



Casey
Stengel,
Climate
Strategist

[Dave Roberts wants to know.](#)

Roberts alludes to [a recent survey showing that conservative white men are the most likely group to be climate deniers](#). (We can put this in the “knock-me-over-with-a-feather” department, although it would be interesting to see how this works with conservative white women). More interestingly, the study (with assistance from Roberts) references some reasons for this trend, including “social dominance orientation,” “system-justifying tendencies,” “identity-protective cognition,” and “epistemic closure.”

The question, of course, is [what does one do about this](#)? Roberts highlights two strategies that have seemed to work badly: “drop it,” i.e. give up, or “finesse it,” i.e. reduce the intensity of the issue and try to recast it as a national security issue, or an energy independence issue, or something else. Roberts rejects both of these: dropping it doesn’t get you anywhere, and finessing it fails to recognize that the American conservative movement knows very well what the stakes are and wants to preserve the dominance of current elites. Recasting it won’t fool them. Roberts argues. Instead, the effort should be to *raise* the intensity: if it’s a zero-sum game for dominance, he contends, then the point is to get folks on our side to wake up.

I would hope that this could be done, but at best, it’s not a complete strategy, especially since raising the intensity of time-distant, non-obvious problems is hard to accomplish: you wouldn’t want to put all your chips in one basket.

Instead, it seems to me that we could use some advice from a very old dead white male, Casey Stengel, [who had some important insights regarding personnel management](#):

The key is keeping the nine guys who hate your guts away from the nine guys who haven’t made up their minds.

As Roberts suggests, there is little point in trying to persuade or assuage climate deniers, who, as the scholarship suggests, are not really interested in getting the facts. But it must be more than increasing the intensity of your own supporters. The task is to find the large number of people who have not made up their minds yet.

How can this be done? I believe that the best way to approach Republican activists on the local level. Even [many Republican mayors support climate-friendly policies](#). If you look at the list of cities that have signed the Mayors' Agreement on Climate Change, they are hardly all Democratic. As former Congressman Bob Inglis observed when he spoke at UCLA a few months ago, climate policy has become polarized in part because it is seen as a Democratic issue. (That's basically because Republicans have a monopoly on climate denial, but that's the perception).

So my idea is to make sure that Republicans who have not yet become invested in the issue hear about the science first — *before* they have to think about it, even before it is directly relevant to their political careers. On the local level, climate-friendly policies don't have the same sort of ideological valence that it does on the state and especially federal levels.

My model here is not gay marriage, but rather AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, sometimes known as the "Israel lobby." AIPAC and similar organizations make sure that state and local officials have plenty of exposure to their perspective on the Middle East. They make sure that promising office-holders get trips to Israel and briefings from IDF officials long before they even have to think about it.

It would make sure if those pushing for rational climate policy could set up briefings, trips, and events for Republicans before they have to engage on the issue. The climate perspective at least gets some help from the fact that the biggest issue is simply understanding the science: there isn't necessarily an ideological hook from the beginning. (Disadvantage: scientists aren't always the best communicators in the world, but I think we can work on that).

Long before Movement Conservatism took over the Republican Party and threatened the political and economic stability of the United States, it was working hard on electing and converting members of local school boards. That's where the environmental movement needs to operate today (as it is in many areas). Education has an obvious link because we are talking about science, but the bottom line is to let up-and-coming Republicans know the truth before the Koch Brothers get to them. Conservatism and realistic climate policy are not enemies: the sooner we can let conservatives know that, the better. Keep the ones who haven't made up their minds away from the ones who hate the planet's guts.