

REPORT |

Examining the Tradeoffs of additional coal plants proposed for our area



Rationale for the forum

The 2007 “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting© attracted 650 participants from all walks of life and all areas of Owensboro and Daviess County. On that day, one of the discussion periods focused on environmental issues, and one of the top environmental concerns that came forth was the high concentration of coal-fired power plants in our region – some of which do not provide power for our area or even use local coal.

Since that town meeting, three coal-to-gas plants have been proposed for our area. Consequently, this public forum was organized to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed plants, and to pose the question: When, if ever, should the line be drawn on these plants?

A Public Forum

**Public Life Foundation
of Owensboro**

**The Springs Conference Center
March 22, 2010**

Planning process

A committee was formed to help plan the event: the format and methodology, the participant guide and polling questions. Committee members included:

- Public Life Foundation staff
- a public health official
- a representative of Owensboro Municipal Utilities
- several environmental advocates
- a college biology professor

Representatives of the three proposed coal plants, Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce, Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation and the Council of Labor were invited to serve on the planning committee, but all declined or did not respond.

Format

Following opening remarks and a review of the ground rules, a PowerPoint presentation complemented a printed participant guide that was distributed to all attendees. The guide included background information on coal and economic development, the three proposed plants, and potential health and environmental concerns. Seven points in support of the proposed plants were aligned with points in opposition to the plants.

At 15 tables, six to eight participants devoted approximately an hour to small group dialogue and deliberation led by a facilitator. A recorder captured key themes, points the group could agree on and those in which they could not agree.

Verbal reports were presented from participants at each table, followed by electronic polling. Finally, participants indicated which “action steps” they would be willing to take regardless of their position, and they were provided with contact information for public officials, stakeholders, advocacy groups and more.

Participants

The 100-plus participants were not expected to reflect a scientific sample, but rather a healthy cross-section of the community. It was a public meeting and all were welcomed.



The event was promoted through news releases, email notices and advertisements in the Owensboro, Henderson and Spencer County, Indiana newspapers.

Participants included:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| retired city planner | students |
| marketing professional | school librarian |
| retired school superintendent | small business owners |
| utility company employees | District Judge |
| environmental advocates | realtor |
| candidates for public office | accountant |
| Daviess County commissioner | teachers |
| college president | college professor |
| concerned citizens | civil engineer |
| college dean | attorney |
| public health official | psychologist |
| farmers | social workers |
| foundation director | photographer |
| economic development specialists | |
| owner of property near a proposed plant site | |

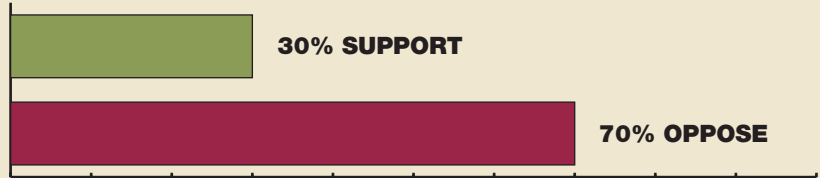


Information

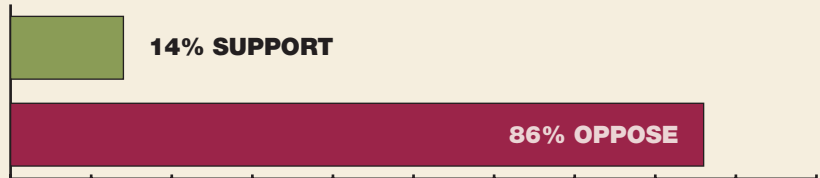
The participant guide is included in the most recent edition of the foundation’s publication, the *Public Life Advocate*:
http://plfo.org/documents/coalforum_PG_web.pdf

Participant Polling

In general, I support or oppose these proposed plants:



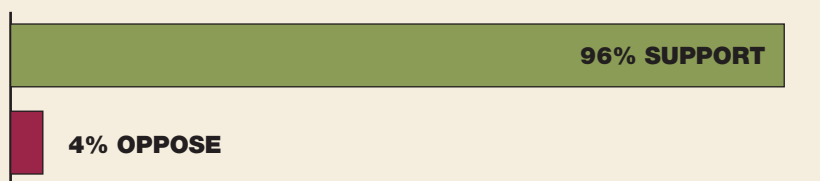
I support or oppose taxpayer-funded incentives to the corporations developing these plants:



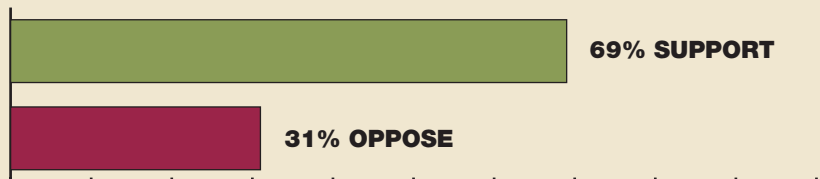
I support or oppose strict enforcement of existing environmental regulations:



I support or oppose placing additional environmental controls on the older plants in the area that do not meet the latest standards:

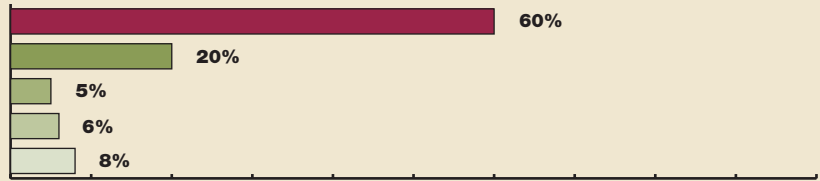


I support or oppose drawing the line on coal plants in this area:

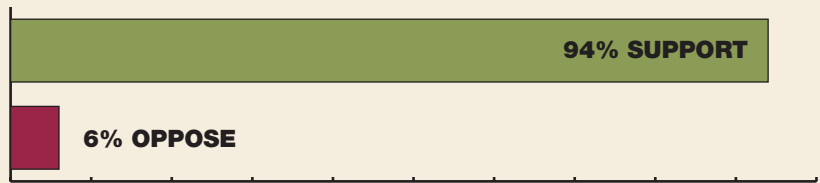


Participant Polling

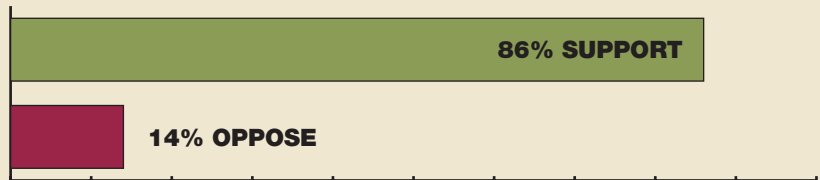
I say ... no more plants at all:
no more after these three are built:
no more after five more plants are built:
no more after ten more plants are built:
keep building them with no restrictions at all:



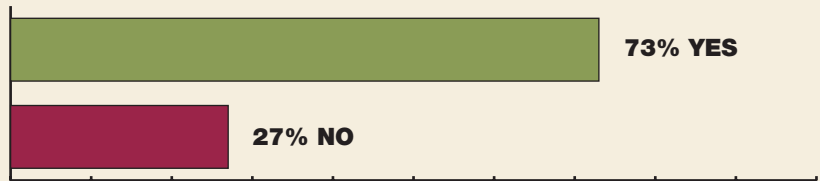
I support or oppose developing a plan to phase out older coal plants that release the most toxic emissions:



I support or oppose shifting more taxpayer investments away from coal plants toward developing and expanding renewable energy alternatives, efficiency and conservation:



... even if it results in an increase in taxes or utility bills:



A sampling of points made by forum participants:

- Want to balance environmental issues with needs for jobs
- Plants would produce quality jobs.
- We have the natural resources. We need to move forward to have time to invest in reusable resources.
- Toxic emissions statistics in our area are troubling, comparing our regions to major cities.
- The older plants are continuing to be used, why not just start over with those plants?
- Current power needs can't be met by alternative fuels at this time.
- Don't compromise health for jobs.
- If fossils are used make it as clean as possible and if new plants are built make them as environmentally safe as possible.
- If we cannot invest the money/time/research into alternative sources of cleaner coal then not worth the acute health effects
- We have not invested in research and development significantly, nor have we offered the same degree of financial incentives.

Action Steps

Whatever my position, I will take the following action steps:

Action	Number of participants who checked this option
Contact officials and share my position	43
Sign a petition	46
Write a letter or an op-ed piece for newspaper	20
Organize a letter writing campaign	7
Join or volunteer for an organization	33
Support an organization with a contribution	25
Speak to a civic club	14
Take steps to conserve more energy	70