

Corporate Political Responsibility Taskforce

Expert Dialogue with Bill Shireman & Madeline Para

Shireman & Para #1

Elizabeth Doty: Lovely to see all of you. My name is Elizabeth Doty, and I'm the director of the Corporate Political Responsibility Task Force. I'm delighted to be moderating today's dialogue with Bill Shireman and Madeline Para. The Corporate Political Responsibility Task Force, or CPRT, is an initiative of the Erb Institute, a 25 year long partnership.

Between the Ross School of Business and the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan. Led by Managing Director Terry Nelodov and Faculty Director Tom Lyon, the Erb Institute is known for its leadership in three areas, teaching and learning, business engagement with groups like the CPRT, and scholarly and applied research.

The CPRT's mission is to [11:17:00] help companies better align their approach to political influence with their commitments to purpose and values, sustainability, and stakeholders. As we're seeing, corporate political responsibility is an increasingly pivotal element in managing stakeholder trust, addressing systemic issues, and rebuilding public trust in institutions.

I'm delighted to share a little bit about just the incredible people we have with us today, both as our featured speakers, and I think you will all see we have some incredible people in the conversation in the room as well. So first I'll start with Bill Shireman. He's referred to as a serial social entrepreneur, a policy innovator, and a conflict mediator, which ends up being important in this work.

And he's known for bringing together capitalists and activists, conservatives and progressives, and other unusual bedfellows to overcome challenges that often divide them, where it seems that there's no common ground or no solution. For example, he leads a nonprofit consulting firm. Future [11:18:00] 500, where he brokered agreements between Mitsubishi and the Rainforest Action Network, and 400 other companies to create the world's first corporate supply chain standards for sustainable forestry.

He also helped broker a 2008 agreement between Greenpeace and ExxonMobil for the exact same federal tax on carbon. Think about that. And we're going to revisit that. Why didn't that break through? He is currently working as a co chair with Trammell Crow, which you may know from the real estate industry and as a philanthropist, to mobilize solution citizens, which we'll hear a little bit more about, and companies to tackle political polarization and revitalize democracy.

Using innovative methods like deliberative polling and deliberative democracy methods proprietary data and analytics to connect with solution citizens who want, want progress and want things to be resolved. He also teaches leadership and negotiations at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and has authored seven books.

The latest with my favorite publisher, Barrett [11:19:00] Kohler called In This Together, How Republicans, Democrats, Capitalists and Activists I'm so glad that you're here, and we'll get into our first question in a moment. But first, just welcome and thanks for making the time. Thank

Bill Shireman: you so much. And for everybody for spending some time on the line today.

We always hope that these conversations will lead to more action afterwards. So hold us

Elizabeth Doty: to that. And then Madeline Parra, who I just met in Dallas and was doing Just delighted to talk with and thought this would be a really great combination here. And also very timely as we talk about climate policy in the next weeks.

I think it's going to be back on the agenda. She is the executive director of citizens climate lobby, which is a nonprofit nonpartisan grassroots advocacy climate change orgasm organization bringing a respectful nonpartisan approach to design a. Designed to create a broad, sustainable foundation for climate action across all [11:20:00] geographic regions and all political inclinations.

It has been supported by climate scientists like James Hanson endorsed by former secretary of state. George Schultz has posted bipartisan sponsored legislation in 2018 to well, before that, but most recently, 2018, 2019, 2021, all with equal support. R's and D's, I believe, at least 2018 and 2019. So there's some really interesting lessons to be learned from this.

And I would love to look that up as we get into the conversation. Madeline worked her way from the local Citizens Climate Lobby chapter in Madison, Wisconsin, starting in 2011. There have been people who've been. Pouring their life energy into this for some time has assisted 10 other groups and getting started in her home state of Wisconsin and growing her role as the organization has grown.

She's committed to their approach and I heard this when we were in Dallas really came through of empowering people from all backgrounds and bringing a deep emphasis on respect. [11:21:00] And in addition to her CCL experience, Madeline draws upon a diverse career in housing, co op management, political activism, anti racism training, peer mediation, counseling, and education.

And other than that,

Madeline, if I could turn to you now, I'm going to go into how solutions happen, and I would like to focus right now on climate policy. I know in Canada, there's a model for Dividend tax and dividend on carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. I'd love to hear your sense of what enabled that or any success stories you'd like to share.

