

MEMORANDUM

JANUARY 28, 2014

CLIMATE: A UNIFYING THEORY TO THE CASE

OVERVIEW

Thank you for asking us to share some ideas for a holistic approach to climate. Per your direction, the goal is to unify policy, politics, and communications to help the Administration best execute an informed plan over a multi-year time period.

This memorandum is presented with the recognition that the Administration has many exceptionally talented people who are giving this matter a great deal of thought; with the understanding that we have limited visibility on how the Administration is considering climate in the context of the next three years; and with the awareness that there are those on the outside who, while they care deeply about the issue, have not always appreciated the imperative of aligning politics and policy to achieve change.

Thus, by definition, this document is intended to provide some food for thought as the Administration refines its thinking on climate.

In the context of our discussion on Thursday, this memorandum addresses the **four components** that the Administration may want to consider as it seeks to lead on this issue:

1. **Three-Year Framework.** Create a framework in which each year represents an iterative chapter in the larger book that will enable the Administration to demonstrate that climate is a winning political issue by 2016, thereby moving the body politic to a place where game-changing climate policy is possible.
2. **Right v. Wrong.** Make the case that climate must be approached as a challenge of historical social change where progress will depend in part on successfully casting the issue in moral terms of who is right and who is wrong, and the implications this has in identifying, designing and executing upon a unifying theory of the case.
3. **The Big Idea.** Develop a range of possible organizing thematic constructs that, if one were to be adopted as the organizing platform, could drive an Administration-wide approach to climate for the next three years. We refer to this as “the Big Idea.”
4. **2014 Action Plan.** Create an outline of a possible 2014 Action Plan consistent with the ideas provided in this memorandum.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unifying Theory

The unifying theory is best expressed by this basic principle: *If the effort to change public opinion on climate change is animated by the same one-off policies and practices that are employed to change public opinion on most other policy issues, then defeat is inevitable. By the time these traditional techniques take hold, the window for averting catastrophic climate changes will likely have closed.*

To achieve victory, we must treat climate change as an issue of historic importance that is worthy of a true political social movement to create change. This political social movement must be founded on moral principles with stark definitions of who is right and who is wrong, and it is important to outline the historically negative, irreversible implications if we were to not succeed.

By pursuing this as a political social movement, President Obama and his Administration will best be able to assure that his legacy includes his unprecedented leadership on climate that initiated the shifting of the country's political tectonic plates to enable transformative climate change policy, before it was too late.

UNIFYING THEORY OF THE CASE

1. A Three-Year Framework

Climate should be thought of as three chapters that build on one another, with each one lasting approximately one year with the specific goals of:

- Demonstrating the efficacy of climate as a winning political issue (i.e., during competitive elections, climate can be deployed both to support Democratic voter performance, as well as to raise basic trust issues with individual candidates that further degrade the Republican brand).
- Engaging key cohorts within the public (i.e., those under 30; Latinos; women) and high-impact regions (i.e., swing states) whose electoral behavior has a disproportionate impact.
- Putting the Administration in a legacy position where it is widely recognized as being the most aggressive Administration in history when it comes to climate.
- Fully leveraging the reality that climate change is now impacting our country on a daily basis, as evidenced by the frequency of extreme weather event increases, such as Biblical superstorms, extreme droughts, and historic wildfires.

Informed by these goals, the three years could be outlined as follows. *(Note: The below bullet points are explored in greater detail later in this memorandum.)*

- **2014 - Demonstrating that the Political Tectonic Plates are Shifting on Climate.** Identify and project a Big Idea representing the three animating principles that is then deployed with political effect by connecting it to three climate political wedge issues (each one related to one of the three principles) where the takeaway is that climate, if properly deployed, can be a winning political issue.
- **2015 - Accelerating Awareness that a Shift in the Political Tectonic Plates is Happening.** Expanding the concept of climate as a winning political issue by conducting outreach among key voter demographics and regions.
- **2016 - Maximizing the Shifting Political Tectonic Plates.** Using the momentum from the shift in the political tectonic plates, and taking advantage of the emerging public awareness of the shift, utilize past successful Obama Administration tactics to address climate, such as a blue ribbon panel; a series of town halls in highly-symbolic relevant places; the release of data on impact, all leading to the surfacing of a significant policy. This activity in the context of the 2016 presidential cycle will have the consequence of forcing the Republicans, due to pressures within their primaries, to adopt an even more extreme, and therefore politically non-viable general election position on climate, while Democrats are able to benefit from such extremism (i.e., climate would be the 2016 policy analog to what immigration was in 2012—it is not politically feasible to be in opposition to reform).

