MOUNTAIN TOWNS 2030

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How Leaders Can Engage Their Communities Through Better Climate Messaging

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Most Americans already worry about climate change, but fewer hear people around them talk about it, and that silence shapes what feels normal. Potential Energy Coalition's research shows mayors are the most trusted voices on extreme weather, energy bills and pollution, and which framings actually move people.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Concern is steady; the conversation is not.** Worry has held steady from 2008 to 2025 and "very worried" is rising. The risk is silence: people act on what they think others around them care about.
2. **Mayors are the most trusted voices.** Mayors outrank governors and the president on extreme weather, energy bills and pollution, with a 20 to 30 point trust gap over the president.
3. **Pollution closes the partisan gap.** Support for government action showed a 36-point party gap for "climate change" but about 12 points for "pollution." On solvability, the pollution gap was within the margin of error.
4. **Real people beat jobs and factories.** Stories of real people and real harms gave about a 15-point lift; factories about 2. Jobs has been the worst performing narrative year after year. People don't want to be told to retrain.
5. **Half of Republicans are concerned.** That holds across MAGA and non-MAGA. Climate-receptive Republicans were the most optimistic group tested, more than liberals. They don't need convincing; they need something to do.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Lean in and talk about it publicly.** 71% say officials who won't acknowledge climate change put lives at risk, and most haven't seen mayors do enough on extreme weather. Treat that as permission.
- ☐ **Frame around love, health and money.** Lead with what people want to protect, like places that are disappearing; the cause comes second. Leading with love gave a 13-point lift.
- ☐ **Make it local and universal, not political.** Avoid bans and global framing. Local pride and "we do hard things together" work; universal framing gained about 20 points.
- ☐ **Show the transition as already underway.** Point to local examples already running on clean energy so change feels like a manageable evolution, not costly and painful.
- ☐ **Lead with materiality over morality.** Only about 38% think clean energy is cheaper than fossil fuels. Telling people the facts gave a 29-point lift.
- ☐ **Use real stories like insurance letters.** Real rate hike and non-renewal letters were their best performing ad with Republicans. Let people see the economics for themselves.
- ☐ **Frame your work as protecting people** from extreme weather, rising energy bills and pollution, then point to popular policies like grid reliability, wetland flood protection and storm drain upgrades.

BY THE NUMBERS

~50%
Republicans concerned about climate

71%
Say officials ignoring climate put lives at risk

20 to 30 pts
Trust gap: mayors vs. the president on local issues

36 vs 12
Party gap: "climate change" vs "pollution"

+29 pts
Lift when told clean energy cost facts

~15 vs 2
Lift: real people and harms vs. factories

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Bans backfire: people don't like being told what to do. Talk about building, what's coming, and energy independence. Avoid cues that the transition is massive or costly.
- ! Polls asking about "government action" build in a partisan gap, since many Republicans don't want more government. Ask about the problem itself instead.

RESOURCES

Potential Energy Coalition: research, how-to manuals and data for mayors and others
potentialenergycoalition.org

Extreme weather resource hub
potentialenergycoalition.org/extreme-weather-resource-hub/

Yale Program on Climate Change Communication
climatecommunication.yale.edu (source of the 2008 to 2025 concern trend)

Insurance cost calculator
On Potential Energy's website: enter your zip code to project insurance vs. mortgage costs 15 to 20 years out

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