



SUMMARY REPORT

## Climate and Energy Truths: Our Common Future

April 2009

*making the necessary connections*

**Westen**  
S  
strategies, LLC



Lake  
Research  
Partners

ecoAmerica  
*start with people*

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## RESEARCH PARTNERS & SPONSORS



Climate and Energy Truths: Our Common Future is a communications research project conducted to determine effective frameworks and messages for speaking with the American public about energy climate change, climate solutions, renewable energy and carbon based fuels. It is an ecoAmerica project conducted by Westen Strategies and Lake Research Partners with support from Natural Resources Defense Council funded by ecoAmerica, NRDC and individual investors.

The **Natural Resources Defense Council's** purpose is to safeguard the Earth: its people, its plants and animals and the natural systems on which all life depends. We use law, science and the support of 1.2 million members and online activists to protect the planet's wildlife and wild places and to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all living things.



**Lake Research Partners** is a leading public opinion and political strategy research firm providing expert research-based strategy for campaigns, issue advocacy groups, foundations, unions and non-profit organizations.



**Westen Strategies** provides consultation for organizations, corporations, and political candidates starting with the assumption that the best way to attain your goals — whether in politics, marketing, or leadership — is to start with an accurate understanding of how the mind and brain work.



**ecoAmerica** is a nonprofit agency that uses psychographic research, strategic partnerships and engagement marketing to shift awareness, attitudes and the personal and public policy behaviors of environmentally agnostic Americans.

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“Climate and Energy Truths” is part of ecoAmerica’s ongoing research and communications strategy to build the critical mass of public support necessary for effective climate and environmental progress in America. For more information on “Climate and Energy Truths” or our other work, please contact ecoAmerica.

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## METHODOLOGY

The research consisted of three phases and took place from February to April 2009: 1) focus groups; 2) an online nationwide dial survey; and 3) a nationwide phone survey. Initial messages were developed from current climate solutions advocates and carbon-based energy advocate public communications as well as prior research.

**Phase 1: Focus Groups** We conducted two focus groups in Columbus, Ohio on February 19, 2009. The groups were separated by gender and participants were screened to be swing voters on these issues. The groups included a mix of ages (between 25 and 65), levels of education, occupations, and marital and parental status, as well as a mix of political orientations, with strong partisans excluded. Participants were screened to be weak environmentalists and included those who consider global warming to be somewhat of a problem or a little problem.



ecoAmerica focus groups, male swing voters, Columbus OH, February 2009

**Phase 2: Online Dial Survey** Messages developed and tested in the initial focus group phase were further refined and tested in the online dial tests conducted March 5-11, 2009. This survey reached a total of 1,000 registered voters nationwide. The sample was drawn from an online panel and respondents were screened to be registered voters. The sample was weighted by gender, age, party identification, education, race, and region to reflect the actual population of registered voters. The margin of error for the survey is +/-3.1%.

**Phase 3: Telephone Survey** Messages were subjected to another round of refinement before the final messages were tested against strong, well-branded carbon-energy advocate messaging alternatives in the phone survey. The phone survey was conducted April 4 - 9, 2009, and reached a total of 1,000 registered voters nationwide.

Telephone numbers for the survey were drawn from a random digit dial sample (RDD). Data were weighted slightly by gender, region, party identification, age, and race to reflect the attributes of the actual population of registered voters. The margin of error for the survey is +/-3.1%.

This research is rooted in contemporary neuroscience and in both a scientific and clinical understanding of the unconscious networks of associations—the interconnected sets of thoughts, feelings, images, metaphors, and emotions—that are active in the brains of potentially persuadable audiences as they read, watch, or listen to information about energy alternatives and climate change. **Effective communication on these issues requires an understanding of the multiple, often conflicting neural networks active when people process messages about alternative energy solutions and climate change.** (e.g. renewable energy, national security, and economic prosperity; carbon emissions and other forms of pollution).

With major climate legislation pending in the U.S. Congress and the upcoming round of the United Nations IPCC Copenhagen round of negotiations, 2009 will be a seminal year in solving climate change. **Success in these forums will depend on the strength of public support for new energy and climate solutions.** Progressive advocates need to adopt the strongest possible themes and messaging on the common truths issues.

**The coal and oil lobby has been very successful in communicating a seemingly moderate and comprehensive approach to our energy problems,** suggesting that they support alternative energy and “all of the above.” Their values-based messaging has resulted in a significant shift in public sentiment moving toward embracing more domestic drilling for oil, both on and offshore, and more coal and nuclear energy. Opinion research has also consistently shown that while growing numbers of Americans believe climate change is real and a threat, the saliency of this issue is low and the debate is often polarizing.

**Too often, climate solutions advocates work the base (elites) while ignoring mainstream Americans. And when we do talk to swing voters or encourage our base to reach out, typically we lack effective, emotionally compelling language on these issues.** Meanwhile, proponents of carbon-based fuels have started to attack climate change solution policies, like cap and trade, as a tax that will fall on consumers. Without effective countervailing communications, these critiques could sink any hope of passing legislation that combats climate change.

ecoAmerica conducted the “Climate and Energy Truths: Our Common Future” research project to address this challenge. Our goal was to develop market-tested language that we could provide to climate solutions advocates and elected officials so that they have the tools to move public opinion and support. We also wanted to provide a shared lexicon to substitute for the cacophony that interferes with effective “branding.”

**The messages we developed are designed to capture attention, raise concerns, offer solutions, and inspire hope and enthusiasm for immediate solutions to our climate and energy problems.** We sought to identify effective and ineffective phrases to capture climate change and our new energy future in ways that resonate with Americans at a core-value level and neutralize the opposition’s framing of the issues.

“Climate and Energy Truths” advocates and provides a more disciplined approach to communications. Many of the concepts here may seem familiar; but in practice, most of us rely on traditional policy arguments that resonate well with traditional environmentalists but are neutral to counter-productive with swing voters.

## MAKING THE NECESSARY CONNECTIONS

Many of the concepts here may seem familiar, but in practice, most advocates rely on traditional policy arguments that resonate well with traditional environmentalists but are neutral to counter-productive with swing voters.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**We need to claim the high ground, play offense, and let the other side play defense.**

America needs to move rapidly toward the clean, unlimited, efficient, job-producing, prosperity-inducing energies of the 21st century that will eliminate our reliance on dirty fuels and our dependence on the hostile, foreign regimes that profit from them. It's time for a renewed period of American prosperity at home and economic and political leadership around the world.

**Oil and coal interests now claim ownership of energy independence, comprehensive solutions, and responsible treatment of the earth – things which they are, in reality, opposed.** Environmentalists might not have great economic credibility, but Americans believe them when they 'point and shame' bad environmental practices. Oil and coal companies should be challenged to explain how their policies foster what they claim in the face of steadily increasing dependence on foreign oil and their almost exclusive reliance on fossil fuels.

**The side that stands on the mountaintop of values in this debate will defeat the side that has to defend its specific positions, policies or fuel sources.** We need to claim the high ground, play offense, and let the other side play defense.

Our research reveals clear strategies for communicating the need for environmentally sound ways of addressing our climate and energy challenges. **Attitudes on these topics are highly malleable with good messaging.** Knowing themes, like "American Leadership" is not enough. Unity and discipline through consistent and effective wording and sequence is absolutely necessary to move public opinion. **Starting with values, and paying attention to specific words and sequencing, can make messages much more effective.**

**Communicating to the environmental base in 'green code' makes us incapable of talking with anyone but ourselves.** The language and concepts in this report are designed to move mainstream or swing American voters as well as the environmental 'base,' and it should be employed with both.

