David Gergen on Climate Politics and Public Opinion

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Greg: This is Climate One, changing the conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment.

David Gergen: If you look at the top five concerns of CEOs from all over the world, four of them were about climate and the environment. (8'')

Greg: Former presidential advisor David Gergen believes the political winds on climate are shifting.

David Gergen: This is turning out exactly the way scientists predicted some years ago with one exception, that is it's happening faster than they thought. (7'') And so the question is what can we do rapidly that would alleviate this and be fair to all. (7'')

Greg: But can lawmakers get voters (from across the political spectrum) to also buy in to the solutions?

Lori Weigel: When we talk about clean energy when we talk about solar and wind and being more energy-efficient, honestly we see very little partisan distinction on those things. (10'')

Greg: Climate Politics and Public Opinion. Up next on Climate One.

Greg: Climate One conversations feature oil companies and environmentalists, Republicans and Democrats. I'm Greg Dalton.

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Greg: In the last twenty years, while the percentage of Democratic voters in favor of immediate action on climate has risen, the level of Republican support has sunk or stalled.

Lori Weigel: But if you broaden your language and talk about should we be transitioning to cleaner energy, should we be taking some sorts of actions, then you get far more Republicans, especially Republican women, especially younger Republicans to say yes.

Greg: Lori Weigel is a Republican pollster. Her data has shown that GOP voters – especially in western states – are skeptical of the current administration's environmental policies. In fact, they support a variety of solutions to promote conservation and clean energy.

Marianne Lavelle: This is the thing that we have tried to get across in our coverage that for so many years the discussion was stuck on is climate change happening or not and a debate on solutions is a moment that we haven't been in before.

Greg: Marianne Lavelle is a reporter for *InsideClimate News* based in Washington DC. We'll hear more from her and Lori Weigel later in the program. First, a conversation with political analyst and former presidential adviser David Gergen, who served in the administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. I asked him what changes he's seen in the politics around climate following the 2018 midterm elections.

David Gergen: Well I think the politics have changed dramatically. If you look at both parties they have not taken in the presidential elections in the past they have not taken climate as seriously as they might to our, I think everybody surprise. As I recall in the debates of 2016 with Hillary and Trump, I'm not sure that anybody ever asked them a climate question. I think of that there are like three debates and nobody asked the question. And now it's not always on top of mind, but it certainly mostly on the top of mind for Americans. I think that's a significant part because of these storms and fires and what people have seen. Almost every American now has a friend who's been affected.

Greg Dalton: So it's on the agenda, you know, some people might say also it's Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who's been a vehicle for that. How do you see this playing out from now. Democrats don't really agree on how ambitious to be and what's the Republican alternative.

David Gergen: Well it seems to me Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has great heightened interest and heightened focus on climate and you have to give her credit for that. I do think there's a danger for the Democratic Party if it embraces the entire Green New Deal in all of its glory. Because no one's expenses out the numbers that are floating around or just beyond belief in terms of how expensive it would all be because it's about much more than climate, it's also about transforming our society and the equity and dealing with the inequities in our society. All of which is to be appreciated, but if you adopt that as your platform as opposed to your aspirations you don't have to tell people how you're gonna pay for it. And that is so mind blowing I think the Democratic Party has been wise, I think Nancy Pelosi has been wise to focus on the climate aspects of the plan and not on the other the rest of it into a secondary category or on the back burner as they sometime say in politics. But to focus on what we need to do by 2025 or within a 20-year period whether we can get back into Paris and whether we can look at something like the Baker-Shultz plan. There are other alternatives now which I think need to be on the public agenda to debate.

Greg Dalton: Some people environmental justice advocates would say, hear that and say, oh you're asking for us to wait again as we so often do. While the affluent people, coastal people solve their concerns and the people of color have to take a backseat again. And I think some environmental justice advocates I've interviewed would say, we're not gonna take a backseat in the green economy

like we did in the brown economy.

David Gergen: With all due respect, I don't think people are living in California who got chased out of their homes many of them died were elites. The people who are farming along the river where the walls are crumbling, and the water is flooding the states. These are not, you know, elites I don't think the question is the elites versus everybody else. The question is what can we do rapidly that would alleviate this and be fair to all. And obviously that includes people who are living in urban areas that are, you know, like in Flint, Michigan and we have to deal with that as well. But you have to be realistic about how are you gonna pay for things. And if the costs or anywhere and if you want to do Medicare for all, you want to have free college for everybody and you want to do all these climate issues. If you don't have priorities you get nothing done. Let's take it one step at a time and get it done. We've been arguing and arguing everybody knows now we need to, you know, that the Republicans have been hopelessly dismissive of science. We need the country to come together and do some serious things in the next four years or it's gonna be too late.

