



Date: September 8, 2004
To: LCV Education Fund
From: Anna Greenberg, Michael Bocian and Patrick McCreesh

RE: Wisconsin Focus Group Memo

LCV Education Fund Focus groups in Wisconsin among key audiences identified through the Environmental Voter Profiles Program (SmarTargeting) reveal deep concern for the environment and a strong desire to protect natural resources. These targeted audiences brought a great deal of knowledge about the environment and the political processes to the conversation and a desire to do something to prevent environmental degradation. We assembled two groups: women whom LCV Education Fund's modeling predicts will be strongly pro-environment and men whom LCV Education Fund's modeling predicts to be strongly pro-labor. Participants in both groups understand that the water and air quality where they live is better than the nation overall, but still worry their environment will change and jeopardize their way of life. These findings are based on two focus groups conducted by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, Inc. (GQR) for the LCV Education Fund on August 30th in Madison among people identified in the "top decile"¹ of SmarTargeting.

Some similar themes emerged here that were witnessed in LCV Education Fund's New Mexico Focus Groups on June 23-24 in Albuquerque and Washington Focus Groups on August 16-17 in Seattle. Just as was observed in New Mexico and Washington, the mood among participants in Madison is downbeat and there is high anxiety about the direction of the country. But in Madison, despite the intensity of concerns about the economy and Iraq, participants also demonstrate a significant amount of concern about the future of the environment. The environment occupied a more prominent place in their worldview than in other areas. In particular, they worry that changes such as depleted fish supplies, water contamination and overdevelopment in their community could affect their health and families.

Anger toward corporate America was strong among these participants. They are not as concerned about the tradeoff between the economy and the environment because they think regulations are necessary to keep corporations in check. However, they do not necessarily think regulations work. They worry that corporate power influences legislation too strongly, and that corporations ignore regulations even if they are fined. Moreover, they fear that there is little the government can do to halt the trend.

¹ All registrants are ranked on an environmental scale, which is divided into ten equal parts. Each part is labeled as a decile, and the top decile represents the top of the model or the most likely to be environmental activists.



The Profiled Groups

Madison is anomalous in Wisconsin and probably nationally. Using SmarTargeting modeling this past spring, GQR was able to locate *potential* environmental activists for the LCV Education Fund, though they will certainly need to work to mobilize them. Here, the participants that were found are people who actually show signs of prior and future environmental activism. The women represent a ripe target for activation; they are highly knowledgeable about the environment and show deep concern for its protection. As was observed in New Mexico and Washington, these women support strong environmental polices as a way to protect their families. Moreover, they want to protect the environment for future generations to enjoy recreationally.

The LCV Education Fund's environmental activist model performed well in all three states, with the lists producing focus group participants that were pro-environment and that might not necessarily be found from pulling certain demographic groups from a state voter file. But, there appear to be differences among different segments from the list identified by the model.

- Women proved the most fertile ground for environmental communication. Across the three states, women were open to environmental messages and to LCV Education Fund's direct mail. These women are often more engaged in environmental issues or at least expressed great interest in environmental activism.
- Men also show promise, though as typically well educated on environmental issues, but still express concern for the environment. Some of these men are hunters and fisherman who want to slow development, while others carry progressive values that are critical of corporate America.
- There was only one group of low-propensity voters (Washington), but that group showed similar views as the women. However, low propensity women are much less knowledgeable and much more cynical and skeptical about government in general.

The labor affinity group in Wisconsin also provided important insights into the overlap between labor and the environment. These participants were invited to attend the groups based on their aversion to NAFTA and their favorability toward labor as found in the labor model of LCV Education Fund's SmarTargeting. With these attitudes, it might be expected that these participants would possibly be wary of environmental regulation as they might see it has inhibiting economic growth. But, these participants actually stressed the importance of environmental regulation and enforcing restrictions on corporate pollution. Similarly, for labor leaning men, the most salient messages focused on corporate malfeasance with respect to the environment. This group quickly agrees that corporations abuse the environment and both the message exercise and mail pieces show that these labor friendly men could potentially be motivated by a message that focuses on this corporate misconduct.



Key Findings from Madison

- **Knowledge is high among these participants.** Participants in both groups were unusually knowledgeable about the environment and the political forces affecting the environment. Many participants mentioned specific legislation or actions that harm the environment, such as loosening federal regulations that lead to an increase in air and water pollution. Participants in both groups used the term “renewables” when discussing the mail pieces about alternative sources of energy, something GQR has not often seen in focus groups. (Based on years of research, GQR still recommends saying “renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power” to provide cues to the many voters less knowledgeable.) The women even expressed concern about the changing climate affected by global warming, a topic that rarely comes up on its own in focus groups.
- **Concern for the direction of the environment is high.** Most participants agree the environment is in decent shape in Madison, but they are concerned it is getting worse. These groups are well aware of the changes linked to sprawl – such as traffic, waste, and the changing ecosystem – that affect the lakes and rivers in their community. For men, overdevelopment also raises concern about preserving their access to recreation, while women worry about children playing near possibly dangerous water. Nationally, both groups expressed concern for actions taken by the federal government including backing out of the Kyoto treaty, opening ANWR to drilling, and politicizing science to push an agenda. These groups lack the optimism we saw in Seattle where participants asserted that the environment is getting better in some respects.
- **Environmental groups viewed largely favorably.** Rather than express cynicism about environmental groups, participants in Madison were familiar with organizations such as the Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy and Audubon, whom they believe have admirable missions and raise important issues. Participants, however, express some fear that groups who use radical tactics like Greenpeace go too far. In New Mexico and Washington, participants had much more mixed views towards environmental groups.
- **Environmental protection is a legacy to children.** Many participants remember fondly a childhood spent outdoors, hiking and swimming in the local lakes. They see preserving this landscape as their legacy to their own children. To be sure, they also worry about how environmental change will affect the health and safety of their children, but conservation is almost equally important. Similar to the “way of life” theme observed in New Mexico and Washington, outdoors recreation is something that people in Wisconsin inherently link to their families. In the image exercise, the most striking photographs invoke images of families outside, such as the woman walking with her child and dog along the water and the picture of the family along the fence. Both of these images suggest to them something that may be out of reach to their children in the future if we do not work to protect the environment now.
- **There is no economic tradeoff for regulation, but they believe regulation is not effective.** The environment versus the economy tradeoff garners a very different response in Madison, more so than elsewhere. In New Mexico there was slight hesitation