- **Voters are more energized around the energy debate than the climate change debate,** but they can become engaged in climate to the extent that they see it as part of energy or pollution, or related to other values and concerns.
- **Messaging on both energy and climate change is much stronger when it uses values-oriented language** rather than a technical or policy-oriented approach or when we debate science. More so than in many areas we have seen, **activating multiple values tends to be stronger than just invoking a single value.**
- For climate change, **leading with global warming, climate crisis or climate change tends to polarize and weaken the message.** The language itself is especially problematic among swing voters. We should speak of deteriorating atmosphere and only after establishing connections with Americans' other values first.
- **Climate messages are successful when they connect to other themes** such as energy independence, reducing dependence on foreign oil, and safe and natural

forms of energy that never run out. **Linking climate change to pollution and our families' health is a strong approach** to garnering support for climate solutions.

- **Aspirational messages that tap into American exceptionalism, American ingenuity, American energy independence, American jobs, "freedom" and America's future are powerful messages on both energy and climate change.** Voters like any language calling on America to "lead."
- **Stay away from debating weather** since voters have alternative explanations or debate the causes of hurricanes, droughts, and floods.
- **Stay away from debating science or specific policies.** Voters believe that there are many sides to the science and question it. There is no debate around the desirability of dealing with pollution, protecting our families' health, and developing new clean and safe energy.
- As on many polarizing issues, **on climate messages, it is important to recognize and address people's ambivalence** while communicating a positive message about how we can address problems. Strong language includes: *We can argue about the causes of what we're seeing, but scientists agree there's something we can do about it.*
- **The best new term is "deteriorating atmosphere"** or "our deteriorating atmosphere" (personalizing the term) instead of 'global warming' or 'climate crisis.'
- We can successfully and should repeatedly characterize coal as "dirty" and nuclear as "unsafe." Our best approach, however, is to embed these issues in a broader, comprehensive approach to energy that is environmentally sound and economically advantageous. **We win far more strongly by fighting on the terrain of clean, safe energy** than by debating specific technologies considered one at a time.
- **It does not work particularly well to talk about the specific amount of money we will save, the cost of fuel, specific mileage standards, etc.** Again, getting "into the weeds" of policy increases voters' concerns and levels the playing field to the advantage of the opposition.
- **Cap and Trade** is unfamiliar to voters and support is relatively weak when voters are presented with a brief description. Referring to a cap and trade proposal as a *Clean Energy Dividend, Clean Energy Cash-Back, Pollution Penalty, or Pollution Reduction Refund* is strongly preferable to using the term, Cap and Trade.
- **We should not differentiate multiple forms of pollution.** We want the public to see that the issue is whether we're going to move toward clean, safe, natural, unlimited sources of energy that protect the Earth and our health or dangerous, dirty energy that endangers both our national and economic security.



ecoAmerica focus groups, female swing voters, Columbus OH, February 2009

## TALKING ABOUT ENERGY

In a head-to-head match up with a strong carbon industry message, we were able to develop progressive messages that won by margins of 20 to 27 points with swing voters on what a comprehensive energy solution should look like. Key elements of the successful messages include emphasizing values such as freedom, independence, self-sufficiency, personal responsibility, national security, and economic prosperity. Strongest themes are about safe, natural, clean sources of energy that create jobs and never run out.

ENERGY MESSAGES (see page 18 for specific messages)	MEAN RATING	% RATING '10'	% RATING PROGRESSIVE MESSAGE HIGHER*	% RATING OPPOSITION MESSAGE HIGHER	MARGIN
Message A: Oil/Coal message	7.1	35%			
Message C: Freedom, and self-sufficiency	8.3	46%	45%	20%	+25
Message G: Made in America	8.2	44%	47%	20%	+27
Message B: National and economic security	8.1	43%	44%	21%	+23
Message E: New manufacturing base	8.1	39%	48%	24%	+24
Message D: Children's legacy	8.0	42%	44%	24%	+20
Message F: Partner with business	7.9	41%	45%	24%	+21

Question wording: Now let me read you some statements about energy issues made by different candidates for national office. For each, please tell me on a scale of 0-10 whether this statement would make you more or less likely to vote for this candidate, where 10 means the statement would make you much more likely to vote for this candidate and 0 means the statement would make you much less likely to vote for this candidate. You can choose any number between 0 and 10.

\*The percentage of voters who rated the messages the same are not shown in this table.

Messages on comprehensive, environmentally sound solutions to our energy problems received a very strong response in the surveys, beating opposition messages by double-digit margins. Even more important is to start and emphasize the aspirational messages of American ingenuity, independence, prosperity, leadership and our future. Other thematics on energy include:

- **The economy:** Voters respond to creating American jobs, new energy jobs, a new manufacturing base to build things in America again, and increased prosperity through new technologies. **It is crucial to frame the issue as win-win** – that is, solving our energy problem while creating millions of new jobs, restoring prosperity, and protecting our air and land – rather than to let it be framed by the other side as a trade-off being environmental concerns and economic prosperity.
- **Energy independence:** Voters respond to national security, moving away from dependence on foreign oil toward economic prosperity and new jobs/keeping jobs in America.

- **American ingenuity:** Voters respond strongly to messages emphasizing American ingenuity and a return to American leadership. Voters like any language calling on America to “lead.”
- **Safe sources of clean energy:** Voters relate clean, safe sources of energy that never run out to energy independence – both of which are strong voter priorities and also address new domestic oil drilling. Phrases around a majestic America for our children also test well when related to energy independence and national security. It is better to lead with national security than to lead with a message focused on the environment. National security and economic security “prime” voters to be receptive to environmental messages.
- **Protecting our health and our legacy to our children:** When placed in a broader context of energy independence, national security, and economic concerns, concerns about polluting and protecting “our land” and “the air we breathe” are persuasive. This should not be used at the beginning of the message, but they add synergistically to the power of messages that include other values (e.g. prosperity, self-sufficiency, and independence) that are persuasive from the start. Health is even stronger in the climate debate and is one of our strongest messages to women.
- **“Moving into the future” versus “Living in the past”:** Voters respond well to the concept of moving from the dirty fuels of the past to a clean, safe energy economy for the 21st century that won't pour pollutants into the air.

... concerns about polluting and protecting “our land” and “the air we breathe” are persuasive.

Weaker ways to talk about energy and the environment include:

- Messages that talk about money, particularly specific dollar amounts to be saved, invested, or spent.
- A localized message as opposed to a nationalistic message. Though local applications can test well, the strength of our messages in the current environment is to talk about big broad values and tap into big emotions.
- Debating specifics around policy (e.g. how many miles per gallon we need to increase fuel efficiency over 10 years).
- Debating specific energy sources and going toe-to-toe on coal and nuclear energy is not a winning strategy.

## TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE

The progressive messaging developed on climate change beat the strong opposition message by large margins of 26 to 36 points. Linking climate change to other concerns – like health, pollution, “our deteriorating atmosphere,” and our land – is critical to winning on this issue. The term “global warming” itself tends to be polarizing and damaging for our side and lowers support with Independents and Republicans. “Climate change” is not as polarizing, but is, at best, emotionally inert and, at worst, debatable and negative for our side. The debate needs to move away from global warming and toward talking about our deteriorating atmosphere and pollution.

