

The Climate Lens - Episode 25 - Some Heroes DO Wear C.A.P.E.s: Canada's Greenwash Win and What Comes Next

00:00 - 00:20

Joe Vipond: I believe that the fossil fuel industry was registered as lobbying the federal government five times a day over the last, like 12 months. Although the industry has money and power, we have truth and people. So, we need to leverage our strengths, which are truth and people, in order to combat the money and power.

Episode opening

00:21 - 01:31

Steve Bentley: Welcome to the podcast. My name is Steve Bentley. I'm with the Calgary Climate Hub and this is the Climate Lens on CJSW and streaming wherever you get your podcasts. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Siksika, Kainai, Pikani, Tsuut'ina, and the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation of Region 3, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. We also dedicate this podcast to another group of folks that have a stake in this land that we stand on today, and that is our children, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and all future generations. I urge you to keep them in mind during this time as we face unprecedented change and start making decisions about what comes next. The opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect those of CJSW, The Calgary Climate Hub Board, or membership.

01:31 - 02:54

SB: After lying about the dangers of climate change to Canadians for at least 40 years, and some would say a lot longer, Canada's Oil and Gas industry's ongoing, dangerously dishonest practices were dealt a blow earlier this year with the passage of Bill C-59, anti-greenwash legislation that would see corporate perpetrators facing fines of up to \$1 million per day if the false representation continued to be published, handing climate organizations, and I would say humankind generally, an important if not yet entirely sufficient win. When Bill C-59 compelled, amongst others, the Pathways Alliance, a coalition of six oil sand companies in Canada, to wipe clean their websites and social networks, and Alberta's infamous petroleum propaganda house, aka the Alberta War Room, to close its private corporation facade and get folded into provincial government protection. To tell us how this all came about, where we're at and what comes next. This month's guests are Leah Temper, the Economic and Health Policy Program Director for the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, and wearing multiple hats here today, as he often does, is my good friend Joe Vipond, who is CAPE's former president and current Board Member, as well as one of your Calgary Climate Hub's founding members, former Co-Chair and current Board Member at Large. Hey, thanks for coming on the show today again.

02:54 - 02:56

Leah Temper: Thank you. It's great to be here.

02:56 - 02:59

JV: Awesome to be here. I'm really excited to talk about this topic.

02:59 - 03:08

SB: Maybe I'll start just by asking you, Leah, what prompted CAPE to be a part of working towards this legislation?

03:08 - 05:50

LT: Yeah. So, CAPE has been working on, fossil fuel advertising, for about two years now. I've been leading a campaign called Fossil Fuel Ads Make Us Sick, and we've been tackling kind of two major issues. The first is we've been working towards a comprehensive ban on all fossil fuel advertising. It would essentially be a tobacco law for the fossil fuel industry, because, you know, we shouldn't be promoting these products. We're in a climate emergency. We know that fossil fuel products kill and will kill many more people than smoking through air pollution and through climate impact, and there's no reason to continue to promote fossil fuel products when we have a commitment to phase down the use of those products around the world. Secondly, we've been focusing on greenwashing. And this is the false and misleading environmental claims coming from the Oil and Gas industry. And actually, right after we kicked off the campaign, the greenwashing from the industry really ramped up. And our approach, what we did some of what we started doing was filing complaints with the Competition Bureau against these misleading advertising campaigns. So the first one was against the Canadian Gas Association. They are claiming that gas is clean, reliable. Their advertising materials went as far as to state that gas will let you breathe easy in your home. and as Dr. Joe can attest to, there's overwhelming evidence that having natural gas, in your home, for example, gas stoves actually increase the incidence of childhood asthma. And then, as you mentioned, of course, there's the Pathways Alliance ad campaign, which is the largest industry ever advertising campaign. My understanding is that they were aiming to get billions of impressions from Canadians. And, the campaign was called Let's Clear the Air. So this is the biggest industrial polluters on the planet talking about clearing the air and that they are on a pathway to net zero.

