

## STRONG PUBLIC SUPPORT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY CONTINUES ITS POSITIVE TREND

A UniStar Issue Brief



As Americans recognize the need for cleaner, greener, and safer energy sources, public support for nuclear energy continues to rise. Nevertheless, political maneuvering, economic realities, and media coverage of the latest, big idea can quickly sway public opinion. In addition, new nuclear energy is under constant attack by groups using fear, deceptive financial arguments, and implausible projections to cloud the promise of nuclear energy. Left unanswered, these efforts could work to undermine the gains that the nuclear energy industry has made in recent years in public education, transparency, and economic development. That is why it is vital that the industry continue to cultivate public support through education and communication.

In recent years, the improvement in public perception of nuclear energy demonstrates that more and better communication can build acceptance and enthusiasm. This approval is essential to building the facilities necessary to meet our country's energy needs, while addressing concerns about global climate change.

Gallup poll results published in March 2010 revealed new levels of support, with 63 percent of those surveyed favoring the use of nuclear energy, including 27 percent who strongly favor it.<sup>1</sup>

### Gallup Poll

Overall, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity for the U.S.?



### FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONFIDENCE

Support for nuclear energy in the United States has increased in the past decade, especially among nuclear facilities' immediate neighbors. In July 2009, research firm Bisconti Research, Inc. surveyed neighbors—people living within 10 miles of a nuclear energy facility—about their perceptions of nuclear energy. Households with employees of the electric utility were excluded from the survey. The results were telling:

- 93 percent support license renewal for nuclear energy facilities that continue to meet federal safety standards
- 84 percent favor the use of nuclear energy
- **91 percent are confident in the plant's safety<sup>2</sup>**

Clearly, those who live closest to nuclear energy facilities, those most affected by the facilities' operations, are also among the strongest proponents of nuclear energy. These are individuals who have experienced firsthand nuclear energy facilities' commitment to safety and clean energy. Although households with utility employees were excluded from the July 2009 poll, half of those surveyed had a close friend employed at a nuclear

energy facility, and nearly 25 percent had a relative employed at a nuclear energy facility. This familiarity makes the technology behind nuclear energy production more accessible and, therefore, easier to support. When informing the public about the benefits of nuclear energy, the industry must employ the same transparent and proactive approach that it uses with the neighbors of existing nuclear energy facilities.

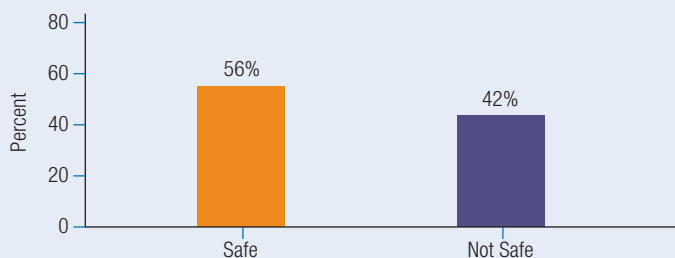
Nuclear energy has a proven track record of safety, reduces our dangerous dependence on fossil fuels, and promises us a greener future. That's why support for nuclear energy continues to grow—the more familiar people are with it, the more they support it.

### TURN ATTENTION TO THE RIGHT AUDIENCES

A large majority of Americans favor the use of nuclear energy. But despite higher levels of support for nuclear energy among the general population, specific subgroups still have questions about the safety of nuclear energy.

#### Gallup Poll

Generally speaking, do you think nuclear power plants are safe or not safe?



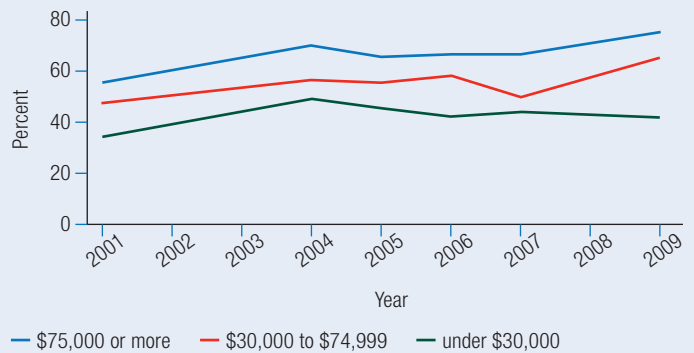
Public perception surveys consistently identify audiences who may need more information about the benefits of nuclear energy before they join the majority who support its use. Women, Democrats, and lower-income respondents are 40 to 50 percent less likely to believe that nuclear energy facilities are safe than are men, Republicans, and higher-income respondents, respectively.

There is evidence that misinformation, or a lack of information, is responsible for the lagging support. A survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Women Impacting Public Policy, a national, nonpartisan organization that advocates for and on behalf of women in business, found that many women lack information about how energy is produced and how nuclear energy can do it more cleanly.<sup>3</sup>

A similar gap in approval is present between upper- and lower-income respondents. Seventy-five percent of Americans whose annual household incomes exceed \$75,000 approve of nuclear energy.

#### Gallup Poll

Low-income households are less in favor of nuclear energy.



To win broad support for nuclear energy resources in the United States, the nuclear energy industry must reach out to Americans across economic, political, and gender lines.

