

Episode 56EK May 24, 2023. The “Wildfires in Alberta and the Alberta Premier election on May 29, 2023” issue.

Canada

Canada, Alberta

RAWSEP View: Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta from 2016 to 2019, is running to regain her position, after a usurper, Danielle Smith, presided as Premier of Alberta from 2022 up to the present day. Conservative Danielle Smith is most notable for fighting “freedom busting” COVID restrictions, and briefly pursuing pardons for violations of COVID health and safety restrictions. Danielle Smith also briefly tweeted that the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine was a cure for COVID. In other words, Danielle Smith slavishly follows the American applause lines of Donald Trump. Predictably, Conservative opponent Danielle Smith also opposes a carbon tax on polluting industries such as the oil and gas industry. In Liberal Rachel Notley and Conservative Danielle Smith’s latest debate last week, Conservative Danielle Smith repeatedly accused her opponent Liberal Rachel Notley of springing a “surprise” carbon tax on the province of Alberta and warned that any attempt to cap emissions would lead to reduced oil production and reduced revenues for the province, (an assessment not universally shared by experts).

So, there is a price for clean air, and slowing climate change. The price is to the oil and gas industry. The rest of us could enjoy the benefit of clean air to breathe, and what follows, better health and longer lives. There is a short term price to oil and gas industry employees in Alberta, Canada, as the dinosaur industry draws its last convulsive breaths before it is replaced by the cleaner energy industries of wind, solar and geothermal. The prices to the consumer of wind, solar and geothermal are declining precipitously, so the cost to jobs in the oil and gas industry is balanced for the average person by that reality of lower energy costs to the consumer. Employees of industries that are dying need to look around for jobs in the new industries, or innovate themselves, and come up with new ideas that will be profitable in a new energy future. Easier said than done. In the election on May 29, 2023, for premier of Alberta, the voters may fearfully choose to look to the past and vote for Danielle Smith. Hopefully they will vote for Rachel Notley and the hope of slowing climate change and stopping the air pollution of wildfires. Hopefully, the people of Alberta most directly affected by wildfires will not choose to go back to their homes and resume making individual decisions to continue generating air pollution from residential wood burning in their own homes.

Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates is interested in the election of premier of Alberta. In an article below the reporter notes that people are not talking much about the carbon tax on the Alberta oil and gas industry, although that carbon tax would serve to slow climate change and the resulting wildfires that recently caused 29,000 people to be evacuated from parts of Alberta. Maybe the people of Alberta are only talking about the wildfire when it affects them, but it is affecting large swaths of people in Alberta right now, and there is a connection between carbon emissions of the oil and gas industry, a warming climate, and the wildfires.

RAWSEP sees these wildfires occurring in Alberta and affecting the whole upper continent of North America as a “teachable moment” when it is hard to ignore the effects on breathing wood smoke eventually drifting everywhere. We had bad wood smoke pollution last Thursday and Friday in Wisconsin, from the Alberta wildfires. The local Wisconsin weather predictions are that it will happen again soon. Is this the time when people will make the connection between the debilitating air pollution of wildfires and the debilitating air pollution in hyper-localized areas affecting near neighbors of residential wood burners? On the West Coast, there is a history of people in those warm areas firing up their wood stoves for no apparent reason as soon as restrictions lift after wildfires blanket the West. Can the connection be made, at least by the neighbors of these residential wood burners, between residential wood burning and air pollution that must not be tolerated? Or will the people of Alberta fire up their wood stoves as soon as they return from being evacuated from their homes because of wildfire smoke. It bears repeating that wood smoke is wood smoke: wildfire wood smoke is the same as residential wood smoke is the same as biomass (wood) industrial smoke. Wood smoke is 90% PM2.5 particulate matter of 2.5 micrometer size, the perfect size to infiltrate the human lung, setting off a cascade of human health problems and early deaths. Near neighbors of indoor residential wood burners are the most affected. If near neighbors of residential wood burners complain to their Health Department, the Health Department should give each near neighbor a Purpleair PM2.5 monitor to hang from the neighbor’s eaves, at the fence line near the stack of the residential wood burner. These fenceline measurements of PM2.5 pollution exceeding U S Environmental Protection Agency (E P A) “safe” limits of PM2.5 (currently 12 micrograms per meter cubed annually and 35 micrograms per meter cubed daily, soon to be lowered to 8 micrograms per meter cubed annually and 25 micrograms per meter cubed daily) should be used to shut down each residential indoor wood burner, one by one if necessary. The Office of the Inspector General (O I G), “watchdog” of the E P A, stated in a February 2023 report that the current practice of certifying wood stoves is deeply flawed. Certification of wood stoves is flawed because the lobbying by the wood stove industry has created loopholes for the wood stove industry that allow highly polluting wood stoves to be manufactured and sold. The alternative of using PurpleAir PM2.5 monitors, which are already used side by side with \$100,000 official E P A PM2.5 monitors on E P A AirNow maps of smoke and fire, correlated to the EPA monitors with a simple mathematical formula, the alternative of PurpleAir monitors could solve the problem to near neighbors of hyper-localized air pollution affecting the health and lives of near neighbors. The emissions of wood burning, CO2 and PM2.5 levels of emissions higher than those of coal burning, and with 450 times the particulates of natural gas burning make residential wood burning a dinosaur of home heating. New Heat Pumps that can work at 40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit are available with subsidies to people of low income through the Low Income Home Energy Program (L I H E A P), and additional subsidies from various sources to people of moderate income are now available, making Heat Pumps a practical and clean alternative to indoor residential wood burning for all in 2023.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/danielle-smith-rachel-notley-slug-it-out-albertas-election-2023-05-16/>

May 16, 2023

Danielle Smith and Rachel Notley slug it out in Alberta's election for Province Premier.

