



Interview with Alex Bozmoski (DEPLOY/US)

Ashley Hopkinson

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Ashley Hopkinson: Can you start by introducing yourself?

Alex Bozmoski: I'm Alex Bozmoski, Vice President at DEPLOY/US. I'm talking to you from Milwaukee USA, the greatest city in the world. I've been at DEPLOY for three and a half years, and before that I spent almost a decade building an eco-right grassroots organization called republicen.org, which is very close to my heart and continues to be run with great effect by former Congressman Bob Inglis.

Ashley Hopkinson: Can you tell me more about DEPLOY/US? Why was the organization started? What problem was it created to help solve, and how do you see the organization moving toward solving that problem?

Alex Bozmoski: I'm lucky to have joined DEPLOY/US after it started. The problem is that decarbonization requires bipartisanship over time, but environmental civil society is almost exclusively invested in and built for pushing and guiding progressives and Democrats on climate. The answer to that structural problem is scaling and better coordinating the field of nonprofits, advocacy organizations, leaders, and thinkers who love, appreciate, and reach right-of-center constituencies in America.

A big part of the solution is fixing this spectacular imbalance in funding. For every dollar invested by US Climate Philanthropy in climate-related grants, less than a single penny goes to organizations that are conservative or libertarian, or that are proactively engaging right-of-center Americans. There was an analysis published on the Center for Effective Philanthropy blog just a few months ago that put it closer to half a penny.

Another big part of it is making sure that the right hand knows what the other right hand is doing. In addition to aggregating and flowing funding to the eco-right field as an intermediary, DEPLOY is building shared infrastructure and coordination to improve the eco-right field's effectiveness as it scales. We're a systems change organization.



Ashley Hopkinson: As an organization, how do you measure success? What's the evidence that DEPLOY/US is making progress?

Alex Bozmoski: The North Star outcomes relate to actual decarbonization progress: the field's contribution to that comes from bipartisan climate breakthroughs -- of which we have seen a number in recent years -- as the eco-right field has scaled its impact, even if it hasn't sufficiently scaled its size.

There are key outputs on the way to those decarbonization impacts that are important indicators of how the field is gaining effectiveness. You could see those from a field-wide perspective: the production of field organizations, the headcount at the organizations, and the production of research.

You can look at the incremental gains in staffing in the US Congress, at talent that developed at eco-right organizations, at the shift in Congressional testimony from more climate-antagonistic voices to more solutions-oriented expert witnesses.

You can also see it in important trends with right-of-center constituencies that are reflected in polls. There are some great field organizations engaging young conservatives and young Republicans, and you see polls that show over 80% of young conservatives care about climate change.

Causality is always difficult, or impossible to prove, but you can strongly intuit it. When constituencies begin to be served by organizations that reflect their values, you see those constituencies caring more and more about climate. That's an important indicator of success.

What counts at the end of the day are the decarbonization wins, and the role that the eco-right field organizations, leaders, and thinkers played in the policy process: from ideation, research and ideas all the way through to advocacy, votes, and promulgation. The evidence for that impact has been mounting considerably over the last number of years.

Ashley Hopkinson: That makes sense for a systems-change organization. It's not a one-to-one impact, but a sweeping change. I know such deep work takes a lot of patience. What would you say makes DEPLOY/US a distinctive organization, or distinctive in the field?

Alex Bozmoski: We are the only organization focused on scaling the decarbonization impact of the entire eco-right field.



Ashley Hopkinson: What insights or teachable lessons do you think others can take from your work? What advice would you give to someone who wanted to start an organization like this, or do this kind of work?

Alex Bozmoski: Organizations, or at least lines of effort, in this field need to be started because the diversity of the right-of-center constituencies across the country that are not served by environmental civil society is rather profound.

The young and way too small eco-right field is not yet equipped to engage all of those folks. What you're posing as a hypothetical question has become a real question that we've been advising on with social entrepreneurs that are looking at filling in some of those gaps in different parts of the country.

What we'd advise is context-dependent on what specific problem or constituency we're intending to engage or solve for. That said, there are a few things that I think matter, that we've learned or had reinforced throughout the course of this work.

First, most conservative Americans care deeply about stewardship, conservation, and yes, reducing climate pollution. However, they aren't well-served or well-organized because the field that's made for that is so vastly under-resourced. There's proof that resourcing the field works, so we've got to fix that.

Two, we need more, and more recognition and appreciation of eco-right leaders. I'm painting with a broad brush here -- meaning nonprofit leaders, lawmakers, policy nerds, field operatives, organizers. I have met the most authentic and incredible human beings working right of center on climate who embody the suite of important talents that any movement needs to be successful.

