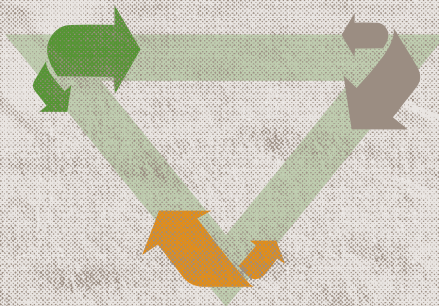


Climate Solutions for a Stronger America

A GUIDE FOR ENGAGING AND WINNING
ON CLIMATE CHANGE & CLEAN ENERGY



VERSION 2.1
PRINTER-FRIENDLY
WITH UPDATED
FACTS & ATTACKS
& RESPONSES

The Moral Imperative

Climate change is no longer an abstract future threat; it is here now. We are experiencing it in our daily lives, as fires, floods, severe droughts and storms damage our communities and drain our public budgets as the need for costly disaster response grows. The impact of climate change is hitting far sooner and much closer to home than many of us ever imagined. We have a moral obligation to protect our children. By cutting our carbon pollution and investing in clean energy and efficiency solutions in our communities, we can start building a safer and stronger America today.

“ *Soft-pedaling climate communication doesn't work, but this stuff does. Take it head-on: We must tackle the climate crisis. We can do it. And we will no longer be deceived, distracted, or demoralized. We will win our best and only viable future. Try this guide!* ”

KC GOLDEN

2012 Winner of the Heinz Award for Public Policy

An Updated Guide

This guide is for leaders and citizens determined to push back against fossil fuel's tight grip on American energy policy and to move our country forward – to catalyze leadership and action toward a clean energy future and a safer climate. First developed in 2012, this message guide has been used as the foundation for a wide range of high-profile communications on climate and energy. Now fully updated, based on new original research, it features a slightly revised messaging triangle as well as updated supporting facts and suggested responses to anticipated attacks.

This guide draws on Americans' optimism and can-do spirit in the face of big challenges. Those who say nothing can be done about climate change forget what America is capable of – and underestimate the progress we have already made to transform our energy economy.

Use it, give us feedback, and help spark the kind of citizen action and political leadership we urgently need to ensure strong communities and a safer future.

*Betsy Taylor & Kathy Washienko
Breakthrough Strategies & Solutions, Inc.*

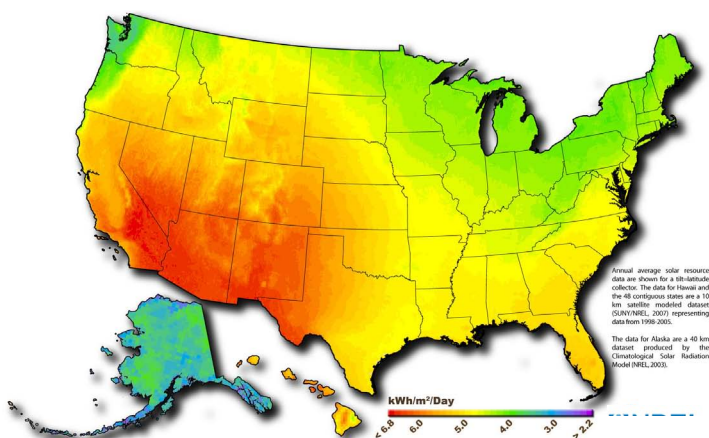
The Political Opportunity

Americans are ready – and hungry – for straight talk and real solutions. Strong majorities agree that climate change should be a priority for the President and Congress.⁽ⁱ⁾ In a recent survey, Americans were more than twice as likely to vote for a candidate who strongly supports climate action – and three times more likely to vote against a candidate who opposes it.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

Yet media coverage and policy proposals have not kept pace with public opinion and the scientific consensus regarding the urgency of the problem. This is largely due to fossil fuel-backed media campaigns designed to confuse the public, and electoral spending aimed at stifling political leadership and stalling progress on American climate and clean energy solutions. With practical solutions now widely available and affordable, there is enormous opportunity both for our communities and for leaders who have the courage to confront the climate challenge with confidence and conviction.

