



# PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel, Public Opinion Strategies

RE: Overwhelming Support for RECLAIM Act In Order to Help Revitalize Coal Communities

DATE: September 22, 2016

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The national polling firm, Public Opinion Strategies, recently completed a regional survey<sup>1</sup> of voters in seven states that shows **there is overwhelming support in these states for the RECLAIM Act, which provides \$1 billion over the course of five years to support economic and community development projects aimed at revitalizing the places hardest hit by the downturn in the coal industry.** Support is significant among all demographic, geographic and partisan sub-groups in the region. Moreover, voters are nearly three times as likely to side with the rationales of supporters of this legislation as compared to critics.

Support may in part be due to the strong sense that rural, coal-mining areas of these states are struggling economically. By a two-to-one margin, voters prefer that decision-makers focus on helping these areas transition and diversify their economy, rather than fighting government regulations to help bring back coal mining jobs. The region's residents place equally high levels of importance on protecting water quality in rivers and lakes from abandoned mines as they do on assisting communities with economic development.

Among the key findings of the survey are the following:

- **There is overwhelming support (89 percent) for the RECLAIM Act, which would release funds to help revitalize coal communities.** Survey respondents received a brief explanation of the proposal in order to ensure all respondents had the same level of information on the topic:

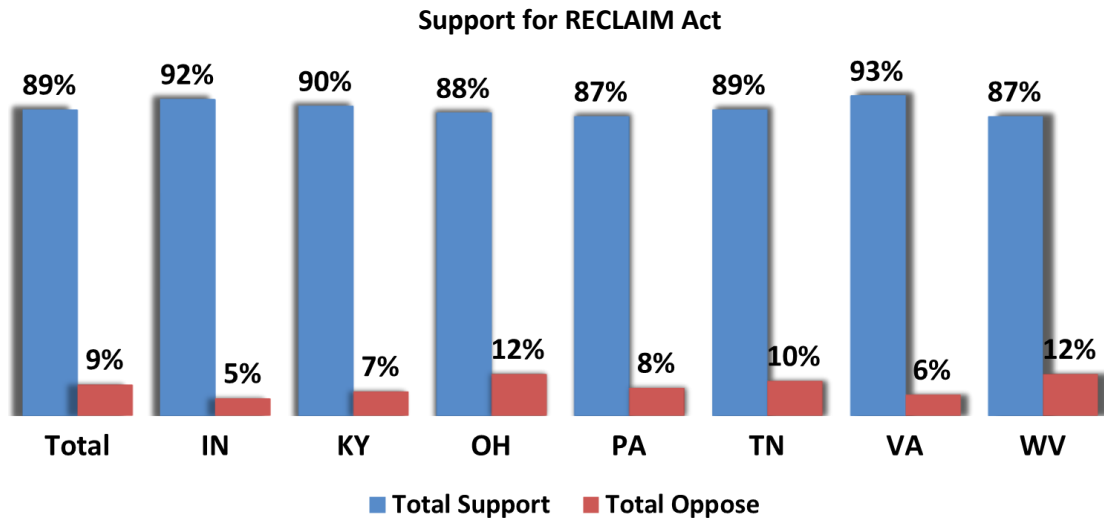
*"A proposal in Congress would release one billion dollars in existing money from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund which was collected from coal producers over the last forty years. The proposal, known as the RECLAIM Act, would release this money to affected states to help revitalize coal communities hit hardest by the downturn in the coal industry. Communities could*

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From September 8-15, 2016, Public Opinion Strategies completed 1050 interviews (441 landline, 420 online, 189 cell phone) among 150 Registered Voters in each of seven states: West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and Tennessee. The margin of sampling error for this regional sample is +/- 3.02%. Overall data presented is aggregate data, weighted proportionally relative to the registered voter population in each state. Margins of sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Some percentages may sum to more than 100% due to rounding.

*apply for grants to restore abandoned mine lands, invest in economic development projects to put people to work, and tackle infrastructure needs such as ensuring clean drinking water.”*

Again, nearly nine-in-ten voters in the region support this legislation, with a majority (54 percent) strongly in support, as one can see in the graph below. Opposition is fairly minimal.



