

To: Interested Parties
From: John Podesta, Founder and Director of the Board of CAP Action Fund
Carol Browner, Chair of the League of Conservation Voters
Date: June 29, 2020
Re: Democrats Need to Make Republicans Pay on Climate

This week, House Democrats are unveiling a comprehensive legislative strategy to address the growing climate crisis. It is a thoughtful, actionable approach to tackling the *next* big crisis barreling towards us that will cost lives and livelihoods, if we fail to heed the warnings of experts and scientists. Now is the time for Democrats to lean into the issue: Republicans continued refusal to act should require them to pay a steep political price in November.

Politics is about drawing a contrast with your opponent and motivating your base. Few issues are better positioned than climate change to help Democrats on both fronts in November.

1. Republicans are WAY out of the mainstream on climate change

Even as scientific warnings have grown increasingly dire the past decade, Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress continue to deny the science of climate change outright or downplay the threat. Either way, they are opposed to any major action on climate change including significant investments in clean energy or significant cuts to carbon pollution. Worse, Republicans, under Trump, have pushed to change the rules to allow polluters to release unlimited amounts of carbon pollution that is disrupting our climate and putting future generations at risk. Reframing the choice in November along these lines is potent.

A survey this spring of *persuadable voters* in battleground states found that Republicans led the congressional generic ballot with this center-right audience by 9 points.¹ (Based on self ID, this group is +11 Republican because Democrats are more aligned behind Vice President Biden and less willing to consider voting for Trump.) However, when reframed as a choice between a Democrat who “supports taking strong government action to combat climate change” and a Republican who opposes such action, **the congressional generic ballot shifts to a 20-point Democratic lead - a net 29-point shift.** Among center-right white women, the shift is even more dramatic, as these voters move from -36 on Democrats in the generic ballot to +12, an incredible 48-point shift. **This is a major opportunity for Democrats to win over Independent and Republican-leaning voters in tough districts.**

¹ Global Strategy Group [survey of 603 persuadable registered voters](#), with additional samples of 302 non-Republican Hispanic voters and 300 non-Republican younger voters in key states between March 20th and March 29th, 2020. . Persuadable voters were defined as anyone who is in categories 3-5 on the following scale AND not a strong Democrat or a strong Republican: (1) Definitely vote for the Democrat, regardless of who the Democrats nominate, (2) Probably vote for the Democrat, regardless of who the Democrats nominate, (3) Undecided/Depends on candidate, but lean Democrat (4) Undecided/Depends on candidate, no lean, (5) Undecided/Depends on candidate, but lean Trump, (6) Probably vote for Trump, regardless of who the Democrats nominate, (7) Definitely vote for Trump, regardless of who the Democrats nominate. All polling referenced in this memo was funded by CAP Action.

Persuadable Voters

<p>Generic Ballot: If the general election for Congress were today, would you vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate?</p>	<p>32 / 41 Democrat Republican</p>
<p>Climate Generic Ballot: If the general election for Congress were held today between a Democratic candidate who supports taking strong government action to combat climate change and a Republican candidate who opposes taking strong government action to combat climate change, for whom would you vote?</p>	<p>46 / 26 Democrat Republican</p>

Democrats should remind voters that not only are Republicans denying reality and dismissing scientists and health experts, they are pushing to give the farm away to oil and gas companies by putting their lobbyists in charge of protecting our air, water, climate, and public lands. The result? Republicans under Trump immediately went to work rolling back 98 different environmental safeguards that mean more mercury, arsenic, and carbon pollution is being pumped into our air and water with the impacts hitting low-income communities and communities of color hardest. At every turn Republicans are **ignoring scientists, siding with oil and coal CEOs and lobbyists and putting our kids’ health and future at risk.**

2. Make Clean Energy Central to the Economic Recovery

Democrats should be on their front foot on clean energy, especially as part of how they will help Americans recover and rebuild from the current economic recession. Not only do persuadable voters oppose Republican inaction, but they overwhelmingly support strong action on climate change. In our March survey, persuadable voters, who were split on their approval of the president, supported moving to a 100% Clean Energy Economy by 2050 by more than a 6:1 margin.

