



## **Framing Global Warming in Canada**

### **A FrameWorks Message Memo**

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### **Preface**

*“The art of political rhetoric has been to reconfigure (core) stories in a manner that affirms and amplifies the changes already occurring in the way Americans tell the tales....Indeed, it is just possible that Americans already are telling one*

*another (new)..stories, and are only waiting for a new set of political leaders to give them voice.*“

*Robert Reich, Four Parables of American Thought*<sup>i</sup>

Of course, while the nature of the stories may differ from country to country, Reich’s observations are not unique to Americans; they relate instead to the way that political culture and political rhetoric coalesce to engage or disengage citizens.

In Canada, in late 2006 and 2007, the FrameWorks Institute found a citizenry literally yearning for articulation of a meta-narrative that would accord global warming a central place in political thought and would demonstrate sensible, pragmatic steps toward responsible stewardship of the planet. Indeed, across all the issues which FrameWorks investigates – attitudes to race, oceans, government, food systems, education, etc. – only health care has exhibited this clear and insistent public mandate for leadership, in our research.

Still, there are holes in the public’s understanding of global warming that prohibit this compelling issue from moving higher on the public “to do” list. And, as these data clearly demonstrate, habits of presentation associated with global warming further impede its evolution on the public agenda.

At the same time, this body of research underscores the fact that the present public opinion climate affords a rare opportunity to elevate public engagement with this issue. Doing so, however, will require a sober analysis of the frame mistakes that have plagued the issue to date, and creative solutions to framing global warming more scientifically, more practically and with greater optimism for the ability of ordinary people to recognize their common concerns.

## **About this Memo**

This memo attempts to outline conclusions that have emerged from the FrameWorks research on global warming in Canada over the course of its multi-method inquiry conducted during 2006 and 2007. In the long-term, this memo seeks to provide a message platform for uniting numerous efforts in Canada to refine and reframe the public conversation about global warming so that it is optimally positioned to galvanize citizen and policymaker attention. In order to meet that challenge, this memo will, of necessity, provide research-based criticism of those strategies and messages that prove less helpful in moving the public discussion forward. We do so in the spirit of movement building, remembering Doug McAdam’s conclusion upon examining the framing of the civil rights movement in American, “For all the importance attached to the question of movement emergence, . . . movements face a tougher set of challenges following initial mobilization.”<sup>ii</sup> – For example, is the story of a global warming Crisis, which proved important in establishing its validity early on, still the right story for successive mobilization? This memo is intended to help scientists, leaders and environmental advocates engage productively in that scrutiny.

The memo is organized as follows:

- Background on the *Task* we set out to address and the *Perspective* we bring to this work
- A brief description of the *Research Base* that has been accomplished as part of this inquiry
- An enumeration of *What We Have Learned* from the research, including a discussion of the effects of various frame choices on public understanding and support, and the most important traps that derail productive thinking
- *Recommendations* for reframing the discussion
- A brief set of *Talking Points* that incorporate and model these recommendations

## **The Task**

The FrameWorks Institute, an independent nonprofit research organization that uses empirical methods to help experts frame the public discourse about social problems, was funded by the David Suzuki Foundation in 2006 to apply its methods to public perceptions of global warming in Canada.

The charge is to outline the broad cultural conversation that needs to take place in order to engage a large Canadian constituency in supporting serious global warming policies and programs, using FrameWorks' unique multi-method multi-disciplinary research methods, and building on its extensive US research.

This memo is further complemented by a set of applications documents that attempt to demonstrate how this research might be applied to specific communications situations that confront global warming experts in Canada, included in the CD-Rom "How to Talk Global Warming in Canada."

## **The Perspective**

This Memo is based upon the perspective of Strategic Frame Analysis™, an approach to communications that draws from an extensive body of literature in the cognitive and social sciences to examine how the way a story is told – its selective choice of values, symbols, metaphors and messengers – triggers the shared and durable cultural models people use to make sense of their world. These models, then, render some policy solutions that experts and advocates would advance "easy to think" and others forgettable or illogical. Many of these choices of how to think about global warming in specific and environmental issues in general are driven off of familiar narratives that are reinforced every day in modern media.

In order to help ordinary people, and the legislators who do their business, see a policy in a new way, policy advocates must get them out of the old thought patterns where they are literally stuck. We do this by "reframing," or offering a new lens on the issue, a story that is so compelling in its coherence and its resonance with Canadian values that it can trump the old frames of reference.<sup>iii</sup> The FrameWorks research uses an empirical approach to identify the

contours of this story; advocates must use their first-hand knowledge, their expertise and their artistry to fill in the picture with specific examples, with explanations that link causes to effects, and with visions of alternative outcomes if changes were indeed implemented.

## **The Research Base**

The following research has been conducted in Canada; it builds on an extensive body of both qualitative and quantitative research conducted by FrameWorks in the U.S. for the Turner Foundation and its Climate Message Project 1999-2001; however, the Canadian research should be viewed as a separate inquiry, mindful of cultural and political differences inherent in the comparisons between countries. Indeed, FrameWorks was conscientious in its commitment to investigate this issue in Canada without pre-judging the outcomes, based on its U.S. research which was also dated at the time of this inquiry.

