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Voters Strongly Support EPA Action on Smog

Voters in Potentially Impacted Regions Say Stricter Smog Rules More Likely to Create Jobs than Cost Jobs

To: The American Lung Association and Interested Parties
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A new bipartisan national survey of 2400 likely 2012 voters, which includes oversamples of four regions where potential impact is significant,¹ finds that an overwhelming bipartisan majority of American voters supports the efforts of the EPA to strengthen rules on smog-causing pollution.

Voters strongly believe that the EPA, not Congress, should set these standards. And even in the industrial, Midwestern states of Ohio and Michigan they reject the argument that stricter standards will damage the economy. In fact, a majority of voters in every region believes that stricter smog standards will spur innovation and actually create more new jobs.

Perhaps most important, after a balanced debate on the issue, with language based on that recently used by supporters of Congressional action, a more than two-to-one majority opposes Congressional action to stop the EPA. This includes a vast majority of independents who, on this issue, look much more like Democrats than Republicans.

Key Findings

- 1. Voters trust EPA more than Congress to set clean air standards.** EPA supporters win every element of this debate. Taken as a whole, the survey clearly indicates that voters strongly trust the EPA to deal with clean air standards more than Congress – even after opponents have subjected it to strong attacks over the past several months.
 - Congress is significantly less popular than either the EPA or the Clean Air Act. In fact, the EPA has seen its net favorability rating rise by 8 points (to +18) over the last four months while Congress' rating has dropped even further, from -13 to -27.
 - Only 17 percent of voters think the EPA is currently exceeding its legal mandate.

¹ Memo based on a national survey of 2,400 likely 2012 voters, including oversamples of 400 likely voters each in the following four regions: Florida, Ohio/Michigan, Minnesota/Wisconsin, North Carolina/Virginia. Conducted for the American Lung Association by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Moore Information, June 4-12, 2011. Margin of error for the full national sample is 3.7%. For half samples it is 4.9%. For each oversample region it is approximately 4.6% depending on sample size.

- A bipartisan 66 percent majority believes that EPA scientists, rather than Congress, should set pollution standards. This is despite opposing language arguing that our elected representatives in Congress would do a better job than “unelected bureaucrats at the EPA.”
2. **Voters overwhelmingly support tougher smog pollution standards, and reject Congressional action that would impede EPA from updating these standards.** Fully three-quarters of voters support “stricter limits” on smog emissions and three-quarters say that Congress should NOT stop the EPA from updating these smog standards.
 - After hearing a balanced debate on the issue, with messages based on the actual language used by opponents and supporters of the EPA, a strong 64 percent majority continues to oppose Congressional action to stop the EPA. Independents continue to oppose Congressional action by a more than two-to-one margin.
 3. **Voters soundly reject the argument that stricter smog standards will hurt the economy or cost jobs.** This economic critique is the centerpiece of the argument against stricter smog standards, but it does not find much traction with voters.
 - By a 65 to 30 percent margin, voters agree that “we can set stricter standards for smog pollution without damaging the economy.”
 - And by a 20-point margin (including a 14-point margin in Ohio and Florida), voters believe that updated EPA smog standards will boost, rather than harm, job creation by encouraging innovation and investment in new technologies.
 4. **Support for the EPA is robust across all regions of the country.** Even after messaging from opponents of the EPA, voters in every region of the country oppose Congressional action against the EPA by margins of at least 20 points. And support for the EPA was robust in each of the four regions we oversampled. In the Florida, Minnesota/Wisconsin and Virginia/North Carolina regions, support for the EPA generally tracked the national numbers. It was slightly lower, but still robust, in the Ohio/Michigan region, where even after messaging a 58 to 35 percent majority opposed Congressional action to prevent the EPA from updating smog standards.

EPA More Popular Than Congress, Voters Want to See More Aggressive EPA Action

The EPA enjoys relatively high ratings with a net +18 favorability rating (45 percent favorable, 27 percent unfavorable), especially when compared to Congress (-27). In fact, despite criticism over recent months, the EPA’s net rating is up 8 points since February, while Congress’ rating has dropped 14 points. Meanwhile, the Clean Air Act has an even higher net rating, at +22.

