose the stated policies of Donald Trump and congressional leaders have an opportunity to make inroads in Congress when pursuing two intertwined message objectives:

- ✓ ***Focus the public's attention on consequences of these policies, by emphasizing their negative impacts***—on our clean air, clean water, and public health—and calling on voters' sense of moral obligation to protect important natural places for future generations. Be as clear and concrete as possible when describing potential harm, such as by naming specific chemicals and pollutants, and pointing to particular communities or at-risk places such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

¹ Senate battleground states for 2018: Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and West Virginia. These battleground states are based on the Cook Political Report's analysis of the 2018 election.

- ✓ **Make clear that oil and gas companies, coal companies, and other special interests are the driving force behind them.** Swing voters and many Trump voters—particularly in the industrial Midwest—are inclined to see these policies as a sell-out to millionaires, billionaires, and corporate special interests. By contrast, they respond favorably to the idea that we should stand up for every American's right to drink clean water, to breathe clean air, and to hike, hunt, and fish on their public lands.

Below, we discuss the key findings from the research in more detail.

1) The electorate remains sharply divided after the 2016 election, and these partisan divisions carry over into expectations for Trump on energy and the environment. However, according to the polling numbers, voters trust Democrats in Congress on issues related to energy and the environment more than they trust Republicans in Congress or President-elect Trump. This gap in trust is more pronounced when voters are asked about Republicans in Congress versus Trump, and is especially true in states that have competitive Senate races in 2018. As shown in more detail later in this memo, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle will need to prove to their constituents that they are working to protect clean water, clean air, and public lands.

- Debates over policies on energy and the environment are set against the backdrop of a divided electorate. Voters nationwide are evenly divided when it comes to their confidence in Trump to take the right positions on energy and what sources of energy we should be developing (46% are very or fairly confident, 48% are not confident), and are slightly less confident that Trump will take the right positions on environment and conservation (43% confident, 51% not confident). Voters in Senate battleground states, which Trump won by six points, have more faith in Trump in each of these domains (54% have confidence in Trump on energy issues, 49% have confidence in Trump on the environment and conservation).
- However, when respondents are forced to choose, the poll results showed that voters trust Democrats in Congress over Trump on environmental and energy issues (46% trust Democrats more, 32% trust Trump more), including among swing voters (39% Democrats, 22% Trump). In states that have a competitive Senate election in 2018, Democrats in Congress are deemed more trustworthy than Republicans in Congress, though only slightly more trustworthy than Trump. On issues involving energy and the environment, Democrats in Congress have a 13-point trust advantage over Republicans in Congress in states with competitive 2018 Senate races (39% trust Democrats more, 26% trust Republicans more) compared with a six-point advantage over Trump. This is

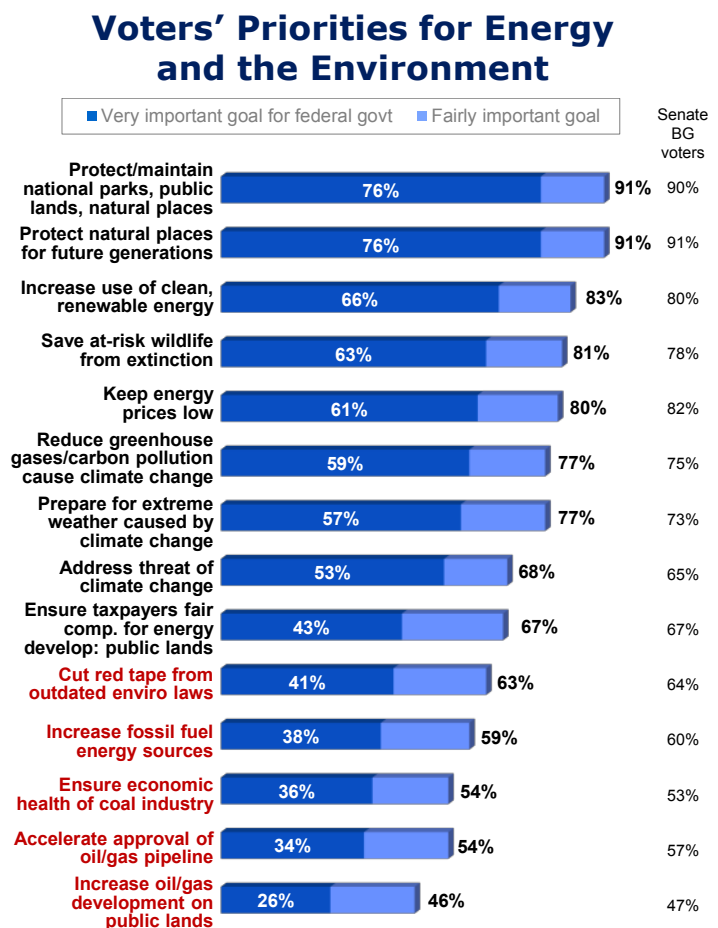
primarily due to skepticism among Trump voters about congressional Republicans; while 71% of Trump voters in Senate battlegrounds trust Trump more than Democrats in Congress, just 50% say the same about Republicans in Congress.

