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American Voters Strongly Oppose Congressional Action Against Clean Air Standards

Voters Want EPA, Not Congress, To Set Standards

To: The American Lung Association and Interested Parties
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A new bipartisan national survey of likely 2012 voters¹ finds American voters at odds with those in Congress pushing to strip the Environmental Protection Agency of its authority to update air pollution standards, including Carbon Dioxide.

An overwhelming bipartisan majority wants the EPA to set stricter limits on air pollution, with about three-quarters of voters backing tougher standards on Mercury, smog and Carbon Dioxide as well as higher fuel efficiency standards for heavy duty trucks.

More important, voters explicitly reject Congressional efforts to stop the EPA from updating these standards both as a whole and in a debate specific to Carbon Dioxide standards. After a balanced debate on the issue, with language based on that recently used by supporters of Congressional action, a two-to-one majority opposes Congressional action to stop the EPA. This includes a vast majority of independents who, on this issue, look much more like Democrats than Republicans.

Key Findings

1. **Voters overwhelmingly support the EPA updating Clean Air Act standards.** 69 percent of voters think the EPA should update CAA standards with stricter limits on air pollution. Moreover, on specific elements of the CAA:
 - 79 percent support stricter limits on Mercury.
 - 77 percent support stricter limits on smog.
 - 77 percent support stricter limits on Carbon Dioxide.
 - 74 percent support tougher fuel efficiency standards on heavy duty trucks.

¹ Memo based on a national survey of 1021 likely 2012 voters conducted for the American Lung Association by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Ayres, McHenry & Associates, February 7-14, 2011. Margin of error for the full sample is 3.1%. For half samples it is 4.4%.

2. **Voters overwhelmingly oppose Congressional action that impedes EPA from updating clean air standards.** 68 percent say that Congress should NOT stop the EPA from updating the four standards listed above. When asked specifically about updating standards for Carbon Dioxide, 64 percent say that Congress should NOT stop the EPA.
 - After hearing a balanced debate on the issue, with messages based on the actual language used by opponents and supporters of the EPA, strong majorities continue to oppose Congressional action to stop the EPA. 63 percent oppose Congressional action on all four standards while 60 percent oppose Congressional action when the debate centers specifically on Carbon Dioxide. Independents oppose Congressional action by a two-to-one margin in both debates.
3. **Voters trust EPA more than Congress to set clean air standards.** Even after hearing strong arguments from opponents of the EPA, EPA supporters win every element of this debate. Taken as a whole, the survey clearly indicates that voters strongly trust the EPA to deal with clean air standards more than Congress.
 - Congress is significantly less popular than either the EPA or the Clean Air Act.
 - Only 18 percent of voters think the EPA is exceeding its legal mandate.
 - A bipartisan 69 percent majority believes that EPA scientists, rather than Congress, should set pollution standards. This is despite opposing language arguing that our elected representatives in Congress would do a better job than “unelected bureaucrats at the EPA.”
 - By a nearly 20-point margin, voters believe that updated EPA standards will boost, rather than harm, job creation.

EPA More Popular Than Congress, Protecting Air Quality More Important Than Cutting Regulations

While this survey confirms that “getting the economy moving and creating jobs” is the most important issue for voters (95 percent rate it as extremely or very important), some in Congress are missing the mark by centering their efforts so heavily on cutting EPA regulations, particularly on stopping the EPA from updating standards under the Clean Air Act. In fact, protecting air quality is seen, by 17 points, as a higher priority than “reducing regulations on businesses.” And voters believe that updating clean air standards is more likely to create jobs by leading to innovation rather than cost jobs by restricting businesses by 55 to 36 percent.

Meanwhile, the EPA enjoys relatively high ratings with a net +9 favorability rating (38 percent favorable, 29 percent unfavorable) compared to Congress (-13). The Clean Air Act has even higher net ratings at +17.

Consequently, voters want the EPA, and not Congress, to set pollution standards. An overwhelming 69 percent majority (including sizeable majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans) agrees that “Scientists at the EPA should set pollution standards, not politicians in Congress” while only 21 percent agree that “our elected representatives in Congress should set pollution standards, not unelected bureaucrats at the EPA.”

Voters Support Stricter Air Pollution Standards, Including on CO₂

Nearly seven-in-ten voters (69 percent) favor the EPA setting stricter limits on air pollution, including 68 percent of independents. Support is even higher for updating standards in four specific areas (Mercury, smog, Carbon Dioxide and fuel efficiency for heavy duty trucks), as the table below shows.²

■ **Table 1:** Support for EPA updating various CAA standards.

	Strong Favor	Total Favor	Total Oppose	Net Favor
Mercury	54	79	18	+61
Smog	49	77	21	+56
Carbon Dioxide	47	77	21	+56
Truck Fuel Efficiency	42	74	23	+51

There is very little partisan debate about these standards, as strong majorities of Democrats, independents, Republicans and liberals, moderates and conservatives all support each of these standards (with the lowest level of support among these groups at 58 percent). The only group in this survey that does not show majority support for these standards are the 19 percent of voters who identify themselves as strong supporters of the Tea Party, and these voters are largely split on these standards. Meanwhile, among voters who supported President Obama in 2008 but did not vote Democratic in 2010, support is at 85 percent or higher for all four standards.

Two-to-One Opposition To Congressional Efforts to Stop the EPA

In a flat question, before hearing arguments from either side of the debate, American voters reject the idea that Congress should stop the EPA from implementing these standards by a 68 to 28 percent margin. In a split-sample exercise, when this question is narrowed down to “standards on Carbon Dioxide emissions,” the results are similar with a 64 to 30 percent majority rejecting Congressional action to stop the EPA.

