

## **Framing ANWR: Citizens, Consumers, and the Privileged Position of Business**

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### **Introduction**

On the morning of March 16, 2005, a narrowly divided U.S. Senate prepared to vote on a key amendment to a budget resolution designed to block oil and gas exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). While previous attempts to open the area to energy development had failed time and again, the momentum that day shifted. As correspondents in Washington struggled to explain the complex legislative maneuvers involved, crude oil futures on the New York Stock Exchange rose to more than \$56 a barrel, the highest price on record since 1983.<sup>1</sup> With both stories breaking the news, President George W. Bush took advantage of a scheduled press conference in the White House briefing room. "I am concerned about the price of energy," he said. "I'm concerned about what it means to the average American family when they see the price of gasoline go up." After attributing the problem to an imbalance of supply and demand, and explaining the substance of his own stalled energy plan, the president added: "I hope Congress passes ANWR. There's a way to get some additional reserves here at home on the books."<sup>2</sup>

By the time the Senate voted later that day--51 to 49 in favor of opening portions of the ANWR coastal plain to drilling--rhetoric on the subject had escalated into a war of words. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska embraced the outcome as a "healthy balance between production and conservation," while Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton said the chamber had "cast a vote for America's energy security."<sup>3</sup> But it was a stinging defeat for environmentalists who had blocked the measure repeatedly and passionately for more than two decades. The author

of one Resources for the Future (RFF) study on ANWR declared the vote “a victory for the oil lobby,” while the Sierra Club charged that it was “another example of the extraordinary disconnect between public opinion and Congressional action.”<sup>4</sup> As advocates on both sides braced for the next public relations battle in the ANWR campaign, one group with a vested interest in the outcome was noticeably absent from the debate. The oil industry had decided to stay silent.

The chapters aligned in this book address, in varying ways, the conditions under which business groups influence environmental policy, and the opportunities and constraints that influence their success. Within that context, the ANWR case offers a worthy and fascinating challenge. While those in the environmental community may interpret the Senate vote as a triumph of interest group politics over democratic institutions, the deliberate decision of major oil companies like British Petroleum (BP), ChevronTexaco, and ConocoPhillips to back away from open participation in the ANWR policy arena suggests a more complicated story. Indeed, we believe that the pragmatism of that decision speaks volumes about the fluid nature of business influence over political decisions. In an era where business no longer assumes what Lindblom (1977) once called a “privileged position” in American politics, today’s corporations must work relentlessly to position their arguments in the public mind (Vogel 1989, Smith 2000). By drawing upon research on agenda-setting and issue framing, we use the ANWR case to illustrate how corporations and their ideological allies exploited the entwined issues of energy security, availability, and cost to their advantage. In the end, we argue that the public’s ambivalence on energy and the environment, embodied in a tension between the public-minded “citizen” and the self-regarding “consumer,” enabled the oil lobby to step back from ANWR and pursue a strategy of triangulation instead, where advertising campaigns and high-profile

donations to mainstream environmental groups were used to mend corporate reputations, while distracting attention away from quieter efforts to direct the agenda of government in their favor.

### **A Policy Window on ANWR**

Within months of his inauguration in January 2001, President George W. Bush placed as a centerpiece of his energy policy a longstanding goal of the oil industry to allow drilling in the previously off-limits coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Opening up ANWR to oil production was a key element in the administration's announced drive to foster energy independence by maximizing use of the nation's oil, coal, and natural gas. To advocates of wilderness preservation and wildlife protection, however, drilling in the refuge was both unnecessary and reckless, given what they argued were its limited proven reserves and the potential for irreversible damage to sensitive tundra and resident wildlife.<sup>5</sup>

Environmentalists had little influence over the president's proposal. While their expectations of the Bush administration were low given the president's environmental record as governor of Texas and his longstanding ties to the oil industry--along with those of Vice President Richard Cheney--they were shocked nevertheless to find themselves completely shut out of meetings of the administration's National Energy Policy Development Group. The administration even refused to release a list of task force participants, prompting the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and other advocacy organizations to sue under the Freedom of Information Act to gain access to the records. The long legal tussle over the energy task force, ultimately decided along narrow legal grounds in the administration's favor, only reinforced perceptions about the extent to which its energy and environmental policies simply

refracted industry priorities, and the degree to which the White House was eager to conceal those ties from public scrutiny.<sup>6</sup>

