

Climate Change Coverage at the Washington Post

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SPEAKERS

Michael Coren, Doug Parsons, Laur Hesse Fisher

Doug Parsons 00:00

Hi everyone this is America adapts the climate change podcast Hey doctors welcome back to another exciting episode. Joining me is Michael Korn from the Washington Post. Michael is a climate journalist who has the climate coach advice column in the post. I love talking to reporters always fascinating to see how the media approaches the issue of climate change. We go behind the scenes and learn how a national newspaper like the post covers climate change. They have really beefed up their coverage in the last couple of years and we'll learn how they've structured that coverage. We discuss some of the diverse topics he covers in his climate Coach column and his increasing focus on climate adaptation. Other topics Michael and I dig into should the post play a role in creating awareness around the emerging adaptation sector should climate skepticism be a bigger story and how Michael brings the latest climate science into his articles, we cover a ton of ground and we'll also hear a bit about Michael's experiences editing a newspaper in Cambodia. We're going to start the episode off with a short interview with Laura hessie Fisher from MIT and hear about the new season of their Today I learned climate podcast. I hope you enjoy this was a fun episode to record. But before we get started, I wanted to encourage my listeners to reach out I usually save this for the end of the episode. But this is really important information for the podcasts as the host of American apps. I'm always eager to connect with my listeners and hear their feedback on the show. Whether you want to share your thoughts or suggest a guest you'd like to hear from. I'm open to it all. What's also critically important is hearing what you guys do and how the podcast is a resource to your careers. This information is incredibly important to me, please take the time and reach out I can be reached at America. daps@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you. All right, let's get this episode started. Hey, doctors, we're back in. I'm with law, Hussey Fisher and she is the program director with MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative. And she's also the host with Today I learned climate podcast. Hey, Laura, welcome back to the podcast. So you're coming on we're having this short interview. And it's kind of an exciting time you guys have a new season, right?

Laur Hesse Fisher 02:10

Hi, Doug. It's great to be back. Yes, we do. Fifth Season coming out.

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Doug Parsons 02:12

Fifth Season. I remember when you guys first started. Well, let's ground people. First, though, let's just talk about what do you guys do there at the initiative? Let's let us know that. And then tell us a little bit about some previous seasons so people can go back in the archive?

L

Laur Hesse Fisher 02:26

Yeah, so what we do with the MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative, is we mobilize the MIT community around solving environmental challenges. And one environmental challenge is what people know and how they think about climate change and environmental challenges. So I run our communications and engagement work with a focus on the public. So T il climate. Today, I learned climate is MIT's climate change podcast. And the show helps you get smart quick on climate change, both climate change science and solutions. And we speak directly with experts from MIT and beyond.

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Doug Parsons 03:00

So let's talk about that archive, though. So people want to go back into that. And I just want to say you guys have a great model. They're relatively short episodes, 15 to 30 minutes, and they're substantive, but they're also relatively quick. But what do you have back there? And then archive?

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Laur Hesse Fisher 03:15

Oh, man, we have a ton. So we have a whole season focused on energy. So if folks are interested in how wind and solar actually works, how fusion works, even what we're talking about, when we say fossil fuels, we have an episode on hydrogen. And you're right, all of our episodes are 15 minutes or less. Some of them are only 10 minutes long. I got that wrong. Sorry. No, no, no, it's it's, it's great, though, we try and keep them really short. In fact, we work really hard to keep them very short, because we're really focused on our audiences, the climate curious, so people who are newly interested in climate change, or particular part of climate change, and maybe you're not interested in in doing a super deep dive, but just interested in clarifying what they know, or learning newly something about climate change. So that's why we have a wide range of episodes, we have one on climate impacts that builds upon some of what you focus on, and American adapts and how climate change affects what you eat. But we have one on hydrogen, or sorry, I mentioned hydrogen already. I just really liked that episode, which is why I mentioned it twice. And probably my favorite one is one we did on, can't we just plant a lot of trees to deal with the climate change issue. That's the one I usually recommend people start with first because I just really like it.

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Doug Parsons 04:23

So the model two is I think that's important because you kind of ground people when you when you start off the episodes, but then you're doing these interviews, and you have quite the bench there at MIT for expertise to come on and share these stories, right.

L

Laur Hesse Fisher 04:35

Yeah, I mean, it is pretty great. We spend a lot of time editing our episodes because we talk with some really smart people who know things really well. And sometimes it's hard to get people to not speak from what they already know and jargon. And we really try to be the bridge between these super smart people and people our listeners who are really smart but they just don't know a lot about climate change, or maybe they don't even know a lot about science in general. That's all okay with us. We just walk it through together in a way. That's fun.

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Doug Parsons 05:09

So before you give us a preview of season five, and I think the first episode is out, tell us a little bit because you've been out there long enough who's using the podcast, I imagined schools, there's all sorts of you're probably getting value of what you're doing here.

L

Laur Hesse Fisher 05:20

Yeah, we've heard a bunch from companies that are actually educating their employees on climate change using our podcasts because our episodes are short and jargon free. And we don't have a political bent in our podcast episode, I think that makes it really appealing. And then also, we have educator guides for each of our episodes. And we're right now developing case studies with the teachers that have actually used as educator guides and the podcasts that teach in the classroom. So it's really exciting to see all the different ways that the podcast is really being used out there.

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Doug Parsons 05:50

So season five, what's in store?