2. Right v. Wrong (*Climate as political social change*)

As touched on earlier, the central challenge in considering how to create a unifying theory for climate is that while climate is an enterprise threat to humanity, it is not yet understood as such by the public to a point where it is demanding action. Consequently, if we do not now pursue an approach to accelerate the public's demand for change, by the time the public does demand change because the climate impacts have become so extreme, it will be too late.

This dynamic is further compounded by the fact that the opposition includes some of the most powerful, well-resourced, and deeply-entrenched interests that the world has ever seen. These companies and individuals who have a direct and enormous financial interest (arguably, a fiduciary duty) to maintain the status quo.

Finally, the opposition is well positioned to manipulate the current dysfunction in our governmental processes to maintain the status quo.

Given this central challenge, and to approach climate with a seriousness of purpose, the strategy must at its foundation be based on an approach that fundamentally recognizes the mission as an exercise in political social change. By its very definition, social change means that any approach must at its essence be designed to leverage the inherent moral nature of the issue to move the key segments of the public from a place where they recognize an issue to where they are demanding action on the subject.

And, as history has made clear, the energy for any campaign involving social change is to define what is at stake in very simple terms of ***who is right and who is wrong***. From ending slavery to women's suffrage to worker rights to Civil Rights to anti-smoking to gay marriage -- the issue was truly joined and decisively won when it became defined not merely as a worthy policy but a moral issue of right and wrong.

While public opinion research can certainly help guide and refine any approach (particularly in how to talk about who is right and who is wrong), one cannot be handcuffed by data on a fundamental moral issue of this kind. The strategic challenge here is not to find the sweet spot within prevailing public opinion, but to move public opinion to a point where action is being demanded because of the morality of the issue.

In other words, the magic will not be in the precision of specific words the Administration chooses to use to describe its approach to climate; rather, it will be in the Big Idea that the words or phrases represent and the principles that animate the Big Idea.

When Theodore Roosevelt first used the words "Square Deal" while campaigning in 1904, they were used to sum up his commitment to empowering the middle class and were defined by his "Three C's": Control of corporations, Consumerism, and Conservation. Square Deal, in and of itself, did not inherently stand for anything but became an extremely powerful platform because it stood for a Big Idea of right versus wrong.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior's, "I Have a Dream," resonated because it captured the core morality of equality under the law.

And Ronald Reagan's "The Evil Empire," worked because it symbolized a totalitarian form of government that stood in opposition to government by the people and for the people.

In the context of identifying of possible climate platforms as an exercise in social change and right versus wrong, the following principles inform our thinking:

- **Big and Simple.** The concept must be big; it must be simple; and it must "lean in" to where the public is inclined to go in terms of right versus wrong.
- **Offensive.** To succeed, the issue must always be framed as taking action for the right reason while being opposed for the wrong reason. This is required to successfully take on the opposing forces, especially given the power of those who oppose climate action. Every action must be positioned in terms of, "Whose side are you on?" It is the sling shot needed to beat the Goliath.
- **Political Wedge Policies.** Identify a defined set of policies that, we know from research (this is where public research can be very useful): (a) are highly popular, (b) will force the opposition into oppose something that is highly popular and will politically expose them; (c) relates to key dispositive voter cohorts in what will be performance elections (Latinos, under 30, women), and (d) reinforce the Republican Party's lack of trust narrative. (Research has proven that climate, if used right, fits nicely into the anti-women, anti-Latino, anti-sane fiscal policy narrative that is at the heart of the Republican Party's long-term electoral challenges.)
- **Cohesive.** To its great credit, the Administration is pursuing a variety of meritorious climate policy initiatives throughout various agencies and departments. However, these policies have yet to be presented as a cohesive, POTUS-led comprehensive game plan designed to take on one of most significant the issues of our times. The Big Idea would be the communications prism, the emotional touchstone, and the policy hub for *all* climate-related policies, regardless of where it is coming from within the Administration.
- **Dialectic.** At the end of the day, given the powerful and entrenched interests that are opposed to climate change policy, one needs to have an organizing platform that defines the Administration as being morally on the right side of the issue and, equally important, defines the opposition as morally responsible for an issue that threatens the health and welfare of the American people. TR had the plutocrats. FDR fought Fascism. LBJ took on poverty. And Reagan had the Soviets.

