

Winning Edge #45 – Finding the Right Story to Oppose RGGI



This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.

In the last two episodes of the *Winning Edge* ([#43](#), [#44](#)), we looked at how to craft memorable messaging on a specific issue. We explored how to talk about the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and how its effects play out differently in rural communities versus suburban swing districts.

Today, we're going to take a deeper dive into a different challenge: how do you find and create a compelling story to show a policy's real impact?

The Challenge: Finding the Right Story

Sometimes, a great story lands in your lap. A constituent shares a personal experience, or you hear about someone directly affected by a policy. But more often, we struggle to find the right story, even when we know the policy is harmful.

The good news is, as legislators, you hear countless stories every day, the challenge is to remember the ones that can make an impact.

A simple way to uncover stories is through the Noun Exercise from [Stories That Stick](#) by Kindra Hall. This exercise helps jog your memory by focusing on key nouns—people, places, and things—connected to an issue. By identifying these elements, you can quickly surface meaningful stories.

Step 1: Identify the People

Start by listing all the people affected by the policy. For RGGI, that might include:

- Fracking workers
- Natural gas rig operators
- Small business owners in the energy sector

- Truckers
- Families in the communities where energy jobs have grown

Write down as many as you can, and see if any specific individuals or stories come to mind.

Step 2: Identify the Places

Next, think about all the places impacted by this policy. Energy policies don't just affect power plants—they affect entire towns and industries. Some examples:

- A diner near a natural gas site, where workers grab breakfast or lunch
- A trucking company office, where drivers plan out deliveries for equipment
- A pipeline construction site, where crews are busy building new infrastructure
- A small town's main street, where local businesses grew because of the energy industry

By zooming in on specific locations, you're often reminded of something you've heard or seen.

Step 3: Identify the Things

Finally, focus on objects. Think of the small, specific details that can help paint a vivid picture:

- A truck sitting idle, waiting on work that may never come
- A utility bill, showing the rising costs families will pay under RGGI
- A hard hat, representing the construction jobs that are in danger

When you take the time to list these people, places, and things, you'll often find that a story naturally emerges. Usually it's something you've heard, someone you've met, or a specific moment that could illustrate the impact of RGGI.

Building the Story: A Simple Structure

Once you have your story idea, it's time to shape it into a compelling narrative.

A strong story follows a simple structure:

- **Normal Life** – The situation before the disruption
- **Explosion** – A change or challenge appears
- **New Normal** – The outcome or impact

Let's say the Noun Exercise reminds you of a constituent who owns a small trucking company that mostly serves the natural gas industry.

Here's how you'd build a story around it:

Normal Life:

The owner is considering buying a second truck, which is a big step to grow his business. He's built his company from the ground up and finally has cash to expand.

Explosion (The Policy Change):

As he weighs this decision, he sees news about RGGI. He starts to worry: What will happen to energy jobs? Will drilling slow down? Will my contracts dry up? Instead of buying the truck and creating another job, he hesitates. The uncertainty is too high.

New Normal:

Instead of expanding, he holds off. No new truck. No new job. The economy treads water, all because the government created uncertainty for the energy industry.

The real impact of RGGI is not in abstract statistics, but in all the decisions not made, businesses not expanded, and jobs never created.

Adding the Bigger Picture

Once you've told the story, connect it back to the larger issue:

- Pennsylvania has already cut emissions—not because of government mandates, but because of the rise of natural gas.
- The shift away from coal has happened naturally—market forces, not RGGI, are responsible for cleaner energy.

End with a Call to Action: What should Pennsylvania do?

Pennsylvania should continue reducing emissions naturally, through market-driven innovation and not government mandates. The state should reject RGGI and focus on policies that support clean energy through economic growth, not job-killing regulations. The best way forward is to let Pennsylvania's energy industry keep doing what's already working.

Bottom Line

A great story makes policy personal. Instead of debating abstract numbers, it puts a face to the impact of RGGI and is something voters and policymakers can feel, not just hear. If you're struggling to find that story, start with the Noun Exercise. Focus on people, places, and things, and the right story will emerge to bring your message to life.