

# Corporate Political Responsibility Taskforce

*Expert Dialogue with Tyler Duvelius*

## Tyler Duvelius - Module #3

**Elizabeth Doty:** [04:22:00] Hello and welcome to the Erb Institute's Corporate Political Responsibility Task Force Expert Dialogue Series. My name's Elizabeth Doty. I'm the director of CPRT, the task force, and I'm delighted to be moderating today's conversation with Tyler Duvelius of the Conservative Energy Network. 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 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 [04:23:00] in managing stakeholder trust, addressing systemic issues, and rebuilding public trust in institutions.

I'm delighted, Tyler, to have you with us. Thank you for joining us today. Thank you so much for making time just so you all know, I met Tyler in Dallas for EarthX last year when we spoke, and we've stayed in touch through the In This Together America leadership circle, working on building broad based cross partisan understanding of the need for action on climate and clean energy.

Just a little background on Tyler. He's the director of external affairs for the conservative energy network, which is a national network of state based organizations. Promoting clean energy innovation. He has worked tirelessly to educate, train and organize conservative grassroots groups on the need for clean energy issues and support while being an active participant in clean energy policy discussions locally at the state level in [04:24:00] Ohio and federally.

And he has had extensive experience on the campaign trail, receiving the John R. Kasich Award for Outstanding Male Ohio Young Republican of the Year in 2015 and 2017, working in the Kasich administration on the boards and commissions department. So all of that stuff that makes such a difference that we don't hear about the news and isn't glamorous.

But you really see how things are done and he's told me some stories and written up some some reports on how things can be distorted or lead to the common good. Welcome, Tyler. Very glad to have you with us today. And thank you. Great.

**Tyler Duvelius:** Thanks for having me, Elizabeth. Excited for our conversation.

**Elizabeth Doty:** I just saw that Speaker Pelosi will not run for another term as Speaker. We're going through a change in leadership. We're going through a change in Narrative around clean energy. I think it's widely recognized as you're saying among the electorate, as I'm

hearing it, what do you see as possible [04:25:00] going forward and what could business do to help make it possible?

We're hearing a bit of a difference between public flogging of business for being concerned about environmental as well as social and governance issues and private. So what do you think is possible? What can business do? What should business ask for?

**Tyler Duvelius:** When we first kind of talked about this, I had fully anticipated coming on here and, you know, being a mile high and loading with, you know, what a wonderful election day Republicans had.

And that's simply not the case, right? And again, I'm happy to share offline my thoughts on why we just ran awful candidates. And in a sense, it gives me a hope for our democracy that our voters are actually picking Can it pragmatic candidates over just, you know, straight ideological crazies on particularly on my side, but on both sides of the aisle.

And I think that's encouraging to get a whole other conversation knowing that we're going to have a slim majority, some democratic majority in the United States Senate. [04:26:00] A very slim Republican majority in the United States House of Representatives. The last person I would want to be in the United States of America right now is Kevin McCarthy.

He has quite the job on his hands. It's going to be hard. It's gonna be really hard to pass big overarching bills like we saw in this last Congress where we pass both the I-I-I-J-A and the IRA and chips. That's just not gonna happen. One of my colleagues who was on a call that I was on yesterday is so astutely pointed out, and I, I think that he's probably right in saying this is that.

What we're going to see probably, both at the federal and state level, are a lot of little technical bills that are going to go in and clean up some of the implementation of the IIJA and IRA, which is really important. Two, three weeks after IIJA was passed, I was sitting next to one of the lobbyists who helped write the IIJA, and his candid response to me when I said, okay, this is great.

We were talking about broadband on that particular day. I said, this is great. How [04:27:00] are states going to be able to access this money? And he looked at me and he said, I have no bleepin idea. And he's the one that wrote the legislation. So, you know, we've, we've made these, these great investments. Now, now it has to be, how do we tap into them?

How do we actually put them into practice? So, I think the more boring the legislation, as weird as it sounds, the less we're seeing on Instagram, call your senator today to tell him to pass the IRA. The less we have of that, probably the more bipartisanship. We're going to get done. They're going to be those boring, mundane bills.

I think business should be demanding that really. They, they shouldn't be demanding that the, the representatives or the senators or the governors that they're supporting that they're getting on MSNBC or FOC I think that they should really be rewarding policy that is, is moving. Moving the, the, the playing field in a direction where business can actually continue to invest in this space.

What [04:28:00] that looks like. It's just money matter and politics. Yeah. It does. There's not, not much else that matters, but we can be good stewards of that money as we give it. We can demand that our corporate leaders are giving money to candidates who are trying to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

And that should be something that, that we as consumers celebrate. by scanning our credit card at those establishments as opposed to others. But also it's a very, I was sitting down with a leader of the Cincinnati business roundtable ahead of the midterms. And he told me that he has noticed that his government relations heads and the CEOs of these large and mid cap companies, they're really starting to be much more discerning in who they're writing checks to, if they're writing checks at all.