- Cognitive analysis of 22 in-depth interviews conducted in July 2006 with a diverse group of Canadian residents.
- Cognitive analysis of a sample of 50 Canadian media reports dealing with Global Warming between January and August of 2006.
- Findings from 8 focus groups with approximately 100 Canadians held in 2006: 2 Vancouver (August), 2 Ottawa (December), 2 Toronto (December) and 2 Calgary (December). All groups with an engaged citizen profile, divided by ideology. Variable focus group guide.
- Talk-back testing, comprised of linguistic and ethnographic research, with a diverse sample of 722 Canadians to identify an effective simplifying model to convey how global warming works.
- Findings from a web-based experimental survey with 2,307 adults aged 18+ drawn from an Ipsos-Reid randomly recruited (RDD) panel of 150,000 English-speaking Canadians, conducted from the 24th July 2007 to the 1st August 2007 inclusive.

We are pleased that this iterative method, developed at the FrameWorks Institute, has been able to report substantial progress in identifying the effects of various framing choices on Canadian understanding of, and engagement with, the issue of global warming.

## **What We Learned: Situation Analysis**

The initial qualitative research – comprised of interviews and focus groups – yielded a rich and consistent set of findings. From this first phase of research, we distilled the following analysis:

### *The Good News*

Canadians are keenly aware of global warming, believe it is real and happening, and view it as a top priority for humankind. They are environmentally predisposed, regardless of party affiliation.

They believe there are important roles for both government and business to play, and they believe Canada can play an important role in the community of nations. They are frustrated by inaction, by the seemingly intractable aversion of governments and corporations in general to address long-term issues, and want to see someone step forward to provide leadership and momentum on the Canadian and world stages. Compared to the US citizens with whom we talked 1999-2001, these Canadians of similar background are: more aware of global warming, more global in their thinking, less cynical of the science, more scientifically literate, and somewhat more likely to embrace collective over consumerist solutions.

### *The Bad News*

While Canadians are more interested in science and somewhat more literate, they remain woefully ignorant of how exactly global warming works and, like their American cousins, easily confuse it with the ozone hole, pollution, littering/recycling and other distracting or unrelated environmental problems. This finding, as we know from earlier work conducted both by FrameWorks and other researchers, is highly problematic. When ordinary people do not have a firm grasp of how a problem works – what happens to produce what effect – they are easily manipulated by the spin of cynical political actors. As Kempton, Boster and Hartley recounted in their foundational study *Environmental Values in American Culture*, “The cultural models available to understand global warming lead to ineffective personal actions and support for ineffective policies, regardless of the level of personal commitment to environmental problems.”<sup>v</sup> While science can prove a powerful antidote to this manipulation, it will require better translation and science education than Canadians have experienced to date.

### *Frame Elements and their Effects*

The FrameWorks Institute defines framing as, “*The way a story is told – its selective use of particular values, symbols, metaphors, and messengers – which, in turn, triggers the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world.*” In pursuing our work in Canada, we paid particular attention to the power of these various frame elements to support or undermine citizen engagement and environmental understanding. Coming out of the qualitative research, we identified a series of frame elements we believed held potential power to redirect thinking toward more effective policies and programs. Some of these frame strategies derived from promising results in the earlier research. Some resulted from our observations on habits of framing among Canadian advocates. And some were, admittedly, driven off of our U.S. research on numerous social issues. In the end, we settled upon the need to test three frame elements: Values, Simplifying Models and Messengers. The rationale behind each of these frame elements, and the scholarship that supports these claims, are available in other FrameWorks publications.<sup>v</sup>

We used an experimental design as the best method to test the causal effects of frames on public attitudes and public policies associated with global warming. Put simply, we subjected an online panel -- weighted to be representative of Canadian census numbers on region, gender and age -- to a series of Values, Models and Messengers that allowed us to test their relative contribution to public understanding. A battery of policies and attitudes was developed, based on prior research, against which frame effects were measured. Put simply, each frame element (Value, Model and

Messenger) was tested for its ability to advance support for specific public policies and to change attitudes toward global warming more generally.

The Values we tested were (1) Legacy/Steward, or the need to leave the planet in better shape for future generations, (2) relatedly, Responsible Manager, or the need to more prudently manage our resources, (3) Innovation/Can Do, or the belief that humans can make a difference if they devote intellectual and financial resources to any given issue; (4) Crisis, or the idea that various documented effects of the problem add up to a turning point for the planet; (5) Science, or the idea that there is a scientific consensus that global warming is happening and how to address it; and (6) Kyoto, or the idea that meeting Canada's commitments to this international climate change treaty is a necessary first step for Canada to take to address global warming.