#### UniStar Nuclear Energy Is Engaged in Local Communities and Across the Nation

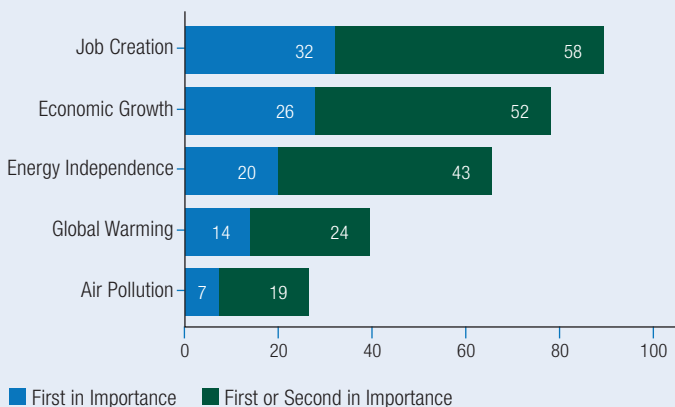
- Building a roster of regularly available speakers to reach out to community and civic groups on a variety of topics.
- Working with its parent companies to plan a new, EDF-funded, public Environmental and Information Center at its Calvert Cliffs 3 project site.



## MAKING CONNECTIONS TO SUSTAIN SUPPORT

In one example of the fragile nature of public opinion, increasing concerns about the economy shifted public perceptions about energy policy priorities. For the first time since 1984, concerns about the economy have taken precedence over concerns about the environment.

### Job Creation and Economic Growth Are Most Important Issues for Americans



Source: *Job Creation, Energy Independence Boost Public Support for New Nuclear Power Plants*, Bisconti Research Inc, June 2009

But this shift in attitude does not present an either/or proposition for the American public. Nuclear energy provides both environmental and economic benefits. The nuclear energy industry is prepared to build new facilities and create new jobs in our effort to shift electrical generation to cleaner and greener sources of power.

As the public struggles to reconcile environmental protection, energy security, an increasing demand for electricity, and the need for job creation in a struggling economy, deep concerns about energy policy have arisen. This atmosphere has created an opportunity for new nuclear energy to expand its acceptance as the clean, dependable, energy solution.

Now more than ever, the public is primed to understand how nuclear energy can help meet the nation's energy demands and address the four major issues of public concern.

CBS News/New York Times polling indicates widespread dissatisfaction with national energy policy:

- 58 percent believe fundamental changes are needed.
- 31 percent believe that U.S. energy policy needs to be completely rebuilt.
- 6 percent believe U.S. energy policy works pretty well and only minor changes are necessary.

### Jobs

Americans are extremely concerned with job creation and retention. The public needs to be informed of the quality and quantity of jobs that will be created during the construction and operation of new nuclear energy facilities.

### Greater Energy Independence

Americans are weary of volatile oil and gas prices and controversial foreign policy. Nuclear energy will help the nation gain energy independence from dangerous and unstable regimes.

### Increasing Energy Demand

A growing economy needs more sources of base-load electricity. To get our economy back on track, we need to take advantage of nuclear energy's potential as a clean, reliable, safe source of energy.

### A Healthy Environment

Americans are concerned about the legacy we are creating for future generations and want the government to invest in alternative fuel sources. A reinvigorated U.S. economy will run on clean, nuclear energy.

For this to happen, a broader majority of Americans will need to favor the use of nuclear energy and be confident in its safety. The nuclear energy industry will need to educate subgroups of the population, such as women and lower-income Americans, about the benefits of this clean, safe energy source. By demonstrating the tremendous benefits of nuclear energy, we will build greater acceptance of nuclear power among these groups, as well as create more wholehearted supporters and vocal advocates.

## A CALL TO ACTION

The American people are motivated to re-energize the nation's economy and reduce carbon emissions, but some are unsure how to do this. That's where nuclear energy comes in. Expanded use of nuclear energy is a critical component of any comprehensive energy strategy to meet the country's growing electricity demand with a cleaner source of power. To increase use of nuclear energy, the nuclear industry must further bolster public support and reach out to those who need more information to be fully persuaded.

UniStar Nuclear Energy and other industry leaders have made a commitment to proactive, open communication, and we call on the industry at large to do the same. We believe that an accurately informed and fully engaged public will be our greatest asset in promoting comprehensive energy policy that meets the country's economic and environmental objectives.

Large scale expansion of nuclear energy generation will require even broader—and stronger—support. This requires the industry to improve acceptance of nuclear energy beyond the industry's traditional base of support.

Poll results offer one clue as to how support for nuclear energy can be expanded. Although 70 percent of Americans polled believe electric utilities “should definitely build more nuclear power plants,” those same Americans believe that their view is in the minority. When asked if they thought the American public in general supports or opposes building more nuclear power plants, the poll found that only 42 percent believed that the



public in general supports building more nuclear energy facilities.<sup>4</sup> Our silent majority is not just silent; it doesn't even realize it's the majority! We must do a better job of popularizing the measure of public support that nuclear energy has today.

Building new nuclear energy facilities is not an unpopular proposition. Supporters should not be left to believe that they face a huge, majority opposition.

We in the industry also must continue to evolve our education strategies. Our supporters must understand nuclear energy and its benefits well enough to confidently discuss the benefits with their parents, children, friends, neighbors and co-workers. We need to arm supporters with facts, confidence, and enthusiasm, and encourage them to speak out. Rebuilding and expanding nuclear energy in the U.S. is an enormous undertaking that will require sustained political support. The support of a silent majority is simply not enough. We need the outspoken support of a vocal majority!



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## REFERENCES

1. Gallup Poll results on nuclear energy support, published March 2009.
2. Bisconti Research poll, "Third Biennial Nuclear Power Plant Neighbor Public Opinion Tracking Survey," July 2009.
3. "Women's Survey on Energy & the Environment", Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, June 2009.
4. NEI. "Perspectives on Public Opinion Newsletter, June 2010.