It used to be the business community was just a blank check. For the Republican candidate and that's not the case in that [04:29:00] particular case. We were talking about the race for Steve Chabot, who was the first incumbent Republican to fall on election night. And I think that's an example of a politician that had veered very far to the right.

And his business community left him. And what we saw out of that is Democratic member of Congress. In the Cincinnati area for the first time in 14 16 years. And so, you know, I think we're starting to see a little bit of that. But Elizabeth, to get back to your question, what can businesses do?

They can demand smart, pragmatic policy be passed and they can reward that behavior with political contributions because we're naive to think that if that we're going to be able to end the influence of money overnight. As consumers, we should be rewarding those companies that are doing that with our pocketbooks.

As well, we should be, and vice versa, those that don't live up to that, they should be hearing

**Elizabeth Doty:** from us. Gotcha, gotcha. And it's interesting because [04:30:00] the shift in what you plan to say and where we are now perhaps gives business more leverage. We know that articulating really extreme views that are not pragmatic.

If we have time, I want to come back to your diagnosis. But this idea of pragmatism and, and you said early on about what's tangible. That people can see and feel that that would be growing or responding to needs in their state for business to use that and say, look, if we get to work, you know, and you maybe don't subpoena us for our climate net zero commitments, we will invest in your state if you make it.

Clear how to go after this old new direction in this moonshot We will do it and we will include your state and we want to work together I think business is all too eager to get to the root issue, which is creating opportunity for people Rather than fighting over who's not getting the opportunity.

Let's let's invest. So do you think they're in a position to use that? leverage to, to make a bit [04:31:00] of a, of a positive bargain.

**Tyler Duvelius:** Absolutely. I think we're already seeing that. And, and, you know, I'll be a homeowner and I'll use Ohio as an example. We landed IBM's computer chip manufacturing right, right here in central Ohio.

It was a great, I have a lot of friends who work in the economic development space. I used to work in the economic development space here in Columbus, very exciting time, IBM demanded, demanded that chips be passed. Before we saw one ounce of tangible investment. And you know what? Rob Portman supported it.

Mike Carey, who's a MAGA, I mean, self identified MAGA Republican. He supported the CHIPS Act. Joyce Beatty, who's a Democrat, supported it. Rob Portman, a moderate Republican, supported it. Sherrod Brown, a very liberal Democratic Senator, supported it.

And so what we saw were truly you know, the political leaders of the state putting aside their political differences because they recognize that this investment in their state was too great.

And one of the things that clean [04:32:00] energy and industry in general needs to do a better job at is quantifying what their investment looks like and putting into, you know, I forget the exact. Numbers that were being thrown around with the IBM deal. But wind and solar need to say, Hey, we're getting ready to invest 4 billion in your state.

We need X, Y and Z to make that happen. And when they do a better job of that, you look at West Virginia and the natural gas industry. They have a state natural gas museum. In West Virginia, they have a fact. They literally have a statewide natural gas industry sponsored festival. There's a pageant queen.

I mean, there's a royal court. There's, you know, they get out scholarships for this stuff. People understand the benefit that natural gas and coal bring to West Virginia, which is why Joe mansion doesn't move on those issues, right? The clean energy industry, those that are [04:33:00] wanting to advance climate solutions need to do a better job of, of talking about what those benefits are to the community and then celebrating them you know, we're, I mean, I would take it.

There's a lot of Midwesterners here on the call. We love high school football in the Midwest, right? It's been 15 years for me, but I can still close my eyes and tell you every sponsor around the scoreboard of my high school football stadium. Why don't we have clean energy companies, you know, next to the dentist?

Board there at the stadium. Why don't why don't we have public messaging in those small conservative communities, talking about the benefits of climate that that seeps into the identity of who people are. And so that's how we really take this conversation. In a way that our politicians can't ignore because a, you know, when they get the spreadsheet from from their economic advisers, they just can't ignore it as as [04:34:00] responsible politicians, responsible politicians.

But they also are hearing it from folks when they travel to Lebanon, Ohio, when they travel to you know, to Ypsilanti, Michigan when, when they, when they're hearing that conversation, then. That's when I think you really will start to see the tide

**Elizabeth Doty:** change more. So if we think about where there's hope or where there are leverage points, where to move forward next, right?

In this really gnarly transition that we've been talking about. This reminds me of one of the themes from the In This Together leadership circle of at the local level, we really, it's much clearer where we have shared interests. And I know that In This Together has actually done things civic engagement efforts to help the communities prepare and deepen their relationships before they get the onslaught of the money from out of state or out of, out of district to try and sway them or turn them against each other.