Our expectations, given what we had seen in the US research on global warming and other issues were as follows:

- We expected Legacy/Steward, Responsible Management, and Innovation/Can Do to further engage people in policy solutions;
- We expected Crisis to have a negative effect on Canadians' engagement with global warming policies;
- We expected Kyoto to have little if any impact on Canadians' attitudes or policy preferences as they relate to global warming; and
- We were agnostic about the Science frame, expecting some positive effects from either its articulation as a Value, Model or Messenger,

Additionally, we used this online venue to test the additive effects of various Simplifying Models, or concrete explanations of how global warming works, with certain related expectations:

- We expected Heat-Trapping Blanket to enhance policy solutions because it made people smarter about policies that are germane to global warming.
- We expected Global Warming Pollution to do the opposite: to be more salient, but more distracting and to set up support for distracting solutions.
- We expected Greenhouse Gases, while scientifically accurate, to fail to add much in the way of explanatory power to people's understanding of how global warming works.

And, finally, we hoped to see variations in frame effects associated with a change in Messengers, even when we held the content of the message constant:

- We expected the Scientist to overcome partisan polarization and build a bigger constituency for policies.
- We expected the Citizen to enhance hopefulness and efficacy, given the fact that a major stumbling block in the qualitative research was the widely held sense that only a handful of Canadians care about the issue. At the same time, we worried that the Citizen might cue individual responsibility and behaviors, not policies and systems.
- We expected the Environmentalist messenger to have the least positive impact because expected and associated with frames of Extremism and Sacrifice, among others, contributing to polarization.

We were surprised on several fronts. This is why we do research. Nevertheless, we want to signal a note of caution about these findings. While we derived significant effects from this concluding phase of the research, FrameWorks would be the first to testify to the need to take the research as a whole, and to avoid using the experimental findings as “the final test.” In fact, some aspects of frame effects that were consistently strong across qualitative methods proved less robust in our experiments. We caution that these inconsistencies may more associated with limitations in our own methods and approaches, than they are with the power of these specific frame elements. In the true spirit of multi-method research, we choose to believe that the methods yield complementary outcomes that need to be carefully evaluated and winnowed toward a single conclusion. This MessageMemo represents the best efforts of FrameWorks researchers to interpret each study in the context of a broader orientation to framing social issues. We preface our overall conclusions with a summary of the quantitative results.

### *Values*

There is a clear winner in the values competition in the Canadian global warming experiments. Innovation/Can Do significantly enhances support for the policy battery (+6 points). Looked at another way, the difference between Innovation/Can Do and Crisis is 19 points (+6 vs. -13).

Among males under 35, Innovation/Can Do is even stronger (+11) and holds for females 55+ (+7). It is the only value that has a significant and positive effect on University graduates (+11). It is also the only value that significantly and positively affects low-media consumers (+8 points). It is directionally positive among those defined as of medium engagement (+8) and significantly positive among those who are highly engaged (+11), as defined by high income, voting participation and media attention patterns.

Innovation/Can Do is the only value that does not significantly reduce support in Alberta (by 15 – 18 points). In Toronto, where all values work to significant advantage, it is the most powerful.

This is as expected. Innovation/Can Do had played a prominent part in FrameWorks’ earlier US research. However, other frames that emerged from the US research in 2000-2001 did not fare well in the contemporary Canadian context. Responsible Management performed poorly, while it had been a leading frame contender in the US research.

Stewardship/Legacy proved a more demographically challenged value in Canada today than in the US seven years ago. It is significantly negative on policies overall (-6), overwhelmingly negative with men under 35 (-18), but significantly helpful with older women 55+ (+13). Among those most familiar with issues in the news, or high media consumers, Stewardship/Legacy significantly decreases their support for policies (-16).

We were reminded by these data of an exchange in one Toronto focus group that had puzzled us initially, but may in retrospect explain the limited appeal of the Legacy/Steward Frame. In the initial word association exercise, when asked by the moderator to offer up whatever came to mind when they thought of the word Legacy, we observed this exchange:

MODERATOR: “Legacy?”  
PARTICIPANT: “What you leave behind.”  
PARTICIPANT: “Children.”  
PARTICIPANT: “Story.”  
PARTICIPANT: “Death. Speaking of death.”  
MODERATOR: “Death?”  
PARTICIPANT: “Well, you have to be dead to kind of have a legacy.”  
PARTICIPANT: “Inheritance.”

Later in that same group, another informant offers the observation that the US is not “taking any responsibility” for its fair share of problems and concludes: “I just feel sorry for our grandchildren. We are not leaving them much of a legacy.” It is altogether possible that the Legacy/Steward Frame is serving to remind people of their pessimism about solutions and to depress them about both their own mortality and the assumption that they will be leaving the children a planet in worse shape than the one they inherited. In short, the Legacy/Steward Frame morphs into the Crisis Frame.

The Crisis Frame, as we had hypothesized, did not help make the case for global warming policies. Crisis, while not significant overall, moves people in the wrong direction (-4) and significantly moves young men under 35 in the wrong direction on policies (-18). It also has a significantly negative effect on those with only a high school education (-13). Among high media consumers, Crisis significantly decreases their support for policies (-15). It also has a significantly negative effect (-8) on those with low engagement, as defined by income, voting and media attention.

