

An honest conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment with Dr. Scott Tinker

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An era of ever-escalating exaggeration is upon us.

Somehow the word hyperbole used to describe the stream of dire climate “pronouncements” is much too academic and too mild. It doesn’t adequately describe the true nature of the messages that climate activists are producing – increasingly shrill messaging that has profound consequences for the West and any country that accepts and implements their action items and timelines.

On April 10th, in the most recent expression of “hyperbole” or what is better described as blatant misinformation, the UN climate chief Simon Stiell declared that “humanity has only two years left”.

“Who exactly has two years to save the world? The answer is every person on this planet,” Stiell said. “More and more people want climate action right across societies and political spectrums.”

Stiell’s message was more politically motivated than based on science. As reported by the Associated Press, nearly half of the world’s population is voting in elections this year– in over fifty countries. More than ever, climate alarmism is increasingly focused on democratic “voting” nations and to what end? The head of the UN’s climate change arm has urged citizens to “raise their voices” and “get climate at the top of the cabinet agenda” to influence elections in nearly half of the world. But this approach is by its nature, aimed at democracies, and is intended to influence the adoption of policies which ask the citizens of democracies to pay more for goods and services and the resulting higher inflation will slow and weaken those economies while non-compliant regimes prosper.

In this “climate” of pressure on democratic nations, it is refreshing to hear from a more sober, balanced scientific perspective and to have an honest conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment which many heard as they attended a presentation by Dr. Scott Tinker, an American geologist, educator, energy expert, and documentary filmmaker.

Dr. Tinker has an impressive array of credits on his resume. He served as the state geologist of Texas (2000–present)^[5] and he holds the Edwin Allday Endowed Chair of Subsurface Geology in the Jackson School of Geosciences at the University of Texas at Austin. Earlier in

his career, he worked in the oil and gas industry with Robert M. Sneider Exploration in Houston, (1982–83), Union Pacific Resources in Englewood, Colorado (1985–1988) and Marathon Oil’s Petroleum Technology Center (1988–1999). He commented at the beginning of his presentation that he last visited Calgary in the 1980s in search of oil and gas opportunities.

Tinker is also the founder and Chairman of the Switch Energy Alliance, which looks to inspire energy education through film. He co-produced the feature-length documentary, *Switch*, a critically acclaimed^[6] film released in 2012 on global energy. He is also the writer and host of a sequel, *Switch On*, released in 2019, about global energy poverty and moderates *Energy Switch*, an energy and climate point-counterpoint PBS TV talk show. The Canadian Energy Executive Association invited Dr. Tinker to speak at their annual mid-year update event at the Calgary Petroleum Club on April 3rd, 2024.

In the opening of his presentation to the Calgary audience Dr. Tinker framed the dual challenge that we face in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

“How do we reduce global emissions and advance human flourishing? And notice I framed that as a dual challenge. Reduce... not zero emissions or even net zero... just reduce emissions – and it’s not just ending poverty. We’ll be working on that forever and it’s a very noble goal, but it’s about advancing human flourishing. It’s an “and”... it’s a conjunction. We have to do these things together. This involves tradeoffs – very real-world tradeoffs.”

Since the challenges will necessarily involve trade-offs, there is a need for an approach that Tinker called a “radical middle.” He also highlighted the importance of data in a truth-focused discussion and emphasized the need for accurate, not ideological-influenced information in addressing complex issues like energy. He quoted Hans Rosling, Swedish physician and author of the book “Factfulness – Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About the World and Why Things Are Better Than You Think” who said: “Data must be used to tell the truth, not to call to action, no matter how noble the intentions.” This is truly a message that UN climate chief Simon Stiell should heed and a book he should read and contemplate.

Tinker argued that energy security is crucial for economic security, citing that most healthy economies have a reasonably secure energy supply. He noted that energy security varies dramatically across the globe with more than 2.8 billion people still burning biomass for energy.

He recognized the dual reality that we can't depend on energy alone to end poverty – but we also can't end poverty without energy.

When talking about energy density, he pointed out that nature “naturally” densified energy when it created coal. He described the history of the use of increasingly densified energy by human beings starting as early as 10,000 BC when humans first burned biomass. Ironically 1/3 of the world still lives as if they were in 10,000 BC and burns biomass for fuel.

In terms of energy consumption, it is no secret that the consumption of coal and natural gas continues to rise. Tinker pointed out that even though China has pledged to reduce coal consumption, the opposite has happened as reliance on coal-burning plants continues. He suggested that if India adopts the same approach as China and uses more coal, then there will be dramatically higher greenhouse gases globally. Coal demand has indeed hit a record high last year merely due to the consumption coming from India and China. This demonstrates very clearly the dual challenge of our quest to advance human flourishing.

So how we can reconcile this result of increasing coal use and increasing emissions with the challenge to reduce emissions? So far in 2024, it seems the drive to advance human flourishing is much stronger and stands in opposition to the drive to reduce emissions. Tinker characterized this disconnect between our aspirations and our practices in reality with a very appropriate quote from Major League Baseball's most famous player, coach and manager Yogi Berra who said:

“If the world was perfect... it wouldn't be.”

Adding to the dual challenge of reducing emissions while advancing human flourishing, Tinker pointed out that global leaders are prioritizing energy security and economic security over climate security. Perhaps in response to growing demand. He referred to Big Tech's latest obsession which is finding enough energy – enough electricity.

“They are finally starting to have to admit they're the largest consumers of electricity by far of any industry – the tech sector, Bitcoin, AI, Data set, etc,” Tinker said. “Amid explosive demand, America's running out of power and we're running out of a certain kind that certain people want. There's a lot of electricity being made but we're going to need a lot of power lines, solar, wind and batteries. But we're not building them.”

Energy and economic security also require adequate raw materials. Tinker points out that electric vehicles are not turning out to be the answer for North America and much of the world as expected. Currently, 85% of global EV sales are occurring in China and Europe. The supply of raw materials is the issue that exists for EVs, which need more metals to build than ICE vehicles. Since China controls the processing of most metals globally and lithium battery production is also controlled by China, this presents an energy security issue.

An added wrinkle in our efforts to resolve the challenge of human flourishing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the practice in developed nations of offshoring industry – having Asia produce our goods. Tinker points out that this practice is not reducing emissions – it merely offshores them. Currently, Asia emits more CO2 than the rest of the world combined. He quoted data showing Asia's tech sector consumes 46% of world energy to produce tech for the rest of the world. Tinker advises that we must carefully choose our route to accelerate economic growth and that it is perhaps unwise to offshore industry to Asia – we would be better off keeping industry in our respective countries. He believes the West has made a big error in giving manufacturing off to Asia and points out that if we shut down the oil and gas industry in the free world then it does not go away. It gets run by Russia and China and autocracies or states that do not seem as dedicated to global greenhouse gas emission reduction.

In an era when climate alarmists scare us into thinking we have no choices, Scott Tinker wants to get us thinking about our choices and our options. Perhaps no one has the whole answer on energy, but he urges us to review the science, to question assumptions, to review reliable data and be fact-based in order to know our conclusions are sound while charting a path forward.

Many thanks to the Canadian Energy Executive Association for inviting Dr. Scott Tinker to speak at their annual mid-year update event at the Calgary Petroleum Club.

Maureen McCall is an energy professional who writes about issues affecting the energy industry