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Spilman law firm to host climate change conversation Tuesday

By Kate Mishkin Staff writer Jun 10, 2018



Steam billows out of the stacks at the FirstEnergy Corp. Bruce Mansfield coal-fired power plant in Shippingport, Pennsylvania in December.
JUSTIN MERRIMAN | Bloomberg photo

This week, four people will take to the stage at the University of Charleston to present their differing perspectives on climate change.

But it's not a debate, said Nick Preservati, member at Spilman Thomas & Battle, the Charleston law firm hosting the event.

"We're trying to present it as a conversation," he said. "Other people see it as a debate which may add a level of challenge."

The event, "[Conversations on Climate Change](#)," will be held Tuesday at University of Charleston, and it promises a discussion without the "typical vitriol," Tiffany Fridley, marketing manager for the firm, said in an email.

She cited a website that referred to the event as the "climate showdown of the decade."

The discussion will focus on two questions: To what extent are humans causing climate change, and how do we manage the effects of climate change? Four scientists will each give a 15-minute presentation before a longer question-and-answer session. Hopefully, Preservati said, that format will help facilitate a balanced dialogue.

"Our goal is to ask both sides some hard but fair questions," he said.

The both-sides approach, he said, alienated some people who were invited to speak but said they didn't think the topic was up for debate.

"You wouldn't have an event to debate whether the earth is round. It's sort of in that category," said Jeremy Richardson, a senior energy analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists who declined an invitation to moderate the debate.

David Titley, director of the Center for Solutions to Weather and Climate Risk at Penn State University, said he's hoping to shine a light on the link between climate change and national security – a topic that's not always discussed. He said he's turned down opportunities to testify at "circus-type" hearings in Congress.

"That visual is probably what concerns me most – you should see almost 200 people lined up with Mann and myself and two on the other, and that would show where science community is," he said, referring to Michael Mann, director of the Earth System Science Center at Penn State, who will also be presenting Tuesday.

The debate should focus on how to solve the problem, not whether there is a problem, Mann said in an email.

He accepted the invitation to speak because "I think the folks in West Virginia need to be informed about the facts and in an environment where I and my colleague David Titley, former oceanographer for the Navy, are able to

present those facts in an objective fashion, I think science & truth will prevail," he said.

Patrick Moore, former president of Greenpeace Canada, and Judith Curry, former chair of the school of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, are the other two panelists.

"I don't think anything like this has ever occurred formally. Almost all the conferences on climate are one side or the other attending, and there's far too much name calling in this game," Moore said.

He said he planned to talk about how fear and guilt often motivate the discussion around climate change.

In an email, Curry said she planned to talk about the "role of politics in torquing the scientific debate in one direction."

The scientists who accepted, Preservati said, accepted because they're not afraid to defend themselves.

"And I respect that. If you take a position, you should be able to stand up and defend yourself and defend your position. I think that's what you should do," he said.

The law firm purposely stayed away from corporate sponsorship to maintain objectivity, he said. That's why tickets, which can be [purchased online](#) or at the door, are \$20. [Tickets to the live broadcast](#) are \$10.

Preservati said he didn't think the cost would be a deterrent.

"I don't know, I hope not. We think it's an important enough issue. ... We could've offset the cost of all this by having corporate sponsors," he said.

"Conversations on Climate Change" is Tuesday from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The event will be at the University of Charleston's Geary Auditorium: 2300 MacCorkle Ave. S.E., Charleston.

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