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Trade groups' poll: Residents oppose energy bill

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By Luther Turmelle, North Bureau Chief

For the second time this spring, a Boston group of energy providers and business and trade organizations that serve New England has released a study that it hopes will sway the opinion of Connecticut lawmakers.

The New England Energy Alliance survey covers a wide variety of attitudes that residents of the region have toward energy issues. But the survey, which was conducted in mid-April, includes a series of Connecticut-specific questions that were posed to 246 state residents, designed to gauge the level of support for energy legislation that was going through the legislature at the time.

The bill passed the last day of the 2010 session of the General Assembly, but was vetoed by Gov. M. Jodi Rell last week.

Lawmakers are expected to convene around June 21 to determine whether they have the necessary votes to override the veto, said Douglas Whiting, a spokesman for House Speaker Chris Donovan, D-Meriden.

To override Rell's veto, 24 votes would be needed in the Senate and 101 in the House, Whiting said.

Paul G. Alfonso, executive director of the NEEA, said members of his organization are "leaving nothing to chance, taking nothing for granted" in terms of whether lawmakers will be able to override Rell's veto.

"We're working with some very high-profile companies that have achieved cost savings under the competitive market, and trying to get them out there to let people know what's at stake if the veto is overturned," Alfonso said.

Three out of every four Connecticut residents surveyed opposed the energy legislation

developed by state Sen. John Fonfara, D-Hartford, and state Rep. Vickie Nardello, D-Bethany, Alfonso said.

The centerpiece for the bill that Nardello and Fonfara crafted called for a 15 percent reduction in electric rates and the creation of a state energy authority to oversee the procurement process.

A little more than half the Connecticut residents surveyed, or about 53 percent, said the legislation didn't make any sense, he said.

When asked to rank the most important issues that state lawmakers need to work on in this year's legislative session, what was termed in the survey as "additional regulation of electric companies" finished last among the five choices respondents were given. Job creation and economic development was identified as the top priority.

Ernie Paicopolos, whose Massachusetts polling firm Opinion Dynamics conducted the survey for NEEA, said the concerns that Connecticut residents mirrored their neighbors in other states across the region.

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