05:50 - 06:16

SB: Yeah. And so for Joe, I know that when you went to COP28 last year, you recorded a series of videos that, the Calgary climate had posted to our socials, entitled Debunktion Junction. And so you were debunking a lot of a lot of claims. What are what are some of the, the, greenwash topics that that you hope this legislation is going to be able to tackle?

06:16 - 07:13

JV: One of the main reasons why a lot of these websites were scrubbed was because of the net-zero claims. So it's pretty clear that one of the things that you need is a plan. There's no plan. There's no actual interim targets. There's no mechanism to get there. It's being used in a lot of ways to lobby the government for funds to support their plan that doesn't exist, which involves a lot of carbon capture and storage, which also hasn't been proven at scale. And has failed in many places around the world. So I do think that focus on net-zero was what drove a lot of those, places to shut down their communications on this, which is which is sad because I would like the industry to actually have a plan to get to net-zero and to commit to that plan. But if it doesn't exist, they shouldn't be allowed to say it does.

07:13 - 07:19

SB: Leah, do you have any thoughts about the what the industry should be saying about carbon capture?

07:19 - 07:58

LT: We put out a report kind of outlining some of the most common deceptive practices on behalf of the Oil and Gas industry and this, you know, putting forward technologies that have not been proven at scale. I think we called it techno science fiction in a sense. Right. And there's

another term, that a scholar, Wren Montgomery from Ivey Business School, that she uses, she calls it Greenwashing 3.0, and she calls it Futurewashing.

07:58 - 08:00

SB: Oh, I like that.

08:00 - 09:13

LT: So this kind of refers to all sorts of claims that are taking place, far off in the future as Joe mentioned, without any sort of interim targets. And of course, it's tricky because how can something be true when it hasn't happened yet? Right? How can you actually have accountability for these sorts of claims? And the Commissioner of Competition has already put out some guidance, and it's already telling companies they should be very careful about any sort of forward looking claims and statements that they're making regarding carbon capture and storage. I mean, besides the question of technological viability is that, as a recent report has, actually I believe that was commissioned by Alberta, aMcKinsey report, stated the technology is not economically viable. Actually, it would lead oil and gas, you know, it would cost exorbitant amounts. So it's obviously, you know, a simply a delay tactic to avoid making cuts now.

09:14 - 09:15

SB: Yeah. Doctor Joe.

09:15 - 11:15

JV: Yeah, a couple more points on that. so the, the industry claims that they can reduce emissions by 95% from the stack. but actually, in regards to the clean energy, electricity regulations which are being discussed right now, they are also, other industry proponents are saying that the carbon capture and storage requirements are too stringent because there's no way they can capture 95% of emissions at the stack. So really what they're doing is they're working, carbon capture and storage both ways. and in regards to the economics of this, they actually explicitly say this because they say they need to have government subsidies in order to, in order to actually do this. so should and they call this risk mitigation so that they should not be, putting forward all this money for a technology that may or may not meet the needs of government or may or may not needs meet the carbon sequestration targets that are set out. So they want the government to take that risk on. And just for the record, the government is you and me and everybody else around here. So they want the public to take that on. And the final really important element of the carbon, CCS discussion is that it only manages 20% of all the emissions. So in the oil sands, 20% of emissions come from the production and transportation of these fuels. The other 80% comes from burning it. And there is zero plan for the industry to deal with this. So when they say net-zero by 2050, what they're actually stating is net-zero from our emissions, which we've already stated is dubious that they will achieve that, and they neglect all the other emissions from the system, which is basically us getting in our cars and burning it in our internal combustion engines and other sources of combustion. So, that doesn't fly. We have a climate crisis. We need to reduce emissions across the board by 2050, not just in the production of one industry.

11:16 - 11:20

SB: The Climate Lens will be right back after this word from our sponsors.