- Environmental organizations are far more trusted on energy and environmental issues than the coal industry (58% of voters trust environmental organizations, 19% trust the coal industry) and the oil and gas industry (61% environmental organizations, 13% oil and gas industry). This is true among swing voters and voters in Senate battleground states. Even voters in coal states trust environmental and conservation organizations (53%) more than the coal industry (23%).

2) Voters prioritize progressive goals for energy and the environment; pro-energy development goals are lower-tier priorities. The idea of protecting natural places resonates strongly with voters across party lines.

- Public opinion is far more aligned with progressive ideas on energy and the environment. Out of 14 goals and priorities tested, the top eight that voters rate as most important for the federal government are all progressive priorities. At least two in three voters rate each of the progressive priorities below as very or fairly important.

- The idea of protecting public lands has strong and broad appeal. Nine in 10 voters say that it is important to protect and maintain America's national parks, public lands, and natural places (91% important, including 76% very important) and to protect important natural places for future generations (91% important, 76% very important). These are the top priorities for voters nationwide and swing voters in Senate battlegrounds. Large majorities of Democrats (85% very important), independents (76%), and Republicans (66%)



agree that protecting and maintaining natural places should be a very important priority for the federal government.

- Pro-energy development goals such as accelerating approval of oil and gas pipelines (54% important, 34% very important), increasing oil and gas development on public lands (46% important, 26% very important), and ensuring the economic health of the coal industry (54% important, 36% very important) are lower priorities for voters.
- Climate change evokes strong partisan divisions, while support for clean energy cuts clearly across party lines. While Democrats rate increasing the use of clean, renewable energy (82% very important) as highly as reducing greenhouse gases that cause climate change (82% very important) and addressing climate change (82%), there is a marked drop-off in support for priorities that explicitly name climate change among swing voters and Republicans. **Instead of speaking in general terms about the need to address climate change, progressives should use concrete frames relating to clean energy and reducing carbon pollution, which are more broadly appealing.**
- Progressives have a strong advantage when voters are asked to choose between clean energy and oil and gas. In a head-to-head match-up, voters nationwide say that investing in clean, renewable energy sources (58%) should be a bigger priority than increasing production of traditional fossil fuel-based energy sources (23%). Swing voters (61% clean energy, 21% fossil-fuel energy) and battleground voters (55% clean, 28% fossil fuel) agree. Similarly, by four-to-one, voters say that protecting important natural places should be a bigger priority than increasing oil and gas development on public lands (67% protect natural places, 16% increase development on public land). Swing voters (72% natural places, 11% oil and gas), and even Trump voters (48% natural places, 26% oil and gas), agree that conservation should take precedence.

