

Voters: Act on global warming

Contributed by Mark Mellman
05/12/09 05:20 PM [ET]

Some progressives seem unwilling to take yes for an answer.

Just as the long battle for public opinion on global warming is being won, along comes a well-meaning Bob Perkowitz and his ecoAmerica with a politically naïve, methodologically flawed and factually inaccurate study, which he apparently interprets as telling us that voters do not care about global warming.

He could hardly be more wrong.

In fact, most Americans believe global warming is real, is happening now and constitutes a serious threat, particularly to future generations.

A survey we completed in March reveals that nearly eight in 10 voters believe global warming is either happening now or will happen in the future, with 53 percent seeing evidence that it is happening right now. Gallup uncovered similar attitudes, as 53 percent told them global warming has already begun, while just 16 percent are deniers, expecting it will never happen.

Over two-thirds of the electorate believes global warming constitutes a serious threat. In response to a different question, posed by researchers from Yale and George Mason universities, a similar number said they "worry" about global warming. A third believes it will harm them, while 61 percent foresee harm to future generations.

Perhaps more importantly, voters are demanding action to reduce the carbon pollution that causes global warming. In the Yale/George Mason poll, two-thirds urge Congress to do more on the issue, and in our survey, 77 percent favor action to reduce carbon emissions. In an April ABC/Washington Post poll, 75 percent supported federal regulations on the release of greenhouse gases.

In short, a strong public consensus has emerged on the reality and severity of global warming, as well as on the need for federal action.

Mr. Perkowitz devalues that consensus, suggesting Republicans stand outside it because they express less concern about the problem than Democrats and independents. That is true and lamentable, but Republicans are also less concerned about jobs and we have not shied away from trying to create them, nor started calling them "income generating opportunities" in a desperate attempt to solicit GOP support. Republicans also care less about healthcare than other Americans, but no one is using that as an excuse to avoid action.

Indeed, part of the Republicans'™ problem with the majority of America is their failure to take seriously voters'™ real concern on issues ranging from jobs to healthcare to energy and global warming.

While some Republican leaders, like John McCain and John Warner, have been forthright in recognizing the need to reduce global warming, others, who deny the problem and discourage solutions, are out of touch with their own base.

Yes, Democrats are more concerned about the problem than are Republicans, but that does not mean Republicans are unconcerned. Far from it " as Mr. Perkowitz'™s own data conclusively demonstrate. While 90 percent of Democrats believe global warming is happening, so does a 54 percent majority of Republicans. While 84 percent of Democrats believe global warming is harmful to people, so do 56 percent of Republicans. While 87 percent of Democrats call it their "duty" to stop global warming, 60 percent of Republicans also feels duty-bound to join the battle.

When 84 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of independents and 56 percent of Republicans think global warming is harmful to people; when 86 percent of Democrats, 80 percent of independents and 62 percent of Republicans favor action to reduce the carbon pollution that causes global warming " it is time to take yes for an answer; it is time for elected officials to recognize the consensus and act, instead of heeding those who, inexplicably, regard a nearly unprecedented level of public unanimity as a prerequisite for legislative accomplishment.

Mellman is president of The Mellman Group and has worked for Democratic candidates and causes since 1982. Current clients include the majority leaders of both the House and Senate.