As we hypothesized, the notion of keeping our commitment to Kyoto does not work as an effective values frame, except among Canadians who are already on board (e.g. Greens and NDP supporters). It does not significantly increase support for the policy batteries.

Nor does Science work as a value – see the section below on Science for a more detailed analysis of the science approach.

### ***Models***

Surprisingly, there were relatively few effects captured in our experiments with the models. This is, as FrameWorks has begun to note in its other experimental work, not unusual. We speculate that the experimental design we have created may be ill-conceived for documenting what appear to be the unique contributions of models: namely, their memorability and durability over time, the extent to which they concretize the issue, and their innate empowering effect on bringing people into the policy conversation who did not participate previously due to lack of specific knowledge. In light of these results, we defer to the methods that heretofore attested to the strength of the CO2 Heat Trapping Blanket. –<sup>vi</sup>

Some weak effects can be noted. Overall, the CO2 Heat Trapping Blanket was the most consistent performer across groups. The combination of Global Warming Pollution as model with Science as Value drove down support significantly (-14 points); this is as we would expect, since this creates an asymmetrical pairing of an authoritative value with a disingenuous model. In fact, the difference between Science paired with CO2 Blanket and Science with Global Warming Pollution is 10 points in favor of the former. Interestingly, Crisis when paired with Greenhouse Gases also proved to have significant negative effects (-15). In fact, the Greenhouse Gases model, combined with the Crisis value, a common pairing in advocacy messaging, scores significantly lower than the CO2 Blanket on its own (.57 vs. .71). This is similar to the effects of combining this value with an Environmental spokesperson (see below) and may, in fact, telegraph the same message.

### ***Messengers***

We also saw fewer effects with respect to Messenger selection than we had anticipated, given the strong reactions in the focus groups. The only significant effects resulted from the pairing of an Environmentalist with the Crisis value (-11). In fact, Environmentalist paired with Crisis scores below any Messenger alone: Scientist, Ordinary Citizen or Environmentalist. This presents a cautionary tale that it is not merely “more information” that moves the dial, but rather the tactical synergy of frame elements.

The Ordinary Citizen also lowered support when coupled with these same two frames, but only directionally. Ordinary Citizen seems best paired with the Responsible Stewardship value. One might speculate that this is getting at the problem observed in the focus groups that most Canadians don't believe other Canadians care about global warming or will do something about it. In fact, Environmentalist plus Crisis scores below Citizen paired with any of the following values: Responsible Steward, Innovation, or Science. By contrast, Ordinary Citizen + Kyoto is a losing combination; compared to Responsible Steward + Ordinary Citizen, it decreases policy support by 11 points. Again, this is consistent with the literature on Messengers – one criterion for credibility is the fact that the Messenger knows something about the topic. Clearly, the Ordinary Citizen is not deemed fully credible about the complexity of Kyoto. If advocates choose to use the Responsible Steward value with any target audience, they are best to couple it with an Ordinary Citizen Messenger.

Environmentalist messengers are most effective when paired with science values. This confirms some of the literature on Messenger choice that suggests that “unlikely messengers” are often more credible. Some of the most dramatic differences occurred in the pairing of the Environmentalist Messenger with various values: Crisis + Environmentalist (.61) and Science + Environmentalist (.77), a significant difference of 16 points. Put another way, if an Environmentalist is talking about Global Warming, s/he is best to invoke a Science value.

By contrast, if you must tell the Crisis or Kyoto story, the best Messenger is a Scientist.

### ***Science as Frame Element***

One aspect of this inquiry evolved as a result of our desire to identify exactly how and how much to infuse the global warming debate with a science orientation. We asked ourselves whether Science was sufficiently powerful to serve as a Value, or whether it was best wielded as subsidiary information in the form of a Model, or whether global warming could benefit from more authoritative sourcing in the form of scientists – or all or some combination of the above. The focus groups had given rise to this question.

As a value, Science appears to have both negative and positive effects, depending on to whom it is addressed. It significantly decreased policy support among young men under 35 (-12 points) while directionally advancing support among women 55 and over (+10), effectively cancelling each other out. Science also reduces support, but not significantly, among younger women.

In British Columbia, Science had a directionally positive effect as a frame. Invoking Science scores lowest in the two petroleum producing regions of Canada: Alberta and Atlantic Canada. For these regions, the resonant value is apparently not Science, but Innovation.

Among another demographic subgroup, Science had a strongly negative effect (-12) on those with only high school degrees. Again, this may echo the focus group findings about the attraction of “people like us.”

As a model, the CO2 Blanket had the most consistent effects, but these were far from robust.

And, as a messenger, the Scientist had few effects – but neither did the other messengers, except for the negatives associated with the Environmentalist.

