



Communications Advice For Climate-Forward Candidates

Congratulations on running for local government! Are you looking to make your mark as a climate leader? Or as a fiscally-responsible candidate striving to protect taxpayers from massive climate-related costs? The good news is that you don't need to choose.

Consider the following statement:

The reality is that climate change, caused by the heat-trapping blanket of fossil fuel pollution around our planet, is putting our community at risk from storms, wildfires and flooding, as well as degrading our roads, stormwater systems and buildings. In addition to increased local government costs, it's driving up our food prices and insurance premiums. (Climate Costs)

If we take steps to prepare our community for the impacts of climate change, we can protect ourselves and our neighbours, but also save money even in the relatively short term. Doing nothing, whether in the name of saving money or because of an ideological denial of climate costs, puts human lives at risk, and is actually the most costly, fiscally irresponsible option. (Plan to Protect)

Clearly no one wants to raise taxes. We must explore all options to recover some of the significant climate costs from the federal and provincial governments, and from the fossil fuel industry and other major polluters. But the priority is to keep people safe and our infrastructure working, even if that costs us more in the short-term. (Fiscal Responsibility)

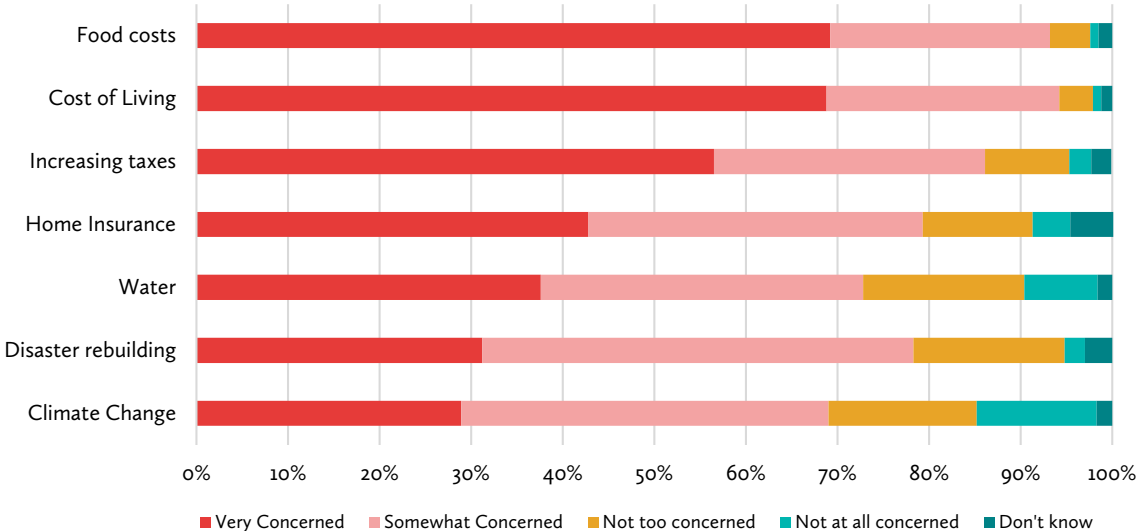
The thinking, and polling, behind the issues raised in each of these paragraphs will be discussed further below.

Climate Costs

Talk about real and current climate threats to your community and the importance of protecting residents and avoiding future (larger) costs

We need climate leaders to talk about the risks and costs that climate change is imposing on our communities, rather than framing climate action as an abstract moral responsibility to help future generations. Talk about how expensive climate change is for your local government, and for your residents, and the need to take proactive steps to prepare for a hotter, less stable future.

COMPARISON OF CLIMATE AND OTHER ISSUES URGENCY



INSIGHTS Talking about current costs

Over half of British Columbians also link climate change to rising insurance premiums (53%), water quality/quantity (57%) and rebuilding after disasters (60%), all topics that more than 70% of British Columbians report being concerned about.

If possible identify one or more tangible examples of climate impacts that are costing your community or require your local government to build expensive infrastructure to keep residents safe. This might include water systems, wildfire and emergency management costs, coastal or flood defences.

British Columbians are particularly worried about rising food costs (69% very concerned, and a further 24% somewhat concerned), and 56% of them recognize climate change as a major cause of those increases.

British Columbians are somewhat less likely to link rises in taxes to climate change (43%), but a [recent report](#) linking increases in heat and precipitation to increased maintenance of roads, bridges, water systems, stormwater and buildings may help you make that connection.

Talking about these threats in terms of climate change, rather than extreme weather, mobilizes climate-concerned voters and overall may result in a slight increase in public support, according to a recent [EcoAnalytics poll \(see slide 30\)](#).

Talk about the great risk and cost of not taking climate action, and emphasize that you have a plan

In the current era, climate action must focus on keeping our neighbours and neighbourhoods safe and healthy, rather than protecting the planet for the good of humanity. In the abstract, British Columbians are prioritize the cost of living (94%) over concern about climate change (70%). However, when the focus is put on protecting their community from current and future climate disasters, public support is higher.

48% of British Columbians will support action to keep their community safe from such climate events, even if this means raising taxes, compared to 36% who prioritize keeping taxes low even if measures to protect against extreme weather and future climate disasters are abandoned as a result.