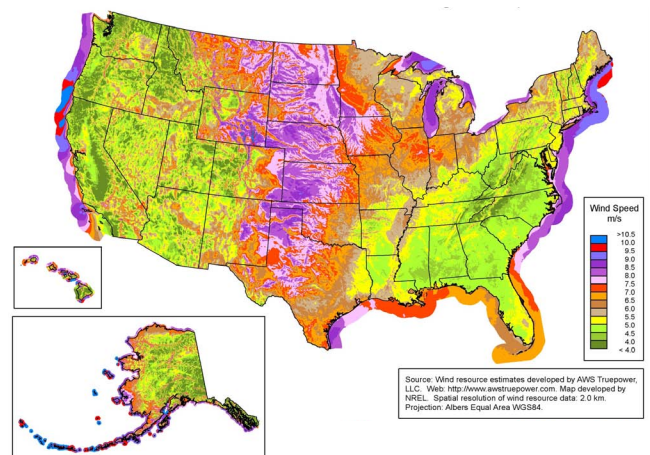
THE U.S. HAS ABUNDANT RENEWABLE ENERGY POTENTIAL

U.S. PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR RESOURCE



Author: Billy Roberts – October 20, 2008

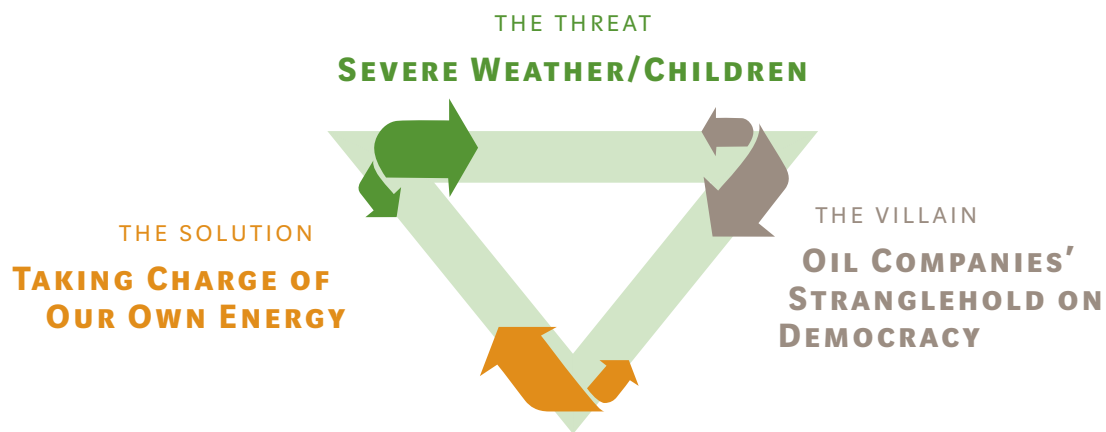
U.S. WIND RESOURCE (80m)



These maps were produced by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory for the U.S. Dept of Energy. http://www.nrel.gov/gis/re_potential.html

The Message Triangle

Our research identified **three top-performing messages**. Together, they form a persuasive **narrative triangle**.



Why it works:

The triangle's narrative structure includes:

- ▼ **THE THREAT** – Pointing to strange and severe weather and our responsibility to protect our children underscores the urgency of the climate challenge.
- ▼ **THE VILLAIN** – Holding oil companies accountable for rigging the system against clean energy shows why progress to date has been delayed and demonstrates that there is a way forward to overcome the roadblocks they've placed in our path.
- ▼ **THE SOLUTION** – Demonstrating the benefits of action in our neighborhoods, cities and states helps avoid partisan debates and shows that local, practical solutions are available and effective.

How to Use It:

Aim to use all three corners.

The messaging is strongest when all three elements are used together, supported by key facts and local examples.