Greg Dalton: Right. And that's where the urgency comes in science.

David Gergen: Absolutely.

Greg Dalton: Right. Do something. So you're for fast rather than something more ambitious --

David Gergen: I'm for fast on climate. I'm for doing the rest when you can as soon as you can. But I am not for trying to do it all because of what we've seen in the past is eventually proposals like that, which seem like they're wonderful aspirations, but they've turned out to be pie in the sky, nothing gets done. And we're better off getting some really, you know, let's get 30% of it let's get 40% let's get back into Paris at the minimum.

Greg Dalton: We saw a pretty big deal recently the Dingell Bill million new acres of land conservation. Republicans, Democrats came together around land conservation to permanently fund something.

David Gergen: I think it's easier to do a land conservation. But the carbon is where we have to go. And I think the Baker-Shultz plan, which is a carbon tax with the tax money that comes in the revenue comes in being sent back to middle income families or low income families. That got quite, when I originally poll that back in late 2018 that was polled very, very well, you know, well over 60% support. And what I like about it is it is a plan which actually does better than Paris according to the surveys or the research on it. And yet it's fair to people it's not aggressive tax return a lot of the revenue in a fair way.

Greg Dalton: You don't grow government.

David Gergen: And you don't grow government and very importantly come from two of the major-domos of the Republican Party. Are they more moderate than where the mainstream of the party is, yes they are. But if you can get the Bakers and Shultzes of the world who are so respected especially by Republicans, but more generally speaking behind some and you got a chance to put some together bipartisan. The last thing we need is another fight that leads to a big environmental bill that the minority won't vote for. And it's only voted for by the majority. And then the minority spends the next five years trying to undo it which what we've seen in Obama care. We should not go down that path again. We need something with more of a consensus behind it.

Greg Dalton: So some combination of the Green New Deal and the Baker-Shultz plan something --

David Gergen: Yeah, something, certainly green. I am not quite sure of the new deal part, that's what I'm questioning. Because I think it's, you know, these are aspirationally terrific but the planet is burning up. And listen, this is an international concern now it is risk not just on the U.S. but we are seeing the rest of the world increasingly is holding things up. I was in Davos in Switzerland this January for the world economic forum. They take an annual survey with CEOs from all over the world, lot of heavyweights come there. And they take survey about what are your biggest concerns. For four years in a row it has been the climate. Number one concern of CEOs and others around the world. And very importantly if you look at the top five concerns of people in Davos this year, four of them were about climate and the environment. This is a deep-seated response to an accumulating problem. I tell you what I'm looking forward to is Netflix has got a big series coming out called Our Planet with David Attenborough. He's splendid.

Greg Dalton: He was a long time climate skeptic and he has come around.

David Gergen: He's come around and he has some -- they were up in helicopter I think it was in Greenland looking at the glaciers. And about 2 miles away they saw a glacier that started crumbling. They flew the helicopter over to the top of that and these pictures are unbelievable. It's like the end of the world as they're watching these glaciers, ten stories or more, just collapsing right in front of you just the fury in it. I haven't seen anything even war produced, I haven't seen anything which was as both a spellbinding and as scary.

Greg Dalton: But glaciers for most Americans they'll never go there they're beautiful but they're far away. The problem with the climate issue is it hasn't connected as been as human or direct as my healthcare my family member who wants to get across the border, gun violence those sorts of things. It's viewed as less personal, more remote.

David Gergen: It is. But I think the storms and the fires are changing that. The uncertainty of the weather this is turning out exactly the way scientist predicted some years ago with one exception that is it's happening faster than they thought. And for that reason it's more frightening. I just can't tell you -- when historians look back if we're not careful, the Trump saga is gonna be like a little footnote. And the bigger story is going to be where in the hell were you people when the world was threatened that way.

Greg Dalton: John McCain had basically the same climate proposal as Barack Obama, 2008. He was a leader in the senate held the senate back to vote on climate one summer, 2005. Who are the leaders now on climate in the Republican Party because with all due respect to George Shultz and Jim Baker, they're elders that the people in office don't necessarily listen to.