CLIMATE MESSAGES (SEE PAGE 22 FOR SPECIFIC MESSAGES)	MEAN RATING	% RATING '10'	% RATING PROGRESSIVE MESSAGE HIGHER*	% RATING OPPOSITION MESSAGE HIGHER	MARGIN
Message A: Oil/coal message	5.5	22%			
Message H: We can argue, but why gamble	7.5	33%	55%	21%	+34
Message B: 10 hottest years and burnt lungs	7.5	34%	57%	24%	+33
Message G: My family's health	7.5	33%	58%	22%	+36
Message I: Scientists predicted	7.2	29%	56%	25%	+31
Message C: Scientists vs. special interests	7.1	27%	53%	27%	+26
Message D: Moral obligation	7.1	29%	55%	26%	+29

Question wording: Now let me read you some statements about changes in our weather patterns and climate from different candidates for national office. For each statement, please tell me on a scale of 0-10 whether this statement would make you more or less likely to vote for this candidate, where 10 means the statement would make you much more likely to vote for this candidate and 0 means the statement would make you much less likely to vote for this candidate. You can choose any number between 0 and 10.

\*The percentage of voters who rated the messages the same are not shown in this table.

Voters are more energized around the energy debate than the climate change debate, but they can become engaged in the latter to the extent that they see it as related to the former. Making this link is key. **Global warming or climate change alone does not win, and is a weak beginning to a message,** except under very specific circumstances. When allied with other themes, however, such as energy independence, reducing dependence on foreign oil, pollution, and safe, natural forms of energy, it is highly energizing.

- **Messages that focus on climate per se can be effective only when included with other values.**
- **It is important to connect to personal experience** (emphasizing what people have “seen with their own eyes”) while communicating a positive message about how we can address problems and why addressing climate change will simultaneously address our energy problems, economic problems, and national security vulnerabilities.
- **It is also important to accept people’s uncertainty about climate change but move past it with messages such as “whatever caused it, scientists know what will fix it,”** “even if we might be wrong about some of the specifics, why play Russian Roulette with our kids’ futures,” “only paid experts on the other side are denying that we have a real problem,” “scientists predicted the odd weather patterns we’re now seeing with our own eyes,” or, “even if we weren’t worried about changing climate and weather patterns, we should still be worried about the pollution in our air and the damage to our land.”
- **Health concerns for oneself and one’s family are a strong frame, and linking these to pollution is powerful.** This is particularly strong with women. Messages that work best fuse climate change with messages about pollution more generally. This allows us to win with values such as health, the majesty and beauty of our land, and our legacy to our children.
- **Debating weather is not a successful strategy.** Voters have alternative explanations and debate the causes of things like hurricanes, droughts, and floods. In general, debating or asserting science is a poor point of departure.
- **One or two strong facts, however, can be effective if they pack an emotional punch** (e.g., that 10 of the hottest years on record have occurred since 1990). Statistics are only useful in moving voters to the extent that they capture their attention and create enough concern that an aspirational message can then resolve their concern.
- Again we see that voters resonate with the notion of a partnership between government and business.

The term “global warming” itself tends to be polarizing and damaging for our side and lowers support with Independents and Republicans.

## WEATHER AND CLIMATE

Global warming and climate change are problematic terms. These terms elicit skepticism from swing voters and tend to be very polarizing. The term global warming is toxic not just because it has become politicized and polarizing, but also because it seems falsified every time there's a cold snap. **Climate crisis seems too alarmist to people, and either makes them anxious, which makes them shut down, or makes them discount the source as histrionic.** Climate change is too bland and has also become politicized and polarized.

**Deteriorating atmosphere is the strongest phrase to describe changes in our weather and climate.** Pollution and climate deterioration and endangered atmosphere are also strong, though with somewhat less intensity. Our deteriorating atmosphere is very powerful because it captures pollution, ozone depletion (which people worry about), and global warming all wrapped into one. It outperforms other phrases that refer to shifting weather patterns and it is also preferable because it is more evocative, briefer, and readily remembered. Deteriorating atmosphere also readily links to health, which is some of our strongest messaging.

TERMS TO DESCRIBE CHANGES IN OUR WEATHER AND CLIMATE	MEAN	% RATING '10'
Deteriorating atmosphere	7.1	30%
Pollution and climate deterioration	7.1	24%
Endangered atmosphere	6.8	24%
Climate change	6.5	26%
Changing climate and weather patterns	6.5	25%
Global warming pollution	6.5	22%
Global warming	6.4	28%
Shifting climate and weather patterns	6.4	17%

Deteriorating atmosphere is the top term across partisan lines, though Republicans rate it much lower than do independents and Democrats. Climate change and global warming also appeal to Democrats, but not to Independents or Republicans.

## CAP AND TRADE

Other research has documented voters' ambivalence toward a proposed Cap and Trade policy. In this study, when presented with a brief description of the policy, half the voters express support, however intensity was low (28 percent strongly favor to 22 percent strongly oppose). Many voters (17 percent) say they are unsure how they feel about this proposal.

Opinions are strongly divided along partisan lines, with Independents being more likely to resemble Democrats than Republicans. The majority of Democrats support the Cap and Trade proposal, though notably, support even among Democrats is not high. Republicans oppose the policy by double digits. A narrow majority of independents support it.

TERMS TO DESCRIBE CAP AND TRADE	MEAN	% RATING '10'	% RATING '8-10'
Clean Energy Dividend	6.7	22%	46%
Clean Energy Cash Back	6.6	22%	47%
Pollution Penalty	6.3	23%	42%
Pollution Reduction Refund	6.2	20%	38%
Cap and Cash Back	5.6	15%	30%
Cap and Invest	5.3	12%	25%
Carbon Fine	5.1	12%	24%
Cap and Trade	4.5	7%	13%

This table shows the results of testing on various names for 'Cap and Trade.' **Cap and Trade** as a term is the lowest testing phrase, with the only net negative mean (i.e. a score below 5 on a 10 point scale).

**Clean Energy Dividend** and **Clean Energy Cash Back** receive the highest ratings as descriptions of this proposal. They both have positive connotations, emphasizing both the shift to clean energy and money back on top of it, making it clear that clean energy and economic prosperity are not opposing goals. The next most preferred terms are **Pollution Penalty** and **Pollution Reduction Refund**. Pollution Penalty is simple, concise, and activates the values of law and order and fairness (you pollute, you pay).

## CARBON AND NUCLEAR ENERGY

Carbon and nuclear energy prove to be tougher terrain for progressive messaging. The strongest approach is to frame the overall debate so that we do not end up on the defensive, arguing about the use of particular energy sources. Voters prefer a message of “all of the above” unless they see the question as phasing out the old and phasing in the new. We need to own being comprehensive and say that the other side is not comprehensive because they support old energy policies, rather than investment in new energy technology.

Our messages also did not work as well in this area because the carbon and nuclear messages tended to be arguments of specifics, instead of being values-oriented. A debate on specifics is confusing and counter-productive for most. Instead, we need to invoke values language in this debate, as we did with energy and climate change.

CARBON AND NUCLEAR ENERGY MESSAGES	MEAN RATING	% RATING OUR MESSAGE HIGHER	% RATING OPPOSITION MESSAGE HIGHER	MARGIN
Message A: Oil/coal message	64.4			
Message G: Not a partisan issue	63.4	47%	44%	+3
Message B: Phasing in, phasing out	63.0	49%	38%	+11
Message F: Look what the free market brought us	62.3	49%	41%	+8
Message C: Looking forward, not backward	62.1	46%	41%	+5
Message D: Oil reserves	58.2	47%	46%	+1
Message E: Clean coal	56.7	39%	53%	-14

We should repeatedly assert that coal is dirty and nuclear energy is dangerous so that we create the associations between coal and dirt and nuclear and danger. We want to be aspirational, not negative, and return to our core values.

