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Idahoans blow cold on wind

Poll finds little love for green power but some affection for Idaho Power.

BY ROCKY BARKER

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A strong majority of Idaho

voters oppose requiring Idaho Power Co. to use less coal and more alternative energy sources like wind if it will cost customers extra.

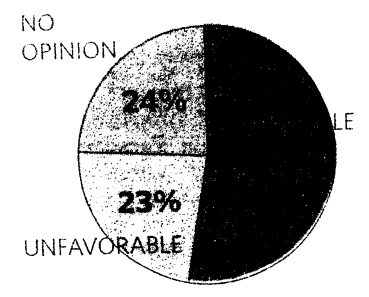
The Idaho Statesman poll, conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research of Washington, D.C., also showed a majority of respondents approve of Idaho Power and the

Idaho Public Utilities Commission that oversees utilities.

Recent years have seen a lot of political division and debate over power and green energy in Idaho.

Idaho Power has been forced by federal law to add more than 400

See **ENERGY, A7**

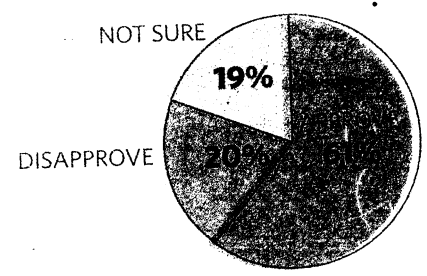


Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Idaho Power?

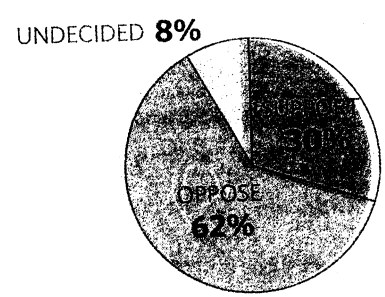
MORE POLL RESULTS ON A7: the PUC's performance; using less coal

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FROM THE FF



Do you approve or disapprove of the Idaho Public Utility Commission's performance regulating electricity rates and protecting customers?



In order to protect the environment, do you support or oppose requiring Idaho Power to use less coal and more renewable energy sources such as wind power, even though it will likely increase utility rates?

ENERGY

CONTINUED FROM A1

megawatts of wind power to its system in the past five years. The investor-owned utility has asked the PUC to reduce the price it must pay, shorten the contract period and even curtail the requirement that the company buy power from existing wind plants when it means turning off cheaper coal plants.

Meanwhile, alternative energy advocates have asked Idaho Power to phase out its coal plants, in part because of expected rising costs from future legislation to reduce carbon dioxide that contributes to climate change. And eastern Idaho residents with wind turbines next to their homes tried and failed to get the Idaho Legislature to pass a moratorium on new windmill farms.

"I don't think alternative energy is going to take the place of what we got now," said Jack Dobson of Meridian, one of the people whom pollsters interviewed. "I think we've got more coal than we do oil. I think we need it."

Opinions on the issue cut along party lines: 75 percent of Democrats supported replacing coal with alternative energy, compared to just 12 percent of Republicans.

That didn't surprise Brad Coker, managing director of Mason-Dixon, which conducts polls all over the country.

"It's pretty clear that when it comes to so-called green energy attitudes, voters are very polarized along party identification lines," Coker said.

GREEN ENERGY BECOMES POLITICIZED

The Obama administration's major focus on green energy is one of the reasons. Republicans, including Mitt Romney, have singled out programs to promote wind and solar energy as a waste of taxpayer dollars.

And, noted Coker, Al Gore's prominent advocacy on climate change broke down what had been bipartisan support for alternative energy programs a decade ago.

"I think alternative energy is a good idea," said Robert Franklin, a semi-retired Democrat from Boise. "We've seen in Europe that, with a little bit of government encouragement, it leads to good results."

Idaho Power conducted a statewide campaign — including billboards — to limit wind development earlier this year. Coker said that campaign, along with its na-

Mason-Dixon Polling & Research of Washington, D.C., conducted the poll Monday through Wednesday, interviewing 625 voters who said they were likely to vote in the Nov. 6 election. Those interviewed were selected from a phone-matched Idaho voter registration list that included land lines and cell phones.

The margin for error is no more than plus or minus four percentage points. This means that there is a 95 percent probability that the "true" figure would fall within that range if the entire population were sampled.

tionally low rates, might have contributed to the company's positive approval rating.

"In this case they are making an aggressive attempt to say 'We don't want to take more money from your pocket,' and a majority of Idaho voters are responding to that," Coker said.

Idaho Power serves about 500,000 customers in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon.

REGULATORS GET A THUMBS-UP

The three-member PUC, appointed by the governor, decides the amount of return on investment that monopoly utilities like Idaho Power get.

Tanya Falk, who owns a medical training business in Boise, has a favorable view of Idaho Power and the Idaho Public Utilities Commission. She's glad the PUC is watching out for consumers, she said.

"We need to have regulations because businesses can get carried away always looking at the dollar signs," said Falk, who was interviewed for the poll.

Falk supports requiring Idaho Power to use less coal and more wind, solar and other alternative power.

"If it costs a little bit more, that's all right," she said. "We

need to do the right thing and the best thing."

Bob Greer of Nampa, a retired Republican who participated in the poll, thinks green energy is a waste of money. And he's not happy with Idaho Power, which he said reported it cut rates and a few months later raised them.

But he was especially unhappy that the PUC doesn't ride Idaho Power harder.

"It's a slipshod outfit," Greer said.

Earlier this year AARP Idaho, a group that represents people over 50, promoted a bill that would have established a separate consumer board to look out for utility customers. Greer said he parted ways with AARP over its support for President Obama, but supported AARP on the utility watchdog.

"We need somebody to stand up and talk for us because, the way it is, we're totally at the mercy of big government and the Public Utilities Commission is part of big government," Greer said.

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