Reuters.

Edited by RAWSEP for brevity and clarity and relationship to Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates.

Both the UCP with candidate Danielle Smith, and NDP with candidate Rachel Notley, are supportive of the energy sector, recognizing it as Alberta's main economic engine.

The UCP with candidate Danielle Smith released the province's first-ever [climate plan](#) last month. The plan targets net-zero emissions by 2050 but does not have interim emissions-reduction targets and was criticized by climate think-tanks as lacking details.

The NDP with candidate Rachel Notley is also targeting a net-zero economy by 2050 and a net-zero electricity grid by 2035.

The current Alberta Premier is Danielle Smith and her opponent in the May 31 election is former premier and leader of the New Democratic Party, Rachel Notley.

Danielle Smith comes from the socially conservative Wildrose Party. She has been premier since October 2022 after she won the UCP's leadership race. Smith, 52, started her career in media. First as an extra in the Vancouver film and television industry and then as a journalist on radio, television and in print. While working as a radio broadcaster in March 2020, Smith tweeted and later deleted claims that the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine is a cure for COVID-19. As premier, Smith fired Alberta Health Services' governing board for what she called "freedom-busting health restrictions" implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. She later walked back her plans to pursue pardons for violations of COVID-19 health and safety restrictions. Smith was a lobbyist for the Alberta Enterprise Group (AEG), encouraging capital investment and big business in Alberta.

Rachel Notley, 59, became premier of Alberta in 2015, ending 44 years of Progressive Conservative Party rule in the Western Canadian province. She lost re-election in 2019. Rachel Notley was a labor advocate and lawyer before entering politics. She specialized in workers' rights and health and safety. Notley's mother, an anti-war activist, took Notley to an anti-war demonstration before she was ten years old. While premier, Notley gave Canada its first C\$15 (\$11) minimum wage, stabilized funding for healthcare, restricted money in elections and increased taxes on corporations and the wealthy. Her government introduced harm-reduction measures targeting the opioid and fentanyl epidemic.

RAWSEP thinks it is significant that Danielle Smith, Alberta Conservative, running to keep her seat as Alberta premier, during their latest debate this week repeatedly accused her opponent Rachel Notley of springing a "surprise" carbon tax on the province and warned that any attempt to cap emissions would lead to reduced oil production and reduced revenues for the province, (an assessment not universally shared by experts).

What follows is a list of the involved parties in Alberta, Canada while wildfires continue to burn.

1)The oil and gas industry in the province of Alberta: Wildfires in western Canada are [striking the heart of Canadian oil and gas country](#), curbing company production. Oil and gas production accounts for 28 percent of Canada's carbon emissions, [the country's largest source](#) of carbon emissions. The amount of carbon released for each barrel produced has been reduced but increases in total production have more than offset those gains. Oil and gas revenues account for 36 percent of all the money the province takes in. Alberta is the only Canadian province without a sales tax and income and corporate taxes are low relative to other provinces. The energy industry provides high-paying jobs. 2)Evacuated Alberta residents. Wildfires this week caused evacuation of 29,000 people from Alberta. Wildfire blazes sweeping across western Canada have [driven thousands of people from their homes](#). The smoke that enveloped Calgary this week briefly gave the city one of the worst air-quality ratings in the world, as the [fires to the north and west](#) burned.

3)Alberta potential voters: Poll after [poll](#) have shown that Albertans are more or less in line with other Canadians on the need to take steps to reduce carbon emissions.

4)Discussion about the Alberta premier election on May 29, 2023. This week people wanted to talk about the Alberta provincial election on May 29. Discussions about climate change were largely absent.

5)Danielle Smith, Alberta Conservative, running to keep her seat as Alberta premier: During Thursday's debate with Rachel Notley the subject of climate came up only in an economic context. Ms. Smith repeatedly accused Ms. Notley of springing a "surprise" carbon tax on the province and warned that any attempt to cap emissions would inevitably lead to reduced oil production and reduced revenues for the province, (an assessment not universally shared by experts).

6) Rachel Notley, the former (Alberta province) premier and leader of the New Democratic Party running for Alberta premier: During Thursday's debate with Danielle Smith the subject of climate came up only in an economic context.

7)Professor Feodor Snagovsky, a professor of political science at the University of Alberta, said "It's very tough to talk about oil and gas in Alberta because it's sort of the goose that lays the golden egg, It's the source of a remarkable level of prosperity that the province has enjoyed for a long time." The suggestion that production might have to be limited in order for Canada to meet its climate targets raises alarms. "People hear that and they think: my job's going to go away," Professor Snagovsky had lived in Australia in 2020 when that country was [plagued by extreme heat and wildfires](#). At the time in Australia, Professor Snagovsky said, not only was there very little discussion there about climate change, but politicians and others argued that it was not an appropriate time for such talks. Professor Snagovsky said he hoped that the fires and smoke will prompt Albertans to start thinking about the climate effects that caused them, but he's not confident that will happen. "I think it's unlikely, but you can always hope," he said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/20/world/canada/canada-wildfires-climate-change.html?action>

Alberta Is on Fire, but Climate Change Is an Election Taboo