Wisconsin Conservation Voters

CANDIDATE MESSAGING GUIDE

Clean energy is popular across demographics and partisan lines. Data centers are unpopular across demographics and partisan lines, and people are strongly in favor of policies to reign them in. And, Wisconsinites are deeply concerned about the rising cost of their utilities, adding yet another burden to the high cost of living. These are some of the key findings from our recent polling that can help you, as a candidate, understand how these issues impact people's everyday lives.

In Wisconsin, utility bills are now right up there with groceries as a major part of the cost-of-living crisis. People are having to make impossible decisions about whether to pay for medications or groceries or housing, and with utility rates going up at twice the rate of inflation, they are adding to that stress.

Poll-tested proof points

There are solutions - solutions that are extremely popular among Wisconsinites. In our polling, messaging that pairs corporate accountability with protecting community resources performs highly with voters:

91% **support requiring utilities to be fully transparent** with the public about exactly how much energy and water data centers are consuming. No secret deals!

82% **support forcing "Big Tech" companies to pay their full share** for the energy they use so that regular families' bills don't go up. Billionaires pay your full share!

93% **support requiring data centers to pay for 100 percent of the new energy infrastructure** they require, preventing those costs from being shifted onto Wisconsin ratepayers. Pay their own costs!

70% **support clean energy**, which is the most affordable and fastest energy to build. More clean energy!

This election will be decided by voters who are struggling with the cost of living and are fed up with corporate greed. Our research, narrative, and policy solutions show how you can stand up to monopoly utilities and side with consumers to protect their families' financial futures.

The Kitchen Table Connection

Energy costs are no longer on the back burner. They are central to the pressures Wisconsinites are feeling over the high cost of living.

Costs are out of control. **84 percent of voters are concerned about the cost of electricity**, with 42 percent of swing voters reporting they are very concerned.

67 percent of people are aware that their utility bills have gone up. A majority of those people think utility bills have gone up at about the same pace as groceries, gasoline, and health care.

The majority of people who are aware of rising utility costs blame corporate greed. Candidates get more traction when they position themselves as a check on utilities and Big Tech rather than a partner to them.

Building more coal and gas power plants will continue to raise energy prices for consumers and line the pockets of electric utilities. Building more solar and wind will be faster to build and keep energy costs low for consumers.

93%

THE FULL SHARE LITMUS TEST

93 percent of Wisconsin voters think data centers should be required to pay for all of their own energy use. This is the single most effective message for moving voters across party lines.

70%

THE COST-BENEFIT GAP

70 percent of voters now believe the costs of large-scale data centers outweigh their benefits.

KEY, POLL-TESTED MESSAGING GUIDELINES

Energy costs are no longer on the back burner. They are central to the pressures Wisconsinites are feeling over the high cost of living.

01 Make lowering energy costs about corporate accountability.

Utility companies and data centers are drastically increasing energy demand, and utilities want to fill that demand with more gas plants so they make the biggest profit, but regular families will pay for the resulting price spikes. Solar and wind are cleaner, less expensive, faster, and local.

02 Lead with clean water and clean energy rather than climate change.

While climate goals can be polarizing, 71 percent of voters are moved by the millions of gallons of water used by data centers.

When asked what their top concern was regarding data centers, 25 percent of voters said water usage, only second to utility bills (26 percent). Data centers that don't require as much water on site still require millions of gallons to generate the electricity needed when powered by coal and gas.

70 percent of voters support requiring Wisconsin data centers to be powered with at least 70 percent renewable energy.

03 Demand transparency to end secret deals and disclose environmental impacts.

Voters strongly oppose the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) that keep development deals secret from the public.

"I will work to block the secret NDAs that hide 'Big Tech' deals from the public. Wisconsinites have a right to know exactly how much water and energy these projects will consume."

91 percent of voters support requiring full transparency for tech deals.

04 Highlight the corporate greed angle.

Remind voters that while their bills go up, these facilities received $70 million in sales tax exemptions in their first two years alone while creating few permanent local jobs.

"We shouldn't be giving tax breaks to billionaires while they drive up your electric rates. It's time to put Wisconsin taxpayers ahead of out-of-state corporate profits."

Messaging dos and don'ts

Do…

Hammer home that data centers must pay their full share. This is the most potent angle of opposition, as 77 percent of voters find it convincing that regular Wisconsinites shouldn't pay more to power these facilities.

Connect data center energy use to rising utility bills. With 67 percent of voters reporting their electric costs have risen, framing data centers as a primary driver of these costs resonates strongly, especially with young voters.

Focus on water and energy usage over climate change. Messages regarding the millions of gallons of water used by data centers are more effective than those centered directly on climate impacts.

Highlight bipartisan support for data center regulation. The policy solutions in our poll were widely popular across the political spectrum.

Demand transparency and local control. Voters strongly support (91 percent) requiring tech companies to be transparent about development deals with local governments and residents.

Stand with consumers against Big Tech and corporate greed. Voters (29 percent) already blame corporate greed for rising costs; lean into this by attacking out-of-state billionaires, utilities, and secret deals.

Include messaging on the economic benefits to the local workforce and community to maintain broader appeal. Refrain from using "union jobs" because support for data center projects declines when mentioned by name. Data suggests a preference for what union labor delivers (local hiring and strong pay) over the label itself.

Don't…

Use AI as the primary anchor for your message. While unpopular, AI is viewed less negatively than data centers themselves. Focus on the physical facilities and their effect on community resource consumption instead.

Rely on a purely negative case. While opposition is high, 87 percent of voters support requiring data centers to "give back" by creating local jobs and improving the local energy grid for schools and libraries.

Be afraid to push back on new coal and natural gas facilities. 81 percent of voters don't like utilities focusing on fossil fuels.

Assume data centers are a dealbreaker issue for everyone. Only about 13 to 19 percent of voters currently view this as a primary driver. Use full share messaging to move more voters into the dealbreaker category.

Underestimate the popularity of clean energy.