David Gergen: I totally agree with that. I felt like John Kasich is I think better and more reasonable on that. I think there are some --

Greg Dalton: Carlos Curbelo was one but he's no longer in Congress.

David Gergen: I don't want to say that if you look back in history that Republicans presidents, Republican members of Congress have generally been very slow to come around. But at the end of the day they usually have come around. It should not be forgotten that Richard Nixon started the Environmental Protection Agency. I was there at the time and I can tell you it was like and he put Bill

Ruckelshaus in charge which was a terrific appointment. Bill, I think for many years, serve as a model of what the EPA administrator should be like. Far, far different from what we're experiencing today. And if you look at some of the presidents after that, we can eventually turn much greener. Thatcher had a big influence on, she turned green as a conservative. And George H.W. Bush started out, you talked to Bill Reilly about who served with him and, you know, they eventually turned around. I think they had a big conference in Brazil as I recall.

Greg Dalton: The Rio Earth Summit, Bill Reilly took Bush one to go down to the --

David Gergen: Yes. And Bush became much greener. And so I don't think it's beyond hope that the Republican Party will regain its sanity on this issue. I think the Republican Party right now could find itself on issue after issues, so much on the wrong side of history that the party could be badly better damage. So when we need a right of center party I'm just not sure right now that's what we're looking at.

Greg Dalton: What's the role of fossil fuel companies in this. There's a lot of opposition they fund a lot of opposition they make a lot of campaign donations very powerful lobby. Someone say the most powerful industry in history. Are they the reason that the Republicans are not moving on this?

David Gergen: Well, I think frankly yes they're part of the reason. I come at this as someone who grew up during that and I grew up in tobacco country. There's so many parallel between what goes on with tobacco and what's going on with the environment now. And that is the mainstream medical research people all showed that tobacco kill you and takes you early. And then there were other side funded by the tobacco companies who came up with this, you know, this is false science. And to convince people and many people in the South where I came from didn't believe it. But I'll tell you something I wasn't sure but it was, I lost my father to cancer. Cancer is caused by cigarettes. If we had stronger rules I think he would've survived a lot longer. And it always struck me what we are arguing about then was we needed an insurance policy in case research finding that tobacco could be fatal to you. In case that research are right, we had an answer. And that's the same thing we face in the environment. Okay, the science may not be perfect, it may not be 100% correct and maybe it's only 95% correct. But whatever the number is we should have an insurance policy to protect our kids and our grandkids. I mean it's just, that's just obvious common sense. You have to think that the Republican Party takes a contrary view in part because of the money.

Greg (Track): You're listening to a Climate One conversation with former presidential advisor David Gergen. Coming up, more with David Gergen, plus *InsideClimate News* reporter Marianne Lavelle on climate politics inside the beltway.

Marianne Lavelle: The principle that really motivates the backers of the Green New Deal is considering climate change as an economic policy, not just an environmental policy. And that really isn't all that radical.

Greg (Track): That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're listening to a conversation with political analyst and former presidential advisor David Gergen. Knowing that his wife is a family therapist and his

brother a psychiatrist, I asked him to comment on the emotional toil of experiencing – even from a distance – what feels like an unending series of extreme weather.

David Gergen: We have a lot of folks in my family who have been trying to study, understand emotions and emotional depression emotional anxiety. And I think they would generally agree that our society is going through a wrenching period in which there is enormous amount. The turbulence the uncertainty of where we are so many things seem risky is having an impact upon the psychology of the country. I think we're more depressed I think we're less willing to try bold things than we should be. I think we're less willing to compromise we see other people not as rivals, but as enemies. You and I could both go through the litany that we have but it's I think it's there's a very, very large question in Western countries now is whether democracy is gonna survive the period we're in.

Greg Dalton: Right. And democracy often takes time to make decisions. And so the turbulence that we're seeing in the E.U. is partly fueled by refugees coming from climate amplified disaster.

