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Survey: Virginians Believe Climate Change is Real, Think Government Should Respond

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA., Oct. 21, 2008—Strong majorities of Virginia residents believe that global climate change is occurring, and think that both federal and state governments should be involved, according to the **Report of the Virginia Climate Change Survey**. The University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs presented the results of the poll on **Tuesday, Oct. 21 at 5:30 p.m.**, in a panel hosted by the Center's Governing America in a Global Era (GAGE) program. It is being **webcast live** and archived online at www.millercenter.org.

Authors **Barry Rabe**, Miller Center Visiting Scholar from the University of Michigan, and **Christopher Borick**, Director of the Institute of Public Opinion at Muhlenberg College, presented the first survey of public attitudes toward climate change among Virginia residents, conducted via a statewide telephone survey in September (660 respondents, +/- 4%).

The panel will feature comments from:

- **L. Preston Bryant, Jr.**, Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources;
- **Vivian Thomson**, U.Va. Assistant Professor of Politics; Director of U.Va.'s Environmental Thought and Practice program; and Vice Chair of the Virginia Air Pollution Control Board; and
- **John H. Gibbons**, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy under President Clinton

"This event will shed important light on the **public's** perception of legitimate approaches to global warming," said Rabe. "Although climate change is generally viewed as a global matter, a growing number of states are taking major steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions."

To put the Virginia results in some perspective, it's worth noting that while the 110th Congress has held nearly 150 hearings on the topic of climate change, no major federal initiatives to reduce carbon dioxide and other emissions have emerged from either the legislative or executive branches.

In the absence of federal action, state governments have begun to take the lead.

Presently:

- 27 states require increases in the percentage of their electricity that comes from renewable sources, through so-called portfolio standards.
- 21 states are involved in developing carbon cap-and-trade programs
- 14 states have joined California in attempting to regulate carbon emissions from future cars

Some highlights from the report:

Attitudes about climate change

Seventy-five percent of Virginians say there is "solid evidence" that the average temperatures on earth have been increasing over the past four decades. These results largely the same regardless of race, age, education and gender, though partisan affiliation has differs.

Among those who said they believe global warming is occurring:

- 39% of those say they believe it's caused by human activity
- Nearly 9 in 10 respondents who believe it's happening say it's either a very serious (61%) or somewhat serious (28%) problem
- 72% of those said that immediate government intervention is necessary

Who's responsible for dealing with climate change?

There's a widespread perception that federal, state, and local governments have either a great deal or some responsibility for taking actions to reduce global warming.

- 86% said they think the federal government has some degree of responsibility on this issue
- 85% said state governments have some degree of responsibility
- 77% said local governments have some degree of responsibility
- 69% agreed (38% strongly; 31% somewhat) that "If the federal government fails to address the issue of global warming it is my state's responsibility to address the problem."
- 75% said state governments will boost their economies by requiring greater use of renewable energy.

How do we deal with climate change?

- 82% support adopting a renewable portfolio standard. Demographic classifications showed little difference, but partisan affiliation showed more differences in support of such standards (44% of Republicans said

- they strongly support; 62% Democrats and 55% of Independents strongly support)
- 3 in 5 Virginians did not know whether or not their state had a mandatory requirement for renewable electricity, but they overwhelmingly think it's a good idea.
 - More than half of Commonwealth residents (55%) expressed strong opposition to increasing gas taxes, and 37 percent strongly opposed increasing fossil fuel taxes
 - A combined 82% of Virginians support clean coal technology (51% strongly; 31% somewhat)
 - Virginians also support (49% strongly supported, 28 percent somewhat) the idea that state government should "require auto makers to increase the fuel efficiency of their vehicles even if it increases the cost of the vehicle." Giving tax breaks to those who buy hybrid vehicles received similar support.

The Report of the Virginia Climate Change Survey is online at www.millercenter.org. It is part of a larger national survey initiative that will be presented at the Miller Center's **National Conference on Climate Governance, Dec. 11–12, 2008.**

The Miller Center of Public Affairs is a leading nonpartisan public policy institution aimed at bringing together engaged citizens, scholars, members of the media, and government officials to focus on issues of national importance to the governance of the United States, with a special interest in the American presidency.

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