With no effective access to an administration dominated by former energy industry executives to an extent not seen since the Reagan administration, environmentalists could hope only to mobilize their own supporters and other sympathetic constituencies to obstruct action in Congress. Registered lobbyists representing the National Audubon Society, and the National Wildlife Federation, among others, worked with their largely Democratic allies to shape a legislative blocking strategy even before the administration's proposal went to Capitol Hill. NRDC lawyers led the legal effort to open up the records of the energy task force in hopes that evidence of industry dominance over the process might provoke a public backlash. Staff at the Wilderness Society and other organizations mined federal records for data and reports to counter the administration's public arguments about the extent of proven reserves and the possible impacts of drilling on the preserve's ecosystem.

In spite of coordinated and well-organized opposition, an unexpected convergence of events soon opened a window of opportunity to strengthen the president's hand. First, arguments in favor of drilling in ANWR gained traction in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which renewed public debate over the nation's reliance on oil imports from the volatile Middle East. Within months, proponents were linking ANWR to energy independence, national security, and to the administration's economic stimulus package. In remarks to labor union leaders, President Bush argued: "This energy bill that we're working on is a jobs bill. And when we explore for power, U.S. power, U.S. energy in ANWR, we're not only helping us become less dependent on foreign sources of crude oil and foreign sources of energy, we're creating jobs for American workers, jobs so that men and women can put food on the table."<sup>7</sup>

Members of Congress pushed the argument even further. “It is appropriate for Americans to examine again our increasing dependence on foreign oil, especially Mideast oil,” argued Senator Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska), a key proponent of drilling in ANWR. “Each senator is going to have to recognize his obligations to our national security as opposed to environmental extremists.”<sup>8</sup> Senator James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) went so far as to attach an ANWR amendment to an October 2001 defense authorization bill, arguing that energy independence was now a component of national security policy. That tactic failed to generate sufficient support, but it signaled a new level of intensity in a debate framed by proponents in increasingly patriotic terms.<sup>9</sup> Environmentalists countered that national security would be better served through a strategy of aggressive energy conservation, including raising the average fuel economy on automobiles, SUVs, and light trucks, but such proposals had little traction within an administration agenda typified by Vice President Cheney’s view, expressed previously, that while conservation was a laudable “private virtue,” under the circumstances it could hardly be considered serious public policy.<sup>10</sup>

Two other exogenous events likewise strengthened the case, at least rhetorically, for increasing domestic oil production. A massive electrical blackout in August 2003, which temporarily cut power to 50 million residential customers in the upper Midwest and Northeast, highlighted the vulnerability of the country’s energy grids. Even though very little of the nation’s electricity is generated from oil, or that drilling in ANWR would do nothing to modernize the patchwork system of transmitting electricity that allowed the outage to occur, the emergency nevertheless gave new momentum to the administration’s energy plan.<sup>11</sup> For example, Rep. Billy Tauzin (R-LA), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, described the need to

open up ANWR as a “moral obligation,” and suggested that critics should try to “live in the dark and see how they like it.”<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the retail price of a gallon of gasoline began to surge, rising throughout the fall and winter of 2003, finally surpassing the \$2 mark in the spring of 2004. House Republicans and their ideological allies at think tanks like the National Center for Policy Analysis and the Competitive Enterprise Institute used the trend to press their agenda in the media, insisting that “the latest gas spike [was] more evidence of the need to pass an energy bill that would boost domestic supplies by opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil drilling.”<sup>13</sup> Like the blackout, the connection between ANWR and gasoline prices was theoretical at best--dependent first on finding meaningful reserves, and even then on a delay of five to ten years in extracting them--but the issue played squarely to the public’s increasingly anxious mood. As Smith (2002) notes, when people perceive an energy “crisis” they typically demand government action and changes in policy to manage the problem. The president was prepared to offer both.