One methodological point worth noting in this section: voters report that they do not like “negativism,” and our messages were intentionally negative. This is not, however, an accurate reflection of what “sticks.” Respondents were also instructed to indicate with their dials the extent to which what they were hearing made them “warm” or “cool,” and negative messages are difficult to interpret on this scale. For example, Democrats dialed down when they agreed with language expressing concerns about dirty fuels, but their dialing reflected their attitudes toward the content, not the messages.

## TALKING POINTS

Throughout the “Climate and Energy Truths” report you will find useful themes, messages, phrases and words for talking about our new energy future. On this page are gathered some of the most important ones. Remember to **speak in aspirational language about shared American ideals**, like freedom, prosperity, independence and self-sufficiency while avoiding jargon and details about policy, science, economics or technology.

TALK ABOUT	LESS EFFECTIVE
Clean, safe sources of energy that never run out	Alternative energy, renewable energy
Our deteriorating atmosphere. Air Pollution	Global warming, climate crisis or climate change
Moving away from the dirty fuels of the past	Carbon Dioxide; CO2
Clean Energy Dividend, Pollution Penalty, Clean Energy Cash-back	Cap and Trade
Saving money for a more prosperous future	Energy efficiency
The air we breathe, the water our children drink	Environment
Refitting and renovating our homes and businesses	Retrofitting
What we see with our own eyes	Scientific reports; parts per million
Dirty Coal and Dangerous Nuclear power	Fixed point, base-load plants
Dangerous reliance on foreign oil	CAFE standards

## POWERFUL LANGUAGE

*“Freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency are at the heart of who we are as a nation, and they should be at the heart of our strategy for energy independence in the 21st century.”*

*“It’s time to harness the greatest source of power we have in this country: American ingenuity.”*

*“It’s time we start exporting energy, not jobs.”*

*“Let’s start building things in America again, starting with wind turbines, solar panels, and energy-efficient products that say ‘Made in America.’”*

*“We can argue about the causes of what we’re seeing, but scientists agree there’s something we can do about it.”*

*“We need to put millions of Americans back to work refitting our homes and buildings for energy efficiency with jobs that can’t be shipped overseas.”*

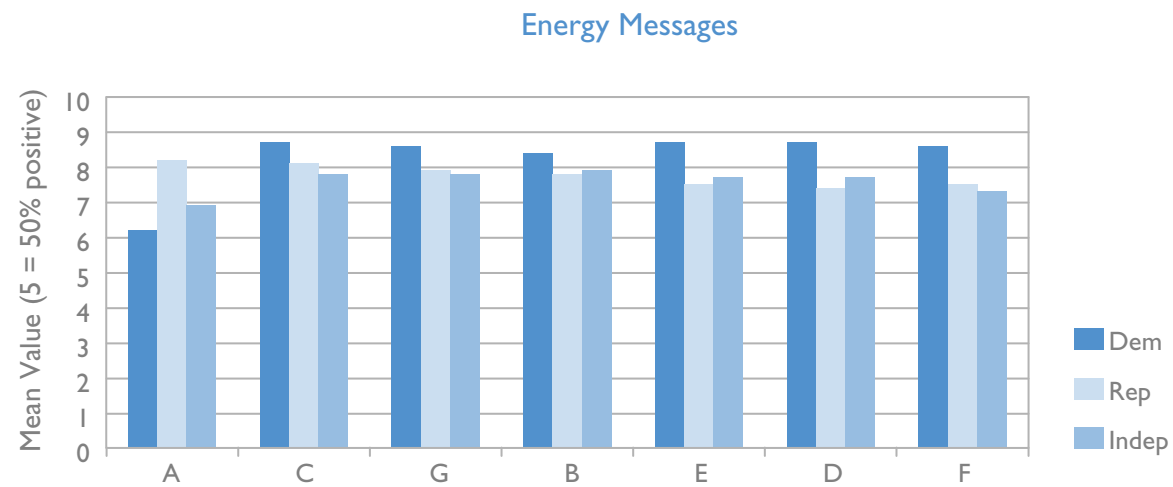
*“Americans created the automobile and we should lead the world in developing the next wave of fuel-efficient cars.”*

*“We need to start investing in new, safe energy technologies like wind and solar power that will rebuild our manufacturing base, create jobs, and get our economy growing again.”*

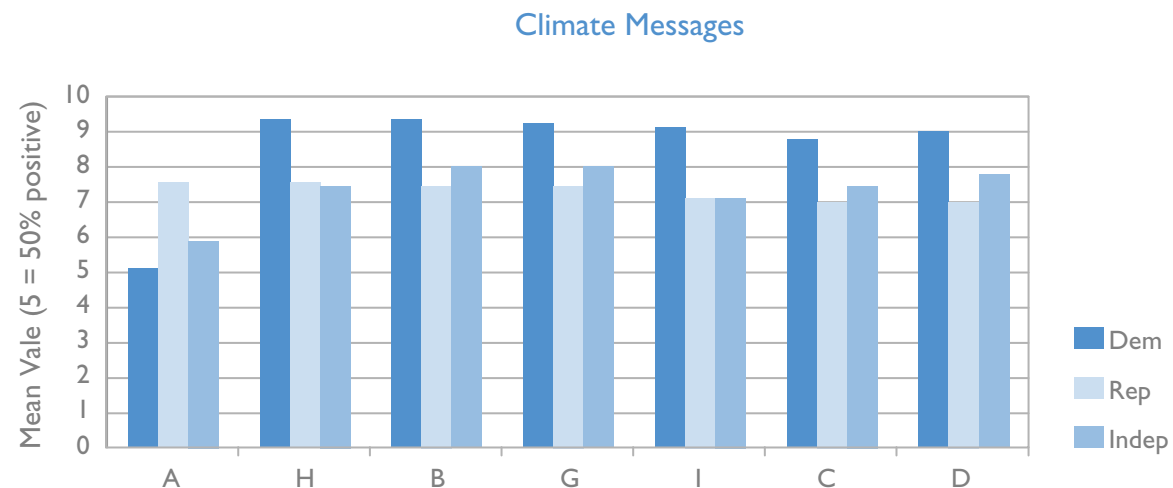


## TRANS-PARTISAN WINNING MESSAGES

Language that inspires the environmental base but turns off Independents or conservatives or vice-versa will not well lead us together to our common future, and may prove counter-productive. The "Climate and Energy Truths" study worked to develop language that would appeal to all Americans.



