

A 'grassroots' group ran Facebook ads against the oil and gas emissions cap. Canada's most powerful oil lobby paid for them

By [Natasha Bulowski](#) | [News, Energy, Ottawa Insider](#) | September 19th 2022

#9 of 9 articles from the Special Report: [The Influencers](#)

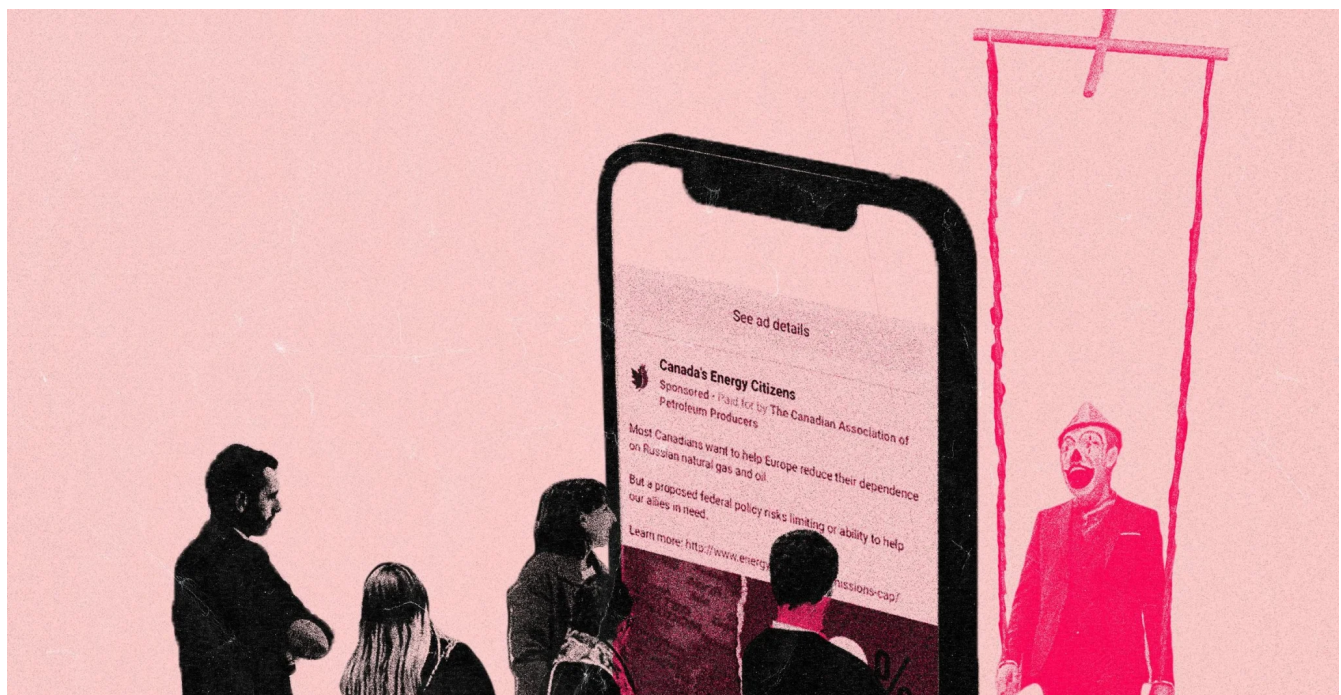


Illustration by [Ata Ojani](#)

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Canada's most powerful oil lobby group is paying for Facebook ads urging Canadians to oppose greenhouse gas emissions limits on the oil and gas industry. Only the ads aren't coming from the lobby group — they're posted by a self-described “grassroots” oil and gas advocacy group.

The ads, launched Sept. 9 by Canada's Energy Citizens and paid for by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), warn that imposing a cap on the industry could reduce Canada's oil and gas production and “harm workers.” A link leads to [a petition](#), which argues “the world has changed.” It also cites global energy security and a “struggling Canadian economy” as reasons an emissions cap is an “unrealistic” solution.

For the most part, the ads target people in Ontario, Alberta and, to a lesser extent, B.C., according to the Facebook Ad Library. The data reveals CAPP spent more than \$23,000 on ads posted by Canada's Energy Citizens about “social issues, elections or politics” from Sept. 7 to 13. From June 2019 to present, that figure exceeds \$500,000. Ads that link to the petition were viewed on a screen approximately one million times collectively, according to the data.