Our team at DEPLOY feels grateful every day for how wonderful and genuine the commitment to decarbonization is across the eco-right field. However, in some corners, there's a pretty in-your-face skepticism or assumption that when you see Republicans or conservatives working on climate, there must be some kind of ulterior motive, that they aren't genuine. There's an attitude of, "Let's look closer because there must be something going on." What's going on is that these are badass genuine leaders and Americans who are trying to make this country a better, stronger, more competitive, more compassionate, cleaner, and healthier place. They're working their tails off in sweat and spinal fluid to do that every day. I want to shout that from the mountaintops to folks who are skeptical of their authenticity.

The third thing, which is more of a meta-observation, is that the media landscape often undercuts the truth of this point. Bipartisanship is very much still alive in America. It remains the norm in America. You see cable news, and social media is optimized for nut picking. I don't study this, but



scholars do, so I'm going to try to channel Curry and Lee's research for this answer, but the vast majority of landmark legislation is still passed by a majority of the majority, and a majority of the minority in both houses of Congress.

When we do big things as a country, we almost always have done and continue to do them with a majority of the minority party. The few times that a majority tries to roll the minority and pass something on partisan lines, you know the names of all those bills because they become these political footballs for the next several election cycles. You can immediately call to mind: Trump tax cuts, the ACA [Affordable Care Act], Dodd-Frank. Those partisan bills are on the tip of people's tongues because they're so much discussed. But there are so many more pieces of legislation that are passed in a genuinely bipartisan manner, and it just doesn't get covered. They're not on the front page of the *New York Times*, or the *Wall Street Journal*.

I think it's helpful to marinate in the normalcy of bipartisanship a little bit because the polarization can feel paralyzing.

Ashley Hopkinson: I can see how these deeply-entrenched beliefs make the work your organization is doing to rebuild narratives about how environmental work is being done, and how policies are passed, systemic-level work. I can also see why it's important to bring people together from both sides so you're able to have more examples to share of what's really happening, and more surprising stories.

Alex Bozmoski: Yes. In terms of surprising stories, the Louisiana state legislature recently -- very close to unanimously -- passed a resolution endorsing carbon border tariffs, or carbon border adjustment, to hold China accountable for polluting exports. On the heels of that, Senator Cassidy, who's incredibly knowledgeable and passionate about his constituents, about the energy industry, and about trade, authored a bipartisan border adjustment bill in the US Senate. That's a neat story. We'll see where it goes.

Ashley Hopkinson: A lot of these stories are undertold because we like to tell what fits into the narratives we already have. It happens with a lot of big, social issues, with topics like education and immigration. That's what makes the space you guys are working in a social change space. Do you feel a need for more people in this field?

Alex Bozmoski: We need so many more people. Put it this way: if you are a Democratic senator, and you post a job description for a legislative assistant to work on climate and energy issues, you'll have a stack of resumes from people with decades of experience in environmental nonprofits, in organizations doing policy work, or working on legislative language. There's a huge talent pipeline. In a lot of ways, your civil society capacity mirrors your governing capacity. On the



center right, our civil society capacity on climate is vastly under-resourced, which creates a scarcity of talent for governing, whether that's staffing Congress or a presidential administration.

Ashley Hopkinson: Can you share a story of impact that illustrates the work you're doing? Something that shows "This is why DEPLOY/US is here."

Alex Bozmoski: In the state of Florida, which is governed by Republicans -- has a super majority Republican legislature and a Republican governor -- a number of landmark decarbonization-related successes have been achieved over the last couple of sessions. They were mostly related to fixing a massive wastewater infrastructure. Those landmark, Republican-led and bipartisan wins for decarbonization were also wins for whole watersheds and important industries like oystering, and just people's quality of life. They resulted in tens of thousands of septic tanks being converted to advanced wastewater treatment.

This saves nature and industries and results in a lot less harmful algae blooms and just general expense. Those wins were informed, pushed, and guided by a number of eco-right field organizations and partner organizations in Florida that DEPLOY funds, and with whom our DEPLOY Florida team is embedded with on the ground in a coordination function, in Tallahassee and across the state. Those organizations succeeded in a number of ways over the last several sessions. The lawmakers did too because these are very popular reforms. They not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but improve quality of life and save watersheds, things that matter to the people and that preserve the places that Floridians love.

The ability to achieve popular decarbonization and win with conservation benefits is a pretty good example of what the field can accomplish when it's a little better-funded and when everyone is working together and has resources. That success is also tied largely to the authenticity and leadership of a number of conservative Florida lawmakers. Their constituents care a lot about the people and places that they love, and are pretty motivated to restore their estuaries and watersheds, and to solve for all the problems that these septic tanks create.

