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Eric:

Hi, I'm Eric!

Salima:

And I'm Salima! Welcome to another episode of The Shared Mic!

Eric:

Today, our guests are Victor and Matthew. Victor is a scientist and a local climate change activist and Matthew is also a local climate change activist.

Salima:

Victor and Matthew will be discussing the impact of environmental change.

Victor:

Good evening, Matt.

Matthew:

Hello, how are you doing?

Victor:

Good! So we've talked a little bit about climate change and global warming before. So we'll probably talk about a few things that you've, you've heard before, but if you don't mind, I'll start and tell you a little bit about my story. And then I'd like to hear your story and how you got involved and interested in climate change.

Matthew:

Sounds good.



Victor:

So I started on this journey of, you know, being active about climate change in 2006 when Al Gore published "An Inconvenient Truth." So even though he's not a scientist, it was a pretty decent book, especially for those days.



Victor (cont'd): And after reading it, I became quite concerned. I didn't become alarmed yet, but concerned about, about the whole issue. And my--given my background is in sciences--I looked at it analytically and I looked at that hockey stick and I thought, well, I think I should get involved. I can go on, but I want to hear a little bit, you know, what drew your attention to this field at the beginning and how you got involved with CCL? And, and maybe tell, tell us about the CCL...the Citizens' Climate Lobby at the same time?

Matthew:

I'm pretty young. I'm only 21. And climate change has been a pretty alarming issue for as long as I've been aware. I didn't really grow up in a world where there wasn't any sort of a climate scare. So it's been pretty concerning for me since I've been old enough to have concerns. I didn't really--it was something I always cared about, but it wasn't anything I thought to do anything about.

Because it kind of seemed like an insurmountable challenge. So it was something I worried about quite a bit, but I didn't do anything about it until I was on the internet--I don't remember where--but it was James Hanson who said, "the best thing that you can do as an individual for climate change is volunteer with CCL."

So, I signed up to volunteer without having any idea of what it was and they told me all about it and I thought it was a great idea. And now I'm doing my best to try and lead the, the local chapter and get some movement and some carbon pricing and have a world to live in for longer than, than 10-20 years.

Victor:

So that's a wonderful start.

Matthew:

Absolutely.

Victor:

It's going to take time and I'm so delighted that somebody, your generation is, is involved. I have two sons around your age, both in the sciences, they have busy lives, but they don't have the same...they don't feel, the same urgency as I do. Sometimes they just think, "oh, what's the point it's too late" or, "I've heard." And I'm sure you hear that from some people, because, at times, the problem seems overwhelming to, to all of us. So it's really important that we do something about it now because climate change has been very visibly occurring. All we have to do is look at the news,



listen to the news or read the, read the paper. There's something almost every day, that's somehow related to climate change, because it affects all aspects of our lives.

Matthew:

Yeah, for me, I think climate change is a symptom of sort of the larger cancer in our society that has been unchecked capitalism.

Matthew (cont'd): And I think that things, things like climate change are just a result of this, this system running rampant, uncontrolled, and just having all the influence over everything in everyone's lives. And I think it's really important to move away from this system that clearly isn't sustainable for the planet or for the people living on the planet. So that's my whole deal. Like, something has to be done.

Victor:

I agree with you. And I'm not a big capitalist. I'm more of a socialist and then capitalist, however, capitalism is...will be with us for some time. And maybe, I mean, I really like the kind of capitalism they have in Germany where it's, it works together with, with a social conscience

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

And, and because we will have to transform our energy systems from burning fossil fuels to alternative energy, I think the capitalist system can work very well in that transition. Seizing all the economic opportunities as we transform our economies.

Matthew:

Yeah?

Victor:

I wouldn't want to change everything because we have to have a pragmatic or realistic approach to the changes we seek, right?

Matthew:

Well, and there's also, I think a misconception that a greener economy is a weaker economy and that's, that's not necessarily true. It's, it's just a different economy. And in a lot of cases, it could be a much more vast and diverse and actually sustainable economy. My issue right now is nothing that we have is sustainable.



Like the way we're currently running things in the world isn't, isn't going to last. It's just impossible. And if we don't move to something more sustainable soon, it's going to be too late. I don't think that means that we, like, have to throw our current economy in the toilet, in the transfer from natural gases to a greener energy system. It doesn't, it doesn't have to be so black and white, but it is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Victor:

I agree.



