

Poll suggests believers can be swayed on nukes, environment

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Most Americans believers do not see preventing climate change or the spread of nuclear weapons as "spiritual obligations," although they see both as important goals, according to a new poll.

Among respondents who said they believe in God or in "spiritual obligations for behavior," the importance of these issues ranked far behind reducing global poverty and hunger.

"The government is not going to issue preventive action on these issues without receiving moral instruction from society," said John Steinbruner, director of University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies (CISSM), which released the poll on Wednesday (Dec. 7).

CISSM conducted the poll to examine how individuals think their faith intersects with global policy challenges.

Just 39 percent of all believers, and 31 percent of evangelicals, agreed that most scientists think the problem of climate change is urgent and that enough is known to take action.

Galen Carey, the Washington director of the National Association of Evangelicals, said the "inaccurate perception" among evangelicals is partly related to "a

problematic relationship between evangelicals and scientists."

Only 15 percent of all believers initially agreed that it is a spiritual obligation to prevent climate change. But after being presented with pro and con statements for the notion that humans have a spiritual obligation to be good stewards of the environment, 76 percent embraced this notion.

Similarly, after being presented with pro and con arguments for eliminating all nuclear weapons in the world, 69 percent favored this goal, up from an initial 55 percent.

"People moved in their positions as they reflected on them more. They saw more of a spiritual connection," said Stephen Colecchi, director of the U.S. Catholic bishops' Office of International Justice and Peace. "What that says to me is that religious leaders need to really engage people more on these issues, because in fact, they are teachable."