

New England Energy Alliance

For Immediate Release

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New England Survey Reaffirms Support for Energy Infrastructure and Industry Competition; Varying Support for New Energy Technologies

Economic Concerns, Post Marathon Mood Temper Results

Boston, MA – 8/15/13 --New Englanders continue to support most energy supply infrastructure options in the region as well as the competitive electricity market system put in place over a decade ago throughout most of New England, according to an annual region-wide telephone survey sponsored by the New England Energy Alliance.

The survey also found that New Englanders remain more concerned about the effects of global warming than the rest of the nation as 70% – down from a high of 77% in 2009 – continue to be at least *somewhat* concerned about global warming, compared to 58% nationally.

However, the number of respondents willing to pay at least *something* extra every month on their electric bill to support utility and government efforts to limit the effects of global warming dropped significantly to four out of ten, compared to eight out of ten last year.

“Not surprisingly, near-term concerns about the economy trump longer-term, more abstract worries about global warming,” said Paul G. Afonso, Executive Director of the New England Energy Alliance. “Also, because the survey was conducted two weeks after the Boston Marathon bombings, respondents were more apprehensive about infrastructure supply options with a perceived safety component – such as nuclear power and LNG – although still favored by a solid majority.

The annual survey conducted by Opinion Dynamics found:

- ***Economic concerns dominate.*** Eighty-five percent (85%) of respondents mentioned economy related topics as the first or second most important issue facing New England.
- ***Decreased concerns about fuel costs.*** The high cost of energy was noted by 39% as the single most important *energy* related issue facing the region, down from 55% in 2012. Sixty-five percent noted the price of gasoline as the fuel with the most impact on monthly household budgets, followed by 45% for home heating oil, 34% for electricity and 22% for natural gas. However, a substantial percentage continue to be concerned about the impact of energy prices on the economy as 84% are concerned that businesses in the region pay over 30% more than the national average for electricity, putting them at a competitive disadvantage and potentially costing jobs.
- ***Continued strong support for competitive electricity markets.*** Seventy-six percent (76%) continue to favor a restructured competitive electricity market system where companies compete on price and service, slightly down from 84% last year.

- ***Skepticism of benefits from government mandated programs.*** Consumers seem to prefer government guidance on energy issues rather than active involvement. In terms of reducing electricity use, 44% would prefer that government impose energy efficiency standards for appliances (even if higher prices result) rather than mandate consumer-funded energy efficiency programs (36%). Last year, New Englanders were evenly split on the perceived cost-effectiveness of programs designed to promote wise energy use and reduce global warming. This year, support dropped to 35%. A majority (68%) oppose any new taxes on electricity generating companies to fund energy efficiency or renewable programs or to help balance state budgets.
- ***Majority remain concerned about global warming, but substantially fewer willing to pay to limit effects.*** Forty-three percent (43%) of New Englanders are *very concerned* about the effects of global warming and 70% are at least *somewhat* concerned. About four in ten (42%) would pay at least *something* extra every month on their electric bill to help mitigate the impacts of global warming (down substantially from 81% last year). Also, less than half said they would pay an additional \$20 per month to purchase half of their electricity from renewable resources to help the environment.
- ***Decreased support for some energy infrastructure supply options, but still favored by solid majority.*** Sixty-four percent (64%) of New Englanders favor LNG facilities, down from 75% last year, but still a significant majority. Over 70% continue to support wind power. While support for renewing the licenses of nuclear plants decreased, license renewal is still favored by a majority (57%). A little over half continue to favor smart meters and above-ground transmission lines that could bring affordable clean electricity generated by renewable facilities in Canada. Conversely, less than half (44%) continue to support coal plants even with new technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- ***Varying support for new energy technologies.*** New Englanders were fairly evenly split on the use of “fracking” to extract natural gas from rock formations. However, half are opposed to using this process to produce supplies for New England (44% in favor). Fifty-nine percent (59%) would be willing to pay an extra \$5 per month on their electric bill for new technologies to ensure that power would be restored more quickly after major storms. But less than half (41%) believe power lines should be buried underground to reduce outages during storms, which is costly. Only 10% said they would be *very likely* to buy an electric vehicle, with about 29% *somewhat* likely.

“The survey is conducted annually to identify broad trends in public attitudes that can help shape regional energy policies,” said Afonso. “However, since we saw significant differences in some results this year, caution should be taken in applying them to decision-making. These topics will be revisited next year to see whether they are an anomaly or a clear inflection point in public attitudes toward key environmental and energy policy issues.”

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The telephone survey was conducted for the New England Energy Alliance by Opinion Dynamics Corporation of Waltham, MA. Interviewing was conducted April 30 – May 9 of 600 adults in New England. The margin of error is +/- 4%. A complete question-by-question summary of results is available on NEEA’s website at www.newenglandenergyalliance.org