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Headline: Most California Asians, Latinos back early action vs. global warming

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SAN FRANCISCO—An overwhelming majority of California's Latinos and the Asian and Pacific Islanders think the state government should act right away to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, rather than wait until the economy and the job situation improve.

This is among the key findings of a statewide survey released last week by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Up to 78% of the state's Latinos and 74% of Asians and Pacific Islanders want the state to act against pollutants right away.

"People of color (Latino's and Asians and Pacific Islander's), the emerging large people of the state do care about the impact of the environment on their families— they want common sense policies," according to Miya Yoshitani, Associate Director of Asian Pacific Environment Network.

During Monday's press briefing facilitated by the New America Media, held at the World Affairs Council in San Francisco, Yoshitani said the support to reduce green house gas would directly improve the conditions of low-income groups, public transport and affordable housing.

Most Californians, 65%, say the government should act right away to cut emissions—up 9 points since 2012. Less than a third (30%) say the state should wait for the economy to improve.

Sonja Patek, research associate at the PPIC, pointed out that legislation on greenhouse gas reduction has 67% support among adults responders with 62% from blacks and 58% from white communities.

The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 signed by former state Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger set the 2020 greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal into law. This law requires a third of California's electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. Up to 70% of Californians support the law, but support drops to 44 percent if this will result in higher electricity bills.

Global warming seen as threat

A large majority of Californians view global warming as a very serious threat (50%) or somewhat serious threat (27%) to the state's future economy and quality of life.

The PPIC survey revealed most states residents (63%) say the effects of global warming have already begun. Far fewer (22%) say the effects will occur sometime in the future, and only 11% say it will never happen.

Most Democrats (73%) and independents (59%) say the effects of warming have begun. Patek told INQUIRER.net that global warming naysayers are more likely to be Republicans.

When Californians are asked about the possible effects of global warming, a majority of residents (57%) are very concerned about more severe wildfires than more severe droughts, flooding or storms.

Cap-and-trade revenues

One of the state's signature programs to reduce emissions is cap-and-trade which includes auctions of emissions allowances that began last November. In the same survey, the PPIC reported 54% have heard nothing about the program, 33% have heard a little, and 12% a lot.

"Climate changes can be negatively affected by industrial ships, agricultural changes and other industries. But the positive side is that California is leading the green trade economy," Michel Gelobter, founder and chairman of Climate Cooler.

The program's revenues will be used to further the goals of the Global Warming Solutions Act, with a portion to improve environmental conditions in lower-income or disadvantaged communities.

A large share of cap-and-trade revenue will likely go to transportation, the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in California, and housing infrastructure.

Overwhelming majorities favor spending it on public transit, such as more buses or reduced transit fares (78%), and repaving roads and highways (72%). A smaller majority (60%) favors spending on housing and commercial developments near mass transit hubs.

"Gov. (Jerry) Brown succeeded getting first \$500 million to put in investment for greenhouse gas production project in low income group," Yoshitina said. Brown, President Obama, enjoys a 54% job approval among likely voters.

Most want stricter regulations

Patek told New America Media's director Sandy Close that California is driving "a lot of numbers and the findings that California is less likely to support traditional fossil fuels."

As state legislators debate stricter regulations on fracking—already under way in California—51% of voters say they oppose increased use of the drilling method used to extract oil and natural gas (35% favor it, 14% don't know). Fifty-percent say they are in favor of stricter regulation of fracking.

Fracking or hydraulic fracturing is a drilling method that injects a mixture of water, sand and chemicals under high pressure into dense shale rock formations to crack the rock and release natural gas.

Fracking has been around for decades, but the techniques, technologies and chemicals used to reach new, remote gas reserves are more intensive and riskier than conventional gas drilling.

When it comes to the increased use of fracking, "Asians are divided, Latinos are more likely to oppose the idea," said Patel.

Regions peppered with drilling rigs have high levels of smog as well as other airborne pollutants, including potential carcinogens. Rural communities face an onslaught of heavy truck traffic — often laden with dangerous chemicals used in drilling — and declining property values.

Hotly debated pipeline

“Californians are conflicted when it comes to controversial efforts to expand the oil supply,” said Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “Slim majorities favor building the Keystone XL pipeline but also oppose fracking, with many wanting stricter regulation of the practice.” Half of Californians (51%) favor building the Keystone XL oil pipeline from Canada to Texas to increase supply; 34% oppose and 15% don’t know.

Offshore oil drilling and nuclear power have been contentious issues in energy policy, and the survey shows that most residents today oppose the expansion of either, Baldassare added. Asked about renewable sources of energy, 79% favor an increase in federal funding to develop wind, solar and hydrogen technologies.

Most Californians say air pollution is a big problem, especially adults living in the Inland Empire, Los Angeles and Central Valley than those living in the San Francisco Bay Area, Orange and San Diego. Latinos (41%) and blacks (40%) are more likely to express this view than Asians (23%) and whites (20%).

At the same time, two-thirds of residents (75%) who work full time or part time drive alone to work. And about half of Californians (53%) say that they have seriously considered getting a more fuel-efficient vehicle the next time they buy or lease one.

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