Canada's Energy Citizens
Sponsored • Paid for by The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

Most Canadians want to help Europe reduce their dependence on Russian natural gas and oil.

But a proposed federal policy risks limiting or ability to help our allies in need.

Learn more: <http://www.energycitizens.ca/emissions-cap/>

72% of Canadians want us to build more energy projects, export our vast resources to Europe, to break their dependence on Russian natural gas and oil.

Source: Marmot Economic Institute

Canada's Energy Citizens
Sponsored • Paid for by The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

Canada has the natural gas and oil the world needs. But a proposal by the Federal Government risks shutting in Canadian production when the world needs it most.

Have your say on capping Canadian natural gas and oil:

<http://www.energycitizens.ca/emissions-cap/>

Canada is a world leader in natural gas production.

Country	Production (Billion Cubic Feet)
US	~1000
Russian Federation	~700
Iran	~300
China	~200
Qatar	~150
Canada	~100
Australia	~50

But we have built zero natural gas export facilities.

Country	Exports (Billion Cubic Feet)
Australia	~100
Qatar	~100
US	~100
Russian Federation	~20
Malaysia	~10
Nigeria	~5
Canada	?

IT ISN'T TOO LATE. If we have the will we can get them built. **#WILLTOBUILD**

Canada's Energy Citizens

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Canada has the natural gas and oil the world needs. But a proposal by the Federal Government risks shutting in Canadian production when the world needs it most.

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RUSSIAN DOMINANCE IN 2050? The world will need lots of natural gas in 2050. So who will be making it?

Annual Natural Gas Net Exports by Select Regions (2010-2050)

Russia and OPEC will command **60%+** of the global natural gas market in 2050.

Year	Russia	United States	Middle East	Canada
2010	~5	~5	~5	~5
2015	~10	~10	~10	~10
2020	~15	~15	~15	~15
2025	~25	~25	~25	~25
2030	~40	~30	~30	~30
2035	~55	~40	~40	~40
2040	~70	~50	~50	~50
2045	~85	~60	~60	~60
2050	~100	~70	~70	~70

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, International Energy Outlook 2020
Canadian Energy Regulator, Canada's Energy Review 2019 Four-Block Natural Gas Producers

CANADA MUST HAVE THE WILL TO BUILD

Canada's Energy Citizens

[HTTP://WWW.ENERGYCITIZENS.CA](http://www.energycitizens.ca)
Take Action!
Send an email now

[HTTP://WWW.ENERGYCITIZENS.CA](http://www.energycitizens.ca)
Send an email now
Have your say!

[HTTP://WWW.ENERGYCITIZENS.CA](http://www.energycitizens.ca)
Send an email now
Have your say!

Screenshots of some Facebook ads posted by Canada's Energy Citizens and paid for by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers directing Canadians to a petition opposing an emissions cap on the oil and gas sector. Screenshot compilation by Natasha Bulowski / Canada's National Observer

Capping emissions from the oil and gas sector was a key campaign promise of the Liberals. In July, the government published a paper outlining [what this could look like](#). The details and timeline of the cap will be announced by early 2023, according to the federal government. In March, the federal government released a climate plan that included a target for the oil and gas sector to reduce its emissions 31 per cent relative to 2005 levels by 2030.

Despite many oil companies going public with their own emissions reduction goals, CEOs and industry association leaders have taken to the opinion sections of publications like the *Globe and Mail* and *CBC* to lament the tight timeline of the federal government's targets. Members of the Pathways Alliance, an organization of six large oilsands companies “working together to address climate change,” have advertised their commitments to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 and a desire to help Canada achieve its climate goals.

The petition and ad campaign launched by Canada's Energy Citizens mark a stark departure from that type of messaging, says Greenpeace Canada senior energy strategist Keith Stewart, who brought the ads to *Canada's National Observer's* attention.

What people are reading



Justin Trudeau and Canadian delegation attend Queen Elizabeth's funeral

The group's argument that Canada should be the one to provide oil and gas to the world is simply “good old-fashioned climate denial,” said Stewart.

“The way I read it is they're saying: The world has changed, there's too much money to be made, so let's let the future burn and make as much money as we can right now.”

At a glance, the Facebook ads from Canada's Energy Citizens look like just that: a campaign by a group of concerned citizens. But the truth is more insidious, said Stewart.

“This isn't just, you know, regular Joe or Jane who's expressing their concerns,” Stewart told *Canada's National Observer* in an interview. “This is an organized push by public relations firms who are working on behalf of the wealthiest and most powerful companies in the country.”

