

THE
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MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties
From: The Luntz Research Companies /Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies
Re: Safe and Clean Water Trust Fund
Date: May 2003

The American people have spoken with one loud voice ... *Safe and clean water is not just a priority, it is a NECESSITY.* Despite the much publicized expanding federal deficit, an overwhelming majority of Americans (84%) would support legislation in the U.S. Congress that would create a long-term, sustainable and reliable source of federal funding for clean and safe water infrastructure.

We interviewed 800 registered voters (\pm 3.5% margin of error) from Portland to Boston. We also conducted an Instant Response dial session in Washington, DC with roughly 30 daily news consumers. Young and old, Democrat AND Republican, the demand for safe, clean water is universal – and the public is willing to pay for it. In addition to the survey results, you will find boxes entitled with “WORDS THAT WORK.” These are the statements from Members of Congress that scored particularly well in the dial session.

Here are the five essential conclusions from the survey and instant response dial session:

- 1) ***Americans believe they have a right to safe and clean water.*** A solid majority of Americans – 61% – believe that safe and clean water is a **RIGHT**, not a privilege. Combine this with the fact that 72% of Americans are currently either “extremely” or “very” concerned ***personally*** about clean air and clean water and you will understand both the intensity of feeling and the desire for immediate action.

WORDS THAT WORK

“Americans have the right to expect clean water, clean air, and that the government is going to make sure that we have both in the future. We won’t have a world to live in if we continue our neglectful ways.”

-Member of Congress

2) **Americans believe water safety is an essential role of the federal government.**

More than half of all Americans (51%) believe that ‘safe and clean water’ is in the *greatest need* of a trust fund that would guarantee federal money to help state and local governments pay for maintenance and improvements.

In fact, every population subgroup without exception picked a Clean Water Trust Fund over trust funds that already exist. This is significant: rarely in survey research do Americans prefer a priority/program that does not exist over one that does.

We then asked Americans what was more important to them personally ... how their Member of Congress votes on issues like clean and safe water or how they vote on issues like aid to foreign countries. Despite the attention foreign aid has received over the past year, a remarkable **77% said clean and safe water**. This is evidence that the clean and safe water issue has real legs and will not disappear until it is solved.

WORDS THAT WORK

“Safety and security of the country is the #1 job of the federal government. The defenses of the United States are not just military defenses ... they are health defenses. Our parents always said that if you don’t have your health you don’t have anything. The federal government has to understand that part of its role is protecting everyday citizens. The states cannot do it all alone. Sometimes these health hazards cross state boundaries and that means that the federal government must play its part.”

-Congressman Mark Kirk

3) **Americans believe that safe and clean water is a basic, essential quality of life issue.**

And they are willing to put their money where their mouth is.

Most surveys ask respondents if they support or oppose a new spending program without mentioning that there would be a cost. We went the extra mile to test real support for a program that would potentially cost additional taxpayer dollars. The answer was clear. Fully 70% of Americans would support a 1% tax increase if they knew that every penny of that money would be dedicated to establishing and preserving a safe and clean water infrastructure in their area.

And when told that many cities on the Eastern Seaboard are relying on 200-year-old pipes to carry millions of gallons of wastewater daily, 79% of Americans said they would support the federal government establishing a trust fund to help local communities maintain a safe and clean water infrastructure.

WORDS THAT WORK

“We have a clean water initiative in my home state, and I think there is real potential for that on the federal level. We need to make sure that the resources are there for communities to gain access to the funding they need to put into place sewage and water systems that will make the quality of life in their communities much better.”

-Congressman Dave Camp

In fact, the more people learned about the water situation in America, the stronger their support for a clean and safe water trust fund became. In the dial session, we provided participants with a series of facts and asked them to rank them in order of importance. Here’s what they prioritized.

THE FIVE MOST ALARMING RESULTS OF UNDERFUNDING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

#1 Many cities on the Eastern Seaboard are currently relying on 200-year-old pipes to carry millions of gallons of wastewater daily. Even the most modern sewer systems, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, are designed to last on average only from 15 years to 100 years.

#2 EPA currently estimates that sewer overflows are responsible for roughly 1.26 trillion gallons of untreated water flowing into the nation’s waters each year.

#3 According to the Environmental Protection Agency, if the clean and safe water funding gap is not addressed and overcome, the U.S. risks losing thirty years of progress ... progress that has come in the form of public health, environmental improvements and economic gains resulting from the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Acts.

#4 There are 40,000 sewage spills every year in the United States.

#5 Thirty years ago the federal government funded 75% of the costs to maintain a clean and safe water infrastructure. Today, they fund just 5%, leaving the remaining 95% of the costs to local communities.

- 4) **Americans believe that this is about health and the NEXT generation.** The reason why a clean and safe water trust fund has such universal support is because it combines the key issue of health and the key attribute of ‘the future.’ Put another way, clean water is a health issue, not an environmental concern, and it is as much about tomorrow as it is today. That is about the most potent political combination you can have.

WORDS THAT WORK

“I think the most important principle when it comes to water and wastewater management is the health of families ... especially children. We need to provide long term environmental protection so that we are not laying this problem over to the next generation.”

-Congressman Mark Kirk

THE PERFECT SOUNDBITE

Our water and wastewater pipes may be out of sight, but they can no longer remain out of mind. Americans cannot continue to take the most basic and natural resource – clean and safe water – for granted. We have a choice. We can invest wisely now or pay dramatically more later. More than thirty years of environmental progress is at risk. If we are to move toward a safer, cleaner, healthier future, we have to ensure federal support for clean and safe water infrastructure. It’s time to plan for the future, not just for today.

- 5) *Americans believe clean and safe water is a national priority and not just a local responsibility.* For the most part, environmental issues are seen as local or state challenges. Not here. On rare occasions, the public turns to Washington for help and solutions. This is one of them. Ask Americans and they will tell you that a healthy environment and safe and clean water know *no* state or local boundaries.

We asked Americans which statement they agreed with more ...

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| 70% | Clean and safe water is a national issue and the federal government should help states and localities pay for the necessary sewerage and wastewater treatment systems. |
| 30% | Clean and safe water is a local responsibility. The federal government is already running a \$300 billion dollar deficit. Clean and safe water are important, but the federal government just can't afford to spend any more. Localities need to foot the bill alone. |

WORDS THAT WORK

“I don’t like spending a lot of government money making the government even bigger. But when it comes to issues like cleaning up the environment and making sure that future generations live in a better land, I think the federal government has a role and I’m willing to see us spend some money.”

-Member of Congress

I’ll be blunt ... this issue is NOT going to go away. The environment is an area in which Americans *expect* progress to be made, and when they do not see progress being made, they get frustrated.

Finally, consider this: ***77% of Americans said they would be ‘more likely’ to vote for their congressman in the next election if they knew that member voted ‘for’ the creation of a federal trust fund that would guarantee annual funding for clean and safe water treatment.***

This is one government program that has real public support.