A recent [EcoAnalytics poll \(see slide 34\)](#) conducted in urban centres of BC showed similar results and found that speaking about investments to “protect residents from flooding, extreme heat, wildfire smoke and water shortages” performed better than to “reduce future emergency response costs, insurance losses and infrastructure repair costs.” Overall, 55% of respondents supported investments to protect residents from impacts, compared to 48% who supported investments that would reduce future costs, with the benefit of this language seen across the political spectrum.

Climate candidates need to talk about preparing for climate change, and the need to upgrade infrastructure and create new infrastructure or programs to protect against climate disasters and risks. Emissions reduction measures can be part of the plan, especially those that also serve an adaptation role, but the emphasis should always be on preventing costs and harm caused by climate change and protecting our communities.

INSIGHTS

Talking about preparing for climate change

Build on the tangible example(s) of climate threats and costs, and the narrative of how residents are at risk, to illustrate how your plan will keep people safe and protect critical infrastructure during extreme weather and climate disasters.

Damage to roads, bridges, water systems, storm drains, buildings and other public infrastructure from increased heat and precipitation caused by climate change is costing Canadian governments an extra \$8.8 billion per year. Proactively working to upgrade infrastructure pays for itself very quickly in terms of infrastructure costs alone, even without counting the avoided harm to residents. (See [Prepare or Repair](#))

Fiscal Responsibility

Talk about spending to protect communities as a long-term way to save lives and costs

British Columbians are not in a mood for tax increases. As noted above, close to a majority prefer tax increases to a failure to protect the community from climate risks; however, despite this, British Columbians rate tax increases as their least preferred option to pay.

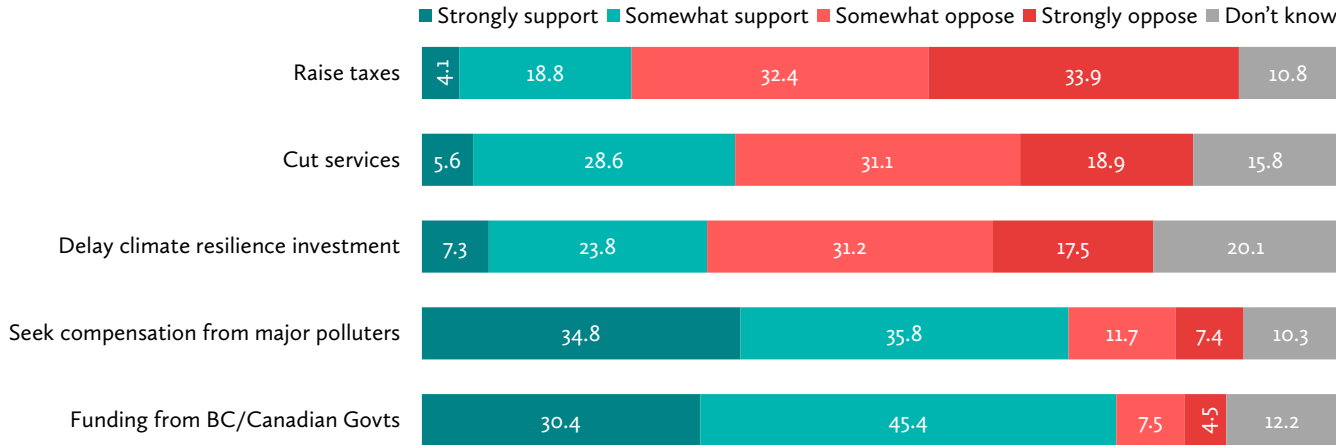
Asked how their local government should pay for “increased costs that occur due to climate change, such as maintaining and upgrading water systems, flooding or erosion protections, fire services and roads,” only 23% supported raising taxes, and only 34% supported cutting other services to prioritize funding climate resilience. Both of these options were opposed by majorities. A similar percentage, 31%,

supported delaying investments in climate resilience, while almost 49% opposed delaying such investments.

By contrast, British Columbians support their local government paying for climate resilience with funding from federal and provincial governments (76%) and by working with other local governments to seek compensation from major polluters such as fossil fuel companies (70%).

Climate candidates should craft a narrative that emphasizes the need to spend what is required to keep us safe from climate change, but promising to explore alternative sources of funding.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL CLIMATE COST FUNDING APPROACHES



INSIGHTS Talking about spending what's needed to keep us safe

Emphasize that climate change is imposing very real costs on your community and that failing to address that reality leaves us more vulnerable and will cost more.

Acknowledge that no one wants to increase taxes, and the priority should be to look for funds from senior levels of government and to look at all available options to make fossil fuel companies and other major polluters pay their fair share of these costs.

Pledge to look into legal options to recover costs from fossil fuel companies, or go further and pledge to support a local government class action lawsuit against fossil fuel companies (supported by 67% British Columbians as a way to recover climate costs). Be clear that those opposed are saying that it's okay for taxpayers to shoulder all of the rising climate costs. If you support the lawsuit, review local government resources on the [Sue Big Oil](#) website.