News
EarthBeat



Jordan Peterson speaking with attendees at the 2018 Young Women's Leadership Summit hosted by Turning Point USA at the Hyatt Regency DFW Hotel in Dallas, Texas. (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore/CC BY-SA 2.0)

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Editor's Note: *This article by DeSmog is published here as part of the global journalism collaboration Covering Climate Now.*

Canadian climate science denier Jordan Peterson's new right-wing project launched last week with claims that carbon emissions have "declined" and that the climate crisis is a "secular religion."

The three-day Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) conference in London featured speeches from UK Cabinet ministers Michael Gove and Kemi Badenoch, and culminated with a high-profile event at the 20,000-seat O2 arena headlined by Peterson.

ARC is backed by the UAE-based investment firm Legatum Group and British hedge fund millionaire Paul Marshall, who together own the TV channel GB News. ARC's advisory board contains several high-profile climate science deniers and pro-fossil fuel politicians. As revealed by DeSmog last week, Marshall's hedge fund holds $2.2 billion worth of shares in fossil fuel companies.

Speakers used the widely-reported conference to dismiss the scale of the climate crisis and to undermine the need for government policies to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

A video trailer for the conference, screened at the start of the O2 arena event, began with a statement read by Peterson: "We do not believe that humanity is necessarily and inevitably teetering on the brink of apocalyptic disaster."

The video featured ARC board member Alan McCormick, a Legatum partner and chair of GB News, who said: "There is this cataclysmic belief that the future is dangerous and somehow we are to blame."

At the conference, U.S. author Michael Shellenberger told the large audience, "carbon emissions have flatlined and slightly declined over the last decade," and downplayed climate change's well-documented influence on extreme weather and nature.

He asserted that "renewables are not able to provide the reliable energy we need" and advocated gas and nuclear energy, claiming that fracking for shale gas had been "demonised" by climate activists.

Shellenberger went on to call climate change a "secular religion" adopted to replace belief in god and urged his audience to "love humanity, that is something our opponents in the Malthusian anti-human left are unable to do."

The conference also broadcast a speech via video link from U.S. scientist Steve Koonin, who has questioned the extent of human influence on the climate. At the ARC event he reportedly said there is no climate crisis, and claimed that not funding fossil fuel projects in the developing world is "immoral."

Koonin told DeSmog he based his remarks on reports by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's foremost climate science body, along with "original data, or quality peer-reviewed literature."

"That can hardly be called denying climate science," he said. Koonin acknowledged that he had "questioned" policies to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

ARC advisory board member and former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott used the launch of a paper on energy security, held "on the outskirts" of the ARC conference, to reaffirm his climate science denial.

Abbott reportedly told the Institute of Public Affairs think tank event that climate change has "nothing to do with mankind's emissions."

He added: "The climate cult will inevitably be discredited, I just hope we don't have to endure an energy catastrophe before that happens."

Abbott is a trustee of the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), the UK's main climate science denial group. In September he was nominated by Lachlan Murdoch to the board of the Fox Corporation, which owns Fox News. Abbott is also a member of the UK government's Board of Trade.

Abbott's remarks — and others made at the ARC conference — are contradicted by established climate science. The IPCC has said it is "unequivocal" that human influence has caused "unprecedented" global warming. The IPCC has also warned of the spread of climate misinformation which "undermines climate science and disregards risk and urgency" of cutting emissions.

ARC did not respond to our request for comment.

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Jordan Peterson is best known for his self-help books and attacks on identity politics, and has a devoted fanbase, with 4.8 million followers on X (formerly Twitter) and 7 million YouTube subscribers. In recent years he has used this significant platform to promote climate science denial.

His 'ARC at the O2' event on Wednesday night, attended by DeSmog, was careful to avoid political language, with Peterson and guests talking more generally about "personal responsibility", the meaning of life, and doing good in the world.

However, this discussion was framed as an alternative to the supposedly "apocalyptic" and "Malthusian" worldview of people concerned about the climate crisis.

("Malthusianism" is a term from the 18th century about the dangers of population growth which is sometimes used by opponents of climate action to refer to people concerned about human impact on the planet.)

Peterson gave a 40 minute speech in which he said ARC was opposed to any "top down globalist view" and any policy involving "compulsion."

He then chaired a panel with ARC advisory board member Bjorn Lomborg, a Danish writer who has regularly downplayed the threat posed by climate change. Lomborg is the author of the 2020 book "False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us

Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails to Fix the Planet."

On the panel, Lomborg said policies should be pursued based on the questions "how much will this cost and how much good will it do?", before suggesting that money and resources spent on climate change would be better spent on improving maternal health and education globally.

Peterson replied by agreeing that it was wrong to posit "a single apocalyptic crisis", as it meant that "political capital" was being spent "on false solutions to that apocalyptic crisis."

Lomborg then argued that climate change gets a lot of media coverage because "newspapers like to tell bad [i.e. negative] stories", but noted approvingly that his articles criticising climate policies, published by the Telegraph and co-written with Peterson, had been widely read.

Lomborg then downplayed the risk of rising sea levels, saying that he had visited an airport in the Netherlands which is under sea level, and that "they're fine."

"I'm not saying it's unproblematic", he added, "but we can fix this."

Another panellist at the O2 event was Spectator associate editor Douglas Murray, who in August suggested that climate policies will "impoverish" Brits, and has argued that "terrifying our children with doom-mongering propaganda on climate change is nothing less than abuse."

Murray said that modern culture suggests that "there's this terrible catastrophe, they change all the time – we fall back on the climate catastrophe. It's enervating."

He later added: "On the climate catastrophe, and the anti-human nature of what's going on, [which suggests that] if not for humans the trees and the moths would be fine: human beings are not the problem, we're the point."

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The ARC conference also heard from hedge fund millionaire Paul Marshall, who co-owns ARC and GB News. This week, DeSmog revealed that Marshall's hedge fund has $2.2 billion in fossil fuel investments, including in the likes of Shell, Chevron, and Equinor.

Marshall used his speech to attack "woke capitalism", adding: "Free markets and scientific innovation can and will also solve the major problems facing humanity today, not least dealing with the challenges associated with climate change." This is a common trope used by opponents of government policies to tackle the climate crisis.

The event also featured a speech via video link by Vivek Ramaswamy, the U.S. businessman running to be the Republican presidential candidate, who has called climate change a "hoax."

Ramaswamy praised Marshall and attacked "the ESG [environmental, social and governance] movement that Paul Marshall so eloquently spoke about." He claimed that states were using pension funds "to tell boards like Apple and Chevron and Exxon that they have to adopt these racial and climate policies."

Ramaswamy said he hopes to see people around the world "say 'hell no' to these agendas, that we the people will once again be the ones who decide the differences from climate change policies to racial injustice."

Gove and Badenoch did not address climate change in their speeches. Gove took up Marshall's theme of "woke capitalism", while Badenoch discussed what she called "gender ideology."

Other speeches were delivered by Conservative MPs Danny Kruger and Miriam Cates, and ARC's chief executive, Baroness Stroud, who is a former CEO of Legatum Group's think tank, Legatum Institute.

This story appears in the **Covering Climate Now** feature series. View the full series .