

August 14, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Dr. Barbara Altmann
President
Franklin & Marshall College
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Dear President Altmann,

We are writing on behalf of the Better Path Coalition to express our concern about a question in the August poll from the Center for Opinion Research. We have tried unsuccessfully to resolve the issue with Mr. Yost, Director of the Center. We are calling on you to direct Mr. Yost to pull the results from the polling data and explain why publicly.

We were dismayed to see press reports citing polling results on Governor Wolf's Restore Pennsylvania plan that indicated that 70% of Pennsylvanians favor it. As the Center's own March 28 poll indicated, 67% of Pennsylvanians believe that climate change is already causing problems and 68% support the government doing more to address it. It makes no sense that 70% of Pennsylvanians would also support a climate-killing plan like Restore Pennsylvania unless the question didn't adequately explain it.

This is the question that participants were asked. "Restore Pennsylvania is a plan proposed by the governor to help local communities improve storm water [sic] management to reduce flooding, eliminate blight, expand broadband access, and address other local infrastructure needs. Restore Pennsylvania would invest \$4.5 billion over the next four years and would be funded by a severance tax on natural gas drillers that [sic]. Do you favor or oppose this infrastructure plan?"

Although the question refers to a severance tax, it does not explain that it would take 20 years' worth of severance tax revenue (and, thus, 20 more years of drilling and fracking and the resulting emissions) to pay for Wolf's four-year plan. And, although the question does mention some of the provisions within Restore Pennsylvania, it does not mention the fossil fuel subsidies that are among them. Restore Pennsylvania would fund more natural gas pipelines and help grow the petrochemical business that is the second generation fracking boom centered on ethane used to make plastics including the single-use variety.

We made these arguments to Mr. Yost. He initially responded that he was sharing the important issues we raised with some media partners. When we replied asking him if he would take the steps we called for, we received the following response:

“I'm sorry, but I will not be pulling the results of the survey. The survey was designed to test the broad themes of the Governor's proposal, which it does. I don't doubt that follow ups that test additional components of the plan might change reactions to it, but I think a large amount of polling has made clear that citizens want more spending on infrastructure as well as a severance tax. The poll's results are in line with those findings.

“The topic I believe you're most interested in understanding is the public's general stance on fracking itself, including their knowledge of the potential environmental and health costs and consequences of that activity, which are significant. I think those ideas are worth testing and are something that we'll consider asking in a future survey.”

His response is wholly unsatisfactory. What he thinks past polls have made clear is not relevant. In fact, to rely on preconceived notions of what the public thinks contaminates the question being asked and the results that follow. There are substantive changes to this year's severance tax proposal that were not made clear to participants. In addition, given the polling data on climate change we cited earlier, it's possible that the public's opinion is shifting on the production of fossil fuels, especially when it is well understood that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has told us that we have less than 12 years to address climate change and Wolf's plan would commit us to 20 more years of fracking. The duration of the repayment was completely omitted from the question. In the same vein, omitting that the plan includes fossil fuel subsidies may have resulted in different responses from those who have been directly impacted by the pipelines and petrochemical projects Restore Pennsylvania would fund and/or the extreme weather events climate change is already causing.

Mr. Yost admits that follow ups might change reactions to Restore Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the Restore Pennsylvania debate is occurring now, not sometime in the future. People across the state are reading the press reports and forming their own impressions of the plan based on the faulty opinion research your institution performed.

The second part of Mr. Yost's response makes more assumptions. No, we are not interested in understanding the public's general stance on fracking itself in this instance. We are specifically campaigning to stop a bad plan from being enacted. It is a matter of great urgency, not a casual academic interest in public opinion.

It is not a trifling matter that the Center's question omitted important details of the plan that the public does not understand. Lt. Gov. Fetterman used Penn Capital-Star's reporting of the results to tweet that the bills should move. Here's just one of the responses. Those of us who follow the severance tax closely see responses like this every time it is discussed. "Thank you for higher taxes - imposed on a region with a high percentage of poor and elderly on fixed income." People don't even understand what a severance

tax is, contrary to what Mr. Yost thinks, much less what Restore Pennsylvania is. Polling results are only as good as the question that elicits them.

We call on you, once again, to direct Mr. Yost to pull the results and make a public statement explaining why. It is particularly important that you do this because Governor Wolf's wife sits on your Board of Trustees.

Respectfully,

Better Path Coalition Planning Committee

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Robert Cross, Responsible Drilling Alliance
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