Sponsor break

11:22 - 13:00

SB: We'll get back to the show in a minute, but first I want to acknowledge some of the Calgary Climate Hub's great sponsors that help make The Calgary Climate Hub ticking. Skyfire Energy is western Canada's trusted solar provider since 2001 that's providing real leadership on solar for over 20 years now, starting with the vision to bring the magic of solar power to the world for a stronger, healthier and more sustainable global community. Hub's sponsor Greengate Power has successfully developed renewable energy projects of unprecedented scales in North America and specifically right here in Alberta. As technology continues to advance at a phenomenal rate, Greengate Power is committed to offer more economic, environmentally sound and reliable ways to continue to meet growing global energy needs. Eavor Technology is enabling local energy autonomy everywhere. As a next generation geothermal company, their Eavor-Loop solution represents the world's first truly scalable form of clean, baseload or dispatchable energy. We also want to thank the Gasonic group, your indoor air quality partner. Gasonic is on a mission to ensure everyone is breathing clean air. They test air quality with the best trained technician and best monitoring technology to ensure healthy air from parkade to penthouse. And finally, we really want to thank CJSW for finding this show a spot on Calgary's only campus and community radio station. Broadcasting at 90.9 FM from the University of Calgary, Alberta, CJSW is your source for music, news and events. Tune in today, donations and volunteering opportunities are available. Okay, back to the show.

13:00 - 13:17

SB: Welcome back to the Climate Lens. So, maybe I'll just pan back for a second. And, Leah, maybe you could just tell me a little bit about, about CAPE and where you've come from and what the mandate is. And then maybe a little more about how, how this victory came about.

13:17 - 15:01

LT: So the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment is a physician led organization, that aims to protect people's health by protecting the environment. Our board is made up of doctors such as Joe here, who's a previous Director of the Board. and we work on a range of environmental issues. So this specific amendment to the Competition Act. We've been working on it for about a year and a half when the government launched, consultation into reforms of Canada's competition policy. We initially asked for sustainability to be integrated into the purpose clause of the Competition Act itself. because as we know, our economy is embedded within our ecosystem. So competition law needs to take that into account. And jurisdictions around the world are already beginning to change how they think about competition to reform their laws. And if Canada doesn't change, you know, its businesses will no longer be competitive on the world stage. But the area where we made the most headway was regarding the greenwashing. So, there were essentially two main areas that the provisions have changed. Now there's specific amendments related to greenwashing, which means that companies that make a green claim have to be able to back up their claim. It's simple truth in advertising.

15:01 - 15:22

SB: I want to get a sense as far as the legislation as it stands. Leah, I got a sense from reading your, response to it that there is still significant work that needs to go into this legislation for it to be meaningful. There's a few things that you feel like these are must haves for this to be really impactful.

15:22 - 18:36

LT: Yeah. So we had made some, some further requests, regarding the the amendments. I mean, one thing is about disclosure and transparency. So the companies now, if they are investigated or accused of deceptive practices, the onus is for us and they have to show that the claims can be backed up. Previously, the onus was on the bureau or on activists or interested parties to to prove that the company was lying. So that that's a relief, but what we had asked was, and some jurisdictions are already doing this, so in France, when you make an environmental claim, the product, or the ad would need to have a QR code and you would be able to through that QR code, all the data and supporting information would be available to the consumer immediately. And, you know, if they need to back it up, if they need to have the data and the proof. Why not share it? So that was one of the the asks we had made. As regards the guidance, I mean, we believe that there are certain practices which are just deceptive in all circumstances and they should not be allowed. One of them that we already discussed is futurewashing, making future environmental or forward looking claims without a verifiable plan to back them up. Another one is generic claims using terms such as green, carbon neutral, environmentally friendly. People really do not understand what those terms mean and they should not be used. Another one is claiming carbon neutrality or net-zero based on carbon offsets. We know that offsets often don't work, and they don't work in order to, store carbon in the long term, as we might have noticed from the forest fires that Canada has been experiencing. So there's sort of a range of these deceptive practices that we hope to see are never allowed. And the most important one, I think, is that highly polluting industries such as the Oil and Gas industry, if they are allowed to advertise, they shouldn't be allowed to make any green claim at all. Fundamentally toxic, highly polluting products. They are not green, and they shouldn't be able to claim that they're green. It's misleading and deceptive. And one example of that, Norway, which is the world leader in electric vehicles. They ruled, I believe, in 2007 that no car, even electric cars, can call themselves green or environmentally friendly because cars are really not green or environmentally friendly. And this actually has not stopped them from becoming the world leader in EV adoption. So those are kind of some of the things that we're going to continue to push for.