Matthew:

There's money to be made from green tech essentially. And, you know, more about that than I do. You, you, you know, more about, about the science behind everything that I do. I'm, I'm more so just on the political side.

Victor:

Well from everything I've read Matthew, the biggest obstacles, which is kind of the next topic I'd like to discuss with you is it's not "the technical" because we, we've made advances in some, some of the technical aspects of this transformation.

For example, just to give you an example, the cost of wind is now cheaper than coal and the cost of solar energy is similar to that of energy...electricity produced by coal. The problem is that companies have invested billions of dollars into projects, producing energy or electricity or oil with existing infrastructure. So they feel they want to get as much out of it as possible while they can. So, there's a lot of pushback from vested interests and big companies and all the lobbyists who are friends of those big, big industries.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

So that means the industries like solar energy and wind, they're struggling. It's amazing how well they've done technically, but they're still struggling with the trillion-dollar fossil fuel industry.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

Which is supported by lobbyists and right-wing governments. So that's the biggest battle is there. Not the technology, it's the whole psychology.

Matthew:

Well, and that's the thing. There has to be a will. And we're in a really difficult era right now because digital misinformation is running rampant and everyone is receiving different information. And it's, it's, it's hard for a lot of people to get on the same page because we're not receiving the same info.



We're not, we don't believe the same things that we, we don't--we're almost to the point where we don't exist in the same realities. And that's a really scary thing that we kind of have to figure out how to move past.



Matthew (cont'd): I know a lot of that is just conversation, but if, if you don't believe in the science and you don't believe in climate change, you're, there's not going to be much of a will for you to give up the thing that has given you everything.

Like, we have, like, generations and generations of people who everything they have is bought and paid for by big oil. And if you don't even believe that this is a reality, if you don't believe that this is happening, it's, it's hard for me to convince you to just like, take a stand against that or to accept a different way because that's, that's all, you know.

And you're receiving all of this...I don't know what to call it. I don't know if it's psychological conditioning. I don't know what the word is there, but like you're, you're receiving some information that is not factual. And I think we all kind of fall into that trap, but it it's, it's, it's something that we're going to have to figure out alongside climate change. Like there's a lot of issues that I think are kind of running parallel and this information is a big one of them like we have in our...go ahead.

Victor:

Misinformation is a big problem. And the better educated we are, the more likely we are to be critical thinkers. So that's an issue before we get too depressed about all this. I just wanted to mention there's lots of signs of hope too.

Matthew:

Absolutely.

Victor:

And I've been following some of the technological developments, even just in the last couple of weeks, there has been a lot of news about the potential for hydrogen as a source or conduit for energy. And of course, politicians have maybe overblown it a little bit because there's no silver bullet. All the experts say that there's no silver bullet in fixing the problem.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

There are many solutions, there's at least 10 different things we have to do in order to leave a better planet behind. So hydrogen is one of them, but not all hydrogen is the same. There is just regular hydrogen. If you get it from natural gas, it doesn't help the environment. Now, if it's green, hydrogen or blue hydrogen...blue hydrogen is



already much better because it involves carbon sequestration of the carbon dioxide produced when you extract hydrogen from natural gas. So there's a lot of potential in blue hydrogen. The best would be green hydrogen, which would involve using electricity from alternatives, like solar.

Victor (cont'd):

And using that electricity to split water into oxygen and hydrogen. That'd be totally green hydrogen, but that's a little bit further down the road and it's quite expensive. And then there are some people, particularly conservatives, for some reason, they'd be pushing nuclear energy and SMG small modular, or SMR's..."Small Modular Reactors." Have you read about those? The SMR's?

Matthew:

No.

Victor:

It's been in the news quite a bit. Just check out SMR's. They may be overblowing the possibility because SMR's are still several years down the road. The experts say we have seven, maximum ten years for significant climate action, if we want to avoid positive feedbacks, killing our chances of restoring our planet.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

So nuclear energy is only as--I don't think, personally, it will be that significant--it's expensive. And there's a lot of resistance because of accidents like Chernobyl and Fukushima. It's a hard sell to the public. And in order to give those alternatives a good chance, we need to price the carbon that we put into the air. Right now, there's no price that we pay, except for our health, for putting carbon into the air from coal plants and burning gas. We're already doing that. So carbon...and you, maybe you can explain carbon pricing because that's what CCL does. Can you explain to us what revenue neutral carbon pricing is and how you understand it?