David Gergen: I think that's right. And again the Brexit, you know, has been interesting striking. Brits now have, a big headline in New York Times I read recently, Brits agree on one thing, democracy doesn't work. It was like a scary headline. But one of the things we've also learned is there is was secret money going in for the pro Brexit forces. New Yorker had big piece on this. He was very close to the Russian oligarchs had a lot of money and he put it quietly into the dark money, put it quietly into opposing Brexit scared the hell out of a lot of people and boom we have Brexit. And, you know, Britain hasn't fully recover I don't think it'll recover for a long time. But we do face that problem I think in our politics more generally speaking, we don't know whether we're reading something that's true or not true.

Greg Dalton: And Russia is a petro state that they benefit from a warmer world.

David Gergen: Absolutely. Absolutely. And they benefit a lot from chaos in the West and from just general uncertainty. So we still desperately need leadership on this public leadership on these climate issues that brings us together. I hope can do it in such a way as a Democrats and Republicans together can agree. It's gonna be hard, you know, for all the criticism we have of U.S. moving too slowly not being gutsy enough on the carbon tax. It is worth remembering that Macron in France the reason he said, you know, people in the streets week after week we're at the 19th week now it's because he put in a carbon tax.

Greg Dalton: And there's other tax changes happening in France as well.

David Gergen: No it wasn't just carbon but it's a warning sign. And I remember I was there when Bill Clinton propose a tiny carbon tax and Al Gore is vice president. Gore persuaded him to do that and he got beaten back he had to withdraw it.

Greg Dalton: Looking at the 2020 contenders, Jay Inslee is the climate candidate Governor of Washington. He is at the bottom of the poll down there with Howard Schultz. Who among the Democratic candidates you think have the right balance and message on climate of what's practical yet aspirational enough to motivate primary voters?

David Gergen: Well I'm not sure I see anybody who is carrying the torch the way Inslee is. And I thought Inslee distinguished himself during the travel ban he stepped forward, he plus his attorney general were very effective in that. So I've been looking forward, I wouldn't count him out as a

contender because he does have a message.

Greg Dalton: Governors typically have a better six months than U.S. Senators.

David Gergen: That's correct. A work hasn't had enough of a time with substance to really put forward a sound plan. But I look at something like, Buttigieg, the mayor of this very small little city 202,000 people and yet I think he's got some very sensible or he's striking people would be more very sensible and thoughtful. And I think he's pretty good on the climate issue. But I don't see anybody, you know, Elizabeth Warren is not crusading on this, Cory Booker is not crusading for it. Bernie Sanders is for it but is not crusading. And I think Joe Biden will be good on, if he gets in, will be good on climate. But I'm not sure he'll crusade on it.

Greg Dalton: I googled CNN and, David Gergen, and climate didn't come up with a lot of hits. Do you think that CNN and you, on CNN talk, raise the climate issue enough?

David Gergen: That's a good question. It's a fair question. Look, I think we've been so preoccupied with the Trump story that we haven't given enough attention. And with everybody likes things to come down so we could get back to some of these other issues. Because on the Trump story it is big it's very important, but frequently we get caught up in the trivia of that story as well.

Greg Dalton: Right. And some would say that it's not a ratings winner. I mean Chris Hayes from MSNBC tweeted once that climate is a ratings loser.

David Gergen: It may be a ratings loser. I don't think that ought to be the standard by which we run our society. There are a lot of things than a rating losers that are important for us to do. And I think this takes really strong, forceful leadership and not only from the presidential candidates but from increasingly from other companies that are not necessarily fossil fuel companies. Some fossil fuel companies are getting the word I understand, you know, if you're the CEO can you imagine what it's gonna be like talking to your grandchild or your great-grandchild the way you sat on your tail and did nothing about this. It's gonna be pretty horrific. I'll tell you in terms of -- I have the privilege of teaching here at the college school at Harvard. We are now getting significant increases in students coming here for climate reasons. Coming to study climate, want to get environmental movement. I run a fellowship we've raised money for fellowship for students to come and work on the environment. We're getting overwhelmed with good resumes from around the world. So I think women are going with this as part of it. It's a little bit like the gay rights movement. When people began to realize everybody has a friend who's gay. Everybody has a friend member of that community, why are we holding these people back? I think now we're seeing, everybody has know somebody who've been adversely affected by these wild changes in the weather. Everybody's been flying now, there's a lot more wind up there than it used to be, you bounce around all the time now, you're not used to do that for a long time. And we're reminded almost daily of the urgency of this issue.

