

Renewables Role in America's Energy Future: Nevadans' Views

Executive Summary

(Methodology: Statewide survey in Nevada of 750 registered voters with an oversample of 330 registered voters in the 2nd Congressional District conducted November 13th-16th.)

Nevadans today have a very favorable view of renewable energy and its potential to change our economic future. Overwhelmingly, residents see renewables as a key part of expanding America's energy portfolio while working toward energy independence and creating jobs in the state. 76% of the electorate has a favorable view of "renewable energy." 71% of the electorate believes that renewable energy will create jobs in Nevada while only 9% think it will cost jobs; 16% said it would have no impact. In addition, 80% of residents agree that government incentives to adopt more renewable energy will indeed create more jobs in Nevada. They also believe renewables will help America achieve energy independence, the key goal residents want in an energy policy (mean of 8.04 on a scale of 1-9 when asked about energy goals the US should pursue).

82% of Nevadans also agree "Renewable energy is a key part of an 'all of the above' approach to energy that ultimately reduces cost to consumers and makes our country energy independent..." with just 15% disagreeing. Prioritizing new sources of energy for this "all of the above" strategy, people put expanding renewable energy first followed by finding new sources of oil and gas, nuclear energy and, finally, coal.

The challenge ahead for the renewable energy industry is defining a balanced approach to government's role in encouraging renewables within the context of an "all of the above" energy strategy, a strategy supported by both President Obama and House Republicans. Nevadans are evenly divided between those favoring a larger government role in providing incentives for renewables and those who believe government has a role to play but should not pick winners and losers through its energy incentives policies. Bridging that gap with energy policies that reflect people's overall strong support for renewables while at the same time acknowledging concerns about how government incentivizes energy production is the challenge ahead.

Overview and General Outlook

Consistent with national trends, residents of Nevada believe the country is on the wrong track (36-52 right direction-wrong track). Key demographic groups such as women (34-52 right direction-wrong track), Republicans (24-72) and Independents (29-59) see the country heading off on the wrong track while the 18-34 age group is slightly more positive at 43-40 right direction-wrong track. Both parties are viewed slightly negatively; Republicans at 41-46 favorable-unfavorable while Democrats fare slightly better with a 45-48 favorable-unfavorable.

When asked which party they had more confidence in to handle specific issues, Republicans and Democrats were tied on the economy at 44-44 Republican-Democrat (24% of the electorate said the economy was their top issue in determining how they voted in November's election). Democrats have a very slight edge on "energy and gas prices"

at 41-44 Republican-Democrat and Democrats held a 17-point margin on “renewable energy” at 36-53 Republican-Democrat. Additionally, when asked to describe energy as an environmental, economic or security issue, respondents overall called energy an environmental over an economic issue by a very slight margin of 2 points while security trailed far behind (42-40-12 environmental-economic-security). 2nd District voters cited energy first as an economic issue but, again, by a very slight margin (41-44-10 environmental-economic-security).

Renewable Energy	Favorable	Unfavorable
Total	76	12
2nd District	74	13
Independents	75	13
Republicans	69	19
Conservatives	61	24
Women	75	10

Interestingly, regardless of how it is defined—renewable (76-12 favorable-unfavorable), alternative (76-13 favorable-unfavorable), or using additional descriptors such as “like wind and solar power” (82-13 favorable-unfavorable)—renewable energy is viewed very favorably across the spectrum. All key demographic groups have a highly positive view of renewable energy. Additionally, residents also have a positive view of their

current electricity provider (68-21 favorable-unfavorable).

Goals and Beliefs

Nevadans overwhelmingly believe the statement “Renewable energy is a key part of an ‘all of the above’ approach to energy that will ultimately reduce costs to consumers and make our country energy independent. We can pursue renewable energy along with other energy types and don’t have to choose one over the other.” 82% of respondents believed the statement compared to 15% who disagreed. 83% of the residents of the 2nd Congressional District, 82% of Independents, 81% of Republicans, 74% of conservatives, and 85% of women believed that renewables play a key role in an “all of the above” approach to energy policy. They do not see this approach as trying to favor one energy type over another, but clearly support renewable energy as a key player in our energy future.

Respondents were read a series of potential goals related to energy policy in the United States and asked to place them on a 9-point scale, where 1 stood for “not important at all,” 5 for “important,” and 9 for “most important”. The most important issue overall—and across many key groups—was “working towards energy independence” followed by “expanding renewable energy.” Nevadans of every political and demographic stripe favored expanding the various kinds of energy sources, ranking all types (renewable, oil and gas, nuclear and coal) as important (above 5) with renewable energy leading the pack. “Finding ways to reduce carbon emissions” also ranked highly as another major energy goal.