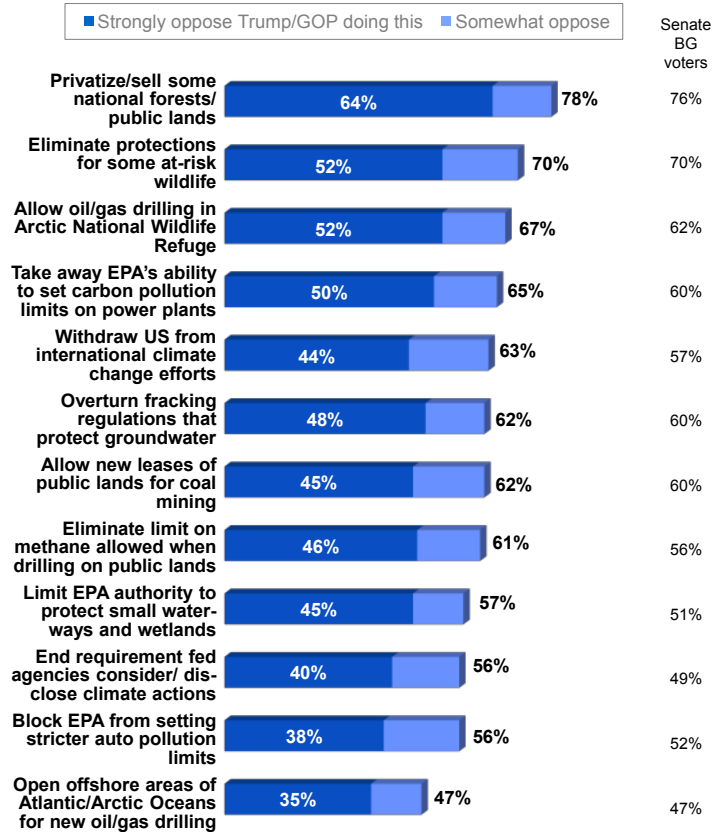
3) Trump's 100-day pledge for energy, absent any real details, receives mixed reactions from voters nationally but has more appeal to battleground voters. A focus on the specific policies of a Trump administration or of congressional Republicans produces stronger and broader opposition.

- When voters hear Trump's pledge to "cancel job-killing restrictions on the production of American energy, including shale energy and clean coal," they are inclined to respond along party lines. Despite holding progressive priorities for energy and the environment, 46% of voters nationwide and 49% of battleground voters have a favorable reaction to Trump's pledge. Clinton voters nationwide are overwhelmingly negative toward this pledge (15% favorable, 77% unfavorable), while Trump voters are overwhelmingly positive toward it (81% favorable, 11% unfavorable). Swing voters in Senate battleground states

represent a bigger challenge with a majority responding favorably to Trump’s pledge (53% favorable, 37% unfavorable).

- It will be important not to let the argument end with Trump’s proposal, but to provide specifics of what Trump or congressional Republican policies would look like. Nearly all of the specific policies that Trump or Republican leaders in Congress might propose are ideas that the majority of voters oppose, as the figure to the right shows. In particular, the idea of privatizing or selling off some areas of America’s national forests and public lands is wildly unpopular among voters nationwide (78% oppose, 64% strongly oppose), swing voters (83% oppose), and Trump voters (64%).
- Even though large majorities of voters oppose most of the specific policies that Trump or congressional Republicans might propose, many voters retreat to their partisan predispositions. Just half of voters nationwide (51%) and in Senate battleground states (47%) have an unfavorable opinion of the overall approach based on these specific policies. White voters without a college degree (54%), seniors (53%), and Republicans (77%) are among those most likely to have a favorable opinion. By contrast, Millennials (66%), African Americans (70%), and Democrats (84%) are most likely to have an unfavorable opinion.

Opposition to Specifics of the Trump-GOP Agenda



4) In a debate against Trump and congressional Republican energy policies, focusing on the impacts—including on clean air and clean water—and the importance of protecting our natural heritage wins the high ground.