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Laur Hesse Fisher 05:53

Yes. Okay, so I'm excited about season five. So I'm going to maybe I shouldn't say this, but I'm gonna say it anyway. I think that our greenhouse gases episode is the best explanation of what's actually happening with greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that's out there. Oh, boy. And the reason why yes, I mean, I'm gonna be bold. And I'm gonna say that if someone finds a better one, feel free to reach out to me. But let me tell you, we did our research, right, we looked at how people were talking about climate change, and how about greenhouse gases and how they interact with the atmosphere. And we were so careful about, how do we describe this? And what did we keep in and what do we leave out and what metaphor was work and what metaphors don't work. And we thought, if there was going to be one place for someone to really understand this, we want it to be that place. So we worked super hard on that. And I'm

really happy with the result, that one already came out, as you mentioned, and then the ones that are coming up, we have a really fun one about what the two biggest hurdles are to getting all of our energy from wind and solar. And how do we overcome those? We have an episode of desalination. So why can't we just get our all of our water from the ocean? A lot of people are talking about methane these days. And so we have an episode on why that is and the opportunity to make a big difference on climate change in the next five to 10 years by tackling methane. We have an episode on why states are building are we this episode that covers why states are building wind farms in the ocean, when building them on land is so much cheaper, and things like that, we got a good and wide variety of episodes coming up.

D Doug Parsons 07:22

Alright, so are these episodes coming out weekly? Every two weeks? How does that work?

L Laur Hesse Fisher 07:25

Yeah, they're coming out weekly. We've never done that before.

D Doug Parsons 07:27

Oh, exciting.

L Laur Hesse Fisher 07:29

We've been working hard. And that's what we're doing. So people don't have to wait like they usually have had to in the past. So hopefully, between now and Thanksgiving,

D Doug Parsons 07:36

okay, I'm gonna put you on the spot. And you might not even have specific episode ideas. But season six, you must be thinking a little bit about that.

L Laur Hesse Fisher 07:44

We are thinking about that. So we have not committed to anything specifically yet. But we get a lot of follow up questions. So we also run the site climate.mit.edu. And on that website, we have an ask MIT climate feature program, where people can write to us and ask their questions about climate change. Some questions that we get are super technical. Some of them are super simple and everything in between. And we work with experts at MIT to answer those and MIT person sometimes is beyond MIT as well, working with a science communicator and we answer those and you know, you can read it in one page basically. So we're looking at pulling some of those questions for our next season. So you can check out our asked him it climate

series, and you'll get a sense of what's to come and also, Doug, you or any of your listeners who are interested in us answering one of their own questions, feel free to go on there and submit some

D Doug Parsons 08:35

most people know where to go. But if you give people advice to find your podcast, what would you recommend?

L Laur Hesse Fisher 08:40

Yeah, so it's called Today I learned climate. The best way to find it is to go wherever you get your podcasts and search T i l climate and you also can find our podcast@climate.mit.edu

D Doug Parsons 08:53

Excellent, Laura, I'm very excited for you guys. Season Five, you guys are kicking butt and you guys sound like you're here to stay. Thanks for coming on the podcast.

L Laur Hesse Fisher 09:01

Thank you so much, Doug, and thank you for your support.

D Doug Parsons 09:07

Hey, adapters welcome back to another exciting episode. Joining me is Michael Coren. Michael is a journalist writing for the climate coach advice column for The Washington Post. Before joining the post in 2022. He spent nearly two decades as a reporter and editor covering Climate Technology and Economics for outlets such as quartz and cnn.com. And this is very interesting and serving as managing editor at Cambodia's and I'm going to mispronounce it because I've never had to say it. phenom penh post. Is that right? All right. Hi, Mike. Welcome to the podcast.

M Michael Coren 09:37

Thank you. It's great to be here.

D Doug Parsons 09:38

Well, my first person from the Washington Post, I've had Bloomberg of Christopher Flavelle. Obviously doing a lot of great work at New York Times. Thanks for coming on. But let's just start off with what does it mean to be a climate coach at the Washington Post?

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Michael Coren 09:51

It's a work in progress. But basically what I'm trying to do is cover the climate from the perspective of how people how individuals can engage with systematic change on climate. So it's certainly about what you can do. But it's just as much about sort of the hard numbers and a rigorous analysis of what that means in the bigger picture.

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Doug Parsons 10:11

Alright, I want to come back to the the column, obviously. But let's stay with your background, though. You've been doing this for a while. And yeah, just tell me a bit about your journey. And you're ending up at the Washington Post, which is obviously a high profile gig there. But you've done some interesting things, you want to just give us some highlights?

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Michael Coren 10:27

Sure. So you know, as a kid, I always used to love science, a slip journalism. And so I was on parallel tracks for a long time. And obviously ended up here on the journalism side, but I really gone back and forth over the course of my career Early on, I was doing environmental coverage, but ended up in Cambodia, as you mentioned, covering the for the for the Phnom Penh post and everything else. And then when I went back to the states, you know, done some things and kind of thought I understood a lot of what I was doing, but I started a climate change special for cnet.com. And at the time, they were, I would say uninterested is an understatement. So I pushed ahead, and I wrangled a bunch of people who spent some of their free time putting this together. And it was the network's for a special report on climate and did quite well. And I also realized, as I was checking out books to the library that I didn't understand, I didn't understand the topic, I didn't understand the science not nearly to the extent I needed to. So I ended up and went back to grad school, I went to the Yale School of Forestry and studied environmental economics actually worked in that field for a while. So looking at forest carbon and carbon markets that actually started my own startup for a while. So I figured out how that works, raise venture capital, and then went back into journalism and really covered technique and omics and then went back into climate specifically. So I really draw on that every day in terms of how I use that, that into those insights to inform my coverage.