After balanced debates³ on the issues in which language was taken directly from supporters and opponents of Congressional action (with half the sample hearing a debate on Congressional action to stop all four updated standards and half the sample hearing a debate on Congressional action just on Carbon Dioxide emissions), support drops only slightly (and mostly with Republicans). But opposition to Congressional action remains robust with majorities of 60 percent or more, including two-to-one majorities of independents, opposing Congressional action both on the broader set of standards and specifically on Carbon Dioxide. On this issue, independents and moderates are much closer to Democrats and liberals than they are to Republicans and conservatives.

² Please see the Frequency Questionnaire for full language tested.

³ See Appendix B for language of the initial questions and arguments on EPA authority.

■ **Table 2:** Final opposition and support for stopping EPA action on all four CAA standards and on Carbon Dioxide overall and with some key groups

	Not Stop	Stop	Net	Net			Net		
				Dem	Ind	Rep	Mod	Lib/Mod Rep	Rep Women
All Four Standards	63	32	+31	+67	+27	-7	+51	+15	+3
CO ₂ Standards	60	35	+25	+53	+31	-11	+35	+5	+9

In fact, voters from most of the political spectrum reject Congressional action, including moderate Republican and Republican women. The only groups who support Congressional action are conservative Republicans, strong Tea Party supporters and Republican men.

Voters Support EPA on All Facets of Debate

Even after hearing strong messaging from supporters of Congressional action (along with messaging from opponents), voters support the EPA position on four key elements of the overall debate. As we noted above, an overwhelming majority believe that it should be EPA scientists, not Congress, who set pollution standards. By a 20-point margin voters also side with the EPA on the critical jobs issue, saying that more aggressive EPA standards are likely to enhance job creation rather than hurt it. And by a similar margin, voters also reject the notion that the EPA is a partisan organization with a political agenda.

■ **Table 3:** EPA issue debate results⁴

	Total First Statement	Total Second	Net Total
Updated standards will create jobs vs. Updated standards will hurt jobs	55	36	+19
Need standard to protect health vs. Can't afford standards because it will hurt jobs	55	39	+16
Scientists at EPA should set standards vs. Elected reps in Congress should...	69	21	+48
EPA is non-partisan vs. EPA is a political agency...	57	37	+20

⁴ Please see the Frequency Questionnaire for full language tested.

Appendix A: Net support for EPA Standards Among Key Groups⁵

Demographic	EPA Update Standards	Post-Debate: All Standards	Post-Debate: CO₂
Total	+43	+31	+25
Democrats	+78	+67	+53
Independents	+41	+27	+31
Republicans	+6	-7	-11
Liberal	+80	+74	+57
Moderate	+60	+51	+35
Conservative	+9	-9	-2
Not Tea Party supporters	+69	+61	+47
Tea Party supporter (not strong)	+36	+21	+11
Tea Party supporter (strong)	-30	-40	-27
Men	+26	+19	+9
Women	+57	+41	+39
College	+50	+43	+27
Non-college	+38	+21	+24
Younger	+50	+38	+32
Older	+35	+26	+19
Northeast	+55	+35	+32
Midwest	+44	+35	+24
South	+44	+21	+34
West	+29	+37	+2

⁵ Table shows net results of questions 19, 27 and 28 among key demographic groups.

Appendix B: Question Language

SPLIT C – Debate on All Four Standards

As you may know, some in Congress want to stop the EPA from updating these standards on air pollution. How about you, do you believe Congress should stop the EPA from updating these standards or not?

...

Now let me read you two arguments some people on both sides of the issue make.

(Some/other) people say: Scientists at the EPA are the most qualified people to decide how to protect the public from pollution, not politicians in Congress. These updated safeguards will prevent tens of thousands of deaths every year, significantly reduce sickness like asthma attacks or cancer, and encourage companies to invest in technologies that will make our air cleaner. Congress should hold all polluters accountable for their actions and let the EPA do its job, not let some polluters off the hook.

(Some/other) people say: Given the weak economy and lack of jobs, now is the worst time for the EPA to enact costly regulations that hurt jobs. This new red tape will cost American businesses hundreds of billion dollars, lead to higher gas and electricity prices for consumers and cause businesses to ship tens of thousands of American jobs to India and China. Congress should stop the EPA because we need to make government smaller, not create new government bureaucracy and regulation.

Now that you've heard more about this issue let me ask you again, do you believe Congress should stop the EPA from updating these standards or not?

SPLIT D – Debate on Just Carbon Dioxide Standard

As you may know, some in Congress want to stop the EPA from updating the standards on carbon dioxide emissions. How about you, do you believe Congress should stop the EPA from updating these standards or not?

...

Now let me read you two arguments some people on both sides of the issue make.

(Some/other) people say: Scientists at the EPA are the most qualified people to decide how to protect the public from carbon pollution, not politicians in Congress. The EPA is taking a common sense approach, requiring polluters to do what is affordable to reduce emissions, something they've been doing for other forms of pollution for decades. Updating these standards will save lives and reduce asthma attacks. Congress should hold polluters accountable for their actions and let the EPA do its job, not let some polluters off the hook.

(Some/other) people say: The Obama administration is trying to impose a backdoor cap-and-trade energy tax through the EPA. Their plan would impose more burdensome regulations that will cost American businesses hundreds of billion dollars, lead to higher gas and electricity

prices for consumers and cause businesses to ship tens of thousands of American jobs to India and China. Congress should stop the EPA because we need to make government smaller, not create new government bureaucracy and regulation.

Now that you've heard more about this issue let me ask you again, do you believe Congress should stop the EPA from updating these standards on carbon dioxide or not?