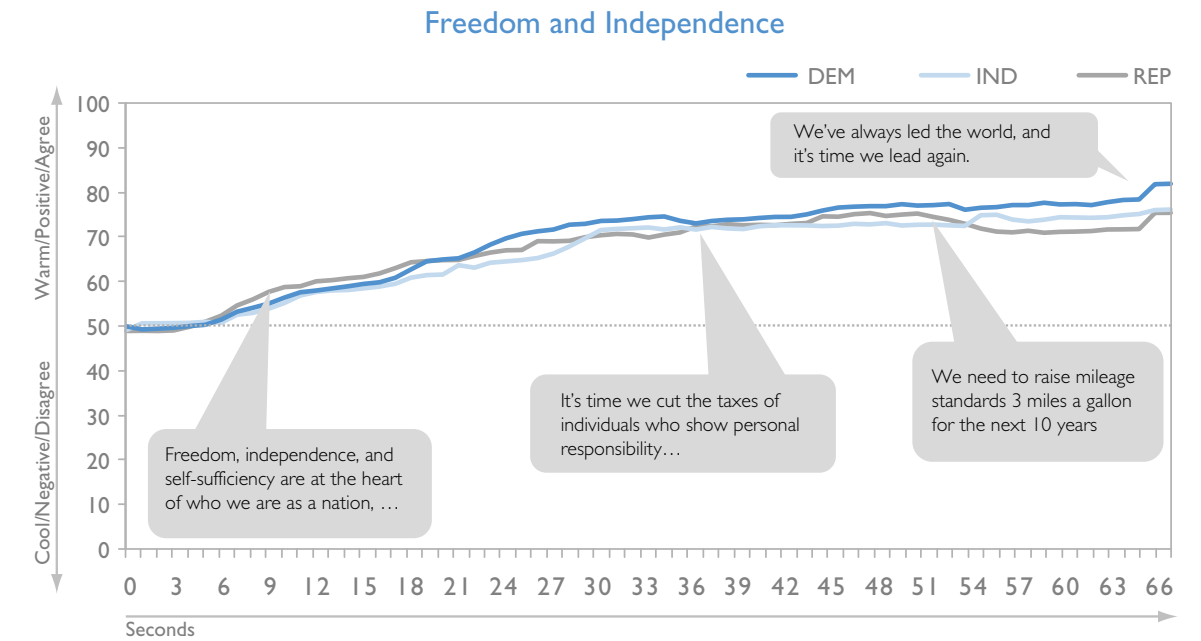
Democrats and Independents rated the opposition message 'A' low, but all groups rated the "Climate and Energy Truths" messages fairly high. (Message C = Freedom, and self-sufficiency; G = Made in America; B = National and economic security; E = New manufacturing base; D = Children's legacy; F = Partner with business)



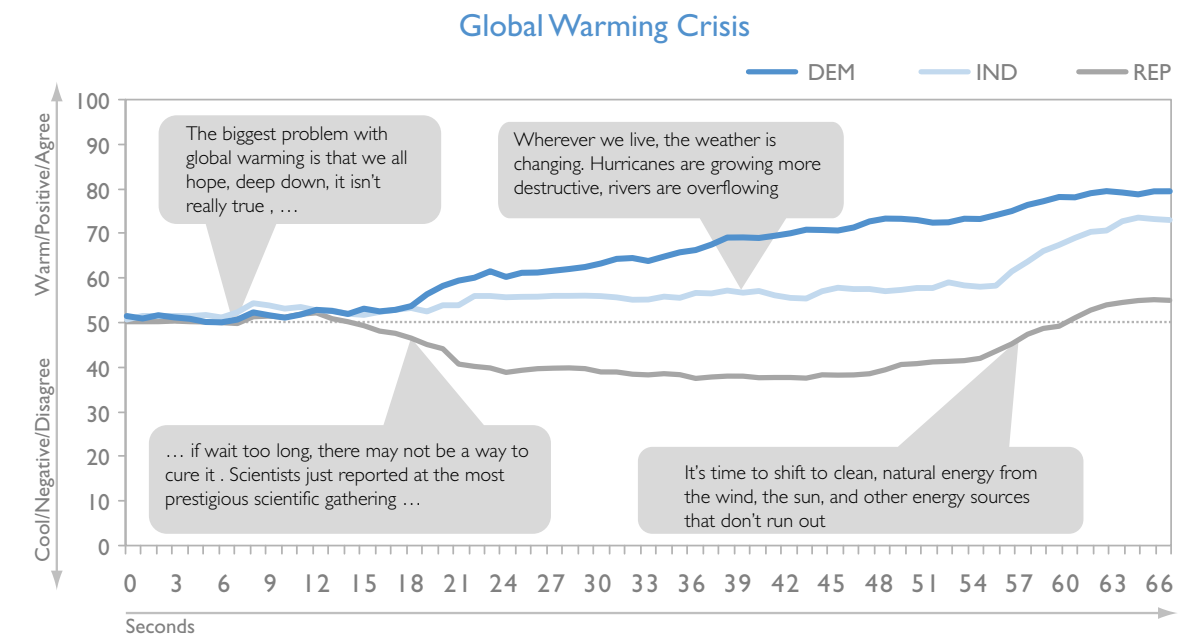
Republicans and Independents consistently ranked the climate messages below Democrats. However, both groups rated the "Climate and Energy Truths" messages nearly as high, or in the case of the Independents, much higher than the opposition message 'A'. (Message H = We can argue, but why gamble; B = 10 hottest years and burnt lungs; G = My family's health; I = Scientists predicted; C = Scientists vs. special interests; D = Moral obligation)

## ASPIRATION VS. CRISIS

Throughout the study we report on the positive results from taking an aspirational, values-based approach versus a technology and policy based approach. The following two dial-test charts demonstrate that impact.



This message is anchored by a strong aspirational values opening building immediately positive attitudes for the whole message about "developing clean, safe sources of energy from the sun, wind, and ground." The weakest point is in the policy specifics "raise mileage standards." The message ends strong by again appealing to aspirational values.



Starting with global warming or climate crisis produces flat to negative responses, especially among swing voters, Republicans and males. This message triggers polarization through an appeal to conclusive scientific evidence. Only the aspirational message at the end lifts responses from all groups.

## WINNING ENERGY MESSAGES & WHY

The top two messages – Freedom and self-sufficiency and Made in America – tap into core values of freedom, independence, and American nationalism. They work because they create intensity with both partisan groups and men and women. Noticeably, our top messages are very strong for the base voters (Democrats and strong environmentalists) as well as the swing voters. Even among men, the top messages beat the strong industry message.

**Carbon Industry Message:** *“We need to move toward energy independence by freeing up businesses from government regulations that interfere with their ability to get the job done. We need to start by promoting new oil exploration, giving tax incentives to corporations that extract more oil here in America both on and offshore. We need to stop putting up roadblocks to technologies like nuclear energy and clean coal, which are safe and clean, and encourage the private sector to explore both existing and alternative energy sources. But we don’t need radical solutions, big government programs, unrealistic environmental standards, and complicated schemes like carbon taxes that will raise the price of gas and electricity on our families and put American businesses at a competitive disadvantage. With our economy struggling, we need to reduce our electricity bills, not increase them. It’s time we worry less about the spotted owl and more about the American consumer.”*

**Message C - Freedom and Self-sufficiency:** *“Freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency are at the heart of who we are as a nation, and they should be at the heart of our strategy for energy independence in the 21st century. We shouldn’t be losing ground in the world economy, building up massive trade deficits to pay for foreign oil. It’s time we commit ourselves as a nation to develop clean, safe energy from the sun, wind, and other natural sources that will create millions of jobs and rebuild our manufacturing base. It’s time we cut the taxes of individuals and families who show personal responsibility by insulating their homes and buying cars and appliances that save energy. It’s time we do the same for businesses that produce innovative energy technologies, cut pollution from their smokestacks to protect our health and atmosphere, and hire American workers to refit their buildings with cleaner, 21st century technology. And it’s time we raise mileage standards for American cars, so we start exporting automobiles again, cut costs for middle class families, and protect the air we breathe. We’ve always led the world, and it’s time we lead again.”*

- **Why this message works:** It begins by emphasizing three core American values that are connected in people’s minds but rarely used in progressive messages: freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency. Men and women voters respond well to leadership language: *We’ve always led the world, and it’s time we lead again.* Republicans’ dial responses are nearly as high as Democrats. This reflects a strong yearning for American superiority. The message brings in other values not usually drawn on by the progressives, such as personal responsibility and nationalism. It also offers a clear way forward that emphasizes jobs and rebuilding our manufacturing base: committing to the development of clean, safe, natural sources of energy. Surprisingly, this message, given its themes, is even more effective with women than men, although it does very well with both genders.