If you start the conversation:

Here's how the storyline flows best:



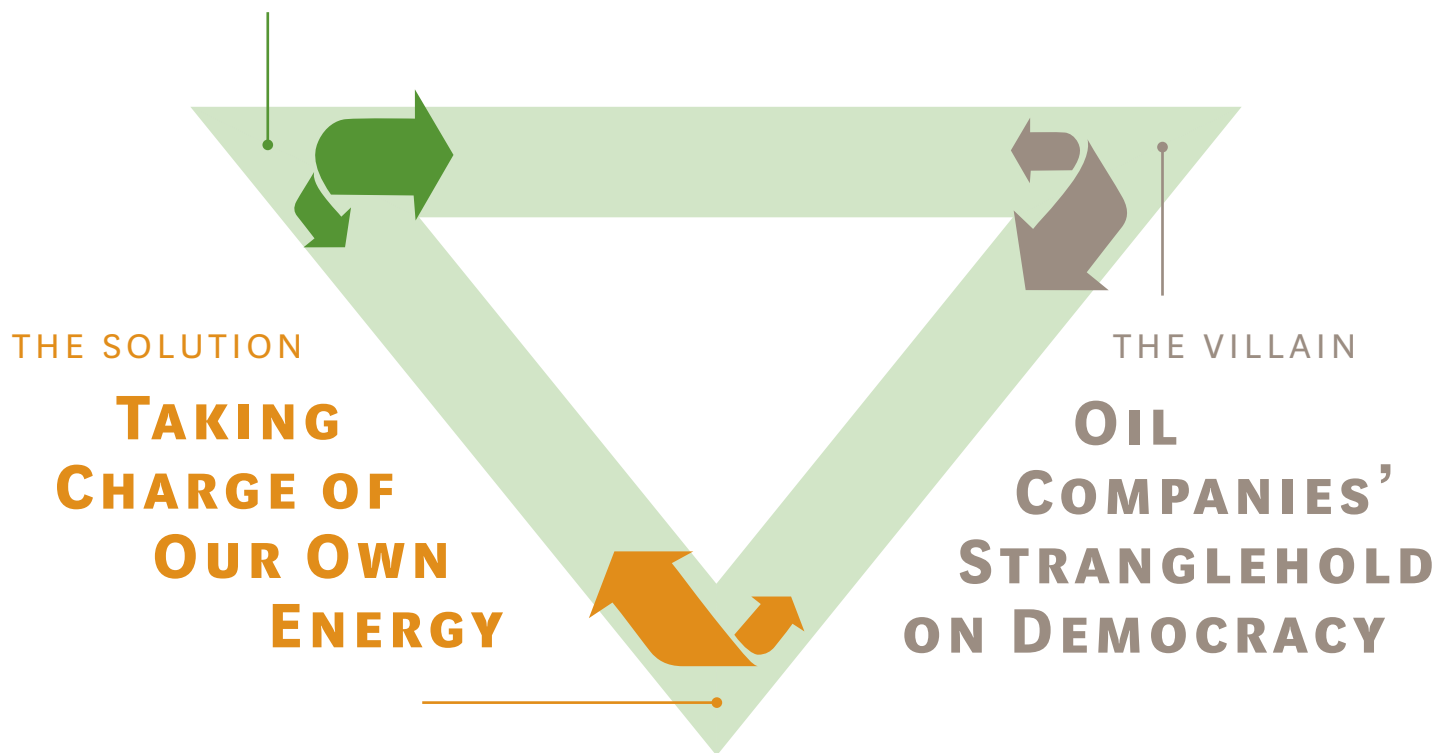
If you are responding to someone else:

Start at the most-related point, then move to the other two messages.

THE THREAT

SEVERE WEATHER/CHILDREN

“ We can no longer ignore our strange and increasingly severe weather. We have a moral obligation to protect our children – this means preparing for and tackling climate change now.”



“ Investing in clean energy means investing in our own communities and taking charge of our own energy. Instead of subsidizing big oil, we invest in wind turbines on farms, solar on our roofs, and schools that use less energy – creating local jobs, stronger communities, and a more stable climate.”

“ Oil companies are spending billions of dollars to rig the system against clean energy solutions. We need to break their stranglehold on our democracy and put people, not oil companies, back in charge.”