- It is important to move the conversation away from the Trump/Congressional Republican talking points and to focus attention on the actual negative consequences of these policies. Voters have a number of major concerns about the consequences of the Trump/congressional Republican approach, but two

issues stand out as the biggest concerns: that the policies would contaminate our clean drinking waters supplies (74% say this is a very big concern), and that they would release chemicals that are hazardous to human health (72% very big concern). These are very major concerns for more than two in three swing voters and more than half of Trump voters.

- Six messages stand out as strongly appealing to swing voters. The messages in the following table are rated as very strong reasons to oppose Trump/congressional Republican policies for energy and the environment by majorities of swing voters and by Trump voters who are not favorable toward his environmental approach. The strongest message across target groups and battleground voters makes a moral argument for protecting these natural places for future generations. A corporate sellout message also makes a strong case, particularly among voters in the industrial Midwest.

Very Strong Reasons to Oppose Trump/Congressional Republican Policies for Energy and the Environment

	<u>Swing voters</u> %	<u>Persuadable Trump voters</u> %
Our parks, lands, waters, and wildlife are part of America's outdoor heritage that we all have a moral obligation to protect for children and grandchildren. It is our responsibility to protect this legacy so that we can guarantee that future generations can enjoy the beauty of our nation, learn about nature, and experience their heritage just like we did.	59	63
These policies are a sellout to the same old corporate interests , Washington lobbyists, and millionaires and billionaires who know how to game the system. A few powerful and well-connected people are angling to make a lot of money, but it will come at the expense of the rest of us. We need to stand up for every American's right to drink clean water, to breath clean air, and to hike, hunt, and fish on their public lands.	54	58
We have a responsibility to our children and grandchildren to address climate change by investing in sustainable energy sources and moving away from finite energy sources that pollute our air and water. The longer we put it off, the more expensive and painful it will be for our economy and our families to solve this problem.	58	54

Clean air and water is critical to the health of all Americans. Doctors, nurses, and public health experts warn us that air and drinking water pollution is a serious threat to our health, especially for the elderly and children. Pollution from power plants is not only one of the leading causes of catastrophic climate change—it leads to thousands of additional asthma attacks and heart attacks. It even increases the risk of premature death.

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**Swing
voters**
%

**Persuadable
Trump
voters**
%

America's natural areas and wildlife are going fast. **In the West, we lose a football field's worth of natural areas to human development every two and a half minutes.** One in five animals and plants in the United States is at risk of extinction. Instead of eliminating protections for our environment, **we must safeguard our remaining natural areas and wildlife habitat** so that they may be enjoyed by generations to come.

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These policies go too far. They are part of an **extreme partisan agenda that tips the scales too far toward fossil fuels, special interests, and the well-connected.** We need a balanced approach that grows America's renewable energy economy, protects our air, water, and wildlife, and that helps bring our country together around our shared values.

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- An all-encompassing message that emphasizes the consequences that the congressional Republican policies would have for public health, clean air, clean water, and our natural heritage is a strong counterpoint to the argument from Republicans in Congress. Opponents of Trump or congressional Republican policies can make a strong case using the message below against the pro-energy development argument. Opponents win this argument by 14 points among voters nationwide (36% agree with supporters, 50% agree with opponents) and importantly, by 21 points among Senate battleground voters (31% agree with supporters, 52% agree with opponents).

Supporters of Trump/Congressional Republican energy policies:

Supporters of these new policies say that for too long Washington has stood in the way of our nation's energy independence with needless and redundant regulations that have increased the cost of energy and had a devastating effect on job production. These proposals will allow us to take full advantage of America's abundant natural resources—including natural gas, oil, and coal. This approach will increase our supply of energy at home, lower fuel prices, create good-paying jobs, and reduce our reliance on foreign oil.

Opponents of Trump/Congressional Republican energy policies:

Opponents of these policies say that this fossil-fuel driven approach to energy will harm public health and the important natural places that are our heritage as Americans. These dangerous policies eliminate vital protections against pollution of the air we breathe and the water we drink and will increase carbon pollution that scientists say is responsible for climate change. We have a responsibility to our children and grandchildren to protect America's priceless natural heritage, and to preserve our clean air and clean water.