Greg: Former presidential advisor David Gergen on climate politics and public onion. You're listening to Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. For an even deeper dive into national climate politics, we turn to Marianne Lavelle, a reporter for *InsideClimate News* based in Washington. I began our conversation by asking her about the vote that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell recently held on the Green

New Deal.

Marianne Lavelle: Yes, so this was interesting, it was really a show vote. I think that's the best way to describe it. And what he wanted to do was to force the Democrats to vote on it and to show that even the Democrats are divided on the Green New Deal. And of course the Green New Deal was going to lose no matter what, but this would put them on the record and put them on the spot. The problem is that he also had to put his own members on the record, and there's a lot of signs that voters, you know, they may not completely agree with the Green New Deal, but they're not very happy with having politicians who are just not paying attention to climate and just not doing anything. And I think you could see in the speeches on the senate floor, there was no Republican, virtually no Republican who really got up there and did a full throated climate change is not happening or, you know, denial of the climate science. Senator Inhofe was remarkably absent from the discussion. Instead, you heard them talking Senator Murkowski, for instance, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. Her state is a big oil state it also is right in the crosshairs of climate change. And so she was talking about how we have to do something. I am going to dedicate myself to doing something it just isn't the Green New Deal. And I'm not sure that that really is the direction that Mitch McConnell wants to go in but that is the direction that lawmakers seemed to be heading in.

Greg Dalton: Now lot of the debate about the Green New Deal is that how ambitious it is in scope whether it's gonna attack the flaws of capitalism, job security, income inequality. But there's no actual bill, right, there's a resolution there is no actual bill yet, right?

Marianne Lavelle: Exactly. And I do think that the plan was that they would kind of have a resolution declaring this commitment but really spend the next couple of years coming up with a plan to implement. Really a 10-year mobilization on climate that is really what it's about and maybe some of the more centrist ideas would really be a part of that. And I think the principle that really motivates the backers of the Green New Deal is considering climate change as an economic policy not just an environmental policy. And that really isn't all that radical as we've written people have been talking about that since 1992 in the Rio Summit. The principles that the United States signed on to when President Bush 41 was president was environmental and economic framework for addressing climate change. And the only thing is we've committed to that but yet haven't really implemented it.

Greg Dalton: Do the Republicans have an alternative to the Green New Deal, I saw that Republican Senator Lamar Alexander had a bill for research and development. There's little pieces here but it seems a little bit of like the healthcare debate, where Republicans are against Obama care but didn't really have an alternative.

Marianne Lavelle: Yes. I think little pieces that describes it so well. I think you will see a lot of Republicans again, Lisa Murkowski, Lamar Alexander, talking about things like increasing research and development. And, you know, just really giving more support to renewable energy and also carbon capture technology, which it just seems that is something that we're going to have work on developing. But what we haven't seen yet, is a real framework for tackling climate change from the Republican side. Now, there are some folks who say we are going to see that even while President Trump is still in office, that there is going to be some sort of answer to the Green New Deal from the Republican side. So I guess we'll wait and see if that happens.

Greg Dalton: There are couple of proposals that are perhaps more focused in scope, and they are economic. The Baker-Shultz plan that you've written about has a carbon price starting at $40 a ton moving up to 2% to 5% annually. And then an alternative bill the Energy Innovation and Carbon

Dividend Act, two congressmen from Florida one Republican, one Democrat, that's comes in at $15 a ton and increases more quickly $10 a ton per year. So it starts lower but it goes higher quickly. Any traction between those what Republican -- well, one is by bipartisan, one is Republican proposal.

Marianne Lavelle: Yes. So we are seeing a lot of the supporters of the energy innovation bill and that's the only one that's been introduced yet. It is promoted by a group called the Citizens' Climate Lobby and their kind of whole reason for being is they believe the climate solution has to be bipartisan. So they have members, citizen volunteers in every single congressional district, and they are going in meeting with members of Congress. And they are hearing a positive reaction I don't know if it's enough traction to get it passed, but again I wouldn't minimize the significance of hearing that Republican members are listening and hearing the concern of these folks on climate. Now the Baker-Shultz, the folks who back the Baker-Shultz approach which include the biggest oil companies as well as environmental groups it's kind of a coalition. They believe that they are going to see that sort of plan introduced by Republican in the Senate before the end of this year maybe this summer. And I think that that would be a significant moment not to say that we're at the place where that kind of legislation could pass but it becomes part of the discussion. This is the thing that we have tried to get across in our coverage that for so many years the discussion was stuck on is climate change happening or not and that is not going to be a productive discussion. But a debate on which approach would be better, Baker-Shultz or the Energy Innovation Act that actually is a discussion that could become productive because and throw Green New Deal in there as well you can see how a compromise could develop. And a debate on solutions is far more it is a moment that, you know, we have to take note of and we haven't been in that position before. Never before has Congress, you know, had different climate solutions really people buzzing about them. And that's an important moment in this long march toward doing something on climate.