Persuadable Voters (March)

<p>Partisanship (self-identified)</p>	<p>30 / 29 / 41 Democrat Independent Republican</p>
<p>Trump Job Approval</p>	<p>47 / 48 Approve Disapprove</p>
<p>Support for 100% Clean Energy Economy by 2050</p>	<p>66 / 11 Support Oppose</p>
<p>Strong US Action to Combat Climate Change Will Be...</p>	<p>72 / 28 Good for the economy Bad for the economy</p>

When persuadable voters (who again lean Republican) were forced to choose between a Democratic position focused on making clean energy central to the recovery and a Republican message opposed to such action, Democrats overwhelmingly won, even though the Republican message attacked the Green New Deal. The 14-point margin on this question beats the +11 partisanship of the GOP-leaning group by a net 25 points.

Persuadable Voters (May)	
<p><u>Democrats who say</u> that, instead of giving more bailouts to big oil companies and their CEOs as the Republicans want to do, we should be focusing on policies that will provide the best bang for our buck in putting people back to work now AND invest in the jobs and industries that will help us in the future. Investing in clean energy will create millions of good-paying jobs for all kinds of workers while protecting our kids' health.</p>	<p>57% Agree with Democrats</p>
<p><u>Republicans who say</u> we should be focusing on policies that will help American workers and business - including the American oil and gas industry - recover from the economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis, not using the crisis as an excuse to push through a wish-list of liberal and socialist policies like the Green New Deal that will drive up the cost of energy for American families and businesses while costing taxpayers trillions of dollars.</p>	<p>43% Agree with Republicans</p>

3. Base Voters Need to Hear Democrats Talk About Climate Change & Cleaning Up Pollution

Much of the Democratic base has written off President Trump and are unlikely to support a Republican congressional candidate. But the risk with these voters--particularly younger voters and Latinx voters--is that they either skip the election or “drop-off” the ballot after voting in the presidential race. **Democrats have a major opportunity to energize these voters by demonstrating that climate change is a priority for them.**

In our research, messaging that highlights Trump’s poor record on climate change boosts the percent of Democratic-leaning younger voters who say they are extremely motivated to vote by 12 points. Motivation among Hispanic voters increased by 9 points.

Similarly, in our May survey², positive messages for Biden on climate change and clean energy significantly boosted motivation with Latinx voters (8 points) and younger voters (7 points).

² Global Strategy Group survey conducted among 502 persuadable registered voters, with additional samples of 401 non-Republican younger voters, 301 non-Republican Latinx voters, and 302 non-Republican African American voters in key states between May 1st and 10th, 2020.

Now is the Democrats should lean into their commitment to cleaning up pollution, especially in communities of color and low-income communities who have paid the highest price for our dependence on dirty energy sources in the form of polluted air and water and greater levels of asthma, cancer, and birth defects. Focusing on cleaning up air and water pollution – like lead, mercury and toxic chemicals – in these communities is especially motivating with younger and African American voters.

Simply put: if these voters don't hear Democrats talking about this issue, they won't believe it is a priority for them. Democrats will unquestionably be more trusted than Republicans on tackling the issue of climate change, but Democratic base voters need to believe that Democrats are committed to addressing this crisis.

Recommended Messaging

“Democrats believe that as we recover from the coronavirus crisis, we should focus on rebuilding an economy that works for everyday Americans, not CEOs, by making investments in clean energy to create 10 million good paying middle class and high quality union jobs right now and provide benefits to the country for decades to come.

Democrats understand that we have a duty to listen to our nation's most respected experts, a basic responsibility to protect our children's health and future and an obligation to clean up a legacy of toxic pollution in communities of color. Investing in clean energy will do all of that while spurring innovation and economic growth, addressing environmental and racial justice, and combating climate change.

In contrast, Republicans refuse to listen to scientists and public health experts, deny climate change is a threat or that it's even happening, and support rolling back environmental protections for our air and water while allowing polluters to release unlimited amounts of the climate pollution that is disrupting our climate and putting future generations at risk.”