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Doug Parsons 11:48

Okay, so I'm not sure the dynamic, but it was a position open at the Washington Post, did they recruit you? And they obviously, were looking to do something a little bit different with your column, right?

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Michael Coren 11:58

Let's see, I was on maternity leave. So it was my last few weeks. And I was trying to figure out to do next. And I had started your two earlier newsletter called hothouse. And that sprung from my frustration with a lot of climate coverage that sort of left the reader if not in despair, sort of

my frustration with a lot of climate coverage that sort of left the reader if not in despair, sort of at odds. And there really was not a lot of options for them to take the next step. And so they were quite frustrated as I. So that's how I started exploring this idea of out individuals sort of engage on systematic change and climate, and did that with my my newsletter. And then I happened to see a column required a request for column this for a new column that they were going to create the Washington Post, and they hadn't called it climate coach yet, but it wasn't in the mix once I started interviewing with them. And it turns out, we were thinking along similar lines. So we're done quite well.

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Doug Parsons 12:52

So I obviously will have links, I have a page for all these episodes. But I want to get to the column now. And just bear with me because I want to read some of the titles from the column because I think that's part of the appeal, too. That's it's, it's people want to dive in. And I'm just gonna read a few here so people can get a flavor. Okay, what I learned when I tried installing a wind turbine on my house, why we all need to think like Floridians now. Is it cheaper to refuel your every battery or gas tank, we did the math in all 50 states, and why you should buy everything used. And so obviously, just a huge diversity of topics, give us some background and how you arrive at these.

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Michael Coren 13:31

I have a long list accumulated over many years of questions that I've always wanted to answer or problems that I had, or things that piss me off. And based on those, I usually have a pretty rich, you know, basis to find a lot of stories. So a lot of those have come from that they've also come from readers, people write me all the time with questions or comments, and I use those. So the main idea is it really needs to have some personal connection in your life. So don't do a lot of very high level policy, or kind of, you know, scientific breakthroughs, except to the extent that it does intersect with you.

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Doug Parsons 14:06

So what calm seem to be doing well, because you've got enough of them out there. Now, do you feel like people more on maybe just the energy side? Or what do you find that to really pop in with folks?

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Michael Coren 14:15

Definitely not just energy, or any one thing? I would say the there's no formula for it yet. But what does seem to resonate consistently is electric vehicles, that has been a big hit. I think things that talk about our place in nature, our appreciation, or how we can be present in nature has done well. So I wrote one about four apps that help you identify every flower plant a tree, I also wrote a column that was really a personal essay about why you should tell your children about fireflies, because it relates to something called shifting baselines, which is the idea that

every generation loses the previous baseline of what a healthy environment looks like, and how to combat that. Yeah, we haven't had too many things that have really bombed I would say there's one about sustainable aviation fuels that just didn't go any Whatever

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Doug Parsons 15:01

the demographic for that must be quite small, but I guess. So I do adaptation obviously, with my podcasts. It's an area I want to focus on. And that's what I want to talk about with you. And so there's one story in particular and I'm curious about the background for is that when I already mentioned why we all need to think like Floridians now. I'm originally from Florida, I grew up there. And obviously, I covered a lot in the podcast, I'm very frustrated by Florida. Did you actually go on location for that? And tell me a bit of history about that story?

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Michael Coren 15:27

Yeah, I was on vacation for about 18 years. I grew up there. So I have some experience. And I've obviously been back quite a bit since then, where that came from, I think was, you know, reading about the insurance woes in the state. And obviously, it's like succession of natural disasters, and the continual flooding that's happening, especially in South Florida. And when you in the states in denial at the not at the state level, at least, about what is happening and what can be done. When I looked at the projections over the next 100 years, or even the next 30 to 50, I became very clear that it's not that Florida is an outlier. It's just early. And so I really wanted to kind of explore that idea.

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Doug Parsons 16:10

I don't know if you saw it, The New York Times insurance and climate change has just been everywhere. It's been fascinating that they did a column I think in the last week and talking about hurricane II, and that came through Fort Myers last year. And just what happens afterwards is that the only people who can rebuild are rich people. And part of the reasons why is all the codes have changed. And so you think Florida is doing a responsible thing by upgrading the codes, but it makes it more expensive. And hurricanes just become these gentrifying events. And in the short term, the government loves it, because it's like, oh, tax rates on higher end property. And it's just this vicious cycle. I don't know if you got the chance to see that or kind of hearing that message.

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Michael Coren 16:47

Yeah. And I'm not surprised. It's a mess. I mean, I think it comes down to this idea that are we going to publicly subsidize places that are not insurable. And that we can sort of pay for that over right now. And there are places that it will go on for a few more years or decades. But ultimately, as someone in recently me, told me, you can't stop the water, because Florida essentially is built on limestone and sand. And the water comes from underneath. And so you're right, like these things seem Oh, they, you know, that works for the government in the short term, but it's really just borrowing from the future.