SEVERE WEATHER/ CHILDREN

UNDERLYING VALUE: MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

“ We can no longer ignore our strange and increasingly severe weather. We have a moral obligation to protect our children – this means preparing for and tackling climate change now.”

WORDS
TO USE:

KEY SUPPORTING FACTS:

- ✓ According to NASA and NOAA, 2014 was Earth’s hottest year on record. Nine of the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2000.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾
- ✓ Climate change is already affecting every part of the U.S. There’s more strange and severe weather – more flooding and wildfires, more intense hurricanes, longer droughts.^(iv)
- ✓ Nearly 50 percent of Americans report being personally affected by severe weather or a major storm in the past three years, or knowing family or friends who have been affected.^(v)
- ✓ Higher temperatures lead to more asthma and other respiratory problems, especially among children.^(vi)
- ✓ In the U.S. , 7 of the worst 10 natural disasters since 1900 have occurred just since 2005.^(vii)



Tips & Talking Points:

- 🗨️ **Stress urgency.** Emphasize that we're seeing climate impacts now. People who feel more urgency are more likely to support solutions that reduce carbon pollution.
- 🗨️ **Talk about the impact on children today.** Don't focus on "future generations," which creates the misperception that impacts and costs are a distant concern.
- 🗨️ **Talk about strange, unusual, and severe weather – not just higher temperatures.** Emphasize that we are already experiencing the impact of climate change in many different forms, from droughts to wildfires to more severe winter storms.
- 🗨️ **Talk about climate change, climate disruption, and damage to our climate caused by fossil fuels.** Some people who are concerned about climate change remain unsure of the cause. The science is clear that the culprit is pollution from burning oil, gas, and coal.
- 🗨️ **Explain that the price of inaction far outweighs investments in solutions.** We are already paying a high price for weather disasters, crop failures, and higher insurance rates. A single super-storm – Hurricane Sandy – cost our nation over \$65 billion in total economic losses.^{(viii), (ix)}
- 🗨️ **Use the ▼.** Remember to pivot to the other two points of the triangle.

Why It's Powerful:

- ✓ It connects the **threat to people's own experience** of strange and destructive weather, not abstract scientific data or distant melting ice caps.
- ✓ It makes a **personal, emotional and moral argument** for confronting climate change now.



OIL COMPANIES' STRANGLEHOLD ON DEMOCRACY

UNDERLYING VALUE: ACCOUNTABILITY

“ Oil companies are spending billions of dollars to rig the system against clean energy solutions. We need to break their stranglehold on our democracy and put people, not oil companies, back in charge.”

WORDS
TO USE:

KEY SUPPORTING FACTS:

- ✓ Oil and coal companies have funded multi-million dollar campaigns to convince people that climate science is uncertain, even targeting teachers and schoolchildren with their misinformation.^(x)
- ✓ Oil companies are attacking renewable energy in our own communities. Groups funded by oil and coal interests have tried to reverse renewable energy standards in at least 17 of the 29 states that have passed them.^(xi)
- ✓ Two billionaires who have gotten rich off oil are planning to spend nearly \$900 million in the 2016 elections.^(xii) To protect their own profits, they're attacking candidates who support wind and solar.
- ✓ Oil companies aren't offering energy solutions that are safe for our communities, our drinking water, or our climate. Fracking is a more difficult, expensive and destructive way to extract oil and gas that pumps millions of gallons of water and toxic chemicals into the earth, often contaminates drinking water, and leaks methane into our air, which further disrupts our climate. And that's all before we even burn the fossil fuel it extracts.^(xiii)
- ✓ Newly uncovered internal documents reveal Exxon knew about climate change as early as 1981, yet spent millions over the next 27 years promoting climate denial.^(xiv)



Tips & Talking Points:

- 🗨️ **Emphasize the oil industry's deceptive, coordinated, and well-funded campaigns.** Describe efforts to mislead Americans on climate science and block clean energy solutions. Print and hold up the American Petroleum Institute's memo outlining their Draft Global Climate Science Communications Plan. (Appendix C in "Smoke, Mirrors and Hot Air.")^(x)
- 🗨️ **Point out it's the same strategy used to hide the truth about the risks of smoking.** The fossil fuel industry has even hired some of the some of the exact same people used by the tobacco companies to argue that cigarettes weren't dangerous.^(x)
- 🗨️ **Make it local.** It's not just happening in DC. They've attacked many states' clean energy standards, targeted public school teachers and schoolchildren with misinformation, and even sponsored local events with kid radio stations to promote gas and oil drilling.^(xv)
- 🗨️ **Use the ▼.** Remember to pivot to the other two points of the triangle.

