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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

--Media Release--

Overwhelming Majority of Americans Favors US Joining With G8 Members to Limit Greenhouse Gas Emissions

**Awareness of Scientific Consensus on Climate Change Growing,
But Still Only Held By Half**

**When Scientific Consensus Assumed,
Majority Supports Even High-Cost Steps to Reduce Emissions**

**Very Strong Support for Legislation to Cut Emissions:
Willing to Accept Increase in Costs of \$15 a Month per Household**

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College Park, MD: An overwhelming majority of Americans supports the US agreeing to limit greenhouse gas emissions in concert with other members of the G8 Summit. The new PIPA-Knowledge Networks poll asked, if, at the G8 Summit, “the leaders of these other countries are willing to act to limit the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, President Bush should or should not be willing to act to limit such gases in the US?” Eighty-six percent said that he should. Eighty-one percent of Republicans supported this as well as 89% of Democrats.

Virtually all respondents—94%—said the US should limit its greenhouse gases at least as much as the other developed countries do on average. Nearly half—44%—think the US should do more than average.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, comments, “Going into the G8 Summit, nearly all Americans feel that the US should not be a laggard, but should be ready to do as much as most other developed countries to reduce emissions that cause climate change.”

Consistent with this support for international cooperation on climate change, a large majority—73%—said the US should, “participate in the Kyoto agreement to reduce global warming.” Curiously, 43% still assume, incorrectly, that President Bush favors US participation in the Kyoto Treaty and another 14% are not sure. Only 43% are aware that he opposes US participation.

Rising Perception of Scientific Consensus

The perception of a scientific consensus about the reality of global warming has grown sharply over the last year. The percentage saying that “there is a consensus among the great majority of scientists that global warming exists and could do significant damage” has risen from 43% in June 2004 to 52% today. The percentage saying that “scientists are divided on the existence of global warming and its impact” has dropped from 50% to 39%. This is part of a long-range trend: in 1994 only 28% perceived a scientific consensus while 58% assumed that scientists were divided.

This trend is also reflected in greater awareness of global warming or climate change, which appears to have grown over the last year. Asked how much they have heard about “the problem of global warming or climate change due to the buildup of greenhouse gases,” 72% said a great deal or some (22% and 50% respectively), up from 63% a year ago, when 15% said a great deal and 48% some. Those who said not very much or not at all dropped from 38% to 28%.

Perceptions of a scientific consensus on climate change continue to be partisan. Sixty-two percent of Democrats perceived a consensus, as compared to just 41% of Republicans.

But over the last year there have been sharp movements in both parties, especially Republicans. Among Republicans, the perception of a scientific consensus has risen 11 points (30% to 41%) and the perception of scientists as divided has dropped a remarkable 17 points (63% to 46%). Among Democrats, perceptions of a scientific consensus have risen 7 points (55% to 62%) while perceptions of a division have dropped 6 points (39% to 33%).

Need for Action

Three in four Americans embrace the idea that global warming is a problem that requires action. Only 21% opposed any steps with economic costs. However, those who said some action is necessary were divided between 42% who said the effect of global warming “will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost,” and 34% who said the problem is “pressing” and “we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs.”

Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between the belief that there is a scientific consensus and the view that high-cost steps are needed. Among those who believe that scientists are divided, only 17% favored high-cost steps, as compared to 51% among those who perceive there is a consensus.

Perhaps most interesting, when the American public was asked to “suppose there were a survey of scientists that found that an overwhelming majority have concluded that global warming is occurring and poses a significant threat,” the percentage of the whole sample saying that they would then favor taking high-cost steps increased sharply, from 34% to 56%.

Climate Change Legislation

A very large majority of Americans express support for legislation to reduce greenhouse gases. Respondents were told about the targets in one of the key drafts of the McCain-Lieberman legislation (Climate Stewardship Act), which would require large companies to reduce their emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2020. An overwhelming 83% said they favored the legislation, with just 13% opposed.

They were then asked if they would favor the bill “if in fact it appears that it would likely cost \$15 a month for an average household.” Two out of three (68%) said they would, while 28% said they would not. Democrats were just slightly more willing to accept the \$15 cost (72%) than Republicans (67%).

Respondents were asked to consider a variety of possible strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- 81% supported “tax incentives to utility companies to encourage them to sell environmentally clean energy, such as solar and wind power, to consumers.”
- 81% supported “cash incentives like tax credits and rebates to individual households that upgrade to more energy efficient appliances like refrigerators and air conditioners.”

- 70% favored “requiring that by 2010, half of all new cars produced are hybrid-electric or some other type that is very fuel efficient.”
- 77% favored, “continuing the tax credit for purchasing a hybrid-electric car.”

A majority expresses optimism that steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will actually benefit the US economy. Asked to choose between two statements, 71% chose the position that “the US economy will become more competitive because these efforts will result in more efficient energy use, saving money in the long run,” while only 23% chose the position that “efforts in the United States to reduce the release of greenhouse gases will cost too much money and hurt the US economy.”

The poll of 812 respondents was fielded June 22-26 with a margin of error of +/- 3.5-4.0% depending on the sample size for each question. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp. Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation. A full report and the questionnaire can be found at www.pipa.org.