Greg Dalton: Almost exactly 10 years ago there was a cap and trade bill moved through the house. It was passed by a few vote margin, there was industry support then oil companies auto companies manufacturing companies. Where is industry this time, you mentioned the oil industry supporting the Baker-Shultz plan, are they really putting muscle into it or they just kind of put their name on it and tossing a nickel into the coffers?

Marianne Lavelle: Yes, the oil industry is spending multi million dollars on lobbying but you only have to see that that's a small fraction of the cash that they have on hand that they're still investing in fossil fuels and the fossil fuel infrastructure and expansion of really their industries. So in that sense it isn't as serious as it needs to be because first of all, they're going to have to address climate change they cannot escape this issue and for them a carbon tax is a far more predictable way of doing it. And they can also include in a carbon tax proposal a lot of things that they would like to see including, you know, number one getting rid of other federal regulations. Number two, getting shielded from these climate lawsuits that are emerging all around the country. They have not made much of a dent in the oil industry yet, but they could, the peril is there and they don't want to be dealing with the uncertainty of litigation. So that's another thing they would like to see.

Greg Dalton: Which is there's a parallel with the tobacco companies in 1960s, they agreed to put the Surgeon General's warning on a pack of cigarettes, this causes cancer. And that basically bought them a few decades of relief until the 90s when there was another deal made. So that's interesting the sort of the indemnification is a key part of perhaps a carbon tax or carbon price deal.

Marianne Lavelle: Right. It really bought the tobacco industry a generation of continuing to do business as they wanted to. And I'm not sure on climate change we have another generation to

continue business as usual. And this is something that the industries, I mean lawmakers, this is something that lawmakers are going to have to look at very seriously, because these Green New Dealers are right we can't be incremental. We have to at this point talk about something that is truly a mobilization that truly is transformational.

Greg: *InsideClimate News* reporter Marianne Lavelle on the new climate of Washington climate politics. This is Climate One. Coming up, Republican pollster Lori Weigel on how GOP voters are often out of step these days of their party's national leadership.

Lori Weigel: I think there's huge openings today that we haven't seen in a long time for Republicans to actually step forward put something in place that would be widely embraced by their core voters.

Greg: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg: You're listening Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. Climate is often framed as a liberal or left-of-center issue. But Republican pollster Lori Weigel finds the views of some GOP voters at odds with the environmental policies of the current administration – particularly in the west. I began our conversation by asking her what Americans thought about the administration's policy of energy dominance.

Lori Weigel: Well, there's some conflicts there. Certainly voters want to see America be energy independent they don't like this idea of having to rely on other nations for energy. And so they are still thinking about that and wary about that. So I think some of the language about energy dominance comes from that it does strike a chord with more conservative voters that side when it comes to public lands and the use of public lands overwhelmingly. We have seen both nationally and with voters in the West that they want those public lands to be managed in a way that conserves them for wildlife habitat as places for outdoor recreation and just for their natural beauty and the value they have as natural areas, more so than as resources for extraction.

Greg Dalton: Does that hold in extraction states Colorado, Utah, big coal state that also hold in those areas?

Lori Weigel: Even in Wyoming which is usually sort of atypical from the rest of the West because of the emphasis and reliance on energy for their economy and their budget. We still see that when it comes to national public lands that they want the emphasis to be on conservation certainly more divided there than in other states but overwhelmingly Western voters tell us that they want the emphasis to be on conservation rather than energy production in those areas.

Greg Dalton: So that reminds me of things like removing national monument protections in Utah, Bears Ears that sort of thing. Lot of public opposition so you're saying that what the administration is doing is going against popular opinion in the areas that it's doing it.

Lori Weigel: Well I think there's a few factors affecting views of the administration's policies here.