Why It's Powerful:

- ✔️ It identifies the **villain**.
- ✔️ **It explains mixed messages.** On one hand, Americans hear climate change is an urgent problem. On the other, they see little being done about it. Now they can understand that progress has been slow because big oil and coal have thrown up many roadblocks to progress.
- ✔️ **It counters the argument that people's behaviors are primarily to blame for climate change.** Individual decisions matter, but people need practical options and choices. Oil and coal companies have blocked clean energy policies and solutions by intentionally confusing Americans about the climate problem. They've tried to rob us of our ability to protect our kids.
- ✔️ **It fits with current attitudes.** Americans are fed up with corporate interests writing the rules in Washington, DC so they can extract greater profits at the expense of our middle class, economy, and communities.



TAKING CHARGE OF OUR OWN ENERGY

UNDERLYING VALUE: EMPOWERMENT

“ Investing in clean energy means investing in our own communities and taking charge of our own energy. Instead of subsidizing big oil, we invest in wind turbines on farms, solar on our roofs, and schools that use less energy – creating local jobs, stronger communities, and a more stable climate.

WORDS
TO USE:

KEY SUPPORTING FACTS:

- ✔ A new U.S. solar installation was completed every 2.5 minutes in 2014; even faster than one every four minutes in 2013.^(xvi)
- ✔ At the end of 2013, the U.S. had installed more solar in the prior 18 months than in the past 30 years^(xvii), and we’re still only scratching the surface when it comes to America’s clean energy potential.
- ✔ The U.S. has abundant renewable energy potential — including offshore wind on our coasts and on the Great Lakes, onshore wind through middle-America, and solar energy almost everywhere, especially in the Southwest.^(xviii)
- ✔ Clean energy creates far more jobs per unit of energy than fossil fuels.^(xix)
- ✔ The cost of electricity from wind and solar has gone down dramatically year after year and as technology improves, it will keep getting cheaper. Not only are they carbon-pollution free, but no one owns the wind and sun; unlike oil and coal, they are free fuel forever.^(xx)
- ✔ From Orlando to Denver, Houston to Salt Lake City, cities across the country are leading the way in reducing their energy use. In the process, they are saving money, reducing carbon emissions, and creating jobs by making buildings more energy efficient.^(xxi)
- ✔ The Empire State Building had a major efficiency upgrade in 2009. In just the past three years, the improvements have saved nearly \$7.5 million in energy costs.^(xxii)



Tips & Talking Points:

- 🗨️ ***It's now and it's local.*** Talk about the practical, clean-energy solutions that are available today. Describe a local clean energy success story – of solar, wind, a green building, or energy savings.
- 🗨️ ***Focus on benefits to people.*** Talk about how regular people in our families, our towns, and our neighborhoods are taking positive action.
- 🗨️ ***Take on opponents with patriotic pride.*** Those who say nothing can be done about climate change forget who we are and what we can do. No one should doubt America's ingenuity and resolve. People are proud of America's history of problem-solving and innovation. With gridlock in DC, this "can-do" appeal may work best when applied to our states, cities and neighborhoods. We can change things from the bottom up.
- 🗨️ ***Use the ▼.*** Remember to pivot to the other two points of the triangle.

Why It's Powerful:

- ✔️ Climate change can feel overwhelming, even paralyzing. But Americans can be ***engaged and inspired*** when we focus on ***positive, hopeful solutions***.
- ✔️ ***It shows people a positive, concrete way forward*** – one that can happen in our own cities and towns, and doesn't rely on breaking gridlock in DC.
- ✔️ While Americans support the idea of clean energy, most aren't aware of the ***extent of our clean energy resources or the progress that's already been made*** with solar and wind installations, electric and hybrid vehicles, and building energy efficiency.
- ✔️ It focuses on solutions that are ready-to-go now; it doesn't ask people to wait for future breakthroughs.