18:36 - 18:58

SB: And so, Joe, the some of the pushback on this from, oil companies and their champions are that this greenwash legislation will hurt environmental activism by not allowing companies to talk about environmental claims. I'm sort of giving this to you on a tee and letting you punch it right out of the park, if you'd like.

18:58 - 20:17

JV: Well, they totally can can do that, right? They're 100% allowed to put in great environmental plans, and celebrate those, if, if they have the data to back up their claims. I think what's been really grossly obvious is by scrubbing everything that a lot of the foundations upon which their claims are based are, it's sugar. Right. Like, it just shifts underneath the sand. It doesn't really have any substance to it, you know, I think one of the things that's been really helpful with this, beyond the concrete aspects of the impacts of this is the conversations that this has precipitated. Right? Like when this came about, there were op-eds, there were conversations around the water cooler. I overheard conversations about this in bars and in coffee shops. And it really made people, have to wrestle with that concept that our fossil fuel industries, may not be truthful and that the claims that they're making, the future that that exists for them may not be amenable because they don't have a plan to get to a climate friendly world.

20:17 - 20:51

SB: So you mentioned, the consultation period, Dr. Leah. What are what are some of the other things that are coming up on the calendar that are important for this legislation? And I think the big question, for our, for our listeners and for the Calgary Climate Hub is how can we help make it so this sticks, and that the oil companies and other businesses, we haven't even talked about the banks, but that Canada's big industries have to tell us the truth when they're talking about climate?

20:52 - 22:47

LT: Yeah. So the first one, the one with Canadian Gas Association, it's been under investigation for more than two years. So we are waiting for the results of that investigation. And that's one of the issues that we identified is that, you know, these investigations can take years. And in the meantime, the deception continues and the ad campaigns continue. And there's almost no redress. We've also tried, you know, another avenue. Your listeners, if they do continue to see misleading and deceptive advertising campaigns, there's also another body, that is called advertising standards. And you can also submit complaints to advertising standards. So if you do see ads, sponsorship of oil and gas companies that is upsetting you. Please feel free to contact us and send it to us at CAPE. We're always looking, for examples, and aiming to spot different disinformation that's coming through from the industry. So send it along. The public can also participate in the consultation process. And, yeah, you can follow our campaign updates. We are pushing still for a Fossil Fuel Advertising Act, which would ban all advertising from the fossil fuel industry. And there's lots of opportunities to engage on this file and to show your support. so those are some of the issues that are coming forward into the fall.

22:47 - 23:31

JV: And if I can speak more generally, Steve, I always like to say that, although the the industry has money and power, we have truth and people. So, we need to leverage our strengths, which are truth and people, in order to combat the money and power. I might be off by numbers, but I believe that the fossil fuel industry was, registered as lobbying the federal government five times a day over the last 12 months. And and I don't know how many times you lobbied the government or myself, but it's a lot less than that. Certainly CAPE is not getting that kind of access. So we need to organize, organize, organize. I think the Calgary Climate Hub. I'm biased, by the way.

23:31 - 23:31

SB: Me too.

23:31 - 24:08

JV: I think the Calgary Climate Hub and the, and CAPE are both exceptional organizations that are doing great work. and there's two things that people have a value. They have time and they have money. So if you have more time than money, then volunteer, and if you have more money than time, then you donate and both of our organizations could use strengthening. I think that before it was closed, The Canadian Energy center had \$30 million a year in a budget. And, neither of our little organization have anywhere close to that. So we need to bolster our organizing efforts. And and every single individual that is listening to this can, can help us up.