Finally, proponents of drilling in ANWR gained even stronger partisan and ideological control of government in the November 2004 elections. Not only was President Bush elected to a second term in office, but Republicans also strengthened their control over both chambers of Congress, most critically the Senate, where they secured a net gain of four seats.<sup>14</sup> Equally important were the Democratic losses, chief among them Senate Minority Leader Thomas Daschle (D-SD), whose role in blunting the administration’s drive to open up ANWR had become a part of his opponent’s campaign theme that Daschle was a partisan obstructionist.<sup>15</sup>

This strengthened Republican majority used its advantage to dictate the formal approval process on ANWR when the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress convened in early 2005. In particular, the March 16<sup>th</sup> vote was embedded strategically in an amendment to the budget bill, which according to

Senate deficit-control rules adopted in the mid-1990s was subject to a vote by simple majority. As a result, Senate Democrats were unable to wield, or even threaten to use, their only effective tactical weapon, the filibuster. More important, the proposal's inclusion in a larger budget bill reduced its saliency to the broader public and thereby lessened the capacity of environmentalists to mobilize against it.

Students of agenda-setting have long pointed to the creation of “policy windows” to explain the timing of key legislative decisions. While early accounts likened the process, quite memorably, to a “garbage can” (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972), later studies pointed to a less chaotic metaphor, emphasizing the convergence of various “streams” that flow independently through the political system: problems in need of a solution, policy proposals waiting for action, and political events that demand attention, including external crises, election results, and shifts in public mood. According to Kingdon (1995), a “policy window” opens at the moment in which a recognized problem is coupled with a viable solution, and the political climate is ripe for change. Ultimately in the case of ANWR, the window of opportunity created by the aftermath of September 11, energy blackouts, soaring gasoline prices, and Republican majorities in Washington worked to the benefit of drilling proponents, giving oil companies their best chance in years to realize a long-standing goal to expand their efforts in Alaska beyond the North Slope. Indeed, if the fortunes of business fluctuate over time (Vogel 1989), the political arena in 2005 offered, in the words of one observer, “the most business-friendly climate since the days of President McKinley.”<sup>16</sup>

As a result of this convergence of forces, overt lobbying by the oil industry or other major elements of the business community on ANWR was notably absent in the months preceding the Senate vote. They were content instead to allow the administration and

congressional Republicans to take the lead. In fact, most major oil companies gave the distinct impression that they had grown disinterested in ANWR altogether. On the one hand, industry insiders claimed to be more skeptical than the administration about ANWR's proven reserves.<sup>17</sup> When compared to other contested areas for exploration, including Florida's Gulf Coast, they seemed to question its long-term economic viability. On the other, the issue has become such a political "hot potato" that oil companies already sensitive about their public image wanted nothing to do with another open fight over what environmentalists called "one of our greatest national treasures."<sup>18</sup> ChevronTexaco, British Petroleum (BP) and Conoco-Phillips cut their public ties to the prominent pro-drilling consortium, Arctic Power, and crafted their press releases carefully so as not to ignite concern about despoiling nature. ExxonMobil reiterated its support for "environmentally responsible development within the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," while BP said in its official statement that "[w]e have taken the view that it is up to the people and the U.S. government to decide whether drilling should occur there. If drilling is authorized, we will then decide whether to bid on the acreage on offer" based on a determination of what "can be explored and developed without adverse impact to wildlife."<sup>19</sup> That the oil industry felt it necessary to avoid controversy and to express diffidence to the outcome of the political process speaks volumes about the degree to which the influence of business is constrained by popular opinion (Smith 2000), particularly on salient issues.

### **Molding Public Opinion**

Just one week prior to the Senate's vote on the ANWR budget amendment, respondents in a Gallup survey were asked to select the statement about energy and the environment with which they most agreed: "Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of limiting the amount of energy supplies--such as oil, gas and coal--which the United States



produces,” or the “development of U.S. energy supplies--such as oil, gas, and coal--should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent.” When pressed, 52 percent of those responding prioritized environmental protection, while 39 percent opted for greater development of energy supplies.<sup>20</sup> In light on the ongoing war in Iraq, and mounting concern over gas prices, the clarity of that preference seemed impressive. But it was hardly indisputable.