General Communication Tips

Repeat, repeat, repeat. Try not to stray far from the core messages. Repetition shows you are confident and consistent.

Think about your audience in advance. Try to understand their local issues and concerns and connect to those local needs and stories as you make your case.

Connect emotionally to your audience. Talk about where you and your audience's concerns and values overlap. Don't be afraid to say why climate solutions matter to you (as a parent, grandparent, person of faith, a business leader, firefighter, etc.)

Make it about people. Show how the threat and solutions matter to people's lives. Frame messages around "our families," "our kids," "our neighborhoods," how pollution harms our health (e.g. asthma rates on rise), how fracking contaminates our drinking water. In print or digital communications, use images of people rather than landscapes or animals.

Make the local connection. Refer to real people and local places to help your audience relate (local strange weather events, a local clean energy business, a local solar installation, etc.)

Use plain language, words that people would say themselves. Pollution, air, food, water, local jobs, strange weather, clean energy, wind and solar. Prepare, don't adapt. Cut pollution, don't mitigate.

Use facts wisely. Sandwich facts and data between messages about people and shared values. One or two memorable facts from a trusted source are far more powerful than a data overload. Use facts that evoke images rather than numbers.

End on a high note. Focus on solutions. The climate threat can be overwhelming. State the threat, call out the villain, and then inspire and empower with hope and opportunity.

Responding to Common Attacks

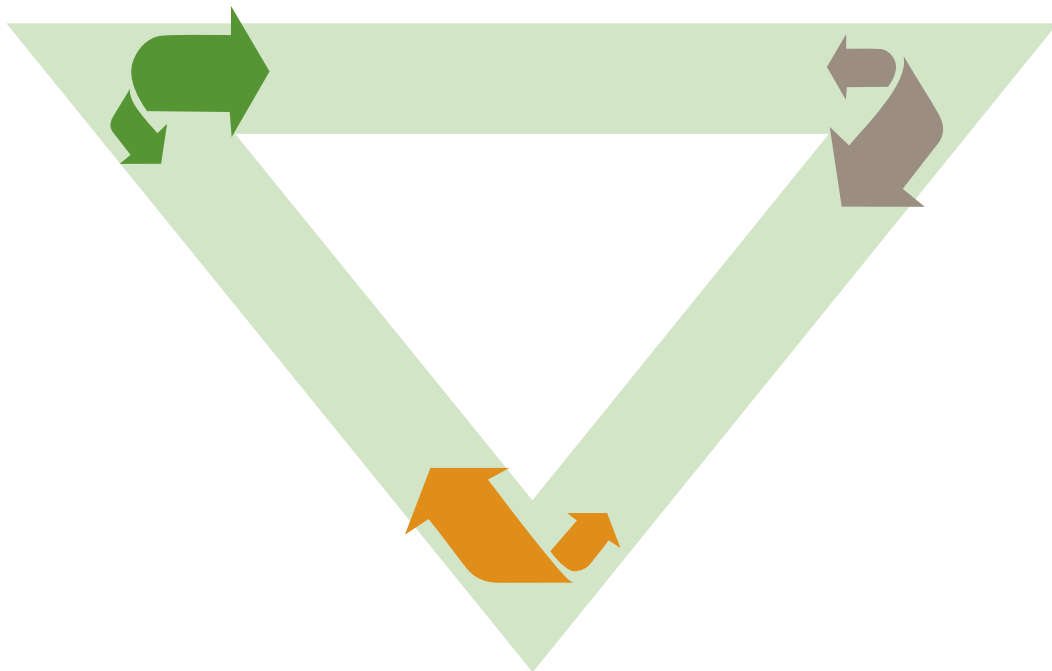
The triangle is designed to help you keep the upper hand – and moral high ground – even under attack. Here's how:

Be flexible. Adapt your response to your situation and audience.