And to go from there, what you would do now as climate policy is back on the, you know, the agenda or, or it's still alive on the agenda. What would you do now, especially a business person? That is a

Madeline Para: deep, big question, Elizabeth. So Canada is a wonderful success story and we do have Citizens Climate Lobby [11:22:00] in Canada.

And like in the U. S., they were single mindedly focused on a fee on carbon emissions, carbon fee, and a rebate back to households to help cushion that energy transition that results. And the folks in Canada It's a small number, actually and I think their politics are somewhat different from ours through persistent relationship building with their government prime ministers.

Members of Parliament. They, they over time managed to introduce this idea and build support for it. And they adopted it in a kind of unique way of being Canada. So the, the federal government basically gave the provinces that told the provinces they had to do something, but if they did nothing, they were going to have the carbon fee.

And dividend. And so there's some variety there. So, so that but that really did come about because [11:23:00] of a sustained persistent relationship building. That's what we've been working on in the United States too. And, and you actually I will full disclosure overstated our success early on in that we, we have had a bill with.

Introduced multiple years embodying those prices. They were they were never half and half Republican and Democrat. But they were bipartisan up until 2021. And actually, that bill is entirely with a huge number 96 Democrats co sponsoring it. So, so the divisiveness in the United States has been tough to crack.

What we got 50 50 on was a caucus In the house called the Climate Solutions Caucus, and we developed that because the lift of getting Republicans on to a carbon pricing climate bill, it was too big of a thing to start with with them. And so [11:24:00] so and that's part of the path is like, if what you're asking is too big, then step back and find something smaller, you can ask.

So our goal there was to get Republicans and Democrats into the room together talking about climate solutions. And that's borne some fruit, but it we're still, um, very challenged here in this country to get major climate legislation passed. We some things happened through the infrastructure bill. But as you probably know, the, the democrat.

Only process of budget reconciliation is stalled at the moment.

Bill Shireman: You can see the challenge that we're facing with us where if you're, if you're trying to advocate policy in an environment where party leadership dictates largely party line votes, it is simply easier to get 96 co sponsors. If you have a Democrats only approach to it.

And after November, it'll be easier to get, get a Republicans only support [11:25:00] with 96 Republicans you know, on a different issue. Philip asks a very good question, and thank you for that Philip Milburn. What's the group that we most need to reach out to, to reach common, common ground on climate?

And those are Republicans and conservatives. They are the center right and the right. They are. At least three segments of the conservative or Republican community, the establishment Republicans who tend to be the pro business oriented you know, I guess I would call them more common sense, but they are Thank you.

Business and corporate oriented, the conservative Republicans who are who have their core principles and the mega Republicans who are the more populist Trump based, we need to have supporters within that community. And we need about 5 million of them, frankly, on the, on the national basis to.[11:26:00]

And around a million in battlegrounds, so that we have the political representation. To decide Republican primaries so that whoever is selected to run in competitive districts has a pro climate solution orientation. Now they're probably not going to support a carbon price right off the bat because there's a process to get there and it takes a little thinking.

Most. Republicans. Most people think there are simpler, simplistic solutions that we can go to for climate. And there are some fundamentals, certainly. So if we can get Republicans to come aboard the broad concepts of we got to do, we got to take action on climate. It is a human caused problem and humans need to act on it.

And conservation of nature is probably the central thing that brings everybody together. [11:27:00] And Clean Energy Choices also has broad support. Once you're inside, it becomes

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very obvious that when you look at the numbers that you know what the best thing that we can do to make the first two happen is to put a price on carbon, and it's the lowest cost way to get that done, and it's logical.

So, the first step with them is get them aboard. And then help people understand that reality once they understand the reality politics will gradually find a way to do it. And there are some really interesting new ideas in that space for getting it done. So, like Madeline says, let's Take the first step, get them four.

We need 5 million solution Republicans for

Elizabeth Doty: climate. So I wanna follow up on this one. As far as the barriers, and Bill, you and I talked in Dallas about the five whys you know, applying a business diagnostic method to, you know, we have this barrier. We can't get co-sponsorship across the party lines.

What, why is [11:28:00] that? And then just keep unpacking. Well, why is that? Well, why is that? Is the primary barrier, and I'm speaking now to your negotiating skills, both of you, is, is how would you weigh the barrier of loss of face or having in the current environment, the gloating that would happen if someone conceded and said, I need to sponsor this.