Matthew:

Well, I have some notes here when asked questions like that. I don't really like to just freestyle because I want to make sure that I have the information correct, but...I mean, to sum it up, basically, my understanding is essentially just that the large corporations of the top that are polluting the air pay a tax and that tax is sort of shuffled back down to us here at the bottom. But I wouldn't, I don't want to just



simplify it that much. I'd like to find the actual, the actual info that I have from CCL in here.

So, basically Canada's carbon pricing policy. These are the improvements that we're looking for. We want the price to rise past 2022, when it halts at \$50 a ton to reach our Paris target climates, it has to reach to \$220 a ton by 2030. It needs dividend checks, and our income tax needs to be harmonized nationally. We need full cooperation in the Canadian Confederation of Provinces and Territories and Political Parties. That includes us here in Alberta. We need our climate targets and a bucket list of accountability measures in trying to under national law.



Matthew (cont'd):

So, we just kind of have to get everyone on the same page here, including here in Alberta, which is kind of challenging in a lot of ways.

Victor:

It is. Yeah, it's a big challenge because we're, we fail to diversify our economy. The last person in Alberta, who, who was really a leader in this area and who made a difference was Peter Lougheed because he, he saw the importance of putting some money aside. But ever since then Alberta has kept this tax is artificially low.

Matthew:

Yeah.

Victor:

Using the oil revenue to pay for healthcare and having an education and having no sales tax. So now we're, we're paying for it because we have a structural deficit in this province, and it's very difficult to bring in a sales tax because "tax" is a bad word. And that's the same problem with the carbon tax, even though it's revenue-neutral, all the conservative politicians fail to mention that a lot of that revenue from carbon taxes will go back into the pockets of middle class and low income Canadians, but that's what we're fighting against. Then I agree that we will, from what I read, we'll need, uh, by 2030, a carbon tax between \$130-200 per ton in order to meet our Paris climate targets. Which aren't even that high, well probably it should be even higher.

Matthew:

Well that, and that's the thing is the Paris climate agreements, if anything, have been criticized for being too lenient. So the idea that our carbon pricing would stop it at \$50 a ton by 2022 is a, is a little worrisome, but it is a step in the right direction.

Victor:

I want to mention a study because we're on economics. Back in 2004-5, there was an economist with the London school of economics. His name is Nicholas Stern, S-T-E-R-N. He produced a report on the cost of climate change. You might want to Google it and look it up.

Victor:

But he said that if we take, and this is back 15 years ago, he said, "if we take strong climate action, now it will cost on the average 1 per cent of our GDP on a global basis."



Matthew:

Okay.





Victor:

But he also said, "if we don't take climate action soon, it'll cost between 5 and 20 per cent of our GDP." So, it will cost us, wait, the longer we wait, the more it will cost us.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

If it's not too late. So there's a lot of economic reasons to take action sooner and take stronger action now, rather than wait till there's even more damage from forest fires and melting Arctic. But I don't want to awfulize because I can, I read the news, I'm sure you, you can think of bad things that are happening.

Matthew:

Oh, absolutely.

Victor:

And the other thing is that the people that are suffering the most from climate change are the people who've done the least to cause it--people in the South Pacific Island, the people in the Sahel Desert in Africa. Their water and food sources are already being affected.

Matthew:

Yeah.

Victor:

And we're not there yet. And that's Canada, it's still not too badly off. And that's part of the reason people don't take action yet because it's human nature to not, not to worry about things that are happening on a few hundred kilometers from you, even. People don't even worry about what's happening in Ontario.

Matthew:

Right.

Victor:

But if it's happening, if there's a flood right there and you're living in High River Alberta, and there's a big flood, then you're going to, you're going to notice. Or if your house has burned down in Kelowna, and sure those people have noticed.

Matthew:



Right.



Victor:

So it has to be right in terms of time and space. Unless it's really close to us, we tend to ignore it. And that's, that's human nature. I think.