3. The Big Idea

Consistent with the imperative of framing climate as right and wrong, following is a range of Big Idea concepts that go along a Goldilocks spectrum (cold to medium to hot). (Of course, some of these could be subsets of one another).

- **Anti-Basic Science.** Define the issue as between those who believe in the science, and therefore are taking steps to respond to the scientific findings, versus those who do not believe in the science. The power of this approach is that it puts the opposition in an indefensible box (the vast majority of people believe the science that climate is changing); it fits into what we call the Troglodyte Narrative (anti-women; anti-Latino; anti-gun safety; anti-common sense fiscal policy; and anti-science) that is raising basic trust issues for the Republican Party - especially with electorally decisive voter cohorts. You either believe in basic science or you are against basic science -- in which case you fail a basic requirement for being capable of occupying public office.
- **Intergenerational Equity(It's About Doing Right By Our Kids).** Frame climate as an issue of whether we will or will not do right by addressing an issue that, if not addressed, will do great harm to our kids. The author Barbara Kingslover put this issue in very simple terms: If you were told your child would have a 99% chance of having her temperature climb above 102 degrees and suffer permanent life altering health problems unless immediate action was taken to deter the fever, there wouldn't be a parent in the world who would not do everything possible to avoid such an outcome. The President talked about the issue in intergenerational equity terms both at Lincoln Park in November 2008 and in his 2012 Inaugural. This is an issue of whether you are looking out for the interests of our kids or taking action against our kids.
- **Fair Shake/Risky Business.** The economic costs of climate change impacts each and every citizen in the country. All of us are - and will be - paying a climate fee that could damage our economy and cost jobs. This argument would cast the issue in very specific economic context and consider issues such as impact on GDP, amount of subsidies already going to fossil fuel industry, etc. This is an issue of economic fairness -- are you paying the price or are the ones responsible being held accountable.
- **All In This Together.** This is the ecumenical argument that in a democratic society we all have a responsibility. Such a concept was used in the anti-smoking movement and the anti-littering effort. You either are a member of our society or you are a social misanthrope (i.e., litterer, smoker around a pregnant women, etc.).
- **Justice.** This idea encompasses several sub-ideas and provides a straightforward moral framework of right and wrong. It starts by making a basic distinction between those who profit (fossil fuel companies) and those at risk (the rest of us). Secondly, it clearly subsumes the environmental justice frame that we have seen global leaders such as Kofi Annan and others using. This frame would also fit consistently with the Administration's focus on equality/opportunity, and could encompass both domestic issues and international issues (rising seas wiping out millions of poor people in Southeast Asia, droughts leading to famine in Africa; rising temperatures creating plagues in Latin

America). This approach connects us to an entirely different, and broader, coalition, namely those under thirty (generational justice), Latinos/African-Americans (environmental justice/health), women (maternal concern about the future), and working families most affected by extreme weather, transportation costs, etc. (economic justice). It becomes an issue of fighting against powerful interests acting without regard for the basic rights of American citizens.

- **Anti-Tobacco.** Compared to the anti-smoking campaign, the anti-tobacco effort has focused on the specific immorality of an industry that is putting profits before human life, including the specific marketing to specific populations (e.g., children). We realize that this is likely a bridge too far, but we felt obligated to present it in the range of options. You are for saving humanity or you are engaged in a business that threatens humanity.

The Winning Principles

The Big Idea will need to be animated by three principles that the wedge political policies would connect with (think of FDR's Four Freedoms or TR's Three C's).

In the context of being informed by various campaigns (candidate and ballot initiative) in which climate was deployed as a decisively winning political issue, there are three issues that really stand out as wedge principles that could undergird the Big Idea (whatever the Big Idea may be).

