



MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: LORI WEIGEL / PARTNER / PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

DATE: AUGUST 12, 2011

RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY OF WYOMING VOTERS REGARDING WATER AND THE PROPOSED MILLION PIPELINE

Public Opinion Strategies recently completed a statewide survey of voters throughout Wyoming regarding their perceptions of water.¹ The survey results show that Wyoming voters are soundly opposed to a proposal to pump water from the Green River near Flaming Gorge Reservoir to Colorado communities and farms, and to eastern Wyoming. In fact, a majority are strongly opposed to the proposal, and opposition remains high even after hearing arguments in support of the project. After all additional information was provided, an overwhelming 90% of Wyoming voters reject the proposed pipeline.

Respondents in the survey and those in focus groups conducted earlier in Cheyenne indicate their opposition is founded in a concern for allowing Wyoming water to leave their state and an uncertainty over the state's future needs due to drought or other conditions. In fact, four-in-five voters rate "out-of-state users diverting water, such as to Colorado" as very or somewhat threatening to Wyoming water availability – the highest of five potential threats tested. Finally, the survey found that "Wyoming sending too much of our water downstream to be used by other states" rated as a more serious problem than twelve other issues tested – more than said "a lack of good-paying jobs" is a serious problem.

Specifically, the survey found that:

- **While most voters believe the state has adequate water supplies now and in the near future, they perceive the greatest threat to water availability as out-of-state users**

¹ **Methodology:** Public Opinion Strategies, conducted a survey of N=400 registered voters throughout Wyoming. The survey was conducted July 31-August 1, 2011 and has an overall margin of error of +4.9% statewide. Sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Interviews were distributed proportionally throughout the state, and are demographically representative of the electorate. The survey was preceded by two focus groups of Cheyenne voters, segmented by party affiliation, and conducted on June 29, 2011.

diverting Wyoming water. Most voters do believe the state has “an adequate supply of water” to meet current needs (73%) or to meet future needs, say ten years from now (57%). However, the focus groups make it clear that Wyoming’s experience with past droughts have left an impression on state residents. They worry that water may be in short supply in the future, and repeatedly cite this as a reason to reject the pipeline proposal. As a Carbon County Republican woman said, “I think our water needs to stay in the state. We never know what’s going to happen. If we have a drought, we can’t get it back. So, we need Wyoming water to stay in Wyoming.”

Wyoming voters also see “out-of-state users diverting water, such as to Colorado” as very or somewhat threatening to the availability of water in their state. Four-in-five (80%) voters perceive this to be very threatening or somewhat threatening – the highest of five potential threats tested. This is perceived as a threat across the state and with all demographic and partisan sub-groups. In fact, more than seven-in-ten voters in every region of the state perceive out-of-state diversions as a threat to the availability of water in Wyoming, as do 79% of Republicans, 89% of Democrats, and 70% of Independents.

In addition, the survey found that “Wyoming sending too much of our water downstream to be used by other states” rated as a more serious problem than twelve other issues tested – more than said “a lack of good-paying jobs” is a serious problem.

- **Just one-third of state voters have heard about the proposed pipeline from the Green River to eastern Wyoming and Colorado, but those who have are overwhelming opposed.** Thirty-four percent (34%) of the state’s voters say they have heard a lot (15%) or some (19%) about the proposed pipeline “that would pump water from the Green River at Flaming Gorge Reservoir near the Utah/Wyoming border to supply water in Colorado and eastern Wyoming.” Awareness of the issue tends to be higher among those in Southwestern Wyoming (55% have seen a lot or something about it), men 50 and older (52%), Democrats (47%) and hunters (41%, as compared to 36% among those who only fish).

Among the 34% who have heard about the proposal, just 8% say they support and fully 87% say they oppose the proposed pipeline. Opposition is ubiquitous among all demographic sub-groups of those who are aware of the proposal.

- **Wyoming voters reject the proposed pipeline once told about it.** Respondents were provided a brief, neutral description of the proposed pipeline based on recent news coverage, and then asked whether they would support or oppose the proposed pipeline.

“As you may know, the proposed pipeline would pump water 560 miles primarily to Colorado communities, with some going to agriculture and to eastern Wyoming. The pipeline has been proposed by Aaron Million, an entrepreneur in Fort Collins, Colorado, and would be financed by private investors and the cities which would use the water. Knowing this, do you generally support or oppose the proposed pipeline?”

Just 13% of voters say they support the proposed pipeline, while 79% oppose it. A solid majority of 57% strongly oppose the proposed pipeline.