Survey researchers frequently ask Americans whether they support an increase in domestic oil production. The results range wildly, and are conditioned by a number of factors. When presented as a way “to reduce the country’s dependence on imports of Middle East oil,” 73 percent approve of “increasing oil drilling in the U.S.”<sup>21</sup> However, support for drilling erodes when national security concerns are balanced against reminders of environment impacts, or when respondents are encouraged to consider “other solutions,” including energy conservation.<sup>22</sup> Interest in expanded oil production also wanes when attention shifted from the general to the specific.<sup>23</sup> While respondents are quick to endorse drilling when the location is defined vaguely within U.S. borders, they are reluctant to support it in any number of places mentioned by name, including the Great Lakes, Florida’s Gulf Coast, public lands in the Rocky Mountains, or, most significant of all, Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>24</sup>

In the summer of 2001, when the president began his push on ANWR, Americans were inclined to believe that energy had become a “very serious” issue--more serious, in fact, according to poll trends, than at any time since 1977.<sup>25</sup> In response, 63 percent supported the broad goals of “drilling for natural gas on public lands,” and 64 percent backed “investing in more gas pipelines.”<sup>26</sup> A combined 70 percent warned that it was either “very important” or “extremely important” that the president and Congress do something to *increase* oil and gas production, and 53 percent were willing to offer tax breaks to corporations to provide incentives

for drilling to be done.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, there was stubborn resistance to the idea of “opening up the Alaskan Arctic Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration.” Just 38 percent of those polled supported the plan as a way “to deal with the energy situation.”<sup>28</sup>

Four years later the verdict seemed less certain. Dueling polls featured prominently in the press seemed to swing wildly in one direction then the other, giving an impression of confusion and volatility. In January 2005, a Luntz Research Group study conducted on behalf of Arctic Power found 53 percent in favor of “exploration, development, and production of oil and natural gas” in ANWR as “one of the ways to increase our nation’s energy supply,” while a December 2003 Zogby International survey funded by the Wilderness Society found 55 percent *opposed* when asked if they thought “oil companies should be allowed to drill for oil in America’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” Meanwhile, Harris Interactive found 53 percent in support of allowing companies “the ability to drill for oil in certain areas” such as ANWR “to decrease our reliance on foreign oil,” while according to Gallup 53 percent believed the region “should not be opened up for oil exploration.”<sup>29</sup> To take the evidence at face value meant that the public either supported drilling in ANWR by up to a 17-point margin, or opposed it by an identical margin. As David W. Moore, a senior Gallup poll editor wondered: ““Can opinion be that vague?”<sup>30</sup>

The answer was “almost certainly yes,” Moore explained, since the public’s knowledge on the subject was shockingly low. According the Luntz Research Group poll, 87 percent could not name a single word found in the acronym ANWR, while the same proportion failed to accurately place its location within the state of Alaska. When the issue was narrowly focused, respondents seemed to take their cue from the name that was read to them, which allowed the phrase “wildlife refuge” to tap into a latent store of environmental concern. Yet without a clear understanding of the issue to anchor their responses, most were willing to be persuaded by the

arguments they were offered. Hence, when the issue was “implicitly framed as one of reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil and dealing with the high price of oil and gas,” people were willing to support drilling in ANWR by a “decisive margin.”<sup>31</sup> When a range of other alternatives (including energy conservation) was emphasized instead, the margin swung like a pendulum in the opposite direction. Not surprisingly, such dualities offered advocates on both sides ample opportunity to shape their discursive arguments.

Experiments in question wording have demonstrated time and again how minor alterations in survey design can produce dramatically different results (Schuman and Presser 1981). As Zaller and Feldman (1992: 582) point out, polls do not simply *measure* public opinion, “they also shape and channel it by the manner in which they frame issues, order the alternatives, and otherwise set the context of the question.” They believe that on a wide range of issues, people hold in their heads opposing considerations, which under varied circumstances might lead them to one decision or another. When interviewed by pollsters they call to mind a sample of those ideas: some that have been made salient by recent experiences or events, and others that they have been primed to consider by the questionnaire itself. Since most respondents are ambivalent about most issues in the first place, their answers can be particularly vulnerable to “framing effects” that are created--whether intentionally or not--by the order in which questions are presented, the language that is used, or the response options that are offered.

