

Backgrounder

GREENPEACE

Key findings from the leaked TransCanada / Edelman strategy to promote the Energy East pipeline

18 November 2014 (Toronto) - Greenpeace has obtained copies of strategy documents and work proposals prepared for TransCanada by Edelman, the world's largest public relations firm. These documents outline the strategic assessment and tactics to be deployed in support of TransCanada's proposed Energy East pipeline from Alberta to New Brunswick.

As of August 5, 2014 (the date of the most recent document), TransCanada was working with Edelman to undertake a "grassroots advocacy" campaign that includes both promoting the Energy East project and undermining its critics. The precise scope and scale of the work TransCanada has contracted with Edelman is unknown, but TransCanada has recently launched the [advocacy micro-site](#) described in these documents.

The leaked documents are as follows:

- [Energy East Campaign Organization: Promote, Respond Pressure](#) (August 5, 2014)
- [Research Synthesis](#) (no date)
- [Grassroots Advocacy Vision Document](#) (May 15, 2014)
- [Digital Grassroots Advocacy Implementation Plan](#) (May 20, 2014)
- [Strategic Plan: Quebec](#) (May 20, 2014)

Key Findings:

1. TransCanada Energy East campaign builds on other oil industry astroturf (fake grassroots) efforts.

Edelman emphasizes that TransCanada would not be alone in adopting this kind of a strategy. The *Grassroots Advocacy Vision* document notes the success of oil industry associations' *astroturf* campaign (including Edelman's [\\$51 million campaign for the American Petroleum Institute](#)) to support the KXL pipeline and fracking, defeat climate legislation and oppose renewable energy:

"Companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and Halliburton (and many more) have all made key investments in building permanent advocacy assets and programs to support their lobbying, outreach, and policy efforts. In launching a program like this, TransCanada will be in good company with a strong roadmap to follow." (*Grassroots Advocacy Vision* p. 5-6)

2. Description of "new realities" of PR for oil industry projects.

The Edelman campaign draft addresses what they describe as:

"the new realities of designing, building and operating a major pipeline project in North America. These new realities include:

- **Permanent, persuasive, nimble and well-funded opposition groups**
- **Pipeline projects being used as proxies for the broader "off-oil" public debate**
- **Record low levels of public trust in government, meaning regulatory approval is no longer sufficient to successful project implementation."** (*Grassroots Advocacy Vision* document, p. 5)

3. Enlisting third party proxies to back up TransCanada.

According to these internal documents, Edelman's proposed work plan will **"add layers of difficulty for our opponents, distracting them from their mission and causing them to redirect their resources"**

by recruiting third parties to do and say things “when TransCanada can’t.” (*Energy East Campaign Organization* document, p. 3)

Edelman is bringing in U.S. experts with experience in “astroturf” (fake grassroots) campaigns to bring third-party pressure to bear on their opponents.

This strategy was recently exposed in the [New York Times](#), when (non-Edelman) PR expert Richard Berman was secretly taped telling oil industry executives to “fight dirty or lose pretty” and to “think of this as an endless war.... And you have to budget for it.”

4. Three-track approach: Promote, Respond, Pressure.

In the Campaign Organization document (p. 2) Edelman details the plan it will deploy for TransCanada:

“Borrowing a page from the modern political playbook, we recommend a three-track approach to build the necessary campaign infrastructure. This approach strives to neutralize risk before it is leveled, respond directly to issues or attacks as they arise, and apply pressure – intelligently – on opponents, as appropriate.”

They describe this as “**running a perpetual campaign**” to protect and enhance the value of the Energy East Pipeline and to help inoculate TransCanada from potential attacks in any arena.

“The three tracks in our approach are:

Promote: Actively promote the positive Energy East story to key audiences.

Respond: Anticipate and respond rapidly to unfavorable coverage/conversation, charges and negative attacks.

Pressure: Work with third parties to pressure Energy East opponents.” (*Strategic Plan: Quebec* document, p. 9).

One of the actions that TransCanada would be asking their supporters to take is “voicing their support of the project to candidates for political office” (*Digital Grassroots Advocacy Implementation Plan*, p. 10) which could prove significant in the lead-up to the 2015 federal election.

The third element, Pressure, is described in greater detail in the *Campaign Organization* document:

“Pressure: Work with third parties to pressure Energy East opponents.

- **Add layers of difficulty for our opponents, distracting them from their mission and causing them to redirect their resources.** We cannot allow our opponents to have a free pass. They will use every piece of information they can find to attack TransCanada and this project – attacks are part of a larger, modern oppositional effort to silence those on the other side. To make an informed decision on this project, Canadians need to have a true picture of the motivations not only of project proponents, but of its opponents as well. This point should particularly be made in communication to supportive third parties, who can in turn put the pressure on, especially when TransCanada can’t.” (*Energy East Campaign Organization* document, p. 3)

This “Pressure” campaign component also involves “**Detailed Background Research on Key Opposition Groups**”, beginning with the Council of Canadians, but would likely be extended to Equiterre, the David Suzuki Foundation, Avaaz, and Ecology Ottawa (*Energy East Campaign Organization* document, pp. 7-8).