You know a large part of it is that people simply don't think of these as places that where the priority be ought to be on energy. We've seen in the past in doing work for Colorado College among eight Western states that voters really don't even recognize that resource extraction is taking place on many national public lands. And so they start from their point of view, and in their interaction with public lands is often more in terms of visiting national parks with their family or enjoying a hike or mountain bike and that familiarity with any sort of resource extraction is really limited. So I think what we see is that their starting point is how does this affect me and for the most part, the vast majority of Western voters say, you know, we need to make sure that we protect these places for all Americans that it shouldn't be something where economic value or resource extraction is taking priority over the uses that we're most familiar with.

Greg Dalton: You also do polling on water, big concerns about drought in the Colorado River Basin there's been a deal recently. What are the voters that you poll think about water is it becoming less predictable, particularly in the Rocky Mountain West?

Lori Weigel: Well, we're seeing that the vast majority of voters are telling us, two thirds are telling us that they're seeing the rate of rainfall and water just being way less predictable than it has been in the past. A lot of that goes back to views of climate change overwhelmingly we're seeing an increase in concern about climate change and Westerners telling us that this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. It's not just true in the West really, it's across the entire country. What we're seeing significant uptick even in just the last couple of years but very much so over the last 20 years where suddenly we have a recognition that climate change is happening that it's a serious problem and immediate action is necessary.

Greg Dalton: What kind of partisan split do you see there with Democrats being more inclined to accept climate change the Republicans, those numbers have typically been much smaller about accepting climate change or thinking so concern in their lifetime. But how is the Republican, how are the Republican numbers changed?

Lori Weigel: Well, it's interesting there was national polling that was done by NBC News/Wall Street Journal at the end of last year. And when you look at those who are saying that climate change is a serious problem and immediate action is necessary, Democrats who held that view is moved up by 42 points over the last decade. It's now at 71% of Democrats saying that immediate action is necessary only it's 15% of Republicans. In fact, those numbers haven't moved since 1999. So in almost 20 years we've seen very little movement. But I will say this, that's when you talk about immediate action. If you broaden your language and talk about should we be transitioning to cleaner energy should we be taking some sorts of actions, then you get far more Republicans, especially Republican women, especially younger Republicans to say yes. Yes, we ought to be doing something they may not know exactly what that should be and they often balk at doom and gloom language. But when we offer practical solutions they grab onto those and they say, yeah we ought to be doing that.

Greg Dalton: Do you ever test people's willingness to pay a little more for cleaner energy cleaner cars that sort of thing?

Lori Weigel: Yeah, when we talk about clean energy when we talk about solar and wind and being more energy-efficient. Honestly, we see very little partisan distinction on those things. People see them as practical they recognize that it's going to save them money in the long term they recognize the clean air benefits. And so we see very little partisan divide on those policies and in fact when it comes to paying a little bit more usually the amounts that we're actually talking about that utilities

might put in place or the implications for real life policies are so minimal that people are shocked. It's just the Republicans tend to overestimate how much those actually might costs them. And so we'll see significant willingness to pay even very significant amounts up to hundred dollars a year and things like that. When often times we're talking about, you know, a couple bucks a month some of the implications of putting in place energy efficiency plans and things like that.

Greg Dalton: Your previous firm did polling for a number of Republicans and if I recall correctly, that included John McCain. Are these poll numbers reaching, are influencing the voting patterns or priorities of the elected officials that are your clients?

Lori Weigel: I think what we're starting to see is just even in the last couple of years, you know, things like catastrophic wildfires things like flooding, you know, in Florida that there's just a recognition that this is starting to affect everyday life. And that has some implications while things like the New Green Deal, you know, really just focus on AOC and, you know, may not be helpful in that political partisan context. I think what it shows is that there's room for Republicans plans too. And when we've tested those, people overwhelmingly embrace those, especially those voters that are so critical for Republican candidates to get reelected. Those Republican women those conservative independents even are saying, yeah we like it when people talk about practical solutions they think of clean energy as a practical solution. They don't respond well to calls about doom and gloom and things that they feel like, you know, too hysterical things like saying, oh, we only have a 10-year window in which to act. They really push back on that. But I think there's huge openings today that we haven't seen in a long time for Republicans to actually step forward put something in place that would be widely embraced by their core-voters.

Greg Dalton: Well often that's happened, Carlos Curbelo, who represented the southern tip of Florida had a carbon plan, carbon pricing plan, some of that is happening. Have you tested carbon tax carbon fee is there support for that kind of what every economist says that's a practical solution.