24:08 - 25:10

SB: What I'll close with here is that we've mainly talked about oil and gas today. but, you know, there's nothing that limits politicians from spreading dishonest, claims. What's going to be the fix for some of those things? Like, I was thinking about the media today. I was forced to because the National Post, as of today, published, by their publishers. It doesn't say a writer, but the

National Post view today is save the planet with Canadian oil and gas and, you know, so I was looking at that and preparing for the show. I was just thinking, like, is there a way that we could force a disclaimer that says, being facetious, but the world is on fire, and Canada's oil and gas are a big part of that. Some kind of disclaimer for things like this that are still coming out of our foreign-owned national newspapers, the National Post.

25:10 - 26:21

JV: Yeah, it's a hard one, especially with our media landscape being devastated. And, those people who have an incentive to tilt the media landscape are buying up all the media, whether it's Jeff Bezos or or Elon Musk or, I'm not sure who owns the National Post. I think it's a hedge fund in the United States. So, another thing our listeners can do is support great journalism because, again, the whole landscape is tilted towards fossil fuel and neoliberal interests. so I'm just going to riff off The Tyee, the National Observer. you know, The Globe and Mail is better, support our CBC, which is being threatened to be destroyed by a future conservative government, and, and, locally, The Sprawl is doing great work, CJSW. We need to value reporting. We need to pay for reporting. And this idea that we can just get good information for free on the internet is not serving as well at all.

26:21 - 26:32

SB: Leah Temper of CAPE and Joe Vipond of CAPE and the Calgary Climate Hub. Thanks so much for coming on today and thanks for this important, I consider it game-changing work.

26:32 - 26:47

JV: Thanks to the work that you do, Steve. It's it's really important to hear this out there on the air, especially in the on the front lines of climate, which is the city of Calgary, the home of Canada's energy industry. We need to be having these conversations.

26:47 - 26:54

LT: Yeah. Thank you. This has been great. And stay tuned for more.

Conclusion

26:54 - 29:27

SB: Did you know that some of the world's most impactful climate activists are seniors? True story. And we see it right here in Calgary all the time with the Eco Elder volunteers who are hosting a Seniors for Climate mobilization on National Seniors Day, October 1st, in conjunction with other seniors groups clear across Canada. They want to remind you that along with our children and grandchildren, we face a climate emergency. We need faster and better climate action. Later is too late. You can find more details about the October 1st Seniors for Climate event in the show notes. A fulsome slate of legislation that hammers down on greenwashing and disinformation from our largest polluters is a critical step in our shared path to a climate smart and safe and, yes, prosperous Canada. But it doesn't start and finish with oil companies. Our banks should behave very much the same way. The pathways Alliance has. You might be surprised to learn that RBC, the Royal Bank of Canada since 2015, has consistently been one of the world's top five fossil fuel financiers, except for 2022, when they were the number one fossil funder on the planet. But you'd never know that from the many glossy and cuddly green and flowery commercials from which they claim they're hard at work, helping accelerate our transition to a greener net-zero economy. These two things simply cannot both be true. RBC and every one of Canada's top five banks are funding climate mayhem. They know it, and they shouldn't be able to lie about it anymore. What about our national media? I wouldn't ever want to muzzle Canada's editors, journalists, columnists, or pundits, but I'd sure love to see a few

disclaimers and disclosures. How about disclosures for commentators like the late Rex Murphy, who for decades took money from Big Oil while feeding Canadians climate denial, doubt and disinformation? Did you know Andrew Coyne, one of Canada's top political journalists and TV faces, was in charge of an organization that gave out \$6.4 million to climate denial groups? Is that not relevant information to any climate story or policy he covers? Of course it is. Disclaimer I like what's happening with Bill C-59's anti-greenwash legislation. I want more of it and Canadians deserve it.

Episode ending

29:27 - 30:02

SB: Well, that's about it for this episode of The Climate Lens. I thank our guests, sponsors and volunteers that make this happen, and of course, you, the listener. Calgary Climate Hub is a volunteer-led nonprofit organization that unites a diverse group of Calgarians committed to working together to support meaningful local action on climate change. We represent a variety of communities in the streets, cultures and causes. We believe that a broad and diverse range of Calgarians and organizations need to be engaged on climate crisis to develop impactful solutions that fit our unique political and economic circumstances.