In this sense, public sentiment on the issue of drilling in ANWR should come as no surprise. If policy preferences can be swayed with relative ease by the context in which an issue is described, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge might be said to offer a “self-activating” frame. The name itself invokes an image of public land permanently set aside for wildlife protection, while the nearly unavoidable mention of Alaska is likely to trigger memories of the *Exxon*

*Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound in 1989. Ten years later, 62 percent of those polled by Gallup correctly recalled, without prompting, the name of the oil company involved in the accident, 66 percent believed that there was “still oil left in the water and on the beaches,” and nearly everyone--a staggering 91 percent--believed that a similar accident was likely to happen again in the future.<sup>32</sup>

In short, environmental groups like the Wilderness Society, which financed the Zogby International poll on ANWR, had every incentive to craft their questions narrowly, and in strictly preservationist terms. After all, asking respondents whether they supported drilling for oil in Alaska was likely to bring emotive images of oil-soaked seals and birds to mind, pressing even ill-informed respondents into opposition. In contrast, for the Luntz Research Group and its client Arctic Power, counteracting that frame required either removing the name itself by referring to the obscure acronym ANWR, or juxtaposing it with frames of equal value by directing attention to energy prices or national security.<sup>33</sup> The results proved so changeable in the end that the staff at the Environmental News Service complained, quite simply, “you get what you poll for.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Crafting an Issue Frame**

If, as Walter Lippmann (1922) so famously wrote, people respond to the “pictures in their heads” rather than to some objective reality, the role that politicians, corporations, and interest groups play in constructing those images warrants careful attention. The capacity to frame an issue strategically by controlling the cues and symbols cognitively linked to it may be one of the most important tools that these groups have at their disposal (Jacoby 2000). After all, according to Schattschneider (1960: 68), “the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power.” Whether in the limited context of a questionnaire or in the broader realm of political

debate, issue framing allows elites to exploit seemingly inconsistent attitudes held by average Americans to their advantage.

When the narrow subject of drilling in ANWR failed to attract popular support in early 2001, President Bush changed course. He directed attention to a broader set of concerns by reference to a weakening U.S. economy and an emerging “energy crisis,” reminding Americans of soaring gasoline prices and electrical blackouts, both of which in his view provided defensible ground for a rollback of environmental regulations. By the summer of 2004, according to the Pew Research Center, “the high price of gasoline” had come to dominate public attention. Legal sovereignty had been transferred to a new Iraqi government just weeks before, and violent conflict involving U.S. soldiers stationed in the region continued, but far more respondents said they followed news stories on gasoline prices “very closely.”<sup>35</sup> The president used the opportunity to press to open more federal lands to oil drilling to reduce American dependence on reserves abroad. “These measures have been repeatedly blocked by members of the Senate,” he said, “and American consumers are paying the price.”<sup>36</sup>

The administration’s overall strategy was crafted, in part, on the advice of Republican pollster Frank Luntz, president of the Luntz Research Group. In a lengthy 2002 memo to party leaders, Luntz advised them to assure voters that they were committed to “preserving and protecting” the environment, but that it could be done “more wisely and effectively.”<sup>37</sup> He told Republicans to emphasize that “exploring” for oil in ANWR--not drilling--was just “one component of a comprehensive energy policy, and not to “allow the radical environmentalists to force you into talking about only this one component.”<sup>38</sup> In the end, the rhetorical strategy succeeded by creating a coherent bundle of issues “stronger than the sum of its parts.”<sup>39</sup> As William Saletan, writing for the liberal online magazine *Slate*, had warned in May 2001:

Right now, most Americans oppose drilling in ANWR. But the more we discuss that idea in terms of energy rather than the environment, the more the political equation changes. Economic considerations enumerated by Bush and Cheney--“sharp increases in fuel prices from home heating oil to gasoline,” electrical threats to “the high-tech industry,” strangled economic growth and layoffs--add weight to the pro-drilling side of the equation. National security concerns--the dependence on foreign oil that, in Cheney’s words, makes it “easy for a regime such as Iraq to hold us hostage”--enter the debate, as well.<sup>40</sup>

Four months later, the administration’s response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, and its recasting of ANWR as a national security issue, would demonstrate Saletan’s prescience.