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Doug Parsons 17:23

Yeah, they're in denial about long term retreat from the area. Okay, so that was a story I was very interested in, because it, you know, dealt with adaptation, I think there's some managed retreat discussion there. Do you approach some of your comps, specifically, I'm assuming just this whole field of adaptation, which I'm going to come back to later in this conversation. But is that something you're gonna focus more on? Or is it still the kind of the random nature of how you get ideas,

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Michael Coren 17:47

I'm gonna focus more on it, I do try to think about it quite a bit. I mean, I think, particularly for lower income, homes, communities, that you cannot have climate policy without equity component and built into it. And you're seeing that more and more, for example, in in Oakland, they're building something called an eco block, which is not just oh, we should get solar for these apartment buildings is we're going to build out a micro grid with Evie charging, and lower solar rates, and affordable housing. And so that's all built into the same system. And you're also protecting against these heat islands in urban areas that just disproportionately affect these communities. So I'm looking more and more to that, in fact, probably going to do a series on real estate next year, that will kind of dive into this more deeply. But as is the nature, I think of the topic, it requires a lot of research and kind of deep understanding. So this year has been about sort of exploring different topics and getting a feel for them. And then next year, doubling down on a few.

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Doug Parsons 18:44

Excellent like to see more of that. Alright, I want to pivot a little bit here. And I want to talk about the climate coverage overall at the Washington Post, because I'm fascinated by this. And I think a lot of people are fascinated. And they're excited, because some of the bigger shops like Washington Post New York Times, and just in this last week, I saw the LA Times is like they announced increase, I won't, I'll bring that up in a little bit. But I want to know, the sausage making there because it's the decisions that you have to make. And maybe you're not privy to all these conversations, but I've got you you do climate work there. And I do want to just read a few things here too, because I you know, I pulled an interview with Zachary Goldfarb, and they were interviewed about the climate coverage. And they kind of broke down what you guys are going to do in these certain areas. And I'd like to get your thoughts on that. And so the first one was like politics policy and Power team, you so you're creating these teams, covering global negotiations. And so the second one was a science and impact team that follows the leading edge of scientific developments, and the evolving effects of climate change. The third team is visual storytelling team, which sounds very interesting. And then there's the extreme weather team, and a climate solutions and innovations team. So there's this notion of teams and I think, at the time of the writing, there were 30 reporters or people working on climate at the Washington Post. I don't know if it's gone up or down. But is that accurate? Does that still seem like what you guys are doing?

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Michael Coren 19:59

Absolutely. I think The Washington Post's and Zack articulated it very well that they've decided to carve this out as a signature area of coverage that we do better than anyone, and invest the resources accordingly. And I think that I've only been obviously a post for a little while. But from what I've seen, it is by far one of the most the some of producing some of the best coverage that no one else is doing, and trying to tackle these stories in ways that I think, get a much larger audience than maybe a traditional sort of straight climate story does, we have our own visual storytelling team, which, which you mentioned. And so those pods are those teams all kind of focus on their areas. But we also work together. So I'm constantly speaking with everyone else on various stories. And the idea, I think, ultimately, is to make climate coverage at The Washington Post's as compelling and maybe high profile as maybe even its politics one day, but it's certainly been an area that I think, has started that trend like we are, we are getting more readers and audience for climate stories than than most other topics. So it's been a good sign. Well, it would have been

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Doug Parsons 21:08

faster. I'm guessing there was probably some internal strategic planning meeting that Washington Post had, because you know, in some ways, it's arbitrary of obviously, they're covering a lot of these important points. And then when I previous life did a lot of policy, when you look at climate change, a lot of times it's broken down, even simply into mitigation, you know, the carbon emission side, and then it's adaptation, and like impacts and all those things kind of come in underneath those things. And how you guys landed on this. It's fascinating. And I just I don't you guys haven't done it long enough. And you've been doing environmental coverage for a long time. But you know how it is sometimes the newspapers say they're gearing up this coverage, but there just might not be interest. Do you think times have truly changed that this is a long term commitment?

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Michael Coren 21:48

You know, I think it's interesting to summer was an eye opener for the newsroom. And as probably for everybody, which was this succession of disasters week after week after week. And obviously, they aren't all entirely attributed to climate, but they're all touched, even driven by it. And far from being an anomaly. We think this is the new normal. And we're reorganizing the newsroom in some ways around it in terms of travel schedules, and how we attack these problems, these stories. And you know, I can't speak for the post, I have only been there for a little while. And I know more about sort of my piece of it. But I would say that the climate story touches everyone and everything in some way. And that's only becoming more and more evidence as time goes on. So I think when we think about how to cover these stories, whether it's insurance, or whether it's supply chains, or whether it's cost of living, they're frequently is a major component that is related to, I guess you could say climate, but really the energy transition and how we build a society that is not as dependent on fossil fuels and restores an ecosystem that is capable of supporting both the natural world and you know, healthy society. And I just don't think you can kind of silo that story personally. And I think the posts has also made that commitment. Well, listen,

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Doug Parsons 23:11

you obviously have the top journalists working in places like the Washington Post, but it's still a

struggle. When I see some of those stories. I just think, all right there, you guys are doing a story on wildfire or extreme heat. And then there, you guys throw in most of the time, which is good. I think that's been a like evolution of coverage has been great, like climate change comes into it. But that kind of creates its own problems, too. Because you're like, Okay, extreme heat is much worse because of climate change, and that it becomes less reporting on the event, let's say about some heatwave somewhere, then you're getting to kind of speculation on what climate change might mean for this in the future. And that, to me, I'm like, man, you're probably losing people right there. Even though you're being responsible by linking it there. It's just like, You're speculating on like what climate change will mean to something and must be a challenge to try to report news in real time, and yet, bring in those bigger topics. And then to throw on top of that. And on top of that, this is only gonna get worse if we don't stop consuming fossil fuels, which in some ways, is unrelated to the original, like we're reporting on this. I hope that makes sense. It's just it's, it can get so messy so quickly, trying to link Oh, and by 2050 by 2075. Again, you're losing people because they're like, What, huh? And so that's an

