

STOCKTON COLLEGE

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



Hughes Center Poll: Area Residents Favor Nuclear Plants and Wind Power

Stockton Group Uses Deliberative Polling® Technique

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Galloway Township, NJ- Findings of an innovative polling technique indicate that residents of Southern New Jersey would prefer more wind and nuclear power to having energy at a low price.

More than 800 Southern NJ residents recently participated in a polling experiment conducted by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Thirty one of the participants were given information to read and came together for a full day of deliberations on energy issues with experts and policy makers. The Center's initial poll was conducted by Zogby International in early spring and followed up by the day of deliberations in May. The first poll has a margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$.

During the deliberation day, participants broke into small groups with trained facilitators to discuss their views and listen and learn from each other. They then met with Stockton faculty, Dr. Patrick Hossay and Dr. Tait Chirenje, to ask their questions and probe the issues surrounding wind power and nuclear power. Later in the day they met with the two people who will be instrumental in setting NJ's energy policy: NJ Board of Public Utilities President Jeanne Fox and NJ Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D-1) who is vice chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. At the end of the day, this same group of people was asked to take the original survey again.

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“This type of polling strategy is called Deliberative Polling®, because it creates the best estimate of what the public would think after they have deliberated with their fellow citizens and learned from the experts,” said Sharon Schulman, Executive Director of the Hughes Center. “The goal is not to change people’s minds, but rather to measure any difference in their opinions after education and discussion,” she said. Stockton was one of only 14 higher education institutions to be selected by the American Democracy Project of the American Association of Colleges and Universities to take part in the Deliberative Polling® process.

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of areas including energy affordability, reliability, safety, and protecting the environment. They also ranked the importance of using nuclear power, wind power, and teaching people to conserve. Low cost and safety became less important after deliberations.

Other changes of note were that some people:

- changed from having wind power as their highest preference to nuclear power and energy conservation;
- became less concerned about wind farms threatening birds and more concerned that nuclear power plants are a threat to the environment;
- who thought wind energy was the costliest to the environment and society changed to nuclear power.

“Throughout the day, participants commented on what a great experience this was and how it clarified information,” said Schulman. “They were really pleased to have the opportunity to have their questions answered by experts and policy makers.”

The initial poll of 818 southern NJ residents, simply by itself, had many interesting findings:

- Overall, women are more concerned about energy policy than men.
- Overwhelmingly, people are not concerned that wind farms detract from the beauty of South Jersey.
- Residents of Cape May and Salem Counties believe using wind power is more important than the other counties. This may be because NJ’s first wind farm is proposed off Cape May County and Delaware’s wind farm is across the bay from Salem County.
- Those individuals with higher incomes and men say the use of nuclear power is extremely important while lower income people and Cumberland and Salem County residents, African Americans and women prioritize teaching customers to save energy.
- Higher income people and Salem County residents support private ownership of nuclear plants and wind farms while lower income people prefer government ownership.
- The more highly educated people are the more likely it is that safety is important.
- The shore counties, Atlantic, Cape May and Ocean, were most concerned about safety.

A video of the participants deliberating and a complete narrative on the Deliberative Polling® project and results of both polls may be found under research and publications on the Hughes Center’s Web site at <http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter>.

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