

**TO: Interested Parties**  
**FROM: Hart Research Associates**  
**DATE: February 10, 2020**  
**RE: Public Opinion on NEPA Reforms**

On behalf of the Center for American Progress, Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey of 1,000 registered voters nationwide. These interviews were conducted January 21 to 26, 2020. The sample is demographically and geographically representative of the electorate and consistent with the political dispositions of voters nationally, including in terms of 2016 vote.

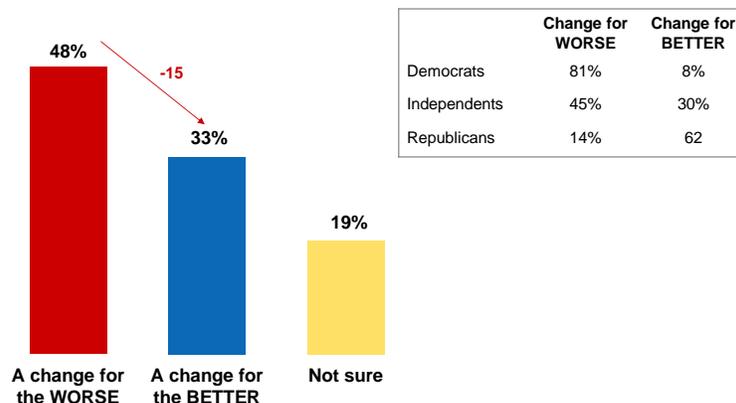
With high disapproval rates of Trump’s handling of the environment and climate change, there is an expectation among voters that any major change to environmental policy that Donald Trump would make would be for the worse. Against this backdrop, **our survey shows that the Trump administration’s proposed changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are extremely unpopular with voters across the political spectrum.** Even when pressure tested against arguments in favor of reducing environmental regulation to speed up the construction of infrastructure projects, there is broad opposition to the Trump administration’s proposal to change NEPA (55% are unfavorable, only 28% are favorable). Particularly, voters strongly support that NEPA presently protects clean air and clean water and requires public input, and are deeply concerned that the Trump administration’s proposed changes would put corporate polluters ahead of the environment and restrict community voices.

Below, we describe the key findings from the survey.

## 1. Donald Trump is not trusted on the environment.

- More than six in 10 voters disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling the environment (62% disapprove) and climate change (63% disapprove). Trump’s high rates of disapproval on the environment include majorities of men and women, all age groups, all education levels, and white, African-American, and Hispanic voters.
- Trump has very little credibility with voters in this domain. By 15 points, voters are more likely to say that if they heard Donald Trump made a major change in environmental policy, they expect it would be for the worse (48%) rather than for the better (33%).

*If you heard that Donald Trump was going to make a major change in environmental policy, do you think it is more likely to be... ?*



### **2. Environmental issues are highly salient to voters, large majorities of whom place a high priority on environmental goals relevant to NEPA, although there is limited awareness of NEPA itself.**

- Voters across party lines place a high priority on several environmental goals relevant to NEPA, particularly those that protect the public from the harmful effects of pollution. Nearly three in four voters (72%) say that protecting groundwater and drinking water sources from pollution is an extremely important priority for them, and 64% say the same about protecting the health and safety of residents in communities and neighborhoods from toxic pollution.
- However, most voters are not familiar with NEPA; only 20% say they have heard of it and know something about it.

### **3. Voters overwhelmingly support that NEPA protects air and water quality and ensures that the public has a say about the major development projects taking place in their own backyards.**

- After reading a basic description of NEPA, voters are overwhelmingly positive toward the policy; 80% say they have a favorable reaction to NEPA including 46% who are very favorable. Favorability toward NEPA spans the political spectrum and includes large majorities of Democrats (88%), independents (76%) and Republicans (74%).
- While large majorities of voters have positive reactions to each of the nine specific aspects of NEPA tested in the survey, several features rise to the top as highly popular across party lines:

*It ensures that federal agencies evaluate the impact of proposed projects on local air and water quality (88% favorable, including 63% very favorable).*

*It requires federal agencies to evaluate the degree to which proposed projects affect public health and safety in nearby communities (87% favorable, 64% very favorable).*