over the impact of regulation on the economy, and in Washington participants felt economic growth and protecting the environment were not mutually exclusive. In both cases, while people clearly felt that regulation could be compatible with a strong environment, these people saw some danger in “over regulation.” In Wisconsin, participants did not waver in supporting regulation and, in fact, began a discussion of the efficacy of regulation itself. We saw this support for regulation despite the inclusion of labor-minded voters who we might assume would worry about economic growth and job creation. The danger, in their view, is not that there is too much regulation, but that corporate interests will find a way to block regulations in the pursuit of profit. Cynically and perhaps realistically, they believe that industry will beat the system by just paying a fine or finding other ways around regulation.

- **Corporate polluters cannot escape responsibility.** To a significant degree, these groups blame corporate America for environmental problems, believing that national policy toward the environment is largely driven by industry lobbyists and corporations like oil companies. The strongest message that the LCV Education Fund can make is that politically connected corporations are being allowed to pollute our water, air and land. Not only should corporate America be prevented from polluting the environment, industry needs to take responsibility, just as the citizens of Madison do. These participants feel they are doing their part to protect the community – recycling and the like – and they want corporations to do the same. They are willing to accept that some pollution is necessary, but believe that there is just too much corporate waste.

The Mail Pieces

Unlike the problem faced in Washington where the participants did not understand what it meant to “vote to protect the environment,” the Madison participants viewed these mail pieces as a call to action that they welcomed. Moreover, these groups seemed to know who is to blame for their environmental concerns and felt the pieces highlighted new aspects of a problem they already know is festering. The Madison participants were much more likely than participants elsewhere to respond positively to pieces that had detailed information. One woman even said that she might not read it all, but that the signposts followed by significant paragraphs show LCV Education Fund has the content to back up claims. Keep in mind, however, participants read this mail in a setting where they are asked to read through the whole piece. While there may be more room to include details based upon the results in Madison, GQR still wants to warn the LCV Education Fund to be careful to avoid pieces that are too text heavy since we know that mail is read quite differently when it is received at home.

- *Water.* In Madison, there is an underlying theme that the local water is fine, but that pollution may be putting it at risk. Both the water glass piece and the “1 in 12” piece build on this *a priori* concern making them strong pieces for LCV Education Fund. In both of the groups, the glass of water piece was either the top or second highest piece the group was likely to open. The content of the piece also appealed to both groups, receiving high scores. Participants liked this piece for its details with signposts and specific information about Wisconsin. Additionally, the groups mentioned that the piece



made them feel like anyone can be affected by water contamination. Participants were quick to compare the glass of water piece to “1 in 12” and most agreed the glass of water was a stronger piece.

- *Corporate Polluters.* For these groups the corporate polluters message generates more than anger; it compels them to take action. The corporate polluters mail piece received high rankings from both groups and was the piece most men in the labor group said they would read first. The corporate framework tested in the message exercise is the strongest across both groups and is consistent with their demand for corporation responsibility.
- *The Landscape.* As was observed in Washington, the “Wisconsin Calls It Home” piece appeals to the men. In these groups, they connected it to the land through hunting and fishing, but a few also mentioned the patriotic subtext of conserving the environment. Moreover, both groups felt it offered the pure beauty of nature, though some mentioned it made them think it was a travel brochure. Unlike in other pieces, the groups agreed that the information in this piece was not very useful.
- *Energy Independence.* This piece was eye-catching for both groups and most participants marked this piece to be read right away. Participants say the question on the cover would provoke them to read the piece immediately and once they had read it, they found it persuasive. A few people in each group said that the images of renewable energy sources at the top make the piece stronger. They think of renewable energy as a way to make the country more independent and they like that the piece offers a solution to the problem of dependence on foreign oil.
- *Early vote.* Early voting has a very different role in Wisconsin than in Washington. Here it is still called “absentee voting,” which carries a negative connotation with voters. Many participants said they would do it, but only if they were out of town. These groups see voting and going to the polls as an important civic duty. One man said he takes his son to the poll to show him the importance of voting; to him, mailing in a form would not have the same effect.

BEST TESTING MAIL PIECES	
<i>Most Likely to Read Right Away</i>	<i>Best Scores</i>
Top Tier	Top Tier
Glass of Water	Glass of Water
Oil Dependent	1 in 12 Women
Second Tier	Second Tier
Corporate Polluters	Oil Dependent
1 in 12 Women	Corporate Polluters