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Widespread Support for Driving Economic Prosperity through Science and Tech

Survey Findings

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR, TargetPoint Consulting, and SSTI (State Science & Technology Institute)

A new poll* shows nearly universal public support—95 percent of likely voters—for SSTI’s Innovative Science & Technology for Economic Prosperity initiative (iSTEP). The March 2020 result builds on a poll from September 2015 that saw support from 89 percent of voters.

Support cuts across common policy divides, with Republicans, Democrats, those with and without college degrees, the employed and unemployed all more than 90 percent approving of iSTEP.

Public appreciation for the initiative seems to be more strongly based in how iSTEP could benefit Americans in the future more than in pure self-interest. When thinking about the initiative’s beneficiaries, 88 percent believed it would create opportunities for their children and grandchildren. A smaller, yet still robust, 74 percent of voters believe the initiative would directly benefit them.

Support continued to be overwhelmingly robust when voters were asked to consider specific policy changes to implement iSTEP. Suggestions with greater than 85 percent support include training workers for the jobs of the future, facilitating the transformation of research into new products, and helping startups and manufacturers access capital.

Voters want to see their elected officials implement iSTEP: 78 percent said they were more likely to support a candidate who supports the initiative.

* The poll was an online survey of 800 registered voters, taken March 17-21, 2020. The survey was commissioned by SSTI. The data are statistically weighted to ensure the sample’s regional, age, and gender composition reflects that of the national population according to the registered voter file. No estimates of sample error are calculated for online polls, as the method does not employ a probability sample. For sake of comparison, a probability sample of this size would have a margin of error of +/- 3.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval.

An Enthusiastic Response to iSTEP

Voters read the following description of the iSTEP initiative and were asked about their support.

Figure 1: Description of iSTEP initiative

As a country, we lead the world in scientific and medical research and innovative ideas. America is home to 40 percent of the world's Nobel Prize winners—the highest of any country—and two-thirds of the world's top 30 universities. However, both of these figures have dropped sharply in the past decade and we often fail to convert much of that research into benefits for all Americans—economic benefits like new jobs and new companies and quality of life benefits like medical treatments and cures.

We need a new approach that increases our economic prosperity and quality of life through science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship. This is where the Innovative Science & Technology for Economic Prosperity (iSTEP) initiative comes in.

This is a comprehensive initiative focused on converting our nation's strength in research into new businesses and jobs and to bring the benefits of American innovation to the American people. Among other things, it calls for:

- *Increased investment in scientific research;*
- *A dedicated effort to convert government-funded research into new companies and jobs;*
- *Streamlining government regulations so innovators can more easily, but still safely, bring new products/technologies/cures to the American people;*
- *Increasing access to financing for innovative start-ups and existing companies that are creating new products and jobs; and,*
- *Making smarter investments in science, technology, engineering and math education in U.S. high schools, universities, and community colleges to ensure we have a workforce trained for the future.*

iSTEP received broad and enthusiastic support. Ninety-five percent of voters supported the initiative at any level, and 46 percent voiced strong support. This appreciation has increased since 2015, when iSTEP polled at 89 percent support overall with 30 percent strongly in favor. Few public policies garner this level of approval.

Enthusiasm was robust across a wide variety of demographics and perspectives. Republicans (94 percent), Independents (94 percent), and Democrats (96 percent) all support iSTEP. College educated (94 percent) and non-college educated (95 percent) support iSTEP. White Americans (95 percent) and American communities of color (95 percent) support iSTEP. The employed (95 percent) and unemployed (94 percent) support iSTEP, as do those who live paycheck-to-paycheck (94 percent).

iSTEP proves popular as an overall concept, but voters also express clear support for specific policy recommendations to enact the initiative.