If Luntz’s advice to Republicans was to enlarge the debate over drilling in Alaska to energy policy in general, a converse decision was made to simultaneously narrow the range of possible solutions. As Stone (1989: 282) argues, “[p]roblem definition is a process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame, and responsibility.” When promoting issues in need of government redress, she says, political actors “*deliberately portray* them in ways calculated to gain support for their side.... all the while making it seem as though they are simply describing facts.” By largely ignoring the value of energy conservation and prioritizing accelerated production instead, the administration--and Vice President Cheney, in particular--encouraged American consumers to believe that they were “on the same team” as the oil companies themselves, driven by the same shared impulse.<sup>41</sup> It was a strategy that on the one hand adroitly reversed the public’s usual suspicions about the greed and

culpability of Big Oil in raising gas prices (Farhar 1994), and on the other muted criticism of the president's close ties to industry executives. After all, says Saletan, during an energy crisis "Bush and Cheney's careers in the oil industry begin to look more like expertise than like a conflict of interest."<sup>42</sup>

Finally, since those in the oil industry were acutely sensitive to the fragile nature of their corporate reputations, they pursued an aggressive public relations strategy, funding advertising campaigns that promoted good deeds to an audience of Americans eager for both affordable gas and pristine landscapes (Alsop 2004). BP's "Beyond Petroleum" and "Plug the Sun" ads, Shell Oil's "Profits or Principles" philosophy, and Chevron's "People Do" campaign all advanced corporate and environmental responsibility. While such self-promotion may have seemed absurd and even comical at times, as in the case of one DuPont television commercial that depicted sea lions applauding a passing oil tanker with their flippers to the strains of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," the subtle, cumulative effects on popular opinion of what some term "greenwashing" cannot be underestimated.<sup>43</sup>

### **Business as a Strategic Player**

We believe that the Senate's vote in favor of drilling in ANWR in March 2005 was not a result of direct business lobbying *per se*, but rather the culmination of its long-term efforts to shape the overall direction of government, and its success in framing the broader public debate. In this sense, we concur with Smith (2000: 10), who argues in his detailed and long-term study of corporate influence in American politics that the reasons "business positions either win or lose are traceable not to any kind of direct leverage that business exerts, but rather result most importantly from the impacts of public opinion and election outcomes." Within that context, three long-term strategies in particular stand out.

## **Supporting the Party of Business**

Other chapters in this volume address corporate electoral and lobbying strategies, but it is worth noting here that the “fluctuating fortunes” of business (Vogel 1989) depends in no small part on Republican dominance over the institutions of government. Business in the general sense can be more or less unified (Smith 2000), and it can more or less in favor with the American people but, ultimately, the primacy of a business agenda in American politics is linked to the capacity of the GOP to refract those values and goals through the systems of representation and governance.

In this regard, the resurgence of business since the mid-1970s, at least in comparison to environmental and other progressive values, reflects the broader regional and ideological realignments of and ideological polarization between the two major parties, especially on issues related to role of government (Shipan and Lowry 2000). More than forty years ago Schattschneider (1960: 42-42) observed that the success of business in politics owes less to any “pressure” it puts on Congress than to the fact that “Republican members of Congress are committed in advance to a general pro-business attitude.” What has changed in four decades is the degree to which Republicans are unified by libertarian conservative values on environmental and natural resource matters, as well as their overall capacity to deliver on their beliefs. Republicans have not only held onto the presidency for all but eight of the twenty-four years since the election of Ronald Reagan--thereby ushering in a reshaping of the federal judiciary--they have also controlled one or more chambers of Congress for sixteen, and almost entirely since their big breakthrough in 1994. The cumulative result is a far cry from the days when a Democratic Congress dueled with Richard Nixon over which of the institutions on opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue could lead on the environment (Jones, 1975: 175-210). The 2004 elections only reinforced Republican, and by extension, business dominance in Washington. The



breakthrough on ANWR “only happened because Americans elected a larger [Republican] majority,” said Jim DeMint (S.C.), one of seven new GOP senators who supported oil drilling.<sup>44</sup>

### **Issue Framing**

Business interests are not simply content to support Republicans, of course. Corporations also sees their influence tied directly to a widespread and fundamental societal fealty to its core belief system, one rooted in the discursive elements of free market capitalism, private property rights, freedom of individual choice, and minimal government--the language and belief system of the consumer.