- **Support for this proposal is widespread.** Majorities in all key subgroups express support, including:
  - 91 percent of women and 87 percent of men;
  - 90 percent of voters under the age of 35, 91 percent of 35-44 year olds, 84 percent of 45-64 year olds, and 92 percent of those over 65;
  - 93 percent of Democrats, 84 percent of independents, and 89 percent of Republicans;
  - 87 percent of those currently or formerly employed in the coal industry; and
  - 88 percent or more in every income category.
- **Voters offer a wide range of rationales for their support for the RECLAIM Act.** We provided respondents with the opportunity to tell us, in their own words, why they support the proposal. Most focused on the dire need to support the economy in these communities. However, a significant number also pointed to the fact that these funds exist already and should be put to use.

*“I feel these towns have been forgotten about. They need support and money to get them back where they need to be.” - Republican Female, Age 45-54, PA*

*“Fighting to restore the mining jobs may not be successful, so available funding for revitalization and diversification seems to make sense.” - Republican Male, Age 65+, KY*

*“My hometown of Nelsonville, Ohio was a boom town in the 40s. Now there are all kinds of coal junk that needed cleaned up and never was. It would be great if that money was used for jobs.” – Democratic Male, Age 55-64, OH*

*“These people have no other industry in their area and we can't just leave them out to dry. They don't have anything else to fall back on.” – Independent Male, Age 25-34, VA*

*“The money came from mines and should go to clean up and help the ones who worked for it.” – Democratic Female, Age 55-64, WV*

*“If the money is there, why not use it?” – Republican Female, Age 35-44, OH*

*“This sounds like a good solution to the problem. It sounds like there is money available so this would be a good way to use it.” – Democratic Female, Age 35-44, IN*

- **The rationales in support of this legislation trump criticisms of it.** Respondents heard both arguments in support of the RECLAIM Act and against it. By nearly a three-to-one margin, voters sided with the supporters' argument, as the table below depicts:

*Supporters say that using existing funds from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund to help revitalize coal communities is a bipartisan idea that provides a step in the right direction with no effect on the federal budget. It will provide new, good jobs in industries that the community feels are best for their area, and put people back to work getting skills that provide long-term benefits. At the same time, it will clean up pollution in our rivers, streams, and drinking water.*

**73%**

*Opponents say that using existing funds from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund will end up wasting more money on bureaucracy than helping coal communities. Coal communities do not need a big federal bail-out. Instead, we should get rid of federal regulations that are killing thousands of good-paying jobs that allowed people to support their families with dignity.*

**25%**

This dynamic holds true in every state, with 65 percent or more of voters in each state saying that the supporters' argument comes closer to their own view than that of critics. The rationales in support are also more powerful across party lines as 60 percent of Republican voters, 74 percent of independents and 86 percent of Democrats side with the supporters' argument.

- **By a two-to-one margin, voters in these states think that elected officials and decision-makers should prioritize economic development and diversification rather than fighting government regulations that have affected the industry.** Conceptually, voters in these states side decisively with a revitalization approach to helping these communities in their state.

*Assisting rural, coal-mining areas to attract new employers, diversify the economy, and ensure workers get new jobs in growing industries*

**62%**

*Fighting government regulations that have made it harder to produce coal, to ensure the good-paying jobs in mining come back*

**32%**

- **Voters anticipate a wide range of potential benefits from the RECLAIM Act.** As the following table highlights, the most important benefits for voters in these states are linked to clean water and economic revitalization.

<b>Potential Benefit</b>	<b>% Extremely/ Very Important</b>	<b>% Extremely Important</b>
<i>Restore streams and rivers polluted by toxic drainage from old mines.</i>	<b>86%</b>	52%
<i>Provide job opportunities to former coal-miners and workers.</i>	<b>86%</b>	47%
<i>Create economic opportunities for local small businesses so they can create more jobs.</i>	<b>81%</b>	39%
<i>Clean-up hazardous abandoned mines.</i>	<b>77%</b>	44%
<i>Diversify the economy so there are many new and different types of employers, rather than relying on coal mining.</i>	<b>72%</b>	36%
<i>Allow communities to voluntarily apply for grants for economic redevelopment projects that best meet their needs.</i>	<b>69%</b>	29%
<i>Provide areas for outdoor recreation for those who come to hike, camp, hunt, ride off-road vehicles and enjoy natural areas near mountains.</i>	<b>43%</b>	17%

**In conclusion**, the survey clearly demonstrates overwhelming and consistent support for the RECLAIM Act and its goal of releasing funds to help revitalize coal-mining communities. This support does not waiver as voters hear arguments from opponents. There is a clear sense that these areas need this kind of assistance, and that this should be prioritized over efforts to fight regulations and bring back mining jobs.