HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

MEMORANDUM

TO: SIERRA CLUB

FROM: HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2014

RE: KEY FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY IN WEST VIRGINIA

From February 4 to 7, 2014, Hart Research Associates conducted a statewide survey in West Virginia on behalf of the Sierra Club. A total of 504 registered voters across the state were interviewed. The results among the full sample have a margin of error of ±4.4 percentage points; sample tolerances increase among subgroups of the sample.

The goal of the survey was to gauge West Virginians' reactions to the Elk River chemical spill and to understand what impact, if any, the spill has had on their attitudes about environmental regulations and protections in the state. This memorandum outlines the key findings from this research.

1 West Virginians view this spill as a wakeup call and a clear indication that the state needs to take a different approach to environmental protection. In the absence of a new approach, they say, we are likely to see more incidents like this occurring.

- Fully 73% of voters in the state agree that West Virginia has paid too little attention to addressing threats to air and water, and that the Elk River spill is a wakeup call that things must change.
- Voters of all ages, education levels, incomes, and political persuasions agree that this is the case, with particularly high agreement among seniors (82%).
- In fact, voters say, the Elk River spill is not an isolated incident. Seven in 10 (69%) voters say that other serious incidents like this will occur unless action is taken to prevent them.
- As the state's economy continues to struggle, there is some reticence about the effect that new regulations might have on jobs, with 59% agreeing that they could result in companies cutting jobs that West Virginia cannot afford to lose right now.
- But this sentiment does not dampen voters' desire for change on this front. Indeed, 62% of voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who favors strong regulations and enforcement to protect the water, air, and health of West Virginians, more than twice the number (30%) who would support a candidate who believes that more regulations will only hurt jobs and the state's economy.

- It is particularly notable that political independents favor a pro-regulation candidate by 67% to 26%, a margin of 41 points, and that Republicans are divided evenly on this point (44% to 47%).

2 Voters overwhelmingly believe that a greater focus on regulations would have prevented the chemical spill, and there are very high levels of support for several proposals for stronger environmental regulations and protections.

- Nearly nine in 10 (88%) voters express concern about the spill, including 44% who say they are extremely concerned about it. Concern is at more than 80% all across the state, even in areas not affected by the spill.
- More than two in three (68%) voters say that stronger regulations and better enforcement of existing regulations would have prevented the spill, including 59% who feel strongly that this is the case. Just 20% say this would not have prevented the spill.
- Voters across the political spectrum agree with this point—79% of Democrats say strong regulation and enforcement would have prevented the spill, as do 71% of independents and 57% of Republicans.
- More specifically, majorities of West Virginians say that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (57%) and particularly the state Department of Environmental Protection (66%) should have stronger standards and enforcement to prevent future incidents like the Elk River spill.
- Even more than a third of Republicans say this of the EPA (37%), and 50% say it of the DEP.
- And 67% of voters say they are more apt to support a candidate who supports EPA and DEP efforts to enforce regulations and oversight of coal and chemical companies. Half as many (23%) are more likely to support a candidate who wants to prevent such efforts.

3 Voters' enthusiasm for stronger air and water protections is not abstract; support is extremely high for several specific changes in environmental regulations.

- We asked survey respondents if they would support or oppose three specific proposals to strengthen clean air and water regulation and enforcement. Support for all three is overwhelming; indeed, in each case, a majority or large plurality of voters *strongly* support the proposal.

	Strongly Support Proposal %	Total Support Proposal %	Oppose Proposal %
Require that all facilities that pose a contamination threat to water supplies be inspected regularly	82	97	2
Strengthen state water-quality standards to reduce the pollution that can be released into the water	65	87	9
Increase the involvement of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in making sure that environmental regulation and enforcement is effective in West Virginia	43	67	29

- As is the case with desire for stronger regulations in general, support for these specific proposals crosses partisan lines. Support for the inspection proposal exceeds 90% among Democrats, independents, and Republicans, while stronger water quality standards is at more than 80% for all three groups. Greater involvement by EPA is favored by 89% of Democrats and 67% of independents; support among Republicans essentially is divided (46% to 50%).

4 West Virginians hold the coal industry responsible for air and water contamination in the state, and they are tired of the stranglehold they believe the industry's lobbyists have on Mountaineer politics.

- Survey respondents were informed that the chemicals spilled into the Elk River were used in the processing of coal. A minority of voters (though a significant one) say that the coal industry bears responsibility for the spill—40% say it bears a lot or some of responsibility, while 57% say it bears just a little or none of the responsibility.
- However, the coal industry's perceived culpability for general air and water contamination is a different story. Two-thirds of voters (65%) say that the industry bears a lot or some of the responsibility for general contamination, while 33% say it bears just a little or no responsibility. Even 54% of those who have a favorable view of the industry say it has at least some responsibility for air and water contamination.
- As noted earlier, there is an overwhelming belief that things in West Virginia must change. This sentiment carries to voters' views of the coal industry's relationship to West Virginia politics. Sixty-one percent (61%) agree that coal industry and other corporate lobbyists have too much power to prevent common-sense protections and regulations. And 58% agree that it is time the state's elected officials put residents' well-being first and stop letting coal industry lobbyists call the shots.
- To wit, 58% of voters say they are more likely to support a candidate who is independent of the coal industry, rather than one who has a close relationship with the coal industry (30%). This is true of majorities of Democrats (69% prefer a coal-independent candidate), independents (59%), and Republicans (51%).