In sum, these findings fly in the face of the qualitative research in some respects. Canadians were empowered in the focus groups and TalkBack Testing when they were able to grasp HOW global warming works. At the very least, what these data suggest is that Science is not the overarching frame; science information in the form of the CO2 Blanket can't hurt; and scientists combined with values and models comprise no toxic combinations.

### ***Toxic Combos***

The experiment did not explore the synergy between all three frame elements. Thus, we can only describe toxic combos, not toxic trios. Crisis + Environmentalist is one of these (-11 points) as is Science + Global Warming Pollution (-14 points). Similarly, the difference between Crisis + Environmentalist and Innovation + Citizen is 14 points (.61 vs. .75) in favor of the latter.

One might speculate logically that there may be a further nonproductive combination of frame elements that should be avoided at all costs: Crisis as Value, Global Warming Pollution as Model and Environmentalist as Messenger. We simply cannot make this conclusion from these data, but it should signal caution, as this combination is a staple of current reporting on global warming.

### ***Putting the Puzzle Back Together***

In summary, looking across the five research studies conducted in Canada 2006 – 2007, we found that:

- The most powerful **Value** across groups in Canada proved to be Innovation or a kind of Canada Can Do. It served in the focus groups to help people over their feeling of helplessness in the face of the intransigence of China and the US. And in the experimental work, it served to lift policy support. In general, the Legacy value, while powerful in earlier FrameWorks research on this topic, appears to depress Canadians.

Given the much greater attention that has been accorded to this issue since FrameWorks' earlier round of research, it is even more important today that Canadian messaging drop the Crisis Frame (Canadians already know it is a crisis) and its singular focus on effects (they can well enumerate many global warming effects, including some that are probably not scientifically valid).

Given the well-documented fact that people need a “new” reason to take another look at an issue, it is the idea that people are coming together to resolve this important issue with new solutions and innovations that magnetizes and empowers Canadians. Thus, Efficacy and Citizen Empowerment are now important parts of the values message; indeed, the importance of demonstrating to Canadians that other Canadians share their values and want the issue addressed is an important part of the reframing task; without this, Canadians assume that they are the only ones who would sacrifice/vote/change political behavior. The Self-Interest frame, to which people readily default, can prove an attractive explanation for lack of progress on this issue. By connecting the dots between Canadians, the Suzuki Foundation and its collaborating organizations can give voice to the latent consensus that exists but remains unexpressed.

- The **Tone** with which the topic is introduced is a key determinant of whether citizens will engage. Science cues up practical, reasonable thought patterns, and prevents global warming from being reduced to nothing more than the latest political football. It is very important that the tone not be elitist nor overtly partisan. Both nuances in tone tend to reduce the impact of the message; both of these “traps” are more fully explained below. This measured response is consistent with what has been termed in the US a “middle stance” and is perhaps best exemplified in the following quote from Carl Wunsch, a climate and oceans expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: “Climate change presents a very real risk. It seems worth a very large premium to insure ourselves against the most catastrophic scenarios. Denying the risk seems utterly stupid. Claiming we can calculate the probabilities with any degree of skill seems equally stupid.” FrameWorks finds much to applaud in the recommendations from these scientists who are quoted in the Washington Post (January 1, 2007) as agreeing “that accumulating carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping smokestack and tailpipe gases probably pose a momentous environmental challenge, but say the appropriate response is more akin to buying fire insurance and installing sprinklers and new wiring in an old, irreplaceable house (the home planet) than to fighting a fire already raging.”

- Selection of **Messenger** is of great importance to the discussion. It is clear that scientists are of great use in getting the issue out of the cynical arena of politics where it languishes and loses urgency, because people doubt anything can/will be done. But the type and tone of the science needs to be carefully considered; Canadians want someone more on the order of Ben Franklin than Albert Einstein. That is, they want someone to stand on the cusp of the science and deliver it to the citizens, not someone who will make it more arcane and more negotiable for politicians. Thus, respondents warmed to the Environmental messenger delivering a science message. Importantly, ordinary Canadians need to see people like themselves calling the politicians accountable and standing up for the science in reasonably articulate and empowering ways.

“I would like to see scientists standing up and delivering the message of ordinary people to the politicians and to the business community, so that they could not ignore us.” (Calgary focus group informant)

- The use of certain kinds of data (**Numbers**) can backfire if not pre-selected and translated. Across all of the focus groups, we saw unanimous push-back on any data that seemed to people to be beyond “recorded” time. The very introduction of data from outside the limits of “modern” centuries prompted a universal skepticism that further eroded the credibility of the science, even among people who strongly believe that global warming is happening. Regrettably, we must conclude that the science of global warming must be communicated in terms of reliably recorded history – centuries, not millennia. For example, the proverbial “hockey stick” diagram invited much derogation of the assertion that scientists can prove global warming. Similarly, the assertion that “Current levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) are higher than at any time during the last 650,000 years” was rejected. We strongly suspect that this depiction cues up science as elitism and invites populist backlash; since environmental issues suffer from this tendency anyway, it is important to get this frame cue right.