Figure 2: Support for iSTEP's specific policy changes

Policy	Strong Support	Total Support
Ensure that the U.S. has a workforce that is trained for the jobs of the future.	57	93
Make it easier for U.S. businesses to use promising research results from universities and federal labs to improve existing products and create new products and services.	41	91
Strengthen federal guidelines and accountability standards to improve energy efficiency, public health and waste reduction.	45	91
Fund programs that help turn promising research into new products, companies and jobs.	41	89
Focus on innovation that will result in cleaner air and water and reduce climate change.	49	88
Provide low-interest financing to American manufacturers to help them modernize their production facilities in the U.S.	38	88
Increase the ability of start-up companies to access early stage financing and capital.	34	88
Streamline government regulations for innovators, but still ensure the safety of new products, technologies and medicines.	40	87
Have the federal government partner with cities, states, and non-profit organizations to help fund locally designed strategies that encourage the creation and growth of innovation-oriented companies.	36	87
Increase federal funding for research.	41	87
Provide a loan forgiveness program for students majoring in science, technology, engineering or math.	35	72

Dealing with Economic Change

Heading into the depths of the coronavirus pandemic response, nearly half of survey respondents believed the economy was getting worse (52 percent), although the same portion believed it would get better over the next three years. Most voters view iSTEP as a means for improving the economy in the future. Ninety-two percent believe the initiative can change the American economy for the better. Looking beyond the next three years, 88 percent report the conviction that iSTEP would create new opportunities for their children and grandchildren.

Figure 3: Reasons to support the iSTEP initiative

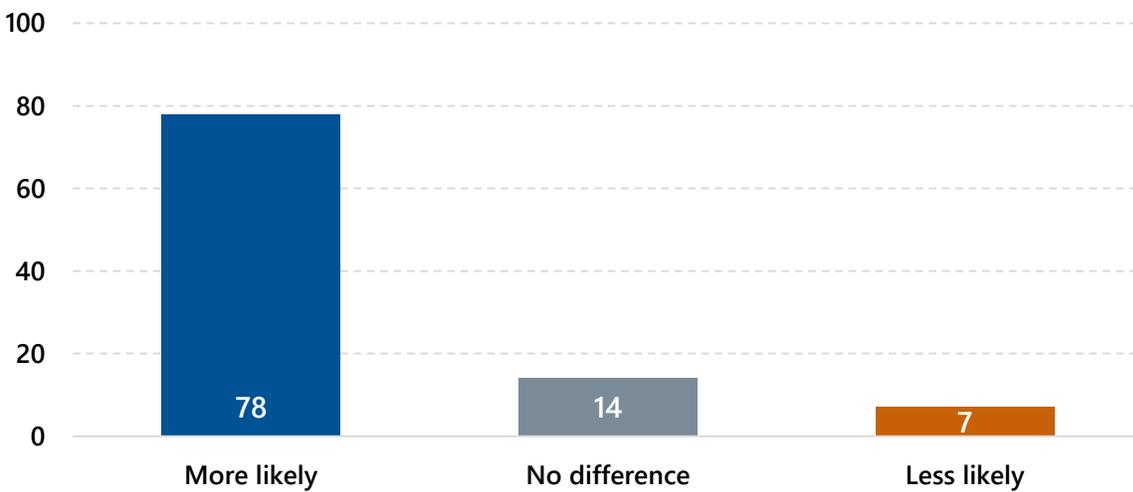
Statement	Strongly agree	Total agree
If this initiative is fully developed, it can change the American economy for the better.	39	92
If this initiative is fully developed, it can open up opportunities for me or people like me.	28	74

Statement	Strongly agree	Total agree
If this initiative is fully developed, it can open up opportunities for my children, grandchildren and the next generation.	45	88

Significant Potential Electoral Impact

Voters report overwhelming interest in supporting a candidate for public office who supports the iSTEP initiative. Nearly eight in 10 voters (78 percent) would be more likely to support such a candidate. This enthusiasm holds across party lines, holding true for 78 percent of Republicans and 83 percent of Democrats.

Figure 4: Likelihood to support candidate supporting iSTEP initiative



Conclusions and Recommendations

Voters understand the vital role research plays in our economy and our ability to compete internationally. They also understand the need to convert this research into American jobs and prepare the workforce for technological change. This is why the iSTEP initiative generates nearly universal support from the public.

At a time when just about everything in this political environment is polarized, the iSTEP proposal crosses partisan boundaries, and bridges racial, regional and socio-economic divides.