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Michael Coren 24:23

interesting question. I mean, are we losing people? I don't know. And it definitely does get into this sort of somewhat, still disputed sort of attribution science of it. All right,

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Doug Parsons 24:32

right, right. That's getting tighter, though. It's getting tighter. It's just it's more of like that story that you've created with that one article. And then all of a sudden, you're bringing in characters that aren't necessarily a good fit for that article. And again, you're being responsible for like trying to tie it into climate change, but I just find when I read this, and like, oh, boy, that's just your it's sort of taken a turn that might make the message less compelling. So

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Michael Coren 24:57

interesting. Yeah. You know, I don't cover that as well. much day to day. But that certainly could be something that we look at I, I think we, you know, we look at our stories every year and try to evaluate sort of what's really serving the reader. What are they asking for? Is this helpful? Is this clarifying? And it may very well be that, you know, trying to tie every one of those stories to climate changes is not always that useful. But I think people definitely want to know, if this happened, is this a precursor for what we're going to see next or not?

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Doug Parsons 25:31

Right? And then obviously, when it gets political and see, someone will say it just like, oh, there was a big rain event, and they're tying in to climate change? Well, listen, basically, every weather event on the planet today is related to climate change, because we have this new Earth's atmosphere. But right, so you said attribution, it's like the it gets less confident, but then they bang you on the head for it, because you're using it. Anyway, I feel sorry for you guys. Because it's, you're trying to teach these bigger lessons. But it's difficult as you weave into its own sort of individual stories. That's true. Listen, I want to talk about adaptation. And

some of this not even necessarily representing the Washington Post, but by all means is, but what's your sense of adaptation? You've written about it, but what do you think it really is? What is climate adaptation?

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Michael Coren 26:15

I'm getting more and more interested in this as time goes on, because it's becoming very clear that we will have to do this sooner than we thought. And we're devoting more resources to covering this in places like Louisiana and Texas, the Gulf Coast, the Outer Banks, because sea level rise is not happening the same in every place. And it's happening faster than we predicted, in some cases, in terms of adaptation. What does that mean? I mean, I think it means creating a society that understands, you know, past is not going to be a guarantee of any future that we know of, and that we're going to see greater extreme conditions, more volatility. And the sort of status quo was designed or evolved in conditions that will not be true in 10 years, or five or 20. You know, I would say that very high level understanding, but that's how I understand that I would love to get your thoughts.

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Doug Parsons 27:09

Well, I'm gonna, I'm gonna ask, I've got a reporter on who covers these things. So I've been doing adaptation until I started the podcast, I was doing adaptation policy. And what I didn't sense for most of the media's, like, adaptation is its own sector. It's an it's trying to establish its own identity. So you I mean, we refer to the energy sector all the time, right? Like someone's got the energy sector, but people don't look at add up, they might talk about sea level rise, and what's going to happen on the coast of Florida, and we might have to adapt. But there are adaptations societies that are emerging, there's people that consider themselves adaptation professionals, and I don't know if you follow it, I shouldn't be. I was going to ask you potentially about delaying this. But right now, the White House is doing this national resilience framework announcements, like a three hour thing, they got all these people, and I'll watch it on YouTube later. But it's this big, emerging area. And when I just don't sense the media, looks at the adaptation sector as its own emerging sector, its own identity. And I personally, that's what I'm sort of advocating to use. It deserves it. Because there's people who have dedicated their planners and all these things, people going to school now focusing on adaptation, and I just don't think a lot of people immediately realize this. I think

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Michael Coren 28:18

that's generally probably true. I mean, I interviewed Beth Gibbons, who was executive, okay, adaptation professionals. And so that was my first introduction to this idea of what she calls communities of practice. These are people who are kind of coalescing around solutions to fight climate change. But I also think that she even if she said, it was so early, that the, this wasn't like a well defined sector, and we have a long way to go. And so I think of it a little bit like startups and you know, pets.com era where you just sort of could see this new industry for me, but it was very ad hoc. And so I have no doubt that in that a couple of years, we will have a very different conversation on that. But I think it's still early days.



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Doug Parsons 29:00

Well, I like to consider my podcast, the community of it. I've been doing the seven years, I'm the only one still doing just solely adaptation podcasts. And so what's nice, I hear from people out there, and now a lot more people from the private sector have been kind of coming out and telling me that they listen to the podcast, lot of government people, but people that consider themselves adaptation professionals and doing adaptation policy. And so I'm an advocate for it, it deserves its own identity. And right now, it's just like, well, we're going to society is going to adapt to these impacts. And it doesn't quite get where that energy sector and I think everyone would benefit if they understood. There are people on the job focusing on this it is a thing so

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Michael Coren 29:36

you consider the chief officers of cities affected position that are those

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Doug Parsons 29:40

that have dance and adaptation professional? Yeah, and I know some of them and yeah, it might get to it might actually get to a point where they just become so integrated in all parts of sector you don't necessarily that's happening right now. And you talked to Beth and it's like, alright, should they be its own thing or is it just so embedded with like urban planning schools and all that, that they're just doing? adaptation. And there's different camps that like, well they'd benefit of were like, okay, because there's I recommend there's a national adaptation forum that happens every two years. I don't know if that's on your radar. Next one's in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I think April, and then there was just in California adaptation forum. And they're the biggest, you know, when it comes to adaptation, California is the big one that was in just an LA area just last month that I went to. So just a lot of cool stuff happening there. And people focused on it. So

M

Michael Coren 30:27

right. I mean, I think I think behind the scenes, you'll see this adaptation professionals sort of congregate around, you know, their, their skills, or these disciplines. I think, from a public facing point of view, perhaps similar to data science and some other fields, it just becomes part of an organization that is integrated into almost every level. And that may, in some ways be a better outcome.