It is important to recognize in this reaction a predilection to observable truth; and most Canadians are able to make very specific, personal and pragmatic conclusions about the way global warming is affecting their world. This is not to say that messages should emphasize these personal “small picture” world views; in fact, we would argue the opposite. But it is important that communicators recognize that the global warming story is best told across roughly three generations -- your grandparents, you, your children – avoiding the problems inherent in complex scientific time. The good news is that there is plenty of data to allow global warming to be translated in this way; the fact that all 10 of the warmest years on record have occurred since 1980, for example, credibly advanced Canadians’ concerns. Where longer trajectories are necessary, they should be carefully explained so as not to raise problems that derive from a lack of scientific literacy.

- While the **Metaphorical** power of “the man-made blanket of carbon dioxide that surrounds the earth and traps in heat” proved less pronounced and literal in its effect on subsequent conversations than we had expected, it nevertheless helped Canadians over

their inability to connect global warming with a specific scientific phenomena. When exposed to a simple explanation and visual that drove home the “heat trapping blanket of CO<sub>2</sub>,” focus group participants responded that they had learned something new, that they understood global warming for the first time. It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that greenhouse gases have been in the news for many years as the dominant explanatory model, only two mentions were made of this model in 12 hours of focus groups! And, while interest has increased in the topic of global warming, as evidenced by Google Trends reports of search volume and news reference volume, greenhouse gases has remained flat. We conclude that the metaphorical model of “green house gases” is not “easy to think” and does not appear to add much to Canadians cognitive repertoire about how global warming works. At the very least, the “heat trapping blanket” metaphor served to differentiate between the attractive pull of seemingly natural causes and the human obligation to correct its habits through political action. We would assert that the need for a substitute for greenhouse gases remains. The contribution of the heat-trapping blanket model was certainly demonstrable in the Canadian on the Street interviews captured in the FrameWorks Trigger Video that accompanies this CD Toolkit. More repetition and elaboration will be needed to drive home this simple construct.

- The promotion of **Solutions** continues to be a powerful frame cue for promoting public reconsideration of this issue, and one closely linked to the Innovation Value. In virtually every focus group, participants expressed relief that the discussion had not been focused on the well-known devastating effects of global warming. People found the solutions intriguing and wanted to see Canada engage in bringing them to scale. Putting solutions at the top of the communiqué, right after explaining the science of global warming, remains an important narrative construct.

It is important for advocates to recognize that, unless they provide the solutions that would meaningfully address global warming, it is highly unlikely that the Canadian public will do so. When asked what Canada should do to address global warming, focus group informants’ first (and often only) recourse was recycling. Incorporating causal sequences that link global warming causes to interventions to effective protection will be imperative if public thinking is to advance.<sup>vii</sup>

There is another sense in which Solutions contribute to public thinking. This relates to seeing other actors moving forward. Articles reviewed in the later focus groups included explanations of actions taken in Japan and Great Britain. These proved empowering to Canadians. But even more important was evidence that the United States may be less intransigent than in the past. When exposed to articles that demonstrated some bipartisan support for global warming legislation (cf. Republican John McCain’s position) or new leadership at the helm of major US legislative committees (cf. Barbara Boxer), focus group informants became more optimistic that “the elephant in the room” might be made to budge. This has important implications for messaging; instead of portraying the United States’ sorry record, new movement in California and at the national level should be

included to give Canadians hope and to inspire them to act in such a way that the US continues to move forward.

“It’s kind of like a dance where everyone waits along the walls for the first person to break the ice. And then someone does, and suddenly everyone is dancing. That’s what’s happening now in Canada and in the world on global warming. We’re waiting for someone to step forward and break the ice.” (Toronto focus group informant)

### *Traps*

There are a set of documented, predictable “frame traps” that advocates need to avoid because they represent easy and learned ways that Canadians have developed to get rid of the issue. Advocates need to expunge any frames that play into these unproductive patterns of thinking:

- It’s too big, too scary, too late (anything we could do now wouldn’t be enough to make a difference).
- It’s got to be global (therefore individuals and individual countries can’t do anything/ enough to matter)
- It requires sacrifice (and most Canadians won’t do that; humans are selfish)
- It requires sacrifice (and Americans will never do that)
- It requires sacrifice (and most politicians won’t promote that).
- It requires consensus (and we can’t even agree on what to do in Canada, let alone the countries of the world agreeing).
- It requires long-term planning (and elections only allow for short-term thinking).
- There’s no market to support new solutions (people won’t/can’t buy these new products inexpensively).
- There’s no plan (therefore anything that is proposed is a random and potentially inconsequential change).