**Message G - Made in America:** *“The best way to bring jobs and prosperity back to this country is also the best way to end our dependence on foreign oil and protect the Earth we leave our children: to build things in America again, starting with wind turbines, solar panels, and energy-efficient products that say ‘Made in America.’ We have led every technological revolution of the last two centuries— electricity, the railroads, the telephone, automobiles, the television, computers—and there’s no reason we can’t lead this one. The sun, the wind, and the geothermal energy at the core of the Earth provide a limitless supply of clean energy, and our scientists can harness them and our workers can build them. We have always been leaders, not followers, and it’s time to harness the greatest source of power we have in this country: American ingenuity.”*

- **Why this message works:** From start to finish, this message emphasizes that our problems are interdependent, and that moving to new energy sources will not only spur jobs and prosperity, but also lead people to see the words “Made in America” again, a strong value. By emphasizing the revolutions and successes we have led, this message suggests that it’s only natural that we would lead the first technological revolution of the 21st century—energy—and implicitly suggests that we will find ourselves in trouble if we don’t. Its final sentence is one that should be used repeatedly as a standalone: ***It’s time to harness the greatest source of power we have in this country: American ingenuity.*** This language is strong with men and women, and across partisan lines. Republicans respond strongly to Made in America but dial down somewhat on this language: *burning it to power our homes and cars destroys our atmosphere.* In general, **Republicans dial down when they hear what they perceive to be traditional environmental language.**

**Message B - National and economic security:** *“There’s nothing more important we can do for our national security, our economy, and the Earth we leave our children than to end our dependence on foreign oil. We can’t afford to be held hostage by Middle Eastern countries that are strangling our economy and funneling money to terrorist organizations every time we fill our gas tanks. And we can’t afford to continue relying on fuels developed a century ago that pollute the air our children breathe and destroy our atmosphere. We need a partnership between government and business to harness our most extraordinary natural resource—American ingenuity—to develop clean, alternative sources of energy, like wind and solar. We need to put Americans to work manufacturing the most fuel-efficient cars in the world and invest in wind turbines that are already producing homegrown energy, so we can start sending American dollars to Middle America, not the Middle East. And we need to put millions of Americans back to work refitting our homes and buildings for energy efficiency with jobs that can’t be shipped overseas.”*

- **Why this message works:** The message pulls together three central values related to energy and the environment: National security, economic prosperity, and the Earth we leave our children. It highlights our dangerous reliance on foreign oil and comes full circle to a hopeful solution: *Sending American dollars to Middle America, not the Middle East.* In the dial survey, language in this message resonated strongly with men and women and with voters of all parties. Particularly effective language includes the statements on *“We can’t afford to be held hostage by Middle Eastern...”, “...develop clean, alternative sources of energy, like wind and solar,” “We need to put Americans to work manufacturing the most fuel-efficient cars in the world and invest in wind turbines,”* and, *“we need to put millions of Americans back to work refitting our homes and buildings for energy efficiency with jobs that can’t be shipped overseas.”*

**Message E - New manufacturing base:** *“As our traditional manufacturing jobs continue to disappear, we need to replace them with new jobs manufacturing clean, alternative energy and new jobs that can’t be outsourced, refitting our homes and businesses so we don’t waste the energy we produce. The American people don’t want to hear the same old arguments about why we can’t change the way we use and produce energy. They want to hear new ideas about how we can and will. New wind turbines rise high above the ground to capture the strongest winds and new solar panels transform sunlight into electricity while blending into the design of our homes and offices. We need leaders who will invest in new technological breakthroughs that will once and for all end our reliance on foreign oil. America should lead in the development of new energy technologies that we sell to the rest of the world, engineered and manufactured by American workers. Its time we start exporting energy instead of jobs.”*

- **Why this message works:** This message makes clear from the start that we don’t have to choose between clean, new energy sources and jobs. Our 21st century manufacturing base needs to be rebuilt through American innovation in energy and the creation of jobs that can’t be outsourced. It brands the nay-sayers as essentially anti-American and emphasizes America’s “can do” spirit.

**Message D - Children’s legacy:** *“We should honor our great traditions, the most fundamental of which is to leave our children and grandchildren with an Earth as safe, beautiful, and majestic as the one our parents and grandparents left to us. It’s time we invest in clean, renewable fuels that never run out, like the wind and sun. We already have wind and solar technologies that can dramatically cut our reliance on coal plants that create most of the pollution that is poisoning our lungs and damaging our atmosphere. It’s time we invest in cars that run on a mix of fuels, like hydrogen and natural gas, which don’t require importing more foreign oil, and set higher mileage and emissions standards. Americans created the automobile and we should lead the world in developing the next wave of fuel-efficient cars. It’s time we encourage personal responsibility, by giving families and small businesses tax credits for insulating their homes and businesses and replacing old appliances with new, energy-efficient ones. We have a sacred obligation to steward the Earth wisely, and it’s time we honor that obligation.”*

- **Why this message works:** This message is powerful with women, the 3rd strongest. It emphasizes the legacy to our children and carries a powerful theme connecting the generations, of doing for our kids what our parents and grandparents did for us. It also focuses on things Americans care about such as personal responsibility, American exceptionalism, and leadership. The last sentence connects with evangelicals on stewardship of the Earth.

**Message F - Partner with business:** *“We need leaders who will partner with business to develop innovative energy technologies that will recharge our economy and create millions of jobs. We shouldn’t need Germany and Brazil to show us how to compete in the emerging markets for efficient appliances and alternative fuels. We need leaders who will invest in clean, alternative energy technologies like wind and solar power that will create millions of new jobs, cut energy costs to American homes and businesses, and end our dangerous dependence on foreign oil. We need leaders who will demand accountability from auto executives, who keep building the cars of the past instead of developing the fuel-efficient engines of the future, and then lay off American workers. We need leaders with the vision to invest in rapid transit and to provide tax incentives to middle class Americans and businesses to retool our homes, buildings, and factories to cut our energy bills, create millions of new construction jobs, and protect the Earth we leave our children.”*

- **Why this message works:** Americans like the notion of government partnering with business, because they don’t trust either one alone and believe each has a contribution to make. Voters like the idea of spurring the market to act in the public interest using incentives and regulations to prevent excess and greed. The message emphasizes the theme of leadership, and accountability, which is particularly important and popular in the current economic situation.

## WINNING CLIMATE MESSAGES AND WHY

These messages stand out for their intensity and competitiveness compared with the opposition message. They beat the oil/coal message by large margins of 26 to 36 points. They all link climate change to other concerns – like health, pollution, “our deteriorating atmosphere,” and our land. They all talk about personal experience. Most importantly, they allow for ambivalence that is crucial for gaining support among Republicans.

There is a noticeable difference between the top message on climate and the top messages on energy. Climate messages retain a substantial gender and partisan gap reflecting how polarizing this debate is among men and Republicans. Also, independents often resemble the Republicans. Nonetheless these communications are successful against oil/coal messages even when they reference increased taxes, a subject voters are very sensitive to. Strong environmentalists express even more intensity than Democrats around the top messages. Finally, introducing the term “global warming” or “climate change,” or introducing climate change as the primary concern too early in a message, is damaging and lowers support with independents and Republicans.