D

Doug Parsons 30:49

Yeah, I'm on the fence. But I use my podcast, if you look through my archive, and just the amount of people working on it, it's pretty amazing. And I've it's been a learning experience for me, too. I was mainly in the conservation sector. And it's just like, wow, everyone else. And these other sectors are kind of doing national security and all these things. So it's encouraging. All right, I want to pivot a little bit again here. And just is there someone who does like the resilience beat at Washington Post? Or is it just sort of embedded within all that other coverage I've mentioned earlier?

M

Michael Coren 31:15

So I would say, No one's has a job title with with resilience or adaptation built into it. I would say that we have a team that's working on how like, like, basically, I think almost everyone from different teams, at some point, has gone to different communities, or talked to sort of policymakers or local governments, and tried to understand what is the problem you're facing? What steps you're taking to confront that? And how does that sort of match the scale of the challenge? And so I don't think it's its own siloed thing, it really does touch several of the different teams. All right, I

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Doug Parsons 31:52

got a few questions from ask people. For me, one just gave me even that didn't ask, do you use the term natural disaster and your columns?

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Michael Coren 32:01

I'm sure I have. I don't think about it one way or another. But I can't say I have, but I have used it in the past,

D

Doug Parsons 32:06

then it's there all the time. And I've had on several times, and I'm just friends with a native Embrapa from World Wildlife Fund. And she's like their disaster management director, their World Wildlife Fund. And so she just has this issue when the media uses natural disasters. And obviously, you know, work I'm kind of going with this is that there's nothing natural about these things. And when politicians say it's an act of God, it's like, no, it's act of a lot of bad planning. And yeah, so obviously, you haven't thought about it too much. But now that I'm putting you on the spot, do you think there's value in not using natural disasters?

M

Michael Coren 32:37

It's great question. So I have thought about the idea of the nature of disaster, the terminology natural, I haven't objected to in the sense that the, you know, when we talk when, in common conversation, when we talk about a hurricane or an earthquake, there is an element outside of human control to that, obviously, the effects of those are completely dependent, or much very dependent on what we have done as a society. And as individuals to prepare for that, you know, I think back to Bangladesh, and you know, the disasters that have happened there were far far more lethal in the 1970s. And they are way more recently, despite changes in population and vulnerability. So I think you raise a good point, like, should we really refer to them as natural disasters, I think we would do a disservice if he only called them that and didn't speak directly to the fact that the consequences of a natural disaster of a disaster generally, is directly proportional to how we respond to them or prepare for them. That's how I think about it.

D

Doug Parsons 33:38

It's kind of this debate that people have in the space. And a lot of times people just think I mean, need in this case, and I agree, to a certain extent is just, you're projecting on to the natural aspect of this when a hurricane hits Miami, and because of a lot of bad planning decisions. And remember, the recent hurricane that just came through the panhandle of Florida, minimal damage, because it hit probably the you know, Florida the only spot that's really not populated in Florida. So it was almost lucky. And I mean, I of course, there was some severe damage there. But compared to hitting Tampa, they were lucked out, in some sense.

M

Michael Coren 34:10

That's right. Yeah. And, you know, I lived through at least nearby or get Andrew down to Miami, and I remember the devastation going down there. And since then, they've changed the codes and changed a lot about how Florida builds and develops and there's goods and Bad's with that, but it is a very different sort of built infrastructure situation than it was that

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Doug Parsons 34:30

I want to go back to you had mentioned the idea of attribution, science and such, and how do you as a reporter, because you can't let trying to get the perfect information paralyze you from doing things but like when you talk about climate science, is there a process that you go through when you're doing? Of course most of your stories are science related? Do you feel like you have, like a Rolodex of climate scientists that you check in? And that just shows my age when I say Rolodex, but what is that? Tell us a bit about that process? Sure.

M

Michael Coren 34:57

Yeah, you know, I've been this for a long time, as I said, So I actually have a pretty well developed Rolodex, or I have a software system, where I collected, let's see, I think, upwards of 3000 sources that I've tagged for various topics. And they may come from the research and universities, they may come from industry, they may come from elsewhere for practitioners. And so I generally, before I start any column, I will do quite a bit of research, I'll look through my own clips, I'll look through the post clips to look through online. I'll look through books on the topic, I'll find sources in my contact list. And I'll set up a research page, I'll state you know, kind of what I know, and what my questions are. And I pretty quickly because I'm, you know, my my training, I have a master's in political science. So I understand a lot of the literature and I can read up on it pretty quickly. And then I can go in with very targeted questions to get up to speed on a particular topic. Usually, I'll already have an understanding or basic understanding of it. But occasionally, like, I'm working on community solar right now. And it turns out that is a far, far more complicated subject than I ever imagined. And so I'm taking an extra week to probably get my mind around it. So it just depends.