After decades of downplaying the risks of climate change and flat-out denying it, the oil and gas industry has changed tack to use modern marketing techniques that are “arguably far more insidious,” according to a [new report by the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee](#). Among the tactics mentioned are “falsely depicting industry as joining the fight against climate change” and “engineering astroturf ‘citizen’ groups to advocate for industry interests and defeat legislative proposals.”

In 2014, CAPP created Canada's Energy Citizens, modelling it off a U.S. front group started by the American Petroleum Institute, political economist Gordon Laxer wrote in his December 2021 [report on Big Foreign Oil](#). The website for Canada's Energy Citizens is run by CAPP, uses the same phone number and even appears to share a media relations email with the industry association: media@capp.ca.

The group's website professes to provide "a membership of over 500,000 grassroots Canadians" with tools to stand up for the country's oil and gas sector.

Neither CAPP nor Canada's Energy Citizens responded to requests for comment by deadline.

"(Oil and gas companies) use front groups like this to try to make it seem like an authentic grassroots push but also to keep the companies' names out of it, let the industry association do the dirty work," said Stewart.

"This way, you know, their logo isn't on this petition but they're paying for it ... it's their dues that fund CAPP and there's no way something like this comes out of CAPP without the major players being OK with it."

Suncor, Imperial Oil, Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Cenovus and Shell did not respond to requests for comment by deadline. These companies and others, pay membership dues to CAPP, which in turn can be used to advocate for the industry through lobbying and marketing efforts like this.

Stewart says these types of astroturfing activities are concerning because citizens don't realize oil companies are actually the ones writing these "grassroots" messages and calls to action.

In marketing, you want your target audience to think they're getting a message from someone like themselves so they feel taking action is in their best interest, he said. CAPP, through Canada's Energy Citizens, is trying to make something written by a public relations firm for oil companies seem like it's coming from family and friends, said Stewart. "And it's not."

CAPP taking a hard line against the oil and gas emissions cap will not change the federal government's promise to Canadians, federal Environment Minister [Steven Guilbeault](#)'s press secretary Kaitlin Power said in an emailed statement to Canada's National Observer.

Power noted receiving "a couple mass emails from both sides of the debate."

The statement acknowledged oil and gas demand will decline and says the oil and gas industry can get on board if they invest now because competition "will get fierce" and low-cost, low-carbon energy will win out.

"A cleaner, brighter future of good, sustainable jobs, affordable clean energy and a more stable climate is achievable if the oil and gas industry invests now," it reads.

The solution to both the climate crisis and the current energy price crunch — driven by Russia's war in Ukraine — is to move faster and further on the transition to renewables, and it terrifies the oil and gas industry that people realize that, said Stewart.

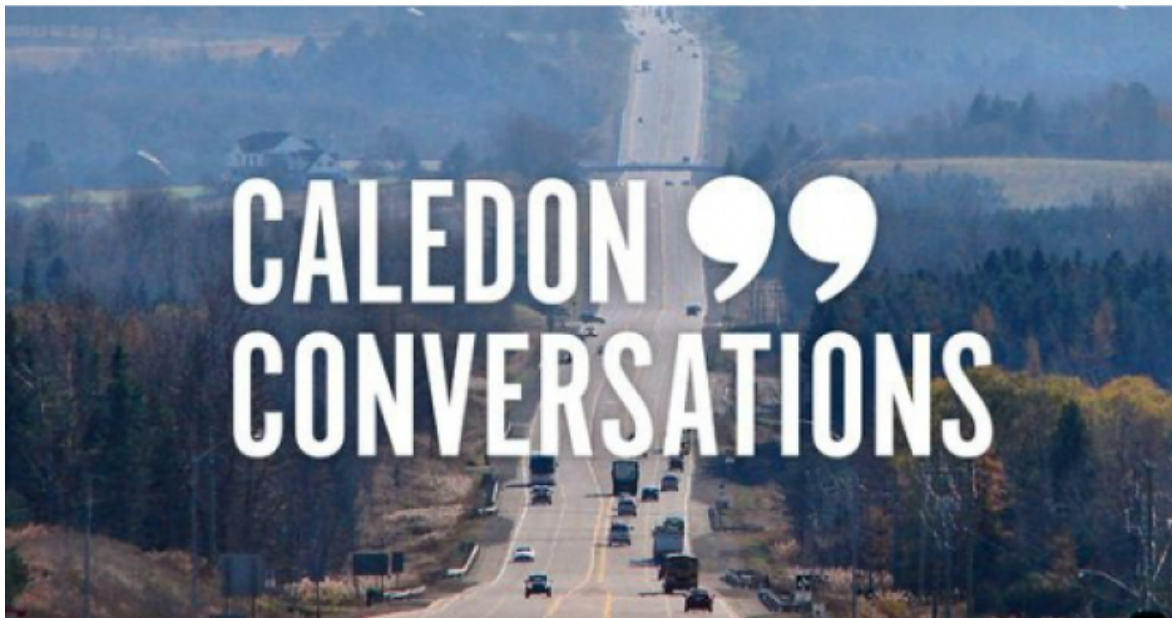
Updates and corrections | [Corrections policy](#)