Get back on offense. Redirect the conversation back to where we win – our three key messages.

Make it about values. Stay out of the weeds. Use a few supporting facts, but don't battle over details (e.g. the number of jobs a given project may or may not create.) That's not where we win. We win with shared values.

Use the triangle to stay on message. Whenever possible, hit on at least two of the three messages. Together, the three parts of the triangle build a story that's more powerful and persuasive than your opponent's.



Attacks & Responses

The narrative triangle makes it easier to respond to opponent attacks and to redirect the conversation back to its values-based messages. After starting with the most relevant entry point, it's most powerful to pivot to the two other messages to complete the triangle. Responses include a relevant supporting fact or two, but focus on the values.

ATTACK:

Clean energy sounds good but it's not realistic to rely on solar panels and windmills to fuel the country.

THE SOLUTION: Clean energy solutions are proven and ready to go—and ramping up fast. In 2013, we installed more solar in the prior 18 months than in the past 30 years^(xvii). And so far, we've barely scratched the surface when it comes to American clean energy. We have abundant renewable energy potential in the U.S., including wind across much of the country and solar in every state.

THE VILLAIN: But oil and coal corporations are spending millions to influence elections, spread misinformation in the media and even in our public schools, and control our energy policies in order to stop progress on clean energy solutions. They keep a stranglehold on our democracy to protect their profits. Instead of subsidizing big oil and coal, we can take charge of our own energy and transition to solutions that benefit people, not polluters.

THE THREAT: Because we all know we're seeing more and more strange and severe weather hitting communities across the country. We owe it to our kids to do something now to protect them against the dangers of a damaged climate.

ATTACK:

These policies will raise electricity prices and prices at the pump and hurt consumers and small businesses.

RESPONSE:

THE VILLAIN: Don't believe the oil and coal industries' claims that they know what's best for families and local businesses—they care about profits, not people. So they spread climate misinformation in the news media and even in our public schools to confuse and divide us.^x And spend millions to influence energy policy in our city halls and state capitols while using scare tactics about prices to stall our progress toward clean energy solutions.

THE THREAT: But as we're seeing, the cost to our communities, our families, and our economy from all the strange and severe weather we've been experiencing is rising quickly— and will only get worse unless we act. We have a duty to protect our children.

THE SOLUTION: So, instead of subsidizing big oil, how about we take charge of our own energy choices by investing in clean energy in our communities? The good news is that the solutions are ready now. In 2014, nearly 600 solar installations were completed every day in the U.S.^(xvi), and the cost of wind and solar has come down dramatically. This is clean, abundant energy we produce right here, in communities across America. These investments create good local jobs, increase efficiency, and provide more choices for consumers— and help create a more stable climate for our children.

ATTACK:

Producing fossil fuel energy in the U.S. keeps gas and electricity costs down.

RESPONSE:

THE THREAT: Subsidizing big oil and coal—the richest companies in the history of the world—may keep fossil fuel prices artificially low for now, but only because we’re not including the much higher price we’re paying for the damage that pollution is doing to our health and our climate. We are already paying for the damage caused by the strange and severe weather already striking communities across the country, and things will only get worse unless we act. We owe it to our kids to protect them.

THE SOLUTION: The good news is that proven clean energy solutions are ready now, and when we invest in clean energy, we’re investing in our local communities and in creating good jobs here at home. These are jobs that can’t be outsourced. Today, we have the opportunity to take charge of our own energy by investing in solutions that benefit people, not polluters.

THE VILLAIN: We now know that Exxon scientists told company leaders decades ago that burning fossil fuels could lead to catastrophic climate change.^(xiv) But instead of developing clean energy sources, oil and coal companies put profits ahead of everything. They spent millions to influence elections, lobby elected officials, stall progress on clean energy solutions, and mislead the public. We need to break big oil’s stranglehold on our democracy so we can move forward with climate solutions, and do what’s right for our kids.

ATTACK:

We need to be energy independent and to get there we should tap domestic coal and natural gas.

