

Memo

To: Interested Parties
From: Navin Nayak, Senior VP Campaigns at LCV
Re: The Shifting Politics of Climate Change
Date: July 24, 2013

The politics of climate change are shifting quickly, and politicians—particularly Republicans—are going to need to make some decisions even faster. As the impacts of climate change take hold on a near daily basis—from record heat waves, wildfires, floods or storms—the American way of life is being violently transformed. And Americans are taking notice—especially younger voters whose future is at stake.

This week, LCV [released a bipartisan poll](#) showing that young voters across the country are concerned about this issue, intensely supportive of federal action to address it, and are willing to punish those who ignore the problem. Moreover, young voters overwhelmingly describe climate change deniers as “ignorant” and “out-of-touch” – reflecting the generational divide and underscoring the disconnect between their real world experience and the politically charged views of deniers. Young people also soundly reject the false choice of economic prosperity versus action on climate change that many climate change deniers hide behind.

Yet it isn't just the most extreme climate change deniers who stand to lose the support of the emerging generation; 73 percent of young voters say they are less likely to vote for someone who opposed the President's plan on climate change.

We started to see signs of this trend last year, when LCV developed a new electoral program (*The Flat Earth Five*) targeting five incumbent climate deniers at the ballot box. It was the first time we'd specifically campaigned against climate deniers. We spent more than \$3 million in those five races and defeated four of them.

The problem for Republican leadership isn't simply that they won't support President Obama's plan to address climate change, it's that they deny that the problem even exists. In doing so, they are rejecting the findings of 97 percent of the world's climate scientists—placing them in the smallest of minorities and deeply at odds with young voters. As Republican leaders move their caucus further toward an anti-science position, this will matter for two important reasons:

- 1) Young voters are everywhere. It has been repeatedly observed that the Republican motivation behind immigration reform is to preserve their viability in national elections and in key states. Yet on the flip side, a majority of the Republican House caucus has rejected the Senate immigration bill because they don't feel the same demographic pressure from Latinos in *their own districts*. They won't have the same such luck with youth. Migration patterns have not forced young voters into certain states or certain districts. While there is certainly some regional variation, there is a relatively even distribution of young voters across the country and across all districts; Members of Congress can't hide from young voters.

- 2) The strong views reflected in our poll exist even before LCV and our allies have done much to really hold climate deniers accountable for their actions in Congress. This summer, with the President having outlined a bold plan to address climate change, we plan to work with our allies to ensure that constituents know if their member of Congress is a climate denier. The bottom-line is that the polling shows there is already a lot of latent intensity around this issue, even before we've fueled the fire.

As has been well-documented, President Obama won young voters by 24 points last year. And while this sentiment is most intense with youth, it isn't unique to them by any stretch. Earlier [polling by LCV](#) has shown that other key groups of voters—including Latinos and suburban women—are also increasingly concerned about climate change and dismissive of climate change deniers.

Despite all this, too many Republican leaders have abandoned the scientific underpinnings of policy-making to appease the Tea Party extremists and the fossil fuel industry. This is evident if you just look at the leadership of House Republicans over the past two and half years when they've controlled the House. Virtually all Republican House leaders deny the science of climate change including Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor. The agenda pushed by leadership has not only included blocking every effort to take action on climate change, but also demonizing clean energy -- an industry that voters view as the future of American energy production.

We know that Republican leadership won't change its views; the fossil fuel industry has spent millions propping up these leaders. So rank and file Republicans will have a choice: they can continue to follow their leadership and deny the science of climate change, risking being viewed by voters as "ignorant" and "out-of-touch", or they can buck leadership and start engaging in a reasonable and thoughtful conversation on how to deal with a threat that is already too real for most Americans.

Over the next several years, LCV and our allies plan to aggressively expose climate deniers and those opposing any action on the issue—a message that our data indicates will resonate with voters. But how long this effort lasts is ultimately up to politicians, who need to decide whether they will listen to scientists and their constituents, or to their polluter campaign contributors.