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Doug Parsons 36:09

How often do they come out, I feel like it's a couple times a week, but that's not the way

M

Michael Coren 36:13

I have it. column plus two newsletters, and one of those newsletters is like a shorter version of the column. So it's, it's a lot

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Doug Parsons 36:22

busy, but less busy. Like you mentioned the newsletter. And so I get that it's a climate 202. That's the main newsletter for the climate team, right?

M

Michael Coren 36:30

Climate change, whose own separate thing, but it is on the climate team, but they're primarily covering policy, that I have a climate coaching newsletter, which is really focused on the column plus a news roundup from you know, across the world,

D

Doug Parsons 36:41

okay, you're gonna love this bit of advice, but I get that. And she the woman who runs that she has a section like external stories that aren't Washington Post, yes. And they never put in podcast there. And there's actually a lot of great climate podcast, it doesn't even have to be America daps. But there's just occasionally a nod to a climate podcast, putting out some good content, it's never in there. So just a few next staff meeting if you could be like, hey, Alright, got it? Absolutely. All right. Okay, you're gonna love answering this question. And I do this. And when I when I talk to policy people, when I do these long interviews on the podcast, and shouldn't climate skepticism be a bigger story that the media covers? I mean, we're not 10 years ago, 15 years ago, where newspapers would have like pro and con, we're past that you guys are on board. The science is good. And yet we have really powerful people that aren't just a little bits, they're outright skeptics. Shouldn't that be a bigger story?

M

Michael Coren 37:39

Good question. Well, you know, yell does this awesome survey over the last 10 years, I think now even longer, and they basically look at, you know, what is the percentage of the US population that is their attitudes towards climate. And at this point, only about 11% are really dismissive. So they're saying, you know, it's a hoax, or what have you, and another 11% have some doubts. But we're now up to the point where over I think 60, or 70%, are somewhere between alarmed and sort of cautious. And so I think, I don't know, if we're really at a point where a big societal debate is happening about is climate change real or, you know, skeptical about the fact that it might not be, you know, somewhat, it'd be attributed to humans. That is a narrative that exists out there, and there are people talking about it. But at least from that perspective, I'm not sure that that's been a huge, huge conversation. Certainly there are

people, politicians or other folks who have a particular point of view and are very vocal about it. But I don't know if we didn't need to cover it from the perspective of the arguments or just the fact that it exists.

D

Doug Parsons 38:45

Not the arguments, no, don't waste your time on that now, and listen, I'm going to push back and disagree. I know the Yale stuff. I follow that for years. And to me some of the questions there. It's almost like push polling, like, you're right. You're asking people and they're like, whoa, okay, that sounds right. And like, listen, we know what we're talking about here. Just one party is really in denial about these things. And if all these people truly thought that this was an issue, it would reflect into the people that they elect. And if you looked at the National Republican Party, tons of skeptics, and then a lot of the hired leaders there, this is people making policy decisions, and like you, the debate was the other night, and the way they talk about climate change now is something that was like 2007. I disagree with you, that is like the American public's coming in the very sort of like, I don't care about this issue. But sure, I believe in climate change. I think that what might be going on, but when it comes to, and when we have people in charge of policy, who are outright skeptics, because look, everyone knows if Trump or whoever someone similar to him becomes President 2025. They're going to pull out of the Paris Accords. And those are very consequential things because they're skeptics. And so I guess I could disagree that it, we've already kind of turned that no, we have not.

M

Michael Coren 40:03

I guess you're right there to make a distinction between people who think it's happening and people who are willing to make changes either personal or policy oriented because of it. And in that sense, the ladder, certainly there's a huge partisan divide there. And that's undeniable. At the top of the party, you're seeing that as well. There's a lot of coverage of it. I again, this is not my particular stuff. And so I actually didn't have an opinion. Yeah, exactly. So I mean, I think we can talk about it. And we can point out maybe logical inconsistencies, or the fact that it's not, you know, that climate policies are supported by much of the country. I don't know if that is the driving force in swaying, pull up politicians one way or another, you know, our job is really to look at this and say, like, what's happening? Why is it happening and try to inform these people as well as possible?

D

Doug Parsons 40:50

I do think there's a bit of eye rolling, and then part of it's just normalized, because they do say really extreme things about it's not happening. And I think we're at the stage, we're so tired of that we just kind of like roll our eyes without really recognizing, I guess some of the things that Trump might say is that, oh, well, that's outrageous, but we've heard 500, things like that. And so anyway, I think climate covered suffers because of that. But that's my opinion. That's very possible. I want to go back to the you guys cover climate change the Washington Post, and I said earlier, the LA Times just is they ramped up the coverage, they announced it. And he just early thoughts on that. Have you poked around on what they're going to do and stuff? Any thoughts on like, maybe how it's different than Washington Post,

M

Michael Coren 41:30

I just saw this a few days ago, I just congratulated a few people. And I'm excited to read it. I know that they started with some coverage of dams. And there's actually trade offs, because you know, you're taking down dams, which is great for the ecosystem on the coastal California, but you're also reducing some of those renewable energy resources. So it's interesting to me, there was a great, I think, good piece that kind of examined the trade offs that we're gonna have to make as we transition to cleaner energy. And it's not free, right. There's always some costs. So but I'm really excited to read what they produce.

D

Doug Parsons 42:00

Yeah, in California, obviously, there's ground zero for me. That's where you live right now. Right? You're basically, right. I'm talking to you. Just so much climate stuff. When I was at that forum, it's just like lightyears ahead of other parts of the country. So for better for worse, right? I'm sure there's locals there, like we're not doing enough. But it's still pretty impressive. This is again, a big pivot, but I'm just fascinated. You're managing editor at a newspaper in Cambodia, can you just give us a flavor of what that meant? And what kind of stories you're doing?