The *Strategic Plan: Quebec* document (pp. 11-13) identifies Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures, Cacouna, St-Honore-de-Temisouata, St-Bruno-de-Kamouraska, Lanaudiere and Chaudieres-Appalaches as communities where environmental concerns have been expressed and which must be targeted by TransCanada’s public relations campaign.

The *Strategic Plan: Quebec* also includes a “Tactics to Pressure” section (pp. 30- 31), which states:

“In order to add layers of difficulty for opponents, we will work with third parties and arm them with the information they need to pressure opponents and distract them from their mission.... Third-party voices must be identified, recruited and heard to build an echo chamber of aligned voices.

Edelman will work with TransCanada’s Community Relations team to develop a list of third-party experts and credible community voices with whom we can form strategic relationships and possibly enlist to author op-ed pieces, blog posts or letters to the editor. In coordination with Community Relations staff, we will identify and vet potential allies to determine their viability and level of interest.

Then we will share this information with the Digital and Grassroots Advocacy team in order to best leverage these advocates online and offline. We will arm them with the materials they need to combat opposition messaging.”

5. Specific Edelman personnel identified on project team.

The *Grassroots Advocacy Vision* document (p. 17) notes that the campaign approach “**has a strong heritage in the more aggressive politics and policy fights in the US, and those lessons and best practices will be critical to our success.**”

Specific Edelman staff people are identified in these documents, including some with experience running “astroturf” campaigns in the U.S., as well as possessing strong Republican and Tea Party ties.

According to the *Grassroots Advocacy Vision* document (p. 20), the Senior Counsel “responsible for overall strategic direction and directly accountable for the success of this campaign” is **Mike Krempasky**, who is from Edelman’s Washington D.C. office. The organizational chart also identifies him as the lead person on the digital grassroots advocacy and “Pressure” element.

Krempasky is no stranger to controversy, having [raised eyebrows within the PR industry](#) over the way he ran Edelman’s Walmart campaign. The [CEO of Edelman ultimately had to apologize](#) for that campaign’s use of fake grassroots bloggers (who, it was revealed, were secretly being paid by Edelman/Walmart). Krempasky also co- founded [RedState.com](#), which bills itself as the voice of the “authentic conservative movement” in the United States. Krempasky himself has [promoted online training opportunities for Tea Party activists](#) and he is credited with assisting various corporations and right-wing blogs to adopt social media techniques [to boost the nascent Tea Party movement](#).

The Program Lead for the TransCanada campaign is [Nate Bailey](#), who developed and implemented Edelman’s energy-related political and grassroots advocacy program for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that has [opposed climate legislation](#). That campaign has been [criticized by environmentalists for trying to delay action on climate change](#). He has also previously served as a spokesperson for the Republican Party.

Krempasky’s Energy East “Pressure” team includes **Brian McNeill** who also has strong Republican credentials, having [served as the director of opposition research](#) for Senator John McCain’s 2008 presidential campaign. McNeill made [national news](#) when it was revealed that he was one of three Edelman employees who were authoring all of the blogs on the supposedly grassroots and independent blog PaidCritics.com, which “exposed” links between unions and other vested interests that are supposedly “smearing WalMart.” As [one commenter put it](#): “Doesn’t anybody at Edelman see the irony behind having their own paid critics writing WalMart’s Paid Critics blog?” asks Sean Carton, a blogger, and chief strategy officer for Baltimore interactive consultancy idfive. “This was a brilliant idea, in its way, but it was evil and they got caught.”

6. Edelman history with astroturf campaigns and blocking action on climate change.

The recruitment of third parties or creation of supposedly-grassroots groups that are run by a PR company to smear the company's critics is relatively novel in Canada. Edelman, however, has turned third party pressure into an art form. The firm had a long history of [working for the tobacco industry](#) and an [internal Edelman document](#) reveals how Edelman pioneered the use of "third party support" for an embattled industry in the 1980s.

More recently, Edelman has worked on behalf of the oil industry to defeat climate legislation in the U.S., including the [creation of fake-grassroots groups](#) (sometimes called astroturf groups) to put pressure on politicians. According to a published report, Edelman was paid [\\$51.9 million](#) to run the American Petroleum Institute's (API) public relations campaign, which has involved Edelman managing multiple websites and online advertising efforts asking officials to approve the Keystone XL pipeline, support tax deductions for the oil industry and expand access for drilling on public lands. Central to this strategy is the pro-oil group "Energy Citizens", which was [unveiled as an API-sponsored astroturf group by Greenpeace USA](#). The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers [recently launched its own version of Energy Citizens in Canada](#).

Edelman's involvement in these campaigns may explain the August 2014 controversy over the firm's position on climate change. Following an [initial story in the Guardian](#) where Edelman wouldn't rule out working on climate denial campaigns, the firm engaged in damage control, resulting in a [second article](#) on how they wouldn't work on climate denial campaigns, but might still work for climate deniers. This led to a follow-up column in the Guardian entitled "[Climate changeable: Waffling lands PR firm Edelman in Hot Water](#)" and an article by Brian Merchant at Vice Motherboard on "[How the World's Biggest PR Firm Helps Promote Climate Change Denial](#)" that detailed work by Edelman