I'm thinking about sponsoring a climate related bill is, is how do you wait that as a barrier compared to actually not thinking we need. The, you know, the climate policy or all the way down to the carbon fee how would you play the political costs versus the actual concern around the issue?

Bill Shireman: Structurally using my rational brain, structurally, what we need in the nation to correct course is a third political force, not a third political party, [11:29:00] Because we know what happens with third political parties, they play spoiler, they pull votes from whichever side they're closer to, and then the other side wins.

But we need a third force of common sense problem solvers from that middle 70%. And the, and the function of that third force is to decide races between the other two, and to decide them on the on in favor of the common sense problem solvers, that takes advantage of the achilles heel of the current divided political system, and that is the competitive district, the battleground, the political battleground.

All those races that you hear about that are decided by 1% often of the vote or less. We've just seen a couple of them in the last couple of days when we have 5% or so of the voters in those communities. Who are demanding solutions and they will only vote for the problem solvers and they [11:30:00] get to decide all of those cases when they decide all those races that changes the political dynamics in all of those districts, so that the winners of the primary need.

The votes of those problem solvers. And the best place for those problem solvers is to be active in the primaries. And the primaries to be most active in are the Republican primaries when it comes to climate. So that's why I say focus on recruiting climate, pro climate Republicans in the primaries, in competitive races because those are the folks that we want to make the decision on election day.

Got

Elizabeth Doty: it. And I see how that goes to what was said in Dallas. I think Joe Pinion said it was the, that this is a way to win, right? That makes this a way to win.

Madeline Para: I, I think Bill's right on about needing to activate the currently Quiet voices [11:31:00] to vote and and explain why they're voting that that centrist vote is extremely important and it's in the swing places.

And if you look at the country as a whole, we are so evenly divided, I think, addressing things like gerrymandering would be very, very helpful to and making sure that people can vote. Continues to be very important. The other thing I would add is that I believe that Republicans are increasingly seeing the need to address climate.

Not not all but significant numbers. And we are seeing more support for that from party leadership. And because I think they look ahead and they look at young people, young conservatives are there. are an extremely important voice. And one survey had 75 percent of them supporting a carbon fee. That, you know, it's like way different from the older Republicans.

And so, so they know they, they know they need to address this. [11:32:00] They will address it faster. And this is one of our goals. The one way our legislative team puts it is we were Republicans who are walking in the right direction and more of them are. We want to help them walk in that direction and walk faster.

And often what happens from the climate movement is just blame. Like, why aren't you, that's not enough. Why aren't you doing it faster? That's just greenwashing. And so our, our goal is actually to help them feel a reward for every step they're taking in the right direction and then encourage the next steps.

But those voters getting active from the center will help that vastly and we really want to be recruiting

Elizabeth Doty: there. Gotcha. And I think that I think the the other part of my question was, do we need to start thinking about a golden bridge as a way to not look like you have capitulated if you do shift to supporting climate and those young conservative voters is one way having the common sense middle is another way.

Do you [11:33:00] see any other ways to have it be. Not, you know, not to rub your face in it if you decide this is a priority issue. Let's bring it back

Madeline Para: to business, you know, business and the economy. These are very important concerns, you know, and not doing climate change at the expense of the economy is, is a central issue for conservatives.

And so this is a place where businesses can make a huge difference.

Elizabeth Doty: Perfect. That's, that's great. And that makes good sense. And it kind of fits the dialogue that we had had with some of our task force members. So I'm going to hit pause on that. We'll come back to more practically what business people could do.

Allison, can you help bring us up to speed on what you're seeing and who might want to speak? So in this section the main comment that we got in the chat was from Ann Drum about gerrymandering, which Madeline did address, but we'll If you guys would like to go into more detail about like the impact on gerrymandering and how many actual competitive races can [11:34:00] be like influenced by you know that common sense really the majority is the common sense that could be a good place to explore.

Bill Shireman: Well Anne is absolutely right but gerrymandering and closed primaries have made competitive elections relatively rare. And we need to fix that. My feeling is that, you

know, when I think about bringing Republicans aboard, both climate protection and. election reform, democracy reform, it's speaking to where they've been all along and reminding them where they've been all along and maybe giving them a chance to get some dig, get some digs in so that they can take their pride forward.

For example, the vast majority of hunters are big conservationists. They want to conserve land. [11:35:00] They've been there for A hundred years, 150 years, you know, since Abraham Lincoln's administration and probably before then. They've always been conservationists, but they feel like they've been tossed out of the community.