M

Michael Coren 42:28

Yes, I showed up to Phnom Penh as a fresh graduate from undergrad and I had no idea what I was doing. I had studied a little bit of the language. So my and my goal of going into Cambodia was that it had a free press and take a chaos but free press. And it was kind of an environment that was really under siege and worth saving. And so I was thinking where they wanted to cover. So from logging into politics, and it turns out almost all my coverage on one way or another kind of related back to corruption, which was the driving force behind a lot of the decisions being made. But I really cut my teeth there, you know, as a journalist, and then eventually as the managing editor, and ran the newsroom of 15 people half expats and half combined Cambodian and learned a hell of a lot. And it was a very scrappy place that did great work. And, really, to the extent possible, hold the government to accounts and was able to give the voice to a lot of people who didn't have

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Doug Parsons 43:26

what a unique experience.

M

Michael Coren 43:30

I loved it. I loved it. I miss it. Although it was a little very interesting. You know, you'd get the head of one of the political parties come into your office and make threats. And it was a very small town, but very exciting.

D

Doug Parsons 43:40

This is how my mind works. Like if I had to do it Cambodia, Vietnam, or Thai, I'm thinking what's better food and Thai and Vietnamese food is just a bit better than Cambodian food, but that that's how my mind works. So

M

Michael Coren 43:52

once you live there, you'll you'll discover the greatness. Okay, good. It's

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Doug Parsons 43:56

good to know, what's next for you? What sort of stories can you share? Maybe you talked a little bit about some of the topics you want to do maybe next year and such, but just give us maybe a primer on what's coming up next.

M

Michael Coren 44:06

Sure. So as I mentioned, I'm gonna probably going to work on a series around real estate and wherever you live in some form or another, and that's a combination, I think of mitigation adaptation, the other pieces, you know, I'm working more on video and hoping to do place some of these more place based stories, I might embed with something called Grizzly core, which is kind of like the Civilian Conservation Corps for California, maybe do some solar powered road trips, you know, take take people places that they maybe haven't been, and I'm going to continue to explore some of the science and the evidence for you know, individual action, and really what matters and why and how people can incorporate that into their own lives.

D

Doug Parsons 44:49

Well, I appreciate the Washington Post giving you the column because it is very eclectic. You know, I don't read everything. I'd be like maybe the aviation I don't recall reading that one. But it's like it's just it's a thought exercise. eyes that sometimes you wouldn't necessarily see in a major newspaper, which is kind of fun so that you do that.

M

Michael Coren 45:06

Glad you're at that. Thank you.

D

Doug Parsons 45:07

Alright, last question. And I asked all my guests this if you could recommend one person to come on this podcast, which focuses on adaptation, but that could be another reporter. Who would it be?

M

Michael Coren 45:17

I'm gonna say Diane Wilson, who recently won the Goldman Environmental prize. And what has fascinated me about her is that she has a shrimper, Louisiana, I believe, and has almost single handedly won a massive series of lawsuits against Formosa Plastics, which is polluting per on the Texas, Texas Gulf Coast in Texas and Susan, and her ability to rally a community and to get consequential action at the state and local M national level really blew me away. And, you know, I think to get the type of change we need, you will probably need to see many more people like her take on a lot of vested interests and and how she did that is fascinating to me. And I'm something I hope to explore in the future. So I would be interested to hear from her. All right,

D

Doug Parsons 46:11

great recommendation. All right, Michael, this has been a pleasure. My first Washington Post reporter you guys are doing great work there. And thanks for coming on the podcast.

M

Michael Coren 46:19

My pleasure. Thank you so much.

D

Doug Parsons 46:25

Okay, adapters, that is wrap. Thanks to Michael Coren for coming on the podcast. As I've said many times, I love talking to reporters and talking climate coverage. I learned a ton and it is incredibly useful to me when I interview other climate experts. It's fantastic that news outfits like the Post New York Times and the LA Times have ramped up their climate teams. We've seen this before. But I finally think this critical coverage is here to stay. As I said to Michael and I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall as they brainstorm how they might cover this issue. I still don't think many in the media get adaptation, though it's lumped under impacts are not acknowledged as an emerging professional sector. I think when that happens, the public will truly understand that adaptation is here to stay and what it means in the larger climate change conversation that said every year the coverage keeps getting better. And I think climate skepticism should be a much bigger story. It's not okay when one of the major political parties thinks that it's a hoax, and that has real world consequences think of pulling out of the Paris Climate Accords. And I think a lot of the survey work from yellow Six Americas is just wishful thinking. Americans still don't understand this issue. And identifying those who are concerned about or those who are really concerned about climate change isn't going to move the needle forward. All right. Thanks again to Michael definitely check out his climate Coach column. It's a great picker upper and the topics are fascinating. And thanks to Laura for coming on and telling us about the new season of Today I learned climate check it out on my show notes. As many of you may not be familiar with the behind the scenes efforts required to produce and sustain America daps I'm making a pitch for your financial support. American adapts is a small nonprofit organization centered around the podcast and while I do receive sponsorship for specific episodes, I also rely on individual donations Thanks to recent donors Holly neighbor, Monica Serrano, Nicholas agrani, Kyle Johnson, Sean Martin, Alec Applebaum, Jessica and Peterson, Andrew rombach Jeffrey Matthews, Michael Katzman of the serendipity

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