Ashley Hopkinson: I love that example as the illustration of wonderful things that can happen when it's not just great policy, but it's also popular policy.

Alex Bozmoski: Yes, exactly. On this question of examples, I want to point out that you can see eco-right field impact in a lot of the recent examples of federal progress on bipartisan decarbonization.

Eco-right organizations and leaders deserve a lot of credit for wins in the Energy Act in 2020, for the passage of the Kigali Amendment, for the ratification of the infrastructure bill, for movement



on permitting reform -- including the first step in the debt deal last year -- for a ton of state wins, and for the recent movement on border adjustments.

The eco-right plays has played an important role in a lot of things that demonstrate that presently, with half a penny of every a hundred bucks, it's punching above its weight, which is a pretty exciting proposition when you think about what kind of impact just a few more percentage points on the climate philanthropy resource distribution might have.

Ashley Hopkinson: This might feel like an obvious question, but how, specifically, do you feel that you are working towards systems change? How would you define that work?

Alex Bozmoski: Systems change is everything that we do. It's identifying the field-wide opportunities and gaps, then seizing opportunities and filling gaps through flowing funds, or aggregating and flowing funds through talent recruitment and training.

It's also facilitating and orchestrating unlikely partnerships, or new partnerships that help bring new institutions and leaders into the eco-right field -- maybe those who haven't had the resources to work on climate issues before.

We do it through building a shareable, field-wide infrastructure, which is more efficient when it's located at a single trusted organization, like DEPLOY, than it is when it's duplicated at a number of different organizations. The eco-right field pursues different priorities and strategies, and organizations have different lanes and engage with different constituencies. That creates a lot of maybe hard-to-see opportunities, but it also means that there can be incidents of friendly fire, or tension, or conflict. There's a coordination, and also a social capital-building role that DEPLOY/US plays and is excited to expand.

The last thing I might mention is that organizations are often really good at setting goals and tracking their performance and progress on activities and outputs and impacts, but the picture is more nuanced and compelling when it's across the field and not just in one organization. The field-wide assessment and learning role that DEPLOY/US plays is going to be more and more useful and important to eco-right field organizations as the field scales in size, complexity, and impact.

Ashley Hopkinson: What would you say is needed from other actors in the eco-right field? What, for you, is the gap that would be most beneficial to see filled?

Alex Bozmoski: I think the eco-right field is jazzed and ready to roll on scale. Broadly speaking, that means bought in and leaned in to collaboration, partnership, learning, and accountability. There is also a funding need as coordination and funding are related. There are giant capacity



needs to be able to effectuate the goals of these organizations and to achieve decarbonization outcomes. Clean energy outcomes as well as tangible, local conservation-related outcomes are motivating a lot of organizations in the eco-right field. DEPLOY/US's North Star is decarbonization, but we work with a lot of partners whose North Stars are a little bit different. However, they are consistent with a cleaner, more competitive, stronger America.

One thing we need from a lot of actors is a better commitment to longer- and medium-term thinking. Often, in the short term, the shortcut to getting something you want in the next five minutes, or before the next election, is to polarize an issue, denigrate the enemies, and try to get the win, right now.

A lot of the time there are short-term opportunities that need seizing, but if it's always short-term thinking, if it's always thinking only in the context of the next two years, you'll never build the broad coalitions that we need to win the relay race of decarbonization over the next 14 Congresses and at least four presidents, between now and 2050. We need to be able to plan and collaborate with longer-term thinking in mind, thinking that extends beyond the end of the week or this election cycle.

We need to accept the reality that there's no such thing as American-led decarbonization without bipartisanship. That is blatantly obvious if you look at the political permutations that are likely between now and 2050. But if you're only thinking about November, then it's less obvious, and it's easier to shun opportunities to work together on bipartisanship. I think you can see this in some of what's happening right now in Congress on other issues, as well.

Ashley Hopkinson: How would you like to see the organization evolve and grow moving forward, say in five years time?

Alex Bozmoski: We intend to see the eco-right field grow a ton, and grow in impact even more than in size. We are going to support that in every way we can, which likely means expanding our funder intermediary role significantly. It means being embedded with infrastructure and expertise in the field with organizations, and facilitating partnerships for impact talent recruitment. We've identified areas where we think we can facilitate field-wide impact and growth. I am optimistic that we'll have made miles of progress, and the field will have made miles of progress, five years hence.

Ashley Hopkinson: Thank you, Alex, for sharing your insights with me today.



Ashley Hopkinson is an award-winning journalist, newsroom entrepreneur and leader dedicated to excellent storytelling and mission-driven media. She currently manages the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of the Solutions Journalism Network. She is based in New Orleans, Louisiana.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*