“Consider the possibility that businessmen achieve an indoctrination of citizens so that citizens’ volitions serve not their own interests but the interests of businessmen,” Lindblom (1977: 202) advised. “Citizens then become allies of businessmen. The privileged position of business comes to be widely accepted. In electoral politics, no great struggle needs to be fought.” This dimension of Lindblom’s often criticized argument bears serious consideration since it speaks to the broader argument about the importance of problem definition and issue framing in politics (Stone 1988; Bosso 1994b). Indeed, the privileged position of business can be said to hold so long as its core values dominate public discourse. The famous Luntz memo underscores the importance of language, and reminds us that rhetoric, classically understood, is key to winning policy debates. Positive value frames like “choice” and “freedom” lie at the core of any discursive argument made by business, forcing opponents to devise frames that speak to similarly potent values of “equity” or, in the case on ANWR, an iconic image of undisturbed “beauty.”

Business works hard to shore up its preferred discursive frames, directly through public relations and advertising campaigns, indirectly through financial support for libertarian

conservative think tanks like American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute, Competitive Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, and the Cato Institute, not to mention their many state and regional brethren. Such strategic long-term support for the generation and dissemination of libertarian ideas has paid off with the clear dominance of the market frame in virtually every area of environmental and energy policy debate, to the point that environmentalists invariably are forced to start out by defending any government “intrusion” into the market (Smith 2000). Business also maintains its own array of peak associations like the Business Roundtable, Chamber of Commerce, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses. Even if different elements of the business community and their respective peak associations disagree occasionally on specific policy proposals (e.g., universal health care), they typically align on core values and agendas. More important, those values are promoted as naturally “American.”

### **Greenwashing**

Constrained by popular opinion on the one hand, and emboldened by political allies on the other, business interests find it profitable to play both ends against the middle by pursuing their goals privately with allies in Washington while simultaneously maintaining a green image to a citizenry that wants to balance environmental values with consumer preferences. As Alsop (2004) argues, Americans want to believe that they can have both. Business plays on that desire through donations to moderate environmental organizations and, more cynically, through “front” organizations like the Global Climate Coalition.

The issue of corporate money is explosive within organized environmentalism (Bosso, 1994a, 2005). The studiously apolitical land conservancies (e.g., Nature Conservancy and Conservation International) are by far the most successful seekers of direct corporate support, followed by more traditional wildlife organizations (e.g., National Wildlife Federation, Ducks

Unlimited) and more market-oriented groups like the Izaak Walton League. In fiscal year 2004, for example, direct corporate donations comprised eight percent of Conservation International's over \$92 million in revenues and six percent of the Nature Conservancy's \$865 million. These donations came from a wide array of corporations, among them oil giants British Petroleum, ChevronTexaco, and Conoco-Phillips, automobile makers Ford and General Motors, and major utility companies like American Electric Power and Cinergy.<sup>45</sup> The relative importance of direct corporate support seems modest compared to other sources (e.g., individual contributions, foundations), but it has tremendous symbolic value for environmental organizations that seek to project a "responsible" and "nonpartisan" image.

For environmental activists on the left in particular, corporate donations are little more than cynical ploys to "greenwash" their public images. The World Wildlife Fund, for example, accepts donations from, among others, DuPont, ChevronTexaco, Alcoa, Philip Morris, and Home Depot, the nation's largest home-improvement store operator. Meanwhile, each of these corporations was targeted for their behavior by another environmental group. Home Depot, for example, was the object of a global boycott organized by the Rainforest Action Network until it agreed to stop selling lumber harvested from endangered forests in the U.S. and abroad.<sup>46</sup> Similar charges of corporate "greenwashing" have been aimed at the Nature Conservancy for including on its board executives from American Electric Power, branded the nation's worst power company by the NRDC for its record on air pollution, and General Motors, which Environmental Defense called "Global Warmer Number One."<sup>47</sup>

Corporate money is, if nothing else, good public relations, especially when the company or industry in question might be under public scrutiny. Donations to the Nature Conservancy or World Wildlife Fund by Home Depot or Chevron cannot help but to burnish a company's image.