There is another trap inherent in the Science Frame. Advocates and scientists must be careful not to overstate the scientific consensus. If one states uncategorically that “scientists now agree...etc.”, this statement incites a backlash of cynicism and suspicion. It violates the “two sides to every issue” paradigm that people have learned from journalism and tend to confuse with balance (see linguist Deborah Tannen’s *The Argument Culture* for more on this cognitive trap). In our Ottawa groups, we first observed this phenomenon – but, with careful tinkering, were able to resolve it in the subsequent groups. So...the science is important not only in helping Canadians understand how global warming works, but also as a frame cue to get them over “just politics” and into reasonable mode. When you seemingly overstate the consensus, it destroys the power of science to cue up reasonable mode and makes them suspicious that they are being manipulated by a political agenda. One way to structure the two-sides equation without diminishing the scientific consensus is to demonstrate differences of opinion over how to address global warming (Solutions), not how it works (Science).

### *Comments on Current Framing Practices*

*“There is no tactical theory so neat that a revolutionary struggle for a share of power can be won merely by pressing a row of buttons. Human beings with all their faults and strengths constitute the mechanism of a social movement. They must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes and learn anew. They must taste defeat as well as success, and discover how to live with each other. Time and action are teachers. When we planned our strategy for Birmingham, we spent many hours assessing Albany and trying to learn from its errors.” The Rev. Martin Luther King, 1963*

It is interesting to note that the latter round of six focus groups occurred within days of a national broadcast of *The Day After*, the sensationalist film about a weather disaster that strikes New York City. In many groups, one or more observers raised the issue of this film and contrasted it with the focus group discussion. In every case, people were relieved to have a discussion that was not about big scary crises, and rather focused on practical steps that could be taken to address the issue. This observation was further confirmed in the experimental research. *Crisis framing needs to be abandoned by global warming advocates as an ineffective strategy; it undermines both urgency and efficacy.*

The pairing of Crisis and environmental effects is fast becoming a cliché and not one that motivates engagement. A recent advertisement from AP Images captures the expectations that attend the framing of The Environment in general and global warming in particular: “AP Images is your source for all environment-related images, covering everything from the polar bears, to celebrity activists. Find images on politicians, the Northwest Passage, and much more content.” Here one can find numerous images of the melting ice caps, movie stars, kissing polar bears and soon-to-be-navigable waters – all deemed credible imagery for capturing the issue as it has played out in public discourse.

Most advocates’ materials continue to give more space to effects than to solutions; this needs to be reversed.

The tendency that environmental groups have to discuss the politics of the issue and their strategies for moving the issue forward needs to be revisited as well. To the extent that politics is framed as an obstacle, and ordinary people are not represented, these messages prove dispiriting. Advocates would do far better to focus on those countries where change is occurring, and those political actors who have moved significant policies forward (cf. the governor of California).

The short-hand metaphor of greenhouse gases showed no more explanatory power in Canada than it did in the US; it needs to be bolstered if not replaced with the heat-trapping blanket and the science section of most materials expanded to explain the process of global warming.

Very few materials that we have reviewed in Canada or the US, for that matter, incorporate quotes from ordinary people. While this should not be an exclusive Messenger strategy, it is an important pre-requisite to future organizing. If Canadians are to come together around this issue, they must see other Canadians as concerned, engaged and committed to change.

The framing of global warming as pollution continues to pose challenges to clear thinking about solutions. When informants think about pollution, they tend to think about the costs of industrialization and to conclude that this is the (inevitable) price to be paid for a modern quality of life. Sacrifice and “going backward” are perceived as unlikely to be endorsed by their fellow Canadians. This, then, further diminishes their sense of efficacy and hopefulness. Moreover, when they believe global warming is synonymous with pollution, they are highly susceptible to policies that may solve pollution but not global warming. Helping Canadians understand the contribution of carbon dioxide is a powerful way to inoculate them against spin and unproductive thinking.

As we began our inquiry roughly a year ago, advocates expressed concern that Canadian values might be shifting away from environmental values and commonality toward more American values of competitive resource exploitation. We have found nothing in the research to date to suggest that this is the case. Canadians remain thoroughly green, concerned about global warming and eager to see their government take action. The biggest obstacles to the emergence of this issue as a social movement, based on our multi-method research studies, were: (1) the degree to which they remain unaware of each other, of the consensus that has emerged, and (2) the dampening and deleterious effects of the Crisis Frame which continues to rank among the preferred message choice by media and advocates alike.

## **Recommendations**

- Do not invoke the Crisis Frame
- Start with the value of Innovation and Canada Can Do
- Explain how global warming works, using the Heat Trapping Blanket model
- Introduce solutions at the top of the communication
- Use causal sequences to link meaningful solutions to the science
- Adopt a tone of practical problem-solving
- Don't spend time on a list of effects
- Don't express the timeline for global warming beyond recorded history
- State a role that Canada can play; don't stress global consensus needed for meaningful impact
- Pair messengers and values strategically, playing to their expertise and their power as unlikely allies
- Invite ordinary people into the discussion, and certify that Canadians are solidly behind addressing this issue
- Point to progress being made by other countries and political actors who have demonstrated leadership
- Challenge political leaders and business to get behind solutions

