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FM3

*Public Opinion Research
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

RE: Patterns of GOP Support for Initiative 732

DATE: September 13, 2015

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of Washington voters to assess their views on issues related to climate and energy policy in the state.¹ The survey included a series of questions about Initiative 732, a ballot measure to establish a revenue-neutral carbon tax in Washington. As we have previously noted, the research shows that Initiative 732 stands little chance of winning approval from Washington voters. However, it also shows that the measure draws overwhelming opposition from GOP voters – opposition that, in the context of opposition messaging, is in no way mitigated by messaging thoroughly describing its revenue neutrality. In short, while some conservative opinion leaders recognize some advantages from a revenue-neutral carbon tax, there **is no data whatsoever indicating that such a measure would succeed in winning over GOP voters in the context of a campaign – certainly not enough to suggest it could win at the ballot.**

Key specific findings include the following:

- **Fewer than two in five voters initially back the measure.** As shown in **Figure 1** on the following page, just 39 percent of Washington voters back Initiative 732 when read the full and final language of the ballot question, as determined by the Attorney General. An essentially equal number of voters (41 percent) oppose the measure. While the measure wins a narrow majority of support from Democrats, it is backed by only 35 percent of GOP voters. This pattern reflects common levels of opposition to tax ballot measures

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from Republican voters, and suggests that nothing in the revenue-structure of I-732 does anything to moderate their usual level of opposition.

**FIGURE 1:
Initial Support for Initiative 732 by Party**

Position on I-732	ALL VOTERS	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Yes	39%	55%	31%	35%
No	41%	25%	49%	48%
Undecided	19%	20%	20%	19%

- **Critically, an exchange of pro and con messaging does nothing to enhance support among GOP voters.** After voters were presented with arguments from supporters and opponents of Initiative 732, in rotated order, fewer than half (49%) supported the measure – with an essentially equal number opposed (44%). The supporters’ message included language crafted by the I-732 campaign the explained the tax-cutting aspects of I-732 in some detail – and yet it utterly failed to budget Republican support. Fewer Republicans (34%) backed the measure after this exchange of messaging than backed it beforehand.

In short, the empirical data suggests that the argument that GOP voters will back a revenue-neutral carbon tax – at least, in the form embodied by I-732 – is based more on hope than reality. **There is no empirical data to suggest that GOP voters have an instinctive desire to support a revenue carbon tax, nor any data to suggest that messaging will move them to do so in a contested campaign.** The virtues of the idea are evident to well-informed policymakers, but appear very unlikely to gain traction with Republican voters in Washington.

¹ **Methodology:** From May 19-24 and 26, 2015, FM3 conducted 2,003 telephone interviews with registered Washington voters likely to cast ballots in the November 2016 general election. The full results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 2.2%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher. A sub-sample of 400 voters was asked about Initiative 732, with a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.9%. Some percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.