RESPONSE:

THE VILLAIN: To protect their profits, big oil and coal and the shadow groups they fund spread misinformation in the news media and even in our public schools.^(x) They keep a stranglehold on our democracy by spending millions to rig the system against clean energy solutions. In fact, the Koch Brothers, two big oil billionaires, have promised to spend nearly \$900 million to influence the 2016 elections in their favor.^(xii)

THE SOLUTION: We are far better off when we free our communities from their control and take charge of our own energy choices. Instead of subsidizing big oil and coal, we can put wind turbines on local farms, solar panels on our roofs, and make our homes and schools more efficient— all using technologies that are ready to go today. When we invest in clean energy, we invest in ourselves— creating local jobs, stronger communities and a more stable climate.

THE THREAT: Because let's face it; we can no longer ignore the strange and severe weather we've been seeing across the country. We have a duty to protect our children; that means tackling climate change now.

ATTACK:

Prices will skyrocket and punish the poorest families.

RESPONSE:

THE VILLAIN: The fossil fuel industry has no credibility whatsoever when it claims to be a voice for the poor. Whether it's spreading climate misinformation in the news media or rigging our political system to control energy policy, big oil and coal will do what it takes to protect their profits and block clean energy solutions.

THE THREAT: The truth is, pollution and climate impacts often hurt low-income people the hardest. But oil and coal companies will always put their profits ahead of people. To protect all of our communities and our children from the increasingly strange and severe weather we've been experiencing, we need to tackle climate change now.

THE SOLUTION: To do that, we need to break oil and coal's stranglehold on our democracy and put people back in charge. Instead of subsidizing the fossil fuel industry, we can invest in clean energy projects that help local people by creating good jobs right here at home. Because efficient, cost-effective clean energy technologies are ready to go, now is the time to implement local solutions that benefit people, not polluters.

ATTACK:

Clean energy costs too much.

RESPONSE:

THE VILLAIN: Big oil and coal will do what it takes to protect their profits, keep their subsidies, and block clean energy solutions. They spend millions to spread misinformation in the news media and control our energy policies. And their reach extends outside of DC, into our own communities. Already, groups funded by fossil fuel money have attacked renewable energy standards in two-thirds of the states that have passed them.^(xi)

THE SOLUTION: The truth is the price of wind and solar has fallen dramatically in recent years and continues to drop, and we have abundant renewable energy potential across the U.S. that we've only scratched the surface of. Wind turbines on farms, solar panels on our roofs, and schools and houses that use less energy—these clean energy solutions create good local jobs, stronger communities, and a more stable climate.

THE THREAT: Because we can't ignore the strange and severe weather we've experienced the past few years. We know things will only get worse if we fail to act—and we owe it to our children to take steps now to protect them. It's time to tackle climate change by taking charge of our own energy and putting people ahead of oil company profits.

ATTACK:

Climate change is a hoax. Maybe the climate is changing, but it's not because of humans. There's nothing we can do about it.

RESPONSE:

THE VILLAIN: Big oil companies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to make people think climate science is uncertain, even targeting teachers and schoolchildren with misinformation, as they outlined in the American Petroleum Institute's Global Climate Science Communications Plan.^(x) And new evidence shows that, decades ago, Exxon scientists told company leaders that fossil fuels could lead to catastrophic climate change.^(xiv) But instead of leading the way in developing new energy sources, they've focused on spreading climate misinformation and blocking progress.

THE THREAT: Now we're seeing what damage to the climate looks like—more and more strange and severe weather across the country and the world. The role of fossil fuels in climate change is well understood by scientists, and we owe it to our children to protect them by transitioning to clean energy now.

THE SOLUTION: The good news is that from wind turbines on farms, to solar panels on our roofs, and houses and schools that use less energy, these solutions are ready to go. Even better: When we invest in clean energy, we are investing in our families and our communities. These investments create good local jobs, build strong communities, cut climate-damaging pollution, and they put us back in charge of our own energy.

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**Another must-read for those
who, like me, believe in
coherent narratives.**

JOE ROMM

*Climate Progress blogger; How to Engage and Win the
Conversation on Climate and Clean Energy^(xxiii)*



www.climatenarrative.org