

POLL: ELECTRIC CUSTOMERS WILLING TO PAY MORE FOR JOBS, CERTAINTY

Supporters of a House energy package that would restructure generation and utility regulation said polling announced Monday shows Michigan consumers believe their electric bills are reasonably priced compared to other everyday expenses but they would be willing to pay a bit more for reliable service, renewable energy and new power plants that create jobs in the state.

The research conducted by Virginia-based TargetPoint and paid for by the Michigan Jobs and Energy Coalition used three polls conducted between March and May that interviewed between 500 and 600 voters, respectively.

The latest survey asked voters if they would pay five percent more per month in their electricity bills to build new power plants in Michigan. Of the respondents, 58 percent said they would after being read a prompt telling them that legislation being considered in Lansing would result in \$12-\$15 billion in investment by Michigan utilities and up to 16,000 new jobs. Thirty-five percent of respondents disagreed.

Of that 58 percent group, only those saying that their incomes are not enough to meet their expenses did not believe the 5 percent increase was reasonable (those respondents split 48-47 percent on the unreasonable/reasonable scale).

When they were told that in order for all rates to reflect the actual costs of generating and delivering electricity residential customers would have to pay about \$20 more per year for the next five years, 66 percent of those polled said that was reasonable while 32 percent said it was not.

The \$20 figure is what DTE Energy figured the cost would be, while Consumers Energy would be about \$16, said Jeff Holyfield, Consumers spokesperson.

As expected, the more disposable income a voter has, the more willing he or she was to pay that amount, with 76 percent of voters "living comfortably," saying they would spend more compared to 53 percent of voters whose incomes don't cover their expenses backing the statement.

Critics of the House legislation have continued to argue during the months of debate on the legislation that the state doesn't need to re-regulate utilities in order for new power plants and generation to be created in Michigan (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, June 5, 2008](#)).

And David Waymire, spokesperson for Customer Choice Coalition, pointed out that the survey did not ask voters whether they support the particular components of the legislation, as a Marketing Resource Group survey did back in March (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, March 18, 2008](#)).

"This (TargetPoint) poll is about apple pie and mom," he said. "It doesn't inform the people about these bills."

He said that poll showed 74 percent of 600 respondents support being able to choose to purchase power from competing suppliers and that 64 percent of voters would be less likely to choose a candidate if they took that choice away.

The survey did not get into the background of the state's current electric choice system, but Alex Gage, CEO of TargetPoint, said while customers like choice they don't really know they have it and would probably be willing to give it up if they were getting something back like service reliability or jobs.

"They would like anything to be built in Michigan," Mr. Gage said.

In other polling questions, voters repeatedly said creating jobs in the state was a priority for them and Mr. Gage said while the state's energy policy is not a "kitchen table" issue for voters that doesn't mean it's not important. In the May poll, 42 percent of respondents said how a candidate feels about electric energy policy is important to them, compared with 86 percent who believe a plan to create jobs is important, 68 percent who believe economic issues like taxes and spending are important and 73 percent who believe plans to make health care more affordable and accessible is important.

Asked about the residency of those polled, Mr. Gage said they used a proportionate size survey with about 55 percent of respondents living in the Detroit media market and the rest living outside of that area.

Kelly Rossman-McKinney, spokesperson for the coalition, said they don't have any more polling on the issue scheduled at this time but if the Legislature doesn't act quickly on the legislation then more surveys could occur.