## **Talking Points**

- Lately there has been a lot of talk in Canada about why we need to devote societal resources (ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY) to innovations (VALUE) that address global warming. According to this view, which many Canadians hold (CONSENSUS), since humans cause it, by burning too much fossil fuel like coal, oil and gas, humans can also fix it. While replacing these old sources of energy requires a big effort, most of the technologies and needed skills are available (SOLUTIONS). Many of these technologies are being developed right here, in Canada (CANADA CAN). By supporting innovation, we can literally phase out the old practices that contribute to global warming. By investing in innovations to fight global warming, these Canadians say, we will also create new jobs and ensure our future economic competitiveness (GOOD OUTCOMES, NOT CRISIS).
- (SCIENCE AND CONSENSUS) Science can help us address this problem realistically. But in order to put reasonable, practical solutions in place (SOLUTIONS INTRODUCED EARLY), we have to understand how global warming works. So let me briefly explain what we know from a vast scientific literature that has accumulated over the past decade. Not all scientists agree on when certain things will happen, but most scientists agree on the basic mechanism that is warming our planet.
- (GLOBAL WARMING 101) It's really pretty simple. (INVITE THE PUBLIC IN) Heat from the sun comes down through the earth's atmosphere. Some of that heat bounces back into space through the atmosphere. It is as if the atmosphere is ventilating some of the sun's warmth so it doesn't overheat. That's because certain gases in the atmosphere act as a layer of insulation that holds some of the heat. But, over the last several centuries (OBSERVABLE TIME), as humans have turned to burning more and more fossil fuels to meet our energy needs, we've released more and more of these heat-trapping gases. Burning coal, oil and gas releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere where it builds up and thickens the heat-trapping blanket of insulation around the earth. The heat builds up, the globe warms, and the atmospheric balance that keeps the climate stable is disrupted. That's not just a small problem of accumulating stuff in the air – the problem that we call pollution. Global warming is more about a mechanism that gets destabilized and broken. Like a thermostat that goes haywire. It doesn't work the way it should – and thus we have extreme effects around the globe. It's happening and it's happening now. All 10 of the warmest years on record have occurred since 1980 (RECORDED TIME).
- (SOLUTIONS EXIST). But here's the good news. Right now, using technology that exists today, we could increase the average fuel efficiency of today's auto fleet significantly – in fact, the difference between business as usual and what we could do through existing technologies is the equivalent of taking 44 million cars off the road (SOCIAL MATH).
- (BRING IN ORDINARY PEOPLE) You know, I've been out listening to Canadians talk about this issue lately. And you might be surprised to know how strongly they feel about our need to get ahead of this problem. In fact, (latest survey data here)

- (SURFACE QUOTES FROM ORDINARY PEOPLE) I spoke to a Canadian just the other day, a guy who felt like many of us that this issue needs to be addressed, but isn't being given the attention it deserves from world leaders. And he had a great way of looking at it. He said, "It's kind of like a dance where everyone waits along the walls for the first person to break the ice. And then someone does, and suddenly everyone is dancing. That's what's happening now in Canada and in the world on global warming. We're waiting for someone to step forward and break the ice." Isn't it time we made it clear to our elected officials that we want them to get to work on solutions? Who will be the first to come forward and break the ice, to offer up some sound policies to get Canada moving and to help us be a model for other countries? (CANADA CAN)
- (SURFACE OTHER EXAMPLES) Actually, there is a great deal of movement around the world just now. Britain's built environment is far more energy-efficient than Canada's. In Japan, auto makers will be required to improve fuel efficiency of their vehicles by 20 percent by 2015. California's Republican governor made history by passing some of the toughest vehicle standards in that country. With the turn-over in the US Congress, there is a real opportunity to get the U.S to finally take action on global warming. So it's time for Canada to get out and join the dance and show some leadership. There is every reason to believe that others will follow. (REASON FOR OPTIMISM)
- Together, we can do this. Let's challenge our neighbors, our friends and co-workers (ESTABLISH EFFICACY) to join us in expressing our shared mandate for Canada as a global warming problem-solver, not a problem-maker (INGENUITY).

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December 2007

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Suggested Citation: FrameWorks Institute. "Framing Global Warming in Canada: A FrameWorks Message Memo," Susan Nall Bales, Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, December 2007.

<sup>i</sup> Robert Reich. *The Resurgent Liberal*. NY: Vintage Books, 1991: 231.

<sup>ii</sup> Doug McAdam, "The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement," in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald,

eds, *Comparitive Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 340.

[iii](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue8framing.shtml) See “A Five Minute Refresher Course in Framing” at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue8framing.shtml>.

[iv](#) Willett Kempton, James S. Boster, Jennifer A. Hartley. *Environmental Values in American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997: 219-220.

[v](#) FrameWorks Institute. “Framing Public Issues.” Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, 2002.

[vi](#) See “The ‘Carbon Dioxide Blanket’ as an Explanatory Model for Global Warming: Findings from TalkBack Testing.” Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, 2007.

[vii](#) See FrameWorks E-Zine #31 at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/issue31framing.shtml>