- Health/Safety. The opposition is engaged in practices or holding positions that are demonstrably imperiling the health and safety of our people. This ranges from macro issues like extreme weather to local issues like drinking water, air quality and rail safety to micro issues like children's asthma. People care when the health and safety of their families are implicated.
- Pocket Book. People care when climate impacts them economically. On the positive/aspirational front, this principle can be about whether new green jobs will be based here or overseas or how citizens are able to save money by paying less for energy. On the negative, this principle can be deployed in terms of how much taxpayers are subsidizing the opposition or how the opposition is pursuing actions that are ultimately costing us all money (disaster relief; food costs; job dislocation; health expenses; etc.).
- Accountability/Responsibility. Follow the money. Who is accountable/responsible for the bad things that are happening, and how are they rigging the system to benefit from the bad things? This principle also has the ancillary benefit of being able to engage in jujitsu by using the opposition's greatest strength against it -- how it uses its financial resources to shape political outcomes.

4. 2014 Action Plan

We assume that much of the basic blocking and tackling laid out below is being contemplated (or already being done) in some form or fashion.

- Commitment to a major monthly activity by POTUS that relates directly to the Big Idea and that demonstrates a consistently disciplined commitment to pursuing the issue.
- Similar commitment of POTUS to visit extreme weather sites and link to climate.
- Identification of three compelling wedge policy ideas that relate directly to the Big Idea (and are derived from the Big Idea's winning principles) and which, ideally, can be accomplished through regulation or executive powers by the end of 2014 (or which would force the Republicans to adopt positions that could be used as a bludgeon against them).

These three policy ideas should be broadly defined as climate policies - meaning policy ideas that would relate to the Big Idea and which we know would be popular with base voters (especially those under 30) and put the Republicans in any competitive race in the position of effectively stating, "The Earth is Flat."

These should not, and cannot, be complex policy ideas. They must be easy-to-understand concepts, for example:

- ending royalties to the most profitable companies in the world and sending the money back to the public as a tax break
 - solar panels along our public roads that would reduce energy costs for all Americans
 - barring or limiting utilities from charging fees to consumers who put solar panels on their domiciles
 - improved drinking water standards
 - significantly enhanced liabilities for companies that pollute water or pollute lands with pipeline/rail leaks
 - asthma protections; establishment of a significant liability health and safety protocol related to fracking
 - banning political contributions from entities that receive federal funding, permits or tax benefits related to public lands
 - stronger consumer protection on gas prices to protect against refiners and distributors manipulating the supply lines
 - protecting consumers from hot gas
- Briefing on the Big Idea to each and every Department/Agency. And then require that they provide a one page document as to the policies they could pursue consistent with the Big Idea, including any policies they are seeking to pursue and explaining how those policies will be framed consistent with the Big Idea and how they relate to a specific winning principle.
- Each agency appoint a senior member of their staff to be the climate point person - who will be held accountable and responsible.
- Weekly meeting with each agency's point person and the White House point person.

- White House point person coordinates all activity with the White House communications office.
- Establishment of an extreme weather SWAT team prepared to work together and engage when extreme weather happens -- including response; local outreach; media; science information about historic nature of the event; and coordinating possible principal travel (POTUS, FLOTUS, VPOTUS, Cabinet).

2014 Month-by-Month

- February 1 to March 1: Identify the Big Idea
Identify 3 policies; meet with agencies; develop calendar for remainder of 2014.
- March 15: Ides of March Meeting / Memo
Meeting or memorandum where thematic is surfaced attached to the three climate wedge issues (thus, not a big speech but policies are surfaced in a purposefully explicit way).
- April (Earth Day): POTUS Tour / Visit with Key Constituencies on the Issue
Latinos in FL; young people in NC; farmers in IA; Retired military in Norfolk; etc. In each location, POTUS lays out a specific wedge policy idea.
- May: Risky Business
Convened and released at the White House.
- June: Events Related to Wedge Policies
In a key state, at a symbolic location.
- July: Events Related to Wedge Policies
In a key state, at a symbolic location.
- August:
Announce executive action on winning issue.
- September:
Climate events related to campaigns with wedge issues in key states (states where candidates will welcome the activity - e.g., Latino GOTV in south FL).
- October:
Climate events related to campaigns with wedge issues in key states (states where candidates will welcome the activity - e.g., Latino GOTV in south FL).
- November:
One year out from Paris 2015, the President does a 24-hour event, with a visit to the Arctic to see the melted ice pack and then to a community in the U.S. where the sea is rising (e.g., Norfolk) and gives a speech a year out from Paris.
- December:
Set the table for 2015.