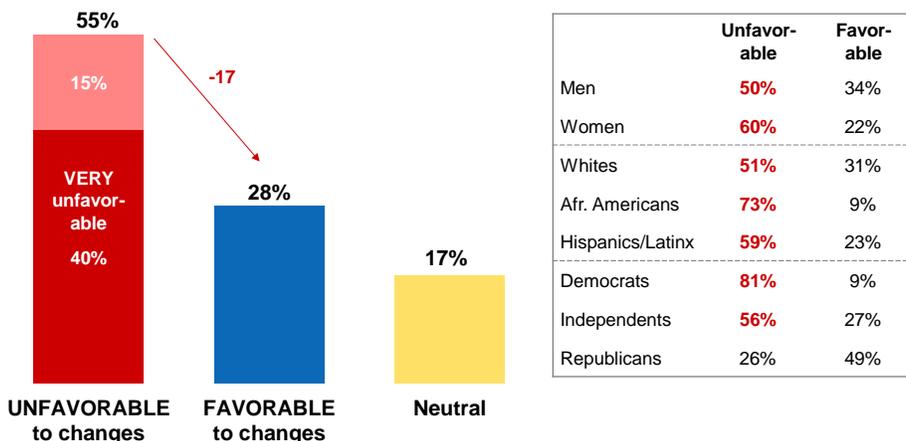
*It makes sure the public has a chance to review and give input on major projects before building and development starts (87% favorable, 57% very favorable).*

- NEPA's provisions on climate change (expectedly, and consistent with other surveys) evoke a more partisan reaction among voters. Democrats are strongly favorable to the requirement that federal agencies disclose the impact of proposed projects on climate change (70% very favorable), whereas favorability is less intense among independents (52% very favorable) and Republicans (36% very favorable).

### **4. There is broad opposition to the Trump administration's proposed changes to NEPA.**

- When described at a high level, by a 17-point margin, voters are unfavorable to the Trump administration's proposed changes that would weaken current environmental protections and public input requirements in order to, as claimed by the Trump administration, speed up the construction of major infrastructure and energy development projects. This includes a decisive majority of independent voters, who are unfavorable to the proposed changes to NEPA by 19 percentage points (56% unfavorable to 27% favorable).

*How do you feel about the Trump administration's proposed changes that would weaken current environmental protections and public notification requirements to speed up construction of major infrastructure and energy development projects?*



## 5. Three specific provisions of the Trump administration's proposed changes especially alienate voters: allowing conflicts of interest by putting companies in charge of their own reviews, taking communities out of the review process, and eliminating consideration of climate impacts.

- The most egregious of the proposed changes to NEPA is the Trump administration's plan to allow corporations and industries to conduct their own reviews of the environmental impact of their projects, rather than requiring independent federal government oversight and review (61% of voters are unfavorable, 51%<sup>1</sup> rank this as one of changes they oppose the most).
- Voters across party lines also have a strongly negative reaction to the Trump administration's proposal to limit the amount of input from the public for infrastructure or energy development projects, including from residents in nearby and surrounding communities (65% unfavorable, 42% rank this as one of the of the changes they oppose the most).
- Voters also did not like that the changes would eliminate the requirement that federal agencies consider the climate change impacts of proposed projects (59% unfavorable, 37% rank this as one of changes they oppose the most).
- Even after reading both sides of the debate, voters are solidly against the Trump administration's proposed changes to NEPA.

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of voters that ranked this as one of the three policy changes that they oppose the most out of eight changes tested.

### **6. The strongest case against the Trump administration's proposed changes to NEPA delineates the negative impact that the changes would have on public health and citizens' voices.**

- Out of eight messages tested, these two stood out as the strongest reasons to oppose the Trump administration's proposal to change NEPA, raising major concerns among voters across party lines.

*Air pollution can lead to pregnancy complications, cancer, asthma, heart problems, and even premature death. These policy changes remove important protections for clean air that protect the health of Americans, especially the most vulnerable among us, such as young children and the elderly (77% of voters say this raises major concerns).*

*These changes would strip American citizens of their right to have a say on major development projects built in their own backyards. It puts a huge amount of power in the hands of industry and will make it harder for local communities to raise concerns about the safety and environmental impact of infrastructure projects, including on their water supply and air quality (76% of voters say this raises major concerns).*

- Voters also have a strong sense that these changes would put the interests of corporate polluters ahead of the environment (75% say this is true) and that they would take us backwards on the progress we have made on clean air and clean water.