And you're seeing the economy and that local football, the community. The irony here is that IBM doesn't do any political spending. [04:35:00] They work very, very closely with those relationships, right? So I think. Part of what I'm hearing you say is do that hard work of the benefit to, at the state level, at the local level, of solving these problems and investing for this next era.

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I know there are counter forces to everything you're talking about and the possibilities we're talking about here and also the election itself. Let me turn it to the group. I imagine we have lots of comments here. Isha, let's open it up.

**Tyler Duvelius:** Yeah, I think those. The theme that we're seeing emerging for the third section of today's dialogue is the consumer perspective.

So I'm going to invite Amy to ask her question about how do consumers discern between, you know, companies who are doing what they're advocating for and those who are not. So what is the balance? What are some strategies that we can sort of equip ourselves with going forward to be able to discern better?

I think that, you know, one of the things we have to, and we're, we're [04:36:00] seeing this. Now, particularly with younger generations. Right. We're able to, to kind of not only sniff out mal corporate practice, but we're, we're able to disseminate that that information to others. And what that's doing is it's not only creating a more informed citizenry, but it's allowing us to Everyone to have a louder voice.

And you know, again, I, I think the government's place in this is to protect us from immediate. Concerns. You know what? Right? We can't. You have, for example you have commonplace setbacks for wind and solar. Because you can't a car can't go off the road and crash into a wind turbine. Right?

That's why you put them back. You know, so many 100 feet and that's that's a commonplace thing that kind of keeps the general welfare. Safe, but as [04:37:00] consumers, I think it's up to us to be educated. And and to hold those corporations responsible, and I think there's a couple of different ways to do that.

I think one is, you know, getting on, you know, I'll sound like Jake Tapper here, the tick tock and and, you know, getting on the Instagram and Twitter but, you know, and calling out and voting with our pocketbooks. But we can also play in shareholder democracy. And in corporate democracy when it comes there, we were starting to see this with with some, you know, Exxon has had some issues at shareholder meetings where you know, look, my grandfather worked at General Electric and for a long time it, you know, get the shareholder voting form after I inherited some shares from him and, you know, filled it out and didn't give it a second thought.

This is who the board recommends. Great. Well, let's start looking at who the board's recommending and are, are they going to steer those companies in a way that we as not only shareholders, but we as consumers want that to go. And [04:38:00] that's going to start demanding real change because there's nothing a board of directors wants to do other than lose their power, right?

They will stop at anything to do that, including listening to, to the demands of, small but mighty uprising in their shareholder elections.

**Elizabeth Doty:** Thank you, Tyler. And this this kind of gets me to a point that's been in the back of my mind around language. We started with it right and framing terminology and in the environment we're in now that really determines whether a conversation continues or not.

Whether you can actually go in and explore things. One of the things I'm struck with as you, in your last comment, the power of getting to know the companies you do business with,

that you invest in, that you work for and, and expecting. I mean, some of the transition you talked about, if we didn't have a price on carbon would come through.

Looking at a company's externalities and responding, right? And yet, currently the ESG debate is framed as overstepping, right? Whereas I've heard [04:39:00] one CEO of an investment management firm saying, This is just information. to allow stockholders, employees, and customers to make decisions the way we think the free market should work.

Is there another way to language that? How would you respond to that, you know, those two different takes on this idea of ESG as data to inform people's participation or some kind of coercion or

**Tyler Duvelius:** overstepping? You know, when you're a company looking for a loan or for financing, right? From another private company.

It is entirely within their right to ask whatever they want to ask about your business, right? You go to apply for a mortgage, they look at your credit card statements, they look at your spending habits, all sorts of things. And that's, that's all fair game. What has gotten us in trouble is kind of going to the extremes when it comes to ESG, right?

It's, it's not just, you know, hey, are we meeting certain goals? We want to know who the state. Of Ohio, the state of Michigan is doing business [04:40:00] with right to saying that we absolutely 100 percent will not do business with any company that you know, has any involvement with, you know, has coal at any part of their their energy strategy.

That's that's tough. That's tough. And, and, and when you drive straight to one side, one extreme of the argument versus another, you're going to alienate people along the way. And that's where, you know, when we look at, at some of these. Divestment movements that are out there. I understand you know, on principle that we don't want our tax dollars going towards something that, that we might not agree with, right?

Or, or something that, that we just hold, both the right and the left are guilty of it, right? There's plenty of Republican states where they don't want their tax dollars going to a pro choice organization, for example, right? I think both of those are, are misguided. And are putting our own [04:41:00] interests ahead of ahead of common interest.

And I hope that that's 1 of the things we haven't done as great of a job as as I could have throughout this. But 1 of the things I really want to stress here is that. If we're going to have meaningful action in terms of carbon reduction, we kind of have to use that old marine adage, slow is smooth and smooth is fast, right?

