

To: CAC Organizations and Partners
Fr: CAC Communications
Da: May 1, 2020
Re: CAC Message Guidance Roadmap: Coronavirus and Climate Change

In April 2020, CAC commissioned a message research survey examining how to talk about climate change during the coronavirus pandemic. This memo adapts the learnings from that research to the Campaign's overall messaging priorities.

When talking about the climate crisis/climate change/reducing carbon pollution or other climate-related topics, please remember these two objectives:

1. In all communications, acknowledge that people are suffering – use an emotional connection to do so
2. Frame the issue with the notion that “all people/Americans deserve to live in clean, safer, and healthy communities”

Objective: People are Suffering

Our messaging should start with a recognition that people are struggling and need help, and it should make the case that government assistance/stimulus/recovery efforts should deliver help to those who need it (people, families, workers) and not those making things worse (large corporations, big oil, big polluters).

Suggested Message Construction:

Start with an acknowledgement...

People are suffering and the ongoing threat to our health and economic stability is tough for all of us.

Add a substantive pivot...

“No Fossil Fuel Bailouts”: The last thing we need to do during a public health crisis is to hand over billions in taxpayer dollars to oil, gas, and coal companies and their lobbyists. Taxpayer-supported relief/stimulus/recovery should only go to families and workers and benefit the public good, not the companies that have been pumping toxic pollution into our air, lands, and water for decades.

“Focus on the People”: The government's plans to address the coronavirus crisis must expand health protections for all and get millions of people back to work in good jobs. We need a just recovery for the people that prioritizes workers, families, and communities who have been hit first and worst by the coronavirus and the current recession. It must provide immediate testing, treatment, and economic relief for all, while also creating high-wage jobs that contribute to the health of our communities and planet. No more bailouts for large corporations.

“Science Matters”: What we've learned through this experience is we cannot ignore warnings from scientists and public health officials. Taking these warnings seriously and taking meaningful action early would have saved thousands of lives and millions of jobs. Science matters when it comes to slowing the spread of a global

pandemic and when it comes to addressing other major concerns, like curbing the air pollution that has been connected to an increased chance of death from coronavirus and to exacerbating climate change.

“Rollbacks”: Now is not the time to roll back protections on pollution. We need clean air, clean water, and safer communities, and we need to cut the carbon pollution that is making climate change worse. Rolling back limits for mercury pollution/carbon pollution/methane pollution/tailpipe pollution/water pollution/etc. harms our children and families and lets big corporations/polluters get away with poisoning our communities.

“Trump’s Hoax”: Trump called coronavirus a “hoax” and didn’t take it seriously, a delay that cost us dearly. He’s called climate change a “hoax,” too. We can’t let Trump and his administration ignore science, dishonor scientists, and ignore the health and economic threat of climate change, while blocking solutions that will clean up dangerous pollution. He was wrong about the coronavirus and he’s wrong about climate change. And he’s misled the public about both.

Objective: All Americans/People Deserve to Live in Clean, Safer, and Healthy Communities

Our messaging on nearly every communications effort should be housed under the umbrella framework that “everyone deserves to live in clean, safer, and healthy communities.” This positive orientation is a strong lead into communications on specific federal rollbacks (CPP, Cars, Methane, Water, Mercury, etc.) and also as a contrast prop for accountability communications for policymaker targets including specific members of Congress and the Trump administration.

Suggested Messaging Construction:

Start with the umbrella framework...

Everyone deserves to live in clean, safer, and healthy communities.

Add a substantive pivot...

“COVID Link”: Coronavirus is a deadly disease that particularly preys on the frail, especially those with respiratory illnesses like asthma and those with heart disease. Air pollution and climate change make these health conditions worse. A new study just found that death rates from the coronavirus are much higher in areas that have more air pollution. So, the more air pollution and climate change we have, the more dangerous the coronavirus is, especially for seniors, communities of color, and people suffering from preexisting respiratory disease. We should deal with coronavirus and climate change at the same time.

“Science”: The coronavirus crisis has shown us how important it is for our government leaders’ decisions to be based in science. We will slow down the spread of this disease/solve the coronavirus crisis only if we follow the guidance of scientists and medical professionals. And we also must follow the recommendations of scientists who tell us that it is critically important to our health and economy to address the climate change crisis and other public health emergencies.

“Rollbacks”: Now is not the time to roll back protections on pollution. We need clean air, clean water, and safer communities and we need to cut the carbon pollution that is making climate change worse. Rolling back limits

for mercury pollution/carbon pollution/methane/tailpipe pollution/water pollution/etc. harms our children and families and lets big corporations/polluters get away with poisoning our communities .

“Enforcement”: Donald Trump’s EPA has failed to protect our health and environment. Even before the coronavirus crisis, Trump’s political cronies at the EPA had reduced enforcement actions against polluters by nearly 80%. Since coronavirus, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler - a former coal lobbyist - has suspended enforcement and told polluters not to worry about compliance with public health and environmental protections. Now is not the time to allow unlimited pollution. This failure to enforce the rules for polluters puts our children, families, and communities in harm’s way.

Trump Accountability

Messaging on Trump’s actions should get this central point across: Trump initially dismissed coronavirus as a “hoax” and ignored the science and experts, just as he has done for climate change.

Topline message guidance:

“Hoax”: Trump called coronavirus a “hoax” and didn’t take it seriously, a delay that cost us dearly. He’s called climate change a “hoax,” too. We can’t let him and his administration ignore science, dishonor scientists, and ignore the health and economic threat of climate change while blocking solutions that will clean up dangerous pollution. He was wrong about the coronavirus and he’s wrong about climate change. And he’s misled Americans about both.

“People vs. Polluters”: At a time when millions across the country are making significant sacrifices to protect their friends and neighbors, Donald Trump is moving to enrich a handful of big corporations and executives by giving them a free pass to dump unlimited pollution into our air and water.

“No Fossil Fuel Bailouts”: The last thing we need to do during a public health crisis is to hand over billions in taxpayer dollars to oil, gas, and coal companies and their lobbyists. Taxpayer-supported relief/stimulus/recovery should only go to families and workers and benefit the public good, not the companies that have been pumping toxic pollution into our air and water for decades.

SAMPLE MESSAGE

- The American people are clearly suffering; as we take steps to deal with the coronavirus crisis, we should be putting in place measures so everyone can live in clean, safer, and healthy communities.
- That’s why we can’t let billions of taxpayer dollars go to oil, gas, and coal companies that contribute to toxic pollution while we ignore clean energy workers.
- Air pollution makes coronavirus worse by triggering asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses that make people even more susceptible to dying from coronavirus.
- We must follow the guidance of scientists and medical experts about threats to public health, including coronavirus and climate change.
- President Trump ignored scientists and experts and called coronavirus a “hoax.” He’s consistently sided with polluters. His delay in dealing with the facts has put millions of Americans at risk and has had a devastating effect on our economy.

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