They can't be environmentalists because environmentalists mean Green New Deal and Green New Deal means socialism and government takeover of the economy. And so we're, we got to stay away from that. Imagine the power of NRA members who. You know, we're asking their lawmakers to take action on climate.

That's a different dynamic and it's aiming not just for the moderate Republicans who we need, but it's aiming for the mega Republicans, the populist Republicans. I think the same can be true on election reform. Now, this is speculation. The right, the extremes on the right are dedicated to the idea that the last election was stolen from them.[11:36:00]

Whether they believe it or not, it's a part of the community. And I think that if folks had activated a campaign on behalf of Al Gore. Who also who probably really did have an election stolen from him or richard nixon back in 1960 to go back You know, this is not a new it's not a new thing. You probably have a lot of people on the left who also You know, we're sure that the election been stolen.

But the reality is, as as an indicates that most every election is stolen. So because of gerrymandering and because of closed primaries, elections are structured so that they don't produce a democratic outcome so that they produce an outcome that benefits the parties that are in power and creates a dynamic where the more extreme voters or extreme candidates Have the advantage and we end up with two bad choices to choose between so maybe it's time that we acknowledged [11:37:00] That you're right Elections are stolen from us from both sides But it's not the way you think it's not that all the ballot boxes are being stuffed or unstuffed It's that the rules are written this way to give power to The Democrats right now and the Republicans after November, perhaps.

And that we got to work on that together. So let them be right, but define a little bit more accurately why they're right and where they're right. Very

Elizabeth Doty: interesting. And you mentioned how few races are competitive right now. I noticed and now I would like to shift into the business focus. For example, I, I saw and I hear the logic of it.

But most business scorecards for where their PAC money goes scores very highly for current leadership positions or current committee leadership positions party leadership or committee leadership so it's skewed towards incumbents. That's [11:38:00] already right there makes it very difficult for any new entrance, right?

If you were to get problem solvers to run or independents to run, good luck with the way companies right now feel that they have to make choices around their PAC spending, let alone their treasury spending.

If you would like to continue with this, I'm going to show a little bit of where we can go from here. So if you go to our website, sign up for updates once a month about our next speakers

and other conversations like this or some special events. The next dialogue will be June 23rd with two experts on recognizing the indicators of authoritarianism, regardless of party or faction or affiliation, trying to help companies recognize where they need to actually take a stand and where they should watch out for culture war.

Issues like taking a position. We have a resource list that is continually growing tools and suggestions and examples and cases there on the website, and you can follow us [11:39:00] at the Erb Institute and then from today's conversation in this together America on how to get to the climate of unity program through in this together, which offers a way to get involved and then citizens climate lobby and the U.

S. take action element of this. So, may I? turn it to you all. Madeline, can I go to you first? Let me specifically invite you to speak to those government affairs sustainability or you know, c suite officers. What would you recommend as an action? I would suggest

Madeline Para: banding together to figure out things like how to organize the chamber of commerce.

Elizabeth Doty: Succinct and powerful. I love it. Great. And Bill, what would you add?

Bill Shireman: What I would add is send, send me a note. Send Bob Stout, who's on the, on the call here, a note. We're working together to give companies that opportunity to expand deliberative democracy experiences. [11:40:00] And we think that that's fundamental, but also in the enlightened interest of the, of the companies,

Elizabeth Doty: all the companies.

Thank you very much. I think that would be great. And I would love to be a fly on the wall support that. I think that would be great. You can be in the

Bill Shireman: room, Liz. Yeah. . I love it.

Elizabeth Doty: Be a fly in. In fact, one idea that came up in the in the conversation in at your wonderful summit in in roundtable in in Dallas last month was the idea of proposing a deliberative democracy method for the trade associations.

You know, what are your members thinking and saying, how do your members talk to each other? Imagine chambers of commerce talking to each other about where climate should fit relative to other priorities that business cares about, along with polarization and all these other issues, right? The foundations, as you mentioned, Bill.

This is fantastic. Thank you all for for joining the conversation, for moving it forward, and for sharing your thinking with the people in this growing network. Please keep going. Thank you for all you're doing, and I hope, I look forward to [11:41:00] collaborating with all of you as we go forward.

Thank you again for the

Madeline Para: invitation. I totally loved it, and the discussion.

Bill Shireman: everybody for participating in this, and keep the faith, and keep it moving. Keep going. Keep going. Keep going. We're on the right path.