Lori Weigel: I think the problem becomes when you say the word tax you get a partisan reaction. And so no matter what you're doing it could be a tax on anything. It could be a tax to pass out free lollipops to everyone.

Greg Dalton: Yeah, no one likes any kind of tax.

Lori Weigel: No one likes a tax especially those conservative voters. And if there's one thing that defines our partisan divide today just a reaction to that three letter word because it really, really provokes a very partisan response. And it's something that you can, you know, that people just worry it's going to get out of hand where will the money go. We're seeing skepticism about government at highest levels since I entered this business and even since George Gallup started doing some of his polling. So, you know, we just see that that skepticism about where those funds would actually go starts to erode people's confidence in those type of schemes.

Greg Dalton: Have the Republicans paid any political price for being obstructionist on climate?

Lori Weigel: Well, I think what it leads to I think is a sense that this party is one that needs a practical solutions and needs to be forward-looking. And to date, you can't say that they have paid a huge price on this specific issue, but they are increasingly seen as out of step. I know in February of 2019 again, NBC/Wall Street Journal look to add a question of whether the Republican Party's views on climate change were seen as in the mainstream or outside the mainstream. It's at 63% of all voters

who say it's outside the mainstream that was up from 54% in October 2015. So in a very short period of time using some movement to saying that's more and more outside the mainstream. And I think these newer generations and you're seeing this within the Republican Party that younger generations are saying we need to recognize this and we need to stop with some policies and you're increasingly seeing even members of the administration talking about this in very practical terms. The military recognizes the importance of it and the implications of climate change and I think increasingly we're going to see changes happening.

Greg Dalton: You mentioned the Green New Deal which gets lots of attention. And I think there's been clearly some people even moderate Democrats are concerned that it goes too far or they're afraid it's gonna engender too much opposition too ambitious, all those sorts of things which AOC of course refutes. But is there any indication that that appeals to young Republicans, the ambition, the aspiration of a Green New Deal.

Lori Weigel: I think everyone is sort of gets excited when you're talking about innovative solutions when you're talking about ways to use technology to create solutions. But where Republican voters and conservative voters tend to pullback is they don't want to see it just be restrictions and regulation. They want to allow for innovation that is not just led by the government or funded by the government but that is sort of a bottom-up approach to this entire challenge and they do want to see. And again we've been talking to Republican women throughout the country they do want to see both parties working together to address this problem and not have it just be pigeonholed just that's too leftist, that's do nothing, they want to see both parties come together and act.

Greg Dalton: You've been doing some qualitative research with Republican voters what have you found?

Lori Weigel: I mean that's one of the biggest things and one of the aha moments is that, you know, I mean we were still sort of in this debate over is it real is it man-made versus natural. And, you know, a lot of people just get stuck in that dialogue and never move past that. But once you actually present potential solutions people get far more excited about that. They just don't want to hear bickering and they don't want to get into this place, you know, they'll talk about it as a hot button issue something that people get too animated about and get too negative about. And so they're scared to say anything they're scared to offer their opinions a lot of the times because they feel like they get attacked over that. And, you know, especially with conservative women, you know, they don't want to get into debates about this, is this fact or fiction, what's going on here. They just want someone reliable, someone neutral they respect NASA they respect NOAA they respect lots of our institutions that have great information on their websites. And when you point them in those directions they embrace it. But they just don't want to get in that bickering dialogue and they want to move past that and think about, you know, much more practical ways that this could actually that we could get something done.

Greg Dalton: What are people want Congress to do?

Lori Weigel: Well they want Congress to stop the partisanship and work together but that's true on almost any issues. So that's not limited to climate change, or to energy policy. I think what we see time and again is that it is not just Congress they're willing to accept things at the local level they're willing to, you know, embrace actions at the state they do think of energy as more of a national issue. But when you talk about policies that are happening at the state often times they may not be aware of them but they'll be pleasantly surprised by them. And so it's not just Congress that they're looking

towards in fact Congress has ratings that are, you know, pretty abysmal right now. They'd like to see action even in their local communities and sometimes when we test things like making government buildings more energy efficient at the local level that's one of the things people most widely embrace.

Greg: Republican pollster Lori Weigel talking about the changing views of GOP voters on energy and climate.

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