Matthew:

As much as we disagree, I think we all kind of all have the same idea of what kind of a world we want to see, even if we don't kind of fully understand each other.

Victor:

Yeah, so Matthew, that leads me to another topic I wanted to mention is so this is what George Marshall says. And also I will just mention my favorite climate science communicators, Katharine Hayhoe. A Canadian atmospheric scientist, who actually lives in Texas. And she's married to an evangelical minister, so that makes it even more interesting.

She, she produces the YouTube series, "Global Weirding" and her latest 17-minute Ted talk is awesome. So Ted Talks, 17 minutes, Katherine Hayhoe. I urge everyone to listen to it. She's, she's one of my champions. Are there some people that you noticed, either scientists or activists that inspire you?

Matthew:

So how do I say this in a way that doesn't sound really corny? I'm more so inspired by everyone around me. Because I think that it's, it's everyone that you meet and interact with that they're going to be the ones at the end of the day, who do something to change it. There's a lot of people worth admiring, and there's a lot of people we're respecting, but I can't think of any names off the top of my head that inspire me more than just everyone I see on the train.

Victor:

Well, speaking of people who inspires me, you're one of the people that inspires me, Matt. So do you think we've covered what we were going to discuss tonight Matthew? Is there anything else you want to mention?

Matthew:

Um, the only thing that I think I want to mention is just that um... And you kinda touched upon it a little bit, a few times and I kind of tried, but I kind of tend to go back into the negatives of things but it's just that, like...There is still a lot of hope. And I mean, if there wasn't, we wouldn't be wasting our time doing this. Like, we don't have to give up. There is still hope. There's still a possibility of a future that works for all. We just have to kind of put our heads together and find it. And I think that's a possibility.

Victor:



Yeah. There's plenty of hope, but it's also important that we take action now and talk about it.

Matthew:

Yup!



Victor:

And I think the two of us had a nice chat and we will, we will continue our discussions in the coming weeks and months.

Matthew:

Of course! Absolutely!

Victor:

And spread the word, spread the word!

Eric:

Again, a very, very interesting conversation, a few things that struck me. I've been following the environmental movement for quite a few years. And one of the big things that I followed has been the economics of it. Years ago, solar power, wind power. They were feasible, but they were so expensive.

And we're at the we're at the point now where both of those, the cost of them has, has come down below the cost of fossil fuel. But so many large companies are so invested in the use of old systems of fossil fuels that it's taking them longer to pivot.

And the question in my mind is how long can they take to pivot before they go out of business? And I'm looking at, you know, for example, electric cars, the traditional cars, there was a lot of resistance by the traditional car manufacturers to start trying electric vehicles. Whereas companies like Tesla have taken off like a storm and are garnering a large market share.

Salima:

And I think it's interesting that you used the word "pivot". I think we are looking at government and companies and we're asking them to pivot, but they're very, short-term focused in that they're looking to the next budget or the next election or the next quarter. And what I find super inspiring about this climate change conversation is it's young people. It's young people talking about this long game, their future, and what they want. And we're watching this moment in history.

And I think we keep coming back to this in this season about, "this is a moment in history." And I think young people are creating power for themselves in a system that ignores them. And I think it ignores them because they don't vote and they're, they're not investors. And so I think the system ignores young people, but young people are coming together to say, "our future is worth talking about, our future's important." And so there you're creating power in a void where there was no power



for them. And I think it just gives me lots of hope for the future and where we're headed.



Eric:

And that brings us to the end of Season2! The Shared Mic is an initiative of Age Friendly Edmonton, which is a project between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

Salima:

We want to thank all the folks who generously shared their stories this season. We so appreciate your patience and time while we figured out how to record virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. We also want to thank everyone who helped make season 2 possible. Including Age friendly Edmonton admin team, the Leadership Table and The Changemakers.

Eric:

We also want to thank Matthew Matyszczuk, our producer and April Magee our Communications and Marketing Strategist. And we can't forget Travis and Gord Matthews! Thank you so much for composing and recording our theme song!

Salima:

Thank you to all of our listeners! We really appreciate you tuning in week-after-week and sharing our podcast with your friends and family. Take care, be safe and we hope to talk to you soon!