

To: Tom  
From: Mike  
Date: June 10, 2019  
Re: CLC Research

I understand that Luntz Research is passing around an “analysis” of survey results from an online survey consisting of about a half-dozen substantive questions they conducted for the Climate Leadership Council in early May. We will take the claims as Luntz Research lays them out (emphasis in the original retained for its comedic value).

Before that, let’s address two points with respect to context.

*First, let’s think about prioritization.* Global warming is at or near the top of the approximately no one’s priority list. MWR Strategies has been starting surveys for years by asking people: “What is the most/second most important or pressing issue facing the United States?” In ten years of asking those questions, never have more than 4% of registered (or likely) voters in any single survey have identified environment as one of their top two issues, and a more typical response is just one or two percent. Fewer than that have identified climate change as the most important or second most important or pressing issue; usually as few as 4 or 5 respondents out of more than a thousand.

Most surveys simply ask respondents to select from a list (“Of the following, which do you think is an important issue facing the United States”) or, worse, ask some variation on “do you think climate change is an important issue?” These questions are not very likely to result in probative, accurate assessments of what respondents really care about, because they limit the choices the respondents can give to those selected by the survey writer. It is probably important to note that even when presented with a list of specific items that includes “global warming” or “climate change”, climate change routinely finishes last among the concerns of survey respondents.

In a particularly entertaining and informative example, Gallup asked more than 1000 adults in each of six different surveys between January and July of 2018 to identify their most important issue. As best we can tell from the reported results, not a single respondent out of more than 6,000 respondents said climate change.

Second, let's think about cost. Despite differing sentiments about causation, there is much more coherence with respect to what voters are willing to pay to address global warming. MWR Strategies has consistently asked about willingness to pay as an open question (“How much are you willing to pay each year to address global warming/to reduce global average temperatures by XX/to reduce the United States’ dependence on fossil fuels?”). The responses have become fairly predictable. Mean (average) responses have been as high as \$422 (mostly due to a handful of respondents answering \$10,000 or more); median responses (the important measure in a democracy) have ranged from 2 to 50 dollars annually. The percentage of respondents who say “zero” or “nothing” has remained pretty consistently in the low 40s.

In our most recent survey, when we asked how much respondents would be willing to pay to address global warming each year, 4 dollars was the median response (and, again, 42% answered “zero”).

The important point is that there is very limited tolerance to pay anything, even absent questions being raised about increasing the size and reach of government, the efficiency of those expenditures, or who can be trusted to make decisions in this area.

Now onto the Luntz Research claims.

Claim 1: Climate Change is both a GOP VULNERABILITY and a GOP OPPORTUNITY... Yes, *Republican voters want a solution.*

Reality: There are no questions asking whether climate change is a vulnerability or opportunity or really anything at all for the Republicans. What we do know is that Members that have embraced carbon dioxide taxes have lost more often than they have won.

With respect to the claim that Republicans want a solution, the only question in the survey that touches that issue asks: “Should the government take action to limit carbon emissions?” 75% of all respondents and 55% of Republicans said yes. But what actions and the contours of any proposed “solution” remained unaddressed in the survey.

Claim 2: In the age of partisan divide, this is the ONE area where BIPARTISANSHIP trumps *everything else.*

Reality: The survey asked this: “Is it important that any national climate survey be bipartisan?” 80% of all survey respondents and 75% of Republicans answered “yes”. But the question says nothing at all about prioritization or cost or what a solution might look like. In fact, it does not ask anything remotely like whether bipartisanship transcends any other consideration.

Claim 3: Voters believe the U.S. *must* change direction on climate policy.

Reality: The only question on point asks: “Do you think climate policy is generally headed in the right direction or is it on the wrong track.” 60% of all voters said that climate policy is on the wrong track. But the intensity of that sentiment is uncertain, as is (again) the prioritization that voters put on this issue. Among Republicans, 67% think climate policy is headed in the right direction.

Claim 4: Voters – Republicans and Democrats – support the Baker-Shultz Carbon Dividends Solution.

Reality: Here is the exact wording of the question: “Business and environmental leaders are proposing a bipartisan climate solution that charges fossil fuel companies for their carbon emissions and gives all the money directly to the American people through a quarterly check. This new climate solution is called “Carbon Dividends”, because all households would receive a quarterly cash payment as part of an effort to solve climate change. Would you support or oppose this plan?

So, shortened a bit, the question asks: “Do you want free cash from companies?” Given that, it is amazing that only 66% of respondents (and 53% of GOP respondents) favored the approach. Usually free cash – without any context -- is a lot more popular.

As noted above, when people are aware that this is a tax, one that they will pay at the pump, in the electricity bills, and for home heating, their enthusiasm vanishes.

Claim 5: The *transformative* element in this climate solution: Paying money back to the American people.

Reality: See above. Without context about costs, priorities, trust in government, etc., the question is meaningless.