This is, this is going to take some time if we're going to do it right, but when we do it right, that change is going to be around to stay. And in my, in my view you know, I've been doing this work for a number of years now. We have to find that common ground. We have to be able to listen to each other and being willing to meet each other where, where everyone's at.

And it's not, it's, by the way, it's not just our friends on the left meeting those on the right, where they're at. It's also us on the right being curious and learning more about things like environmental justice, learning more about you know, things like what does a zero [04:42:00] carbon future 100 percent clean energy future look like?

And so we have to be willing to have some give and take there. And



**Elizabeth Doty:** so in a future life or in our next meeting in Dallas, I'm gonna I'll go into some additional exploration, how to enable that, because I have seen that be the fastest possible way. And I've also seen that get diluted and delayed and obfuscated and then.

We lose the momentum. So Isha.

**Tyler Duvelius:** Oh, I think one question that we didn't really were able to get to during the dialogue is portent to national security arguments. and even economic arguments. And I was just curious to understand, or should we focus on national security and economic concerns and really not focus on the impact of climate change on society when we're having these conversations?

What kind of risks can prioritizing the former create? Sure, absolutely. And Amy, real quick to you, your comment. I did see it in the chat [04:43:00] there. If I, if I insinuated that banks can't vote with, with their investments, that's not, not how I intended it to come off. I think that's certainly within, within their right to, to ask the questions of ESG.

Isha, thank you for your question. I do think national security is A really big point that folks are just now starting to open their eyes to particularly on the conservative side of things. One of the questions we asked in our poll was how has the Russia Ukraine war affected your view on, on energy policy.

And you know, really we, we heard and folks could select a number of different options is. It stresses the need for us to have access to reliable American made energy, of which clean energy is a massive part of that strategy, and it can help bring us to, you know, to hasten that transition. But also it talked about the importance of ensuring that not just America, but really.

Western [04:44:00] civilizations are not having to be beholden to countries that are currently standing adverse to, you know, our democratic principles and way of life in the Western world. And so I do think that's an interesting way for us to approach this conversation here at home, that this is a hot, a real world issue that's going on right now that we're seeing play out in real time.

And I think you can couple that with with jobs in the economy. But, you know, one of the maybe last things as we come to time here to think about, you know, Thanksgiving is next week, commercially means we almost made it through 2022 and, you know, as we sit down at the table next week, we're all going to have different reasons for being there, right?

For Thank you. Some, it's going to be the turkey or the mashed potatoes or the cranberry sauce for, you know, our grandmothers. It's going to be, you know, bringing the family back together under one roof for, for me personally, it's the wine. It's always the wine. We all have [04:45:00] different motivations for sitting at the same table and, and, but we're all enjoying the same.

And I think that we can use that as a way to think about this, right? There are going to be some of us that come into this space because We're worried about climate change. We want to see carbon reduction. There's going to be some of us that come in from an equity from an E. J. Perspective. There's gonna be some of us that come at it from a jobs and economy perspective.

There's gonna I have sat with three and four star generals who are adamant supporters of clean energy because they've seen, you know, firsthand back in the nineties about the importance of clean energy to national security. So let's sit down at that table. We know

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we're all at the same table. We're trying to achieve the same goal of having a memorable meal in this case of having clean air, clean water, clean future for all of us.

Let's not look at why we're coming to the table. Let's just celebrate that we're at the table. And from there we can build from that.[04:46:00]

**Elizabeth Doty:** If you want to take this further, there are several ways to go forward. Reach out to us. I've got our email addresses in the lower right there. Either if you'd like to join as a company, decision maker, government affairs, sustainability, strategy, execution roles. Let us know and help us think this through and build the frameworks we're going to be building for the next year.

If you have a network that you'd like to join to amplify the message and elevate opportunities for action, let us know. And or if you'd like to be a stakeholder advocate expert affiliate, let us know and we'll keep you in the loop for focus groups or feedback and input. Coming up, we're kicking off year two of the task force on December 16th.

It'll be an exciting time to move into how do the ERB principles apply. To corporate political practices and or specific issues and or review the herb principles and consider joining us as we launch in December or a second round in March. We have another expert dialogue next month. We'll be with the interfaith council.

Corporate [04:47:00] Responsibility. Sorry, ICCR, I use it all the time. So it'll be a shareholder perspective on businesses impact on stakeholders and the planet. We have an updated resource list and a newsletter that will be expanded and improved over the next months. If you want to follow up with Tyler, I highly encourage you to stay in touch.

This, these are really important avenues for collaboration and momentum. Conservativeenergynetwork.org. Tyler, so appreciate the thoughtfulness and constructiveness of the way you're describing the reality and what might work. So thank you all. And we'll call that a wrap for today. Thanks so much, Tyler.

**Tyler Duvelius:**

This was a great conversation. Thanks, Terry. Appreciate it. Elizabeth, thank you very much. Appreciate it.