**Carbon Industry:** *The claims about global warming are wildly exaggerated. The doomsayers want us to believe this is an emergency, when any possible effects of climate change are a long time away and disputed by many scientists. Minor and cyclical fluctuations in weather patterns and small differences in high and low temperatures from year to year are normal and are not a crisis in the making. We have seen hurricanes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters since the beginning of time. Yes there may be something going on in the atmosphere, but it doesn't mean we need to enact extreme and costly regulations. Environmentalists are using global warming as a way to promote their agenda, which will cost us jobs and put an unnecessary strain on our economy. If they have their way, they'll tax Americans every time they turn on a light switch. American businesses are already doing a lot to reduce emissions, and drowning them in complicated regulations to fix a problem that may not exist is the last thing to do when we're already facing huge economic challenge*

**Message H – We can argue, by why gamble?:** *“We can argue why the 10 hottest years in recorded history have all occurred in the last two decades. And we can argue about the causes of the changing weather patterns we've all seen—the floods, droughts, hurricanes, and tornadoes. But **whatever the causes, scientists agree there's something we can do about it:** stop polluting the air with chemicals that get trapped in the Earth's atmosphere, upset the balance that sustains all life on Earth, and contribute to diseases like asthma and emphysema. **Our parents' generation took on pollution, and it's time we follow their example. We can gamble that our changing weather patterns and deteriorating atmosphere are just a natural cycle that we can't do anything about. But why play Russian Roulette with our kids' future when the alternative is to invest in new clean energy technologies like wind and solar power that will rebuild our manufacturing base, create jobs, and get our economy growing again.**”*

- **Why this message works:** The order of the argument allows people to maintain any doubts about climate change they may have and not spark feelings of anxiousness (particularly males, for whom anxiety is generally a threatening emotion readily turned into disbelief or anger). The allowance of ambivalence creates an opening for those who may be polarized or suspicious. The format appeals to a person's optimism that there's something we can do, that will have multiple positive impacts, not just on climate but on pollution and health. The message questions why we would make a lose-lose wager when we can have a win-win by moving to alternative energy sources that will have other positive effects. Across gender and party, in the dial research, participants responded to investing in new, safe energy technologies like wind and solar power that will rebuild our manufacturing base, create jobs, and get our economy growing again.

**Message B - 10 hottest years:** *“Local temperatures always fluctuate naturally. But when the 10 hottest years on record have all occurred since 1990, we have a problem. We also have a problem when the American Lung Association reports that toxic chemicals in the air we breathe are affecting the health of nearly half of all Americans. It's time we protect our atmosphere, end our reliance on foreign energy, and recharge our economy by developing a clean, safe energy economy for the 21st century. That means investing in energy from sources that never run out, like the sun and the wind, using technologies that will create millions of jobs now. It means setting tough pollution standards for coal and industrial plants that damage our atmosphere, making them pay if they fail to meet those standards, and rewarding good corporate citizens that exceed them. It means setting higher fuel standards for automobiles. And it means giving families and small businesses a dollar back on their taxes for every dollar they spend on cars, appliances, and renovations to their homes and buildings that conserve energy.”*

- **Why this message works:** It is difficult to win with a message that starts with climate change, and it is impossible to win with a blitzkrieg of statistics. This message works, however, because it begins by acknowledging natural fluctuations that disarm voters who are moveable, but vulnerable to messages from deniers. It presents a startling statistic that draws an emotional response and allows for few alternative explanations, with a key medical validator – the American Lung Association – and segues immediately into that prestigious health organization talking about the implications of pollution for our health. It then proceeds to prescribe a solution for not only our atmosphere but our dependence on foreign oil and our economy, namely to invest in

energy from sources that never run out. People do not understand what “renewables” are, and although an education campaign could get them there, colloquial language is always preferable to technocratic language.

**Message G - My family's health:** *“My family's health matters to me, and I'm concerned about the pollution released every day into our air, soil, and rivers. It seems like every month I learn about another family member, friend, or coworker with some new form of cancer. Just look at the smokestacks and waste dumps of coal plants and oil refineries, the rivers we used to swim or fish in with our grandparents, and the emissions from our cars. We can't afford to keep pouring millions of tons of wastes every day into the air. **It's time we start moving away from the dirty fuels of the past and lead the world in the development of the safe, new energy technologies of the future that rely on natural fuels you don't have to burn, like wind and solar energy.** We could create millions of jobs and regenerate our economy at the same time, building wind turbines, solar cells, and other new technologies, manufactured and installed by American workers. It's time we take on this challenge like our health, the Earth we leave our kids, and our prosperity depended on it.”*

- **Why this message works:** This is an effective message for both men and women – for different reasons. It focuses on health as the central concern but then appeals to broader concerns about the rivers we used to swim or fish in with our grandparents and economic references to new technologies manufactured and installed by American workers. One of the features of this message is its distinction between “dirty fuels of the past and safe, new energy technologies of the future.” There is something highly compelling in contrasting the forms of energy we now rely on with natural fuels you don't have to burn. People can readily visualize and appreciate the difference between natural fuel sources and those that, by definition, require pouring soot into the air. Republicans and men dial down slightly around “but it wasn't happening 20 years ago” and “changing forces of nature we have no business changing.” Both men and women dial up around the following language in particular:
  - *My family's health matters to me, and I'm concerned about the pollution...*
  - *Scientists agree there's something we can do about it: stop polluting the air with chemicals that get trapped in the Earth's atmosphere, upset the delicate balance...*
  - *Safe, new energy technologies of the future that rely on natural fuels you don't have to burn, like wind and solar energy. We could create millions of jobs...*

**Effective but Slightly Weaker Messages** These climate messages rely more on science and talk about our moral obligation, rather than the health of our children. They also tend to be more specific about changes in the climate and different kinds of fuel. The discussion of pollution still strengthens the messages compared to traditional climate messages. These messages still soundly beat the oil/coal messages, but appeal more to strong environmentalists, Democrats, and women, than other voters.

**Message I - Scientists predicted:** *“Scientists predicted over 40 years ago that if we didn't stop producing so much pollution from power plants, factories, and cars, it would melt the polar ice caps and lead to changes in the weather, like increasingly destructive hurricanes, droughts, and forest fires. You don't have to be a scientist to understand that. All you have to do is look out your window at mountaintops that used to be snow-covered or watch the news. We can't continue to rely on foreign oil to fill our gas tanks or on dirty fuels like coal that pour billions of tons of toxic chemicals like arsenic into the atmosphere. **It's time we invest in alternative energy sources like wind and solar that create jobs, not pollution. It's time we demanded high standards from American-made automobiles, so we clean up our air while leading the world again in the industry we invented. And it's time we apply tough standards, strict enforcement, and penalties and incentives to protect our air, and rely on competition to develop innovative new fuel technologies, build energy-efficient products, and clean up our smokestacks.**”*

- **Why this message works:** This message is one of the few effective messages that leads with climate change, but it works because it is prospective, stating that scientists predicted exactly what we have seen with our own eyes, and hence making it difficult to deny both that things have turned out as predicted and that we have seen these things with our own eyes. It is also disarming in its appeal to American anti-intellectualism and people's own experiences: You don't have to be a scientist to understand that. All you have to do is to look out your window. The final sentence appeals to values of law and order, tough standards, and market competition that appeal to voters in the center and are too rarely invoked as part of progressive narratives.

