

SAN FRANCISCO CURRENT TEMP: 65 °F | AM CLOUDS/PM SUN

COW POWER IS HELPING US EXPLORE CLEAN ENERGY IN THE BAY AREA

OCT 13 2009

CO2: POLLUTION OR LIFE?

Posted by: Jonathan Marshall

Whoever succeeds in framing the debate usually wins the argument. So it's no wonder that critics who decry what they call "cap and tax" have been gaining ground on those who maintain that "greenhouse gas emissions" must be curbed to prevent "climate change" and "global warming."

After all, no one likes taxes. As for global warming, it might sound welcome if you live in North Dakota or New Hampshire. And don't greenhouses grow pretty flowers?

Maybe that's why most people put global warming at or near the bottom of their list of concerns, despite urgent warnings from so many scientists.

Supporters of climate change legislation have finally realized that words matter. Whenever possible, [they don't even talk about the climate anymore](#). The House bill is called the "American Clean Energy And Security Act of 2009." And the new Senate bill is called the "Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act."

People may not care much about the climate in the short run, but in a recession, everyone can relate to jobs. And in a world wracked by terrorism, everyone wants America to be powerful.

Similarly, the Senate bill talks about pollution reduction, not "cap and trade," a mysterious concept to most Americans. [And it speaks of "carbon pollution" rather than "greenhouse gases,"](#) an innovation that President Obama adopted back in April, when he spoke to the National Academy of Sciences, and repeated in his speech to the U.N. Summit on Climate Change in New York last month.

Other officials now refer to "heat-trapping pollutants" to engage wider audiences who otherwise tune out when faced with technical scientific jargon.

Said Edward Maibach, director of the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University, "The word 'pollution' is more concrete to people than the term 'greenhouse gases'. There's a fair amount of research showing that people don't understand the phrase 'greenhouse gas' very well. 'Heat-trapping pollution' is a very good, concrete way to express what's going on with climate change."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, global-warming deniers at the Competitive Enterprise Institute have run ads with the slogan: "[Carbon dioxide. They call it pollution. We call it life.](#)"

The big question now is what will the American people, and their representatives in Congress, call it?

Comments (0)     Permalink

CATEGORIES

[Climate Change](#)

