

Too divisive? In survey, bipartisan citizen panel agrees on climate, energy issues

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By P.C. ROBINSON Staff Writer Using rebates and tax incentives to make Americans better environmental stewards?

That seems to be the consensus, according to a bipartisan survey compiled in the 7th Congressional District represented by Democrat Tom Malinowski.

The results were presented and discussed during a virtual "Citizen Panel Forum" on Thursday, March 24 that included Malinowski and roughly 40 constituents. A new kind of town hall that seeks to give the public a more effective voice in the policymaking process, the forum was convened by three nonpartisan organizations: Civic Genius, Voice of the People, and the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation.

The survey was filled out by 476 CD-7 constituents. This was the second citizen panel Malinowski has conducted. The first was an in-person event held on Saturday, Feb. 29, 2020, shortly before the state entered its COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Overall results showed that most Republicans and Democrats were like-minded when it came to federal proposals to tax incentives for clean energy and energy-saving alternatives. The incentives would also require electric companies to have a minimum portion of their electricity from renewable sources, and institute a carbon fee and rebate plan.



The consensus pleased Malinowski, now in his second, two-year term representing the once-heavily Republican district, as it showed that, yes, there could be agreement on major issues.

"What you always learn (in the panels) is there's a lot more common ground in our society than we might think, that so long as people come together and look at issues, not from a tribal point of view, not from a partisan point of view, (but) from a practical point of view, we have more or less a common good, so of course the great challenge we face is figuring out how to replicate this kind of discussion on the broader, national stage," Malinowski said.

"I'm someone who likes to talk about issues," said Malinowski, a Ringoes resident who, as a child, immigrated with his other from Soviet Bloc Poland. "I like to identify a problem and figure out how to solve it and persuade people to come together around that solution, so I really enjoy watching people go through that process."

Malinowski also provided his own thoughts on the issues, acknowledging that climate change was yet a topic the U.S. had best get serious about, or lose the opportunity to be a leader in the field.

He said economic factors already showed the world was moving "more quickly" to clean energy "because the world has already decided what it wants to do" about it.

"Do American companies lead that transition or do we fall behind?" he said, adding that, if investments were not made, "we will fall behind. We will lose jobs."

He said New Jerseyans realized that climate change "isn't an abstract." In New Jersey, he said, "It's four or five feet of water in your basement because a lot of us experienced that during Hurricane Ida and previous extreme weather events."

Although climate change has occurred over time, the events "weren't happening in the single lifetime of a human being as dramatically as we have seen.

"There's something happening that has not happened before," he said.

There was also the need for the country to take a look at how to be more energy independent of countries the likes of Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. According to Malinowski, oil

companies are not making fuel now because, among other things, they are enjoying record profits after the pandemic. They are also sitting on about 9,000 oil leases that are going unused.

Survey Findings

Called a “policy-making simulation,” the survey puts people in the shoes of policymakers by providing a briefing and asking them to evaluate pro and con arguments before weighing in with their recommendations.

“In standard town hall meetings, members of Congress put forward their views and citizens respond,” said PPC Director Steven Kull. “In a Citizen Panel Forum, the views of a representative sample of citizens are first put forward, citizens can elaborate on their views, the congressional representative responds, and there is a discussion.”

“This survey paints a very different picture than what we see on social media. In New Jersey and across the country, people agree across party lines on a variety of ideas,” said Jillian Youngblood, executive director of Civic Genius. “Citizen Panel Forums lift up a critical message for communities and Members of Congress: Americans agree on plenty and we can craft actionable solutions by listening to the people.”

The proposals that received the highest levels of support were ones that provided credits to encourage people and companies to adopt clean energy or energy-saving technologies.

According to survey results, 77 percent of overall constituents - 88 percent Democrats and 72 percent Republicans - favored a proposal providing a tax credit up to 50 percent of the cost of installing a charging station for electric vehicles that can be used by anyone.

Most surveyed - 83 percent - also supported tax incentives for energy-saving improvements to residential buildings, such as offering a tax credit of up to \$1,500 for installing a new energy-efficient heating or air conditioning systems. According to survey results, 91 percent were Democrats, and 76 percent Republican.

Other Results:

- Seventy-four percent of survey takers favored having electric companies having a minimum portion of their own electricity coming from renewable sources. Of those, 90 percent were Democrat and 65 percent, Republican.
- Overall, 73 percent - 82 percent Democrats and 67 percent Republicans - want newly built cars and lights trucks to get 20 to 30 percent more miles to the gallon by 2027.
- An overall 65 percent - 80 percent Democrats, 53 percent Republicans, agreed that companies that produce coal, oil or natural gas should be charged a fee of \$35 for each ton of carbon dioxide emitted from the fuel that they burn, the revenue then returned to citizens in a monthly rebate check.
- An overall 77 percent, 85 percent Democrats and 72 percent Republicans, said they would support coal workers who are losing their jobs due to the transition to clean energy.

The views expressed in New Jersey's 7th District were similar to those in nationwide surveys with samples of more than 2,000 voters provided by Nielsen Scarborough.

Members of the public can go through the same policymaking simulation at: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6794764/NJ7-Clean-Energy>