To critics, however, this money is an outright bribe, and some wonder how any environmental group that takes it can speak critically of corporate behavior when events warrant. For example, in 2000 the Ford Motor Company Fund (not to be confused with the Ford Foundation) gave out \$14 million in grants to environmental organizations, including \$5 million to Conservation International for a center for environmental leadership in business and another \$5 million to Audubon for bird monitoring and public education.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, Ford was being assailed by other environmental organizations for the poor fuel efficiency of its sport utility vehicles. In one particularly notable instance, a coalition of environmental groups ran ads in major newspapers that prominently portrayed company chairman Bill Ford as a grotesque Pinocchio, the wooden puppet whose nose grew each time he told a lie. Ford's fib, according to the ad, was his pledge in 2000 to improve fuel efficiency of his company's SUV fleet by 25 percent in five years, a goal toward which no progress had been made.<sup>49</sup>

### **Politics and Markets**

Whether through direct or indirect means, business gains its "greatest returns" in politics when it successfully influences the public mood. "Policies desired by business," says Smith (2000: 167), "would then become a byproduct of the strong linkages between the opinions of citizens and the behavior of elected officials." But if public opinion on issues like ANWR is ill-informed, ambivalent, and confused, *which* opinion do policymakers follow, and *which* does business seek to shape?

Scholars have long recognized that decisions reached in the voting booth differ from those made in the marketplace. In general, consumer choices are thought to reflect a miserly self-interest, while citizens are motivated by more altruistic concerns when making collective decisions for society at large (Buchanan 1954, Buchanan and Tullock 1962, Wilson and Banfield

1964, 1965, Martinez-Vazquez 1981, Sagoff 1988). When Americans are polled on energy and environmental issues, those expectations are frequently met. If the subject is placed in a *political* context--by comparing interest in a variety of news stories, by ranking political priorities, or by considering a range of policy options--environmental concern tends to rank high in the public's consciousness. However, when those same topics are positioned in a *market* context, where the cost of gasoline or home heating fuel is borne by the individual alone, the citizen quickly gives way to his alter ego, the consumer.

As the ANWR case demonstrates, however, those positions are far from static. Because of the ambivalence of public opinion and the power of issue framing, energy issues often span the chasm between public and private, blurring lines of distinction between the citizen and the consumer. On the one hand, a well-defined frame might encourage consumers to view the purchase of a fuel-efficient car as a patriotic act.<sup>50</sup> On the other, an altogether different frame might persuade citizens to personalize the benefits of domestic oil production in a way that amplifies demand for lower gasoline prices. The very fluidity of those boundaries means that the *psychology* of choice matters more than its location (Guber 2003).

In the end, we argue that business has a privileged position in American politics if and when its interests align with those of the consumer. Such an alignment does not happen naturally, given the individual's wariness of corporate power in the abstract. It is, instead, continuously cultivated and maintained. Business works hard to foster rhetorical arguments that merge politics and markets, citizens and consumers, on issues like ANWR that fall somewhere in between. For example, one week prior to the March 2005 vote in the U.S. Senate, David O'Reilly, chairman and chief executive of ChevronTexaco said in an interview with the *Washington Post*: "We'd like to see it developed. It's just another opportunity to meet a

consumer need from within the country and reduce imports by a comparable amount.” Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club was quick to counter that drilling there “would not save consumers a dime at the pump,” but the very fact that he accepted a market frame on ANWR meant that the terms of debate had long since been ceded to the other side.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, for those who want to shape public discourse on energy and environmental policy, negotiating the boundary that divides the citizen from the consumer may present the biggest challenge of all. In buying a new automobile, for example, the consumer makes choices based on preferences any behavioral economist can explain--price, quality, convenience, and performance, even simplistic attributes like cupholders and tilting-steering wheels. Nowhere do those preferences easily include ecosystem preservation, energy independence, or a host of other factors not included on the side window pricelist. Consumers seldom consider such matters, but citizens do. Of course, as Tullock (1976: 5) reminds us, “voters and consumers are essentially the same people. Mr. Smith buys and votes; he is the same man in the supermarket and the voting booth.” But he is, increasingly, pulled in one direction or another by the appeals of competing elites. To the extent that the consumerist frame wins the discursive war on issues like ANWR, Lindblom is at least half right. It is not business that enjoys a privileged position in American politics. It is the *consumer*. Corporations and their Republican allies just happen to speak the language. The practical effect on environmental policy, however, is one and the same.

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### Notes

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