Energy Goals	Total	2nd CD	Ind	Rep	Con	Women
Working towards energy independence	8.04	8.01	8.39	7.98	8.00	8.05
Expanding renewable energy	7.53	7.46	7.55	6.75	6.50	7.72
Finding ways to reduce carbon emissions	7.06	6.81	6.88	5.91	5.63	7.46
Finding new sources of oil and gas	6.84	6.64	6.38	7.56	7.36	6.78
Utilizing nuclear power	5.54	5.60	5.42	5.93	6.07	5.22
Finding and utilizing coal resources	5.26	5.10	4.99	5.84	5.85	5.35

In looking at belief systems and what residents agree with, renewables have a positive showing in almost all areas. 81% of respondents believe that “it is possible for the United States to produce most of its energy from renewable resources in the next few decades” compared to 18% who do not agree. Some detractors of renewable energy argue that it will not be able to produce energy at a scale to impact U.S. needs, but Nevadans widely believe that it will be possible and also accept that it will take time. This is important because it shows a strong, positive belief system about the current path of different renewable technologies and their increased use in the future. Further, respondents were asked a stand alone question specifically about renewables and energy independence. 85% agree that “renewable energy is a key part of achieving energy independence in the US.” 58% *strongly agree* with the statement; only 13% disagree.

In addition, the electorate views renewable energy very positively and believes in its ability to generate jobs in the state of Nevada. 71% said that it would “create jobs in my state” while 16% said it “will not affect jobs in my state” and only 9% believe it “will cost jobs in my state.” Constituents in the 2nd District were closely aligned with the rest of the state at 70-17-8 create-no affect-cost. Respondents across all key demographic groups believed in the ability of renewables to create local jobs. This is important because many view energy as an economic issue, and an energy source that creates jobs in Nevada is crucial to the state’s economic future.

Challenges

Respondents were asked if they believed or did not believe that “renewable energy is ready and available now at prices consumers can afford.” 40% of the electorate believed the statement compared to 58% who did not believe the statement. Despite a strong favorability towards renewable energy, seeing it as a key part of current energy policy, a source of energy that could meet our needs in the next few decades and able to play a critical role in achieving energy independence, people are not yet fully sold on renewables’ affordability. Reaching out to the public with information about renewables’ potential to help reduce energy costs and major technological advances in reliability and wind power affordability could help bridge the gap between critics and proponents of renewable energy.

Beyond education efforts, one of the key drivers in expanding this popular but still viewed as somewhat costly energy resource, is by the creation of incentives that will encourage increased use and help drive down prices. Residents in Nevada were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: “Government incentives for consumers and businesses to adopt more renewable resources is important in helping America become energy independent and will help create jobs in my state.” 4 out of 5 agreed with this statement (80-18 agree-disagree). This statement performed well in the 2nd District, with 3 out of 4 residents agreeing (76-21 agree-disagree). Independents (80-19) and women (84-14) mirrored the statewide population. While Republicans and conservatives did not support the statement at the same level, (65-32) and (63-34) respectively, they still favored it by wide margins.

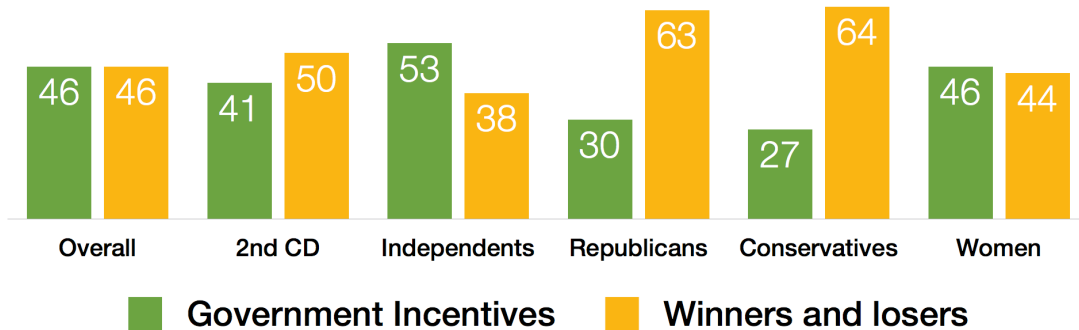
Finally, respondents were given a realistic context in which the debate about the benefits of increasing the use of renewable energy and government’s appropriate role may play out. People were asked which of the following two statements they agreed with more.

The “incentives” framework:

“Many great technologies, like the Internet, required government incentives for their initial development. Renewable energy is the way of the future and is no different in requiring government incentives for it to scale up.”

The “winners and losers” framework:

“Government can do some good things but it shouldn’t be picking winners and losers in business. Government spending on renewable energy is unfair to competition and businesses and doesn’t produce results.”



The results were dead even: 46% agreed with the incentives statement and 46% agreed with the winners and losers argument. This is not an unexpected outcome given the strong belief many hold about government playing any role in any sector of business and the governmental history of the “picking winners and losers” argument, but the results are still even. Only about 1 in 3 Republicans (30-63) supported the pro incentives position, which was similar to conservatives (27-64). As a result, given the higher proportion of Republicans and conservatives, the contrast was slightly lower for the pro incentives position in the 2nd District than overall, at 41-50. But even Republicans who agreed with the “winners and losers” argument (about two thirds), also agreed with the “all of the above” statement by a huge 83%-15% margin. So it is not that people are against government incentivizing renewable energy; but many feel it should not be in the business of picking winners and losers.