September 19, 2022, 09:00 am

This article was updated to include screenshots of some of the Facebook ads posted by Canada's Energy Citizens.

Keep reading

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[SURVEYMONKEY.COM](https://www.surveymonkey.com)

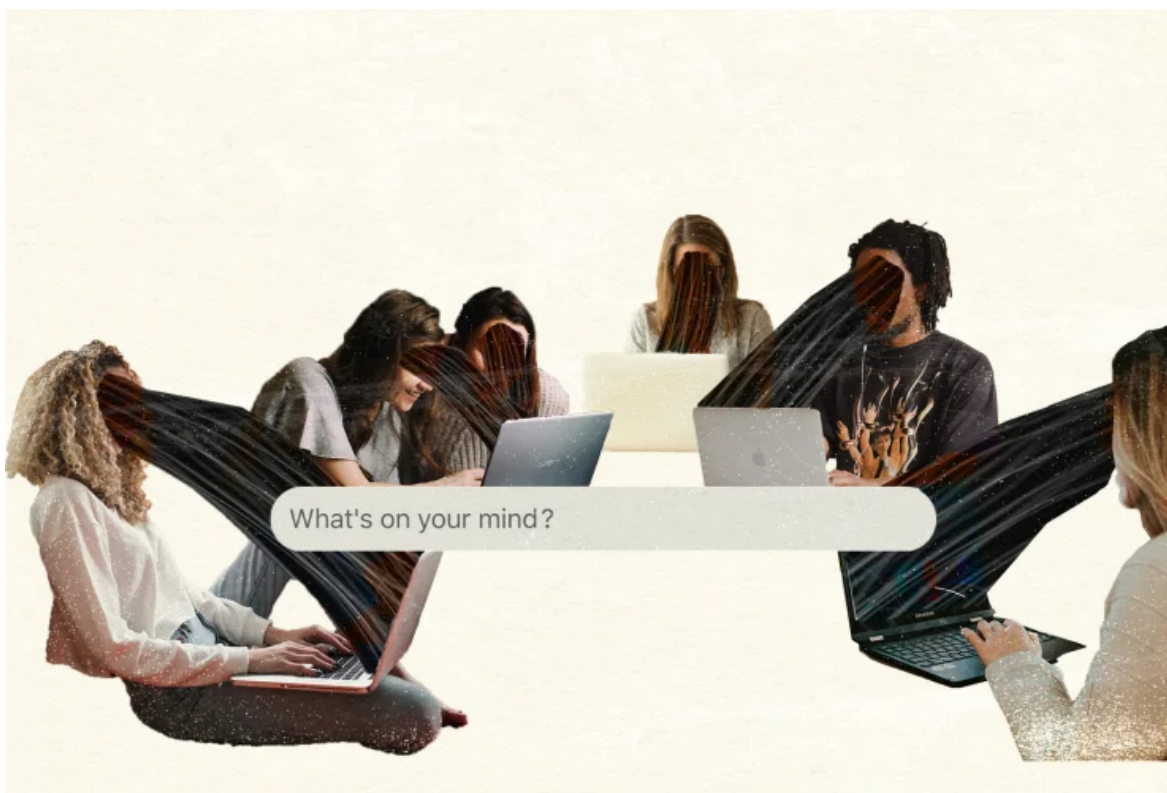
Right-wing groups pose as 'local' Caledon social media page

By Jessica McDiarmid | News | May 26th 2022



The surprising Canadian targets of right-wing political operatives masquerading as local grassroots groups

By Jessica McDiarmid & Marc Fawcett-Atkinson | Investigations | March 17th 2022
in Democracy and Integrity Reporting Project



Anatomy of our investigation into Facebook pages in Canada

By Marc Fawcett-Atkinson & Jessica McDiarmid | Investigations | March 17th 2022
in Democracy and Integrity Reporting Project

Comments

Post a comment

Geoffrey Pounder | 21 hours ago

"The ads, launched Sept. 9 by Canada's Energy Citizens and paid for by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), warn that imposing a cap on the industry could reduce Canada's oil and gas production and 'harm workers.'"