Consequently, voters want the EPA, and not Congress, to set pollution standards. An overwhelming 66 percent majority (including sizeable majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans) agrees that “Scientists at the EPA should set pollution standards, not politicians in Congress” while only 21 percent agree that “our elected representatives in Congress should set pollution standards, not unelected bureaucrats at the EPA.”

Seven in ten voters favor the EPA setting stricter limits on air pollution generally, including 70 percent of independents and at least 64 percent of voters in each of our oversample regions.

Two-to-One Opposition To Congressional Efforts to Stop the EPA – Even After Balanced Debate

When asked specifically about smog pollution, an overwhelming 75 to 21 percent majority supports the EPA setting stricter standards. This holds across the political spectrum and in every region of the country.

■ Table 1: Support for stricter smog standards.

	Strong Favor	Total Favor	Total Oppose	Net Favor
Total	54	75	21	+54
Democrats	72	90	7	+84
Independents	55	74	21	+53
Republicans	33	59	37	+22
Florida	56	75	22	+54
Ohio/Michigan	44	65	28	+36
Minnesota/Wisconsin	47	73	22	+51
Virginia/North Carolina	49	72	24	+49

And in a flat question, before hearing arguments from either side of the debate, American voters reject the idea that Congress should stop the EPA from implementing new smog standards by a similar 72 to 20 percent margin. Again, this holds across the political spectrum and in every region of the country.

After a balanced debate² on the issues in which language was taken directly from supporters and opponents of Congressional action, support for the EPA drops slightly but opposition to Congressional action remains robust with a 64-percent majority, including a more than two-to-one majority of independents, opposing Congressional action. On this issue, independents and moderates are much closer to Democrats and liberals than they are to Republicans and conservatives.

Even moderate Republicans and Republican women overwhelmingly support the EPA after a balanced debate. The only groups that show significant support for Congressional action to stop the EPA from updating smog standards are conservative Republicans, Republican men and strong supporters of the Tea Party.

² Please see the Frequency Questionnaire for language of questions and arguments from both sides.

■ Table 2: Opposition to Congressional action against EPA robust after debate³

Demographic Group	Pre-Debate	Post-Debate
Total	+52	+37
Democrats	+80	+61
Independents	+48	+40
Republicans	+22	+2
Liberal	+84	+72
Moderate	+71	+57
Conservative	+15	-3
Liberal/Moderate GOP	+56	+33
Men	+40	+28
Women	+62	+45
College	+56	+40
Non-college	+48	+35
Younger	+57	+42
Older	+46	+32
Florida	+51	+36
Ohio/Michigan	+37	+23
Minnesota/Wisconsin	+47	+33
Virginia/North Carolina	+46	+36

³ Table shows net margin for each group saying Congress should NOT stop the EPA – Congress should stop the EPA

Voters Support EPA on Nearly All Facets of Debate

Voters support the EPA position on four key elements of the overall debate. As we noted above, an overwhelming majority believe that it should be EPA scientists, not Congress, who set pollution standards. By a 20-point margin voters also side with the EPA on the critical jobs issue, saying that more aggressive EPA standards are likely to enhance job creation rather than hurt it.

■ Table 3: EPA issue debate results^a

	Total First Statement	Total Second Statement	Net Total
Updated standards will create jobs vs. Updated standards will hurt jobs	54	34	+20
Need standard to protect health vs. Can't afford standards because it will hurt jobs	60	30	+30
Scientists at EPA should set standards vs. Elected reps in Congress should set standards	66	21	+45
Updated smog standards will NOT damage the economy vs. Will damage the recovery	65	30	+35

On only one question in our survey did voters not overwhelmingly support the EPA position. We asked voters a question about the timing of the new EPA standards, reading them a statement from EPA supporters arguing that immediate action was needed to protect public health and a statement from EPA opponents arguing that the EPA should wait until its next regularly scheduled update in 2013.^b The results of this question were somewhat muddled, with a 47 – 39 percent plurality agreeing with EPA supporters that we need to act now rather than wait until the regularly scheduled 2013 update. While a plurality agrees with the EPA's position, this is the one area where those opposing the EPA position do not find themselves vastly out of step with public opinion. Clearly, on the substance of the debate, voters appear to strongly favor the EPA position.

^a Please see the Frequency Questionnaire for full language tested.

^b Please see the Frequency Questionnaire for full language tested.

