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## **Survey shows desire for competitive energy**

New Englanders enthusiastically favor competitive electricity markets and would be willing to pay more each month for their electricity to mitigate the effects of global warming, according to the results of an annual survey released Thursday.

Paul Afonso, executive director of the New England Energy Alliance, and Ernie Paicopolos of Opinion Dynamics, the company conducting the survey, held a conference call to discuss the findings of this year's annual regionwide survey to 600 citizens, which revealed continued support for choice and competition in New England's electricity market.

It is important for people in New England to engage with their public officials and understand the relationship between energy issues and economic development in the region, Afonso said.

This year's survey was conducted over 10 days in April via telephone to residents in all six New England states. Paicopolos said responses about competitive markets were similar to answers exhibited in previous years.

Paicopolos said the most "consistent commitment" found in each of the six years of the survey is to the "3 C's," which are competition, cost and climate change.

Central to the survey were questions on New England's decision about a decade ago to open its electricity market to competition and allow consumers to buy electricity from a retail supplier.

In the poll, when asked if they favor or oppose the switch to a competitive electricity market system, 84% of respondents said they either strongly favor or somewhat favor the new system.

"When competition is working well, we like it," said Joseph Rosenthal, of the Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel.

When his office sees a reason to "mitigate" competition, "we do that," Rosenthal said.

Another key topic of the survey was the issue of climate change and global warming. "[Respondents have] been very consistent in their support for remedies to help solve our climate change issues," Paicopolos said.

New Englanders' interest and concern for climate change issues is interesting, said Paicopolos, because there has been a pattern of waning concern throughout other parts of the country.

As to the survey's results, Rosenthal said it is important to take into account a variety of factors — including who is doing the survey, who is being surveyed and what the survey is about. "A lot depends on who you ask."

The results can also depend on the way specific questions are phrased, Rosenthal pointed out. If it is just asking if you like competition, you are going to get a different result than if the question is more specific, he said.

Paicopolos said the survey questions did see different results based on distinction with wording and phrasing of the questions, especially with a question asking how much more people would be willing to pay on either their monthly or annual electric bills to combat global warming.

About four out of five people would pay at least something extra per month on their electric bill to help mitigate the effect on global warming, Paicopolos said.

The survey phrased the question in two separate ways, putting the increase to costs in terms of a price per month and a price per year, and respondents were more willing to pay a bit more per month than to add a significant amount to their yearly electric bills, Paicopolos said.

— *Ellen Stodola*