- **Opposition is widespread and broad-based.** Significant majorities of all sub-groups oppose the proposed pipeline, including opposition among:
 - 83% of men and 76% of women;
 - 75% of voters in the Central and Northeast regions of the state, 80% in the Northwest, 83% in the Southwest, and 85% in the Southeast,
 - 86% of Democrats, 70% of Independents and 79% of Republicans,
 - 82% of hunters and 81% of anglers, and
 - 81% of those who have been to the Green River and 78% of those who have not.
- **Respondents repeatedly tell us that this is Wyoming water and Colorado (or even the Front Range of Wyoming) should find other solutions to their water supply problems.** We provided respondents with the opportunity to say in their own words the reasons for their initial views on the proposed water pipeline. While many themes emerge in the responses, including concern for how the diversion of this water would affect wildlife, fishing, and the local economy, more often voters simply find it unfair and inappropriate to send Wyoming water out of state. As one Republican man in Sublette county succinctly said, “I think that they should get their own water and not ours.”
- **Voter opposition to the proposed pipeline stands even after hearing rationales on both sides of the issue.** In order to assess whether voters’ initial perceptions would persist after hearing more about the issues involved with the pipeline, we simulated some of the give and take which has occurred on both sides of the issue. Respondents were then asked again for their views on the proposed pipeline. As one can see below, there is very little shift in attitudes with strong opposition even after respondents hear a supportive rationale.

“Supporters of the pipeline say that it is a public-private partnership that would move surplus water and shift it to areas to help keep farms and ranches from drying up and produce clean, hydroelectric power. It will do little to disturb the environment and wildlife by running along existing natural gas pipelines, and will help be part of the solution to Wyoming’s water problems.”

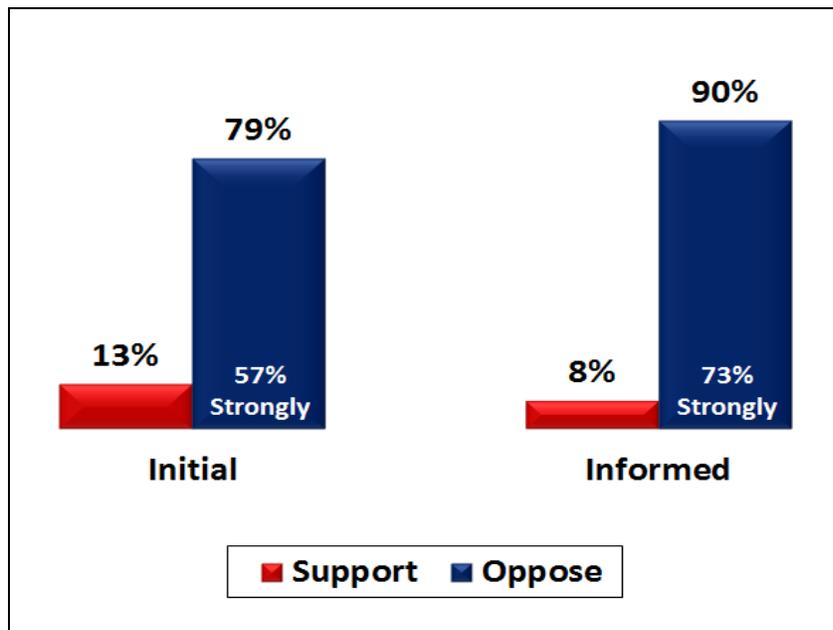
25% support, 71% oppose (49% strongly oppose)

“Opponents of the pipeline say that Wyoming cannot afford to give away any more of its water, as we don’t really know when another drought will come along and we may need it. Piping Wyoming water to Colorado will hurt tourism, hunting and fishing, our economy, and the natural beauty of this area.”

15% support; 85% oppose (59% strongly oppose)

Opposition tends to be strong throughout and among virtually all voter sub-groups.

- **As voters hear additional information, their support for the project tends to decrease while opposition increases.** Over the course of the survey, respondents were provided with detailed information about the structure, benefits, and potential downsides of the project. After this information, overall support for the project decreased and opposition increases dramatically, as shown in the following graph.



- **In summary,** Wyoming voters are strongly opposed to a proposed water pipeline, with the overall level and intensity of their opposition increasing as they learn more about the project. While state residents view Wyoming as having adequate water to meet current needs and those in the near future, they also believe that out-of-state water users diverting Wyoming water is both a serious problem and a threat to the availability of water in the state. Thus, the proposed pipeline strikes a nerve among residents across the state, of all political stripes and all key demographic sub-groups.

