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CLIMATE: Public concern, demand for action about global warming wanes

-- poll (*Wednesday, April 2, 2008*)

Christa Marshall, *E&E Daily* reporter

Worry about global warming has declined somewhat in the minds of Americans over the past two years, lagging behind Medicare, Social Security and energy as a source of concern, according to a new survey.

Overall, the number of individuals who said they were "very and somewhat" worried about climate change declined 70 to 67 percent from 2006 to 2008, according to the [poll](#) from the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress at New York University. The other three issues gained in traction, jumping from four to seven points.

The percentage of Americans who said global warming requires immediate attention also declined over the two-year period, from 77 to 69 percent, raising a potential public opinion barrier for Congress as it considers major climate change legislation.

"Something's not getting through to the public" about climate change, said study author Paul Light, a professor at NYU's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service.

"You almost need a Ph.D. to understand the cap-and-trade proposals floating around. Most Americans would guess that the term is about baseball, not climate change," Light said.

Still, the poll found that the number of Americans who were "very worried" about global warming jumped seven points to 39 percent in 2008. Those that called the issue only "somewhat" worrying sent the overall global warming numbers in decline, however.

Light emphasized that the rise in the "very worrying" percentage still was the lowest rate of increase of the four issues studied, indicating the issue has much less traction than the others.

Social Security, Medicare and energy are related to people's fears about their future ability to cope financially and are likely heightened by oil prices and current "financial jitters," said Frank O'Donnell, the president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch.

"In 2006, by contrast, people were more confident about the economy, and the Gore movie ("An Inconvenient Truth") had just put global warming on the front burner of public consciousness," said O'Donnell.

Other pollsters and communications experts have noted in recent months that the global warming issue is lagging behind the economy and the war in Iraq in the minds of some Americans. A February poll in

Minnesota -- which has voted Democratic in recent presidential elections -- found that voters listed jobs and health care among their top concerns.

However, that Minnesota poll reflected a trend picked up in the New York University survey -- the global warming issue is highly partisan.

Light found that 46 percent of Republicans were worried about global warming in 2008, down from 52 percent in 2006. Democrats followed an opposite trend, increasing their "worry" percentage over the two-year span from 71 to 81 percent.

There also is a difference among men and women, according to Light's survey. Forty-four percent of women called themselves "very worried" about climate change in 2008, compared to only 35 percent of men.

Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted the study for New York University via a survey of 1,001 randomly selected Americans in March 2008. The answers were compared to those from an identical poll conducted in August 2006, which also had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

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