**Message C - Scientists vs. special interests:** *“When scientists have come to an overwhelming consensus, like that smoking causes heart disease and cancer, we've always acted. But too often we've delayed because politicians listened to special interests and their paid “experts,” like when the tobacco industry insisted cigarettes were safe. Now we're in the same place again. Scientists all agree that pollution from power plants, factories, and cars is damaging the air we breathe, destroying the ozone layer that protects our skin, and altering the delicate balance of nature. But so-called energy company “experts” are telling us that smokestacks are harmless. Whether we're concerned about the impact of pollution on our health, our weather, or both, we need government and business to solve this problem together, by setting rigorous standards and making it good business to behave responsibly. We tax cigarettes. There's no reason we can't tax dirty energy sources and reward clean, safe ones.”*

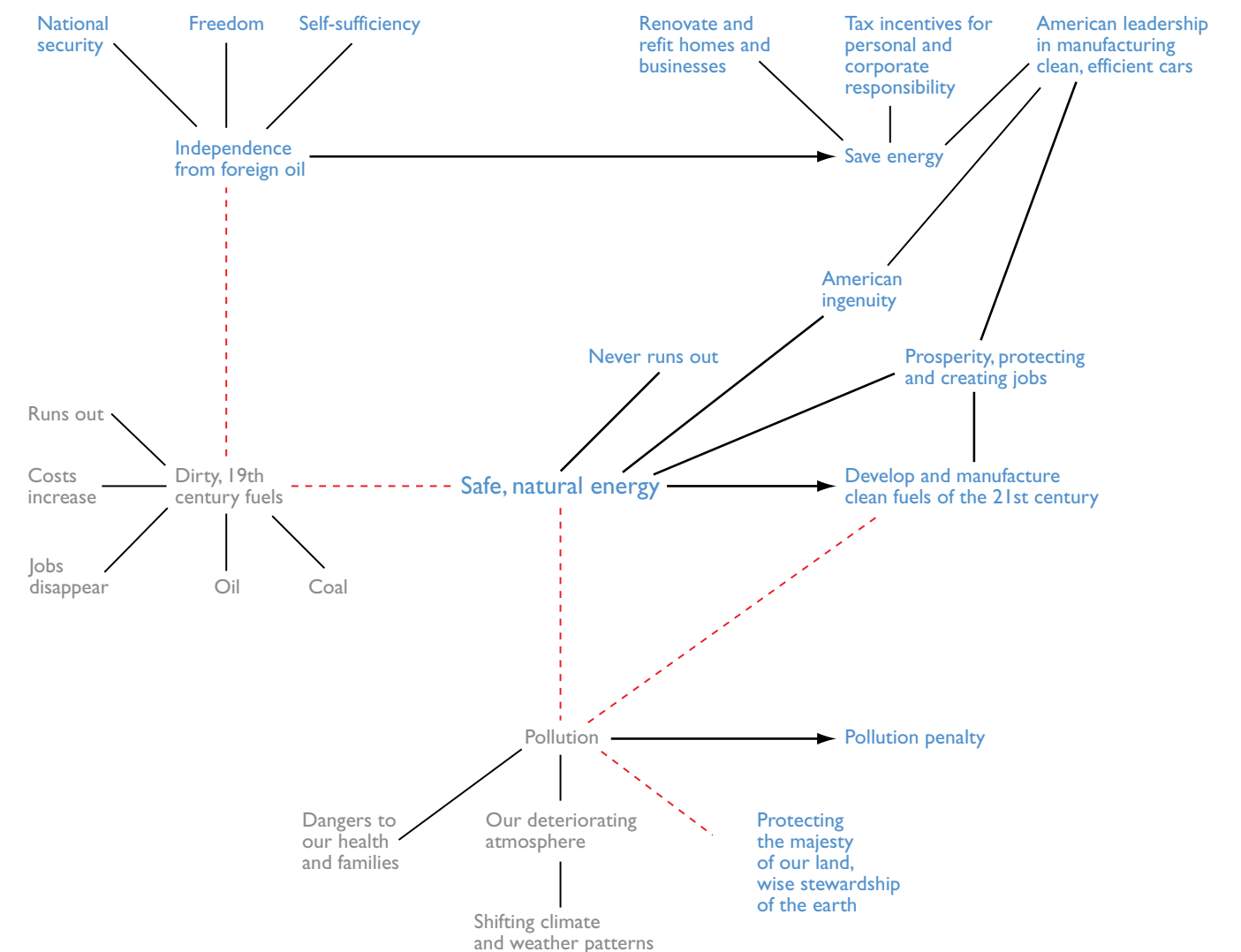
- **Why this message works:** This message is particularly potent with women, but less so with men. It draws a powerful analogy between the tobacco industry and the energy industry, which is made all the more powerful by connecting the dots between two dangers that reduce to one: What happens to our health when we burn something and then breathe in the air. This is weaker, especially with men, because it is implicitly responding to messages from the other side—branding the “lack of consensus” narrative on climate change as an industry ploy, and taking on the idea that progressive energy solutions like carbon taxes are just new taxes—but it is an important message to have in our arsenal precisely because it effectively addresses those attacks. Like virtually all successful messages on climate change, it links climate change with damage to our lungs and the ozone layer. This makes the message about the more generic “pollution,” which is where progressive climate messages win by big numbers.

**Message D - Moral obligation:** “We have a moral obligation to leave our children an Earth as beautiful, safe, and majestic as the one our parents and grandparents left us. We’ve already begun to see the effects of our reckless stewardship of the Earth: Coal-burning power plants and industrial smokestacks are pouring so much mercury, lead, and arsenic into our air that millions of pregnant women now have dangerously high levels in their bloodstreams, **which can affect their unborn children.** Scientists have warned us that those same smokestacks are changing the delicate balance of nature, **which we can see with our own eyes:** unusual tornados, floods, and hurricanes; increasingly fierce forest fires tearing through increasingly dry trees; and farmland and reservoirs drying up. **We need leaders who understand that to protect our Earth, our health, and our national security we need to wean ourselves off of dirty fuels like oil and coal that damage our land and our lungs and invest in safe, renewable sources of energy that never run out, like the power that comes from the wind and sun.**”

- **Why this message works:** This message is relatively ineffective with men, who are easily turned off by messages that directly assert the existence of climate change and who likely experienced this message as a “woman’s” message. It was, however, very effective with women because of its focus on our legacy to our children and what pollution is doing to pregnant women and their fetuses. It also includes some language that we know from other research appeals to evangelical Christian women with its use of words and phrases such as “stewardship” and “their unborn children.” The message also uses phrases such as “we can see with our own eyes,” which push listeners to visualize something concrete they have seen, rather than to treat climate change as an abstract issue debated by scientists. The final sentence strengthens its appeal to a range of voters by tying together our Earth, our health, and our national security and ending with a call for investment in safe forms of energy that will never run out. In this case, we included the term “renewable” presented in a context that explains its meaning, which is the only way the term should be used in public communications.

## ACTIVATING THE RIGHT NETWORKS ON ENERGY AND CLIMATE

The figure shows how an understanding of neural networks can lead to effective messaging on energy and climate change. It is like a “snapshot” of the associations we want to create or reinforce in the minds of listeners. Concepts depicted in blue generate positive emotional responses in listeners, whereas concepts in gray generate negative reactions. The links show how the concepts are connected in peoples’ minds: solid black links suggest that two ideas are positive connected (i.e., that one activates or suggests the other), dotted red links suggest that two ideas are negatively connected (i.e., that one deactivates or suggests the other is not present), and arrows represent solutions.



What is clear from this network is the wide range of values that can be associated with comprehensive energy solutions and addressing climate change (“our deteriorating atmosphere”). What is also clear, however, is why climate change cannot be the primary point of entry into the debate, because it is too distant from the central values that energize voters. The network suggests why, in both energy and climate, all roads lead to safe, natural energy (or at least through it).

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