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NEWS

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Dakota Wesleyan University Poll: South Dakotans mirror nation on global warming

MITCHELL — South Dakotans appear to mirror the attitudes of most Americans when it comes to the issue of global warming, according to researchers at Dakota Wesleyan University.

The statewide poll conducted by DWU indicated that 77 percent of South Dakotans think global warming is a very serious or a somewhat serious problem, with only 17 percent of respondents stating that global warming is not a problem. The results of the DWU poll were almost identical to similar recent polls conducted nationwide which indicate that between 74 and 77 percent of Americans believe global warming is a very serious or somewhat serious problem.

The poll of 410 South Dakotans, conducted between March 18 and 29, asked respondents about the gravity of the problem. The poll indicated 35 percent see it as a very serious problem, 42 percent believe it is a somewhat serious problem and 17 percent don't think it is a problem at all, with 6 percent having no opinion or not responding.

Where people live seemed to be a factor for those surveyed. Forty-six percent of respondents who lived west of the Missouri River viewed global warming as a very serious problem, while only 30 percent east of the river viewed it as a very serious problem.

“The fact that much of South Dakota, especially the western part has been in drought conditions for the last five years probably influenced the survey,” stated Dr. Don Simmons, director of the McGovern Center for Leadership and Public Service at DWU. “It will be interesting to see if those numbers hold in coming years as we continue to ask the question.”

Student coordinators of the poll were Katrina Jarding, junior public service and leadership major from Alexandria, and Brock Seim, senior math major from Le Grand, Iowa.

“Political party affiliation seems to play a role in how South Dakotans view global warming,” said Jarding. “The way the two parties address issues related to the environment probably explains the difference in responses based on party affiliation.”

Democrats responding to the poll perceived global warming as a more serious problem than Republicans. Slightly more than 50 percent of Democrats viewed global warming and climate change as a very serious problem, while only 20 percent of Republicans viewed it as very serious. Only 33 percent of Caucasians viewed global warming as a very serious problem, while 61 percent of Native Americans viewed global warming and climate change as a very serious problem.

The poll was a joint project of the McGovern Center and the DWU Mathematics Department. The poll’s margin of error was plus or minus 5 percent.

More detailed information about the poll results are available online at www.mcgoverncenter.com/poll.htm.