



## Survey: Why Pro-Environmental Views Don't Always Translate Into Votes

Durham, N.C. -- Eight-in-10 Americans say they support pro-environmental policies, but a new national survey by the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University finds their support often stops short of the ballot box. The survey suggests opportunities for how to address this disconnect.

"These results are a wake-up call, but they also represent an important opportunity," said Tim Profeta, director of the Nicholas Institute. "They help us understand what we need to do to build public consensus and break down barriers to environmental progress. This is central to the mission of the Nicholas Institute."

The survey's findings were announced Tuesday (today) by Profeta at a press briefing at the U.S. Senate. Profeta was joined by U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), William K. Reilly, former EPA head and chair of the advisory board of the Nicholas Institute, and Peter Nicholas, chairman of Boston Scientific. The Nicholas Institute, which commissioned the public opinion research in conjunction with its launch this week, was made possible through a \$70 million gift to Duke's Nicholas School of the

Environment and Earth Sciences by Nicholas and his wife Ginny.

The survey of 800 registered voters found that 79 percent favored "stronger national standards to protect our land, air and water," with 40 percent strongly supporting it.

But only 22 percent said environmental concerns have played a major role in determining whom they voted for in recent federal, state or local elections.

Even among self-described environmentalists, only 39 percent could recall an election where a candidate's environmental stance was among the two or three most important reasons why they voted for or against him.

"There is a clear disconnect here," Reilly said. "Seventy-four percent of Republicans and 85 percent of Democrats say they support stronger environmental standards. Yet, when it comes time to vote, they rank the environment low on their list of priorities."

In focus groups, the environment ranked last out of nine issues tested, both as a vote qualifier and in terms of expressed personal importance to voters. The nine issues, in order of their expressed importance, were:

the economy and jobs; health care; Iraq; Social Security; terrorism; education; moral values; taxes; and the environment. Only 10 percent of voters identified the environment as one of their top concerns, compared to 34 percent for the economy and jobs.

The research was conducted for the Nicholas Institute by Hart Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. They surveyed 800 registered voters nationwide and conducted focus groups of voters in Columbus, Ohio, and Knoxville, Tenn. The survey results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.46 percent.

The pollsters identified five reasons for the discrepancy between voters' support of the environment in general, and their inconsistent support of it at the ballot box:

-- Misperceptions: A majority of voters, 57 percent, believe that "a lot" or "some" progress already has been made and that environmental problems are not as bad as they used to be. Only 30 percent described themselves as "angry" about lack of action.

-- Concerns about economic trade-offs: Eighty-seven percent of voters believe it is "at least somewhat

likely” that stronger national environmental standards will result in higher taxes. Fifty-six percent fear higher standards will hurt the economy and cause some people to lose their jobs.

-- Lack of immediacy: In focus groups, voters told pollsters they perceive the environment as a long-term problem that can't compare in urgency to immediate concerns such as jobs, health care or taxes.

-- Breadth of issues: The environment encompasses a broad range of issues, from global warming and sustainable agriculture to water quality and urban sprawl. Few voters care about them all.

-- Personal factors: Voters' perceptions and priorities change in response to changing circumstances and personal responsibilities. “Voters can have on the equivalent of five different pairs of glasses when they judge a policy proposal,” pollster Peter Hart said.

The issue of trust -- or lack of it -- appeared to play a role in many voters' ambivalent attitudes toward environmental problems. Only 19 percent said there are “a lot” of trustworthy sources of information on environmental issues, while another 40 percent said there are “likely some trustworthy sources.”

Voters generally viewed universities and research institutes as the most credible sources of information and the least likely to have hidden agendas or special interests.

Profeta, Reilly and the pollsters

will present the results of the survey again at 9:45 a.m. Wednesday at Duke's Fuqua School of Business as part of the Nicholas Institute's inaugural environmental summit. Hundreds of top scientists and leaders from corporations, governments and environmental organizations are taking part in the three-day summit, which begins Tuesday night (tonight).

The Nicholas Institute was founded to provide decision makers with independent, science-driven evaluations of policy risks and rewards, and to work with them to develop innovative, practical solutions. It will unite the broad resources of the Duke University community with the expertise of partners in industry, government and environmental organizations worldwide.