That last phrase is key. It's another PR strategy to deflect attention from hugely profitable multi-national O&G companies and garner sympathy for O&G "workers". Our friends and neighbours. Don't let them down.

Support "working people" — a favorite rhetorical tactic of Rachel Notley's NDP in Alberta. Expect to hear more of the same.

"Both Enoch and Eaton pointed to a public relations strategy used by the oil and gas industry in recent years to deflect criticism. They describe efforts to use workers as the face of the industry, rather than executives, in an attempt to make criticisms of the industry synonymous with criticism of the workers."

"How powerful is Big Oil? Just ask Regina city council" (National Observer, Dec 15, 2021)

A rhetorical sledgehammer wielded by Alberta NDP politicians, too. Notley's NDP Govt used that phrase to bludgeon their critics on the left.

Notley cited the concerns of "working people" to justify support for Big Oil's agenda, even as the oilpatch automates jobs out of existence, while returning billions of dollars to shareholders.

Notley: "Ignoring the very real needs and concerns of these working families only feeds the growing inequality that fuels so much of the extreme politics we see around the world."

"...climate action, a strong and competitive energy industry, and the well-being of working people go hand in hand in hand."

"On this issue of standing up to B.C., and their attack on working people across Canada, we are very aligned."

"(There are) those who want to write working people out of climate action..."

"To do that and forget the needs of working people, or to throw working people under the bus, means that both economic growth and environmental protection are bound to fail."

Reply

Geoffrey Pounder | 21 hours ago

Premier Notley heaped scorn on federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh several times over Trans Mtn:

"To forget that and to throw [working people] under the bus as collateral damage in pursuit of some other high level policy objective is a recipe for failure and it's also very elitist."

"To do that and forget the needs of working people, or to throw working people under the bus, means that both economic growth and environmental protection are bound to fail."

Elitist? In subservience to Big Oil CEOs, Notley travelled the country, preaching salvation by pipeline to choirs of business elites.

NDP Deputy premier Sarah Hoffman: "I recall many times Jagmeet Singh has not been a friend to Albertans, to working people or to our nation when it comes to energy policy."

From Premier Notley's 2018 address to the Alberta Teachers' Association:

"And I submit that the approach of anti-pipeline activists is a disaster not only for working people but, quite frankly, for effective climate action as well because if we write off the jobs and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of working women and men, I guarantee you we will write off the ability to move forward on climate or, quite frankly, on just about any other progressive change.

"...But here's the bottom line. Climate action is not free. There is a cost. And to cover that cost, we must grow our economy. We must diversify our economy. We must create jobs. We must fund the things working people depend on. And, that's why we need to build Trans-Mountain.

"...And I would say to those who oppose our fight to build this pipeline that they are being extremely foolish."

No climate action possible on the oil & gas front. Emissions to rise indefinitely.
Because "working people".

Blatant deception. Neoliberal energy policy doesn't help working people. It helps the rich get richer at the expense of working people.

Fossil fuel expansion doesn't protect working Albertans. The oil & gas sector has been shedding jobs for years.

The NDP did "working people" no favor by enabling oilsands expansion. That just sets us up for bigger crashes and economic ruin down the road. AB's over-dependence on oil & gas is our vulnerability, not our strength.

The only "working people" the AB NDP seem to care about work in oil & gas. How about "working people" in First Nations' communities in the oilsands region? Already paying bigtime with their health and loss of culture. What will be left for them when the oilsands industry collapses?

The livelihoods and communities of "working people" in Canada and around the world are threatened by climate change.

So who is really defending working people?

Reply

Rufus Polson | 14 hours ago

I don't see why astroturf shouldn't be illegal--and not illegal in the "corporation pays a small fine and keeps on doing it" sense, but illegal in the "whoever signs off on creation of an astroturf campaign should see serious jail time" sense.

Well, I mean I do see why it's not illegal--that would be inconvenient for corporate rule. But ethically speaking it's a method of poisoning our political discourse and I don't see why we shouldn't ban the hell out of it.

Reply

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