

Strategic Communications Conversation .
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Below is a document -- that I've shared with our colleagues -- intended to spark some discussion during tomorrow's meeting.

NON-PAPER ON STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

SITUATION

The recent Gallup poll attracted widespread attention due to its stark report on global warming perceptions. The number of Americans who say the global warming threat has been exaggerated is at an all-time high. This is undoubtedly a challenge. However, the lesser-reported aspect of the poll should encourage this new EPA leadership.

When Americans were asked to identify the top environmental issues they "personally worry about," they responded (in order): pollution of drinking water (84 percent); pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs (83 percent); contamination of soil and water by toxic waste (80 percent); maintenance of the nation's supply of fresh water for household needs (80 percent); and, air pollution (76 percent). Extinction of the rain forests, extinction of animals and plants, and climate change followed.

The overwhelming majority of Americans "personally worry" about environmental challenges and threats that fall squarely within the purview and regulatory jurisdiction of this agency. Meaning, through direct action, effective communications and a proactive agenda, we can directly address concerns that haunt the majority of Americans. That is a tremendous opportunity for this agency.

BEYOND THE INAUGURATION

The retrospective and introspective: "EPA is (back) on the job!"

The new EPA leadership has certainly spread the message far and wide that this agency is under not just new management, but also a new mandate. Through direct steps to "review" and "reconsider" Bush era decisions, we have begun work to "unring" many of the environmentally disastrous bells rung during the previous administration. This agency, rightfully so, has received significant praise for doing so.

The "back on the job" messaging will carry the agency forward until 100 days -- the mythical timeline much ballyhooed by the press and external stakeholders -- however, our grace period is drawing nigh. The goodwill we have amassed by unringing bells will soon become harder earned. External stakeholders and the media will intensify their questions about our proactive agenda and will demand actions that are more aggressive than forestalling, reviewing and reconsidering Bush era decisions.

The Administrator's opening day memo provided the broader roadmap for this agenda. In it, she specifically highlighted five areas that will receive her attention: reducing greenhouse gas emissions; improving air quality; managing chemical risks; cleaning up hazardous-waste sites; and, protecting America's water. Our task now is to add key landmarks and mileposts to the roadmap she has clearly drawn-out.

BEYOND 100 DAYS

From retrospective to prospective: "This is (part of) EPA's proactive mission* to protect Americans."

Following the 100 day period, we must begin to universally communicate an outward-facing, proactive message about our work. Key stakeholders and media will have fully accepted that we are "back on the job" -- now they will want to ensure we are not out to lunch. The "proactive mission" is our way to tag each EPA regulatory action with a forward-looking message that speaks to the bottom line.

This isn't about hamstringing business or the economy. This isn't about targeting Dunkin' Donuts. This isn't about overreaching to prevent a mythical danger. This is about hearing the personal worries of Americans and working proactively to minimize the environmental risks that rightfully fuel their concerns. In short, this is about people and all of the places they go. We must begin to create a causal link between the worries of Americans and the proactive mission we're pursuing.

In essence, "Americans are worried about the air they're breathing. We hear them. And this is why we're doing [action]. This is part of EPA's proactive mission to protect Americans."

In addition to several programmatic efforts we will make, there are various hooks to attach our proactive messaging. (This list is not inclusive.)

Stimulus: The stimulus support enables EPA to protect Americans in three ways – by reducing the ravaging impacts of environmental / community degradation, supporting jobs and economic expansion, and constructing a long-lasting infrastructure that ultimately protects human health. The White House has provided strong messaging guidance on these measures; however, the public health dimension must certainly be added. There will be multiple opportunities throughout the year to highlight how the stimulus plan is protecting the American people.

Lisa Jackson: While we will be beyond the "back on the job" stage, there is still tremendous opportunity to introduce Lisa Jackson to diverse audiences. The stable of trades and environmental reporters have had – and will have – ample opportunities to engage the administrator and hear her views. We are continuing that outreach to ensure we maintain a constant pipeline to that ever-important cadre of reporters. There is, however, a bloc of reporters who would fall outside the typical press gallery of EPA: ethnic minority press [African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American], women-oriented press, youth press, urban radio, bloggers, key columnists, etc. OPA has begun outreach to many of these critical media segments to expand the universe of Americans who hear our message. Furthermore, a diverse convention/speaking schedule will facilitate this broader outreach initiative. We have begun flagging key speaking opportunities for the administrator that will place her before influential and/or mission-critical audiences.

Climate: Polar ice caps and the polar bears have become the climate change "mascots," if you will, and personify the challenges we have in making this issue real for many Americans. Most Americans will never see a polar ice cap, nor will most have the chance to see a polar bear in its natural habitat. Therefore, it is easy to detach from the seriousness of this issue. Unfortunately, climate change in the abstract is an increasingly – and consistently – unpersuasive argument to make. However, if we shift from making this about the polar caps and about our neighbor with respiratory illness we can potentially bring this issue home to many Americans. There will be many opportunities to discuss climate-related efforts this year. As we do so, we must allow the human health argument to take center stage.

Children: There will be several opportunities to show leadership and initiative in this area. This is critical not just because this subject was given short-shrift by the previous administration, but also because it is good policy. This justifies our work at the most base level. By revitalizing our own Children's Health Office, leading the global charge on this issue, and highlighting the children's health dimension to all of our major initiatives – we will also make this issue real for many Americans who otherwise would oppose many of our regulatory actions.

**The use of the word "mission" will undoubtedly raise some eyebrows internally. The word is interchangeable, but is intended to convey something more than incremental "steps," limp "efforts," sinister "agendas," or inchoate "plans." Mission implies a monumental effort driven by a positive motivation.*

BEYOND THOSE INSIDE THE TENT

To the collective: "This is environmental protection."

For many, environmental protection is about the caribou, polar bears, and sea otters. While our work certainly impacts all of these creatures, it obviously does not reflect our day-to-day work. It is important

for us to change this perception, particularly among those who are critically impacted by EJ issues – but are otherwise “unchurched.” (By unchurched, I mean they are not affiliated with a group or effort that would self-identify as EJ or environmentalist.)

For these families, we must address their fundamental worries by taking proactive, meaningful regulatory actions in their communities – and coupling that with community-sensitive messaging that highlights why our work is so critical. The Air Toxics effort provides an optimal chance to do this. Our work to monitor air quality in many of these areas will be incomplete, if not joined with an effort – through the regions and HQ – to engage local civic organizations who aren’t necessarily self-described environmentalists. Our message to them is that the work we’re doing in their communities is environmental protection and community protection.

BEYOND THIS DOCUMENT

What this document doesn’t include: a broader discussion on the EPA brand, 40-year discussions, etc. Much of that will follow in the coming weeks.

This document is intended to initiate our broader conversation on strategic communications. It contains thinking on this issue that is certainly open to further discussion and feedback. Hopefully, our conversation will elicit ideas and thoughts on the above concepts. Above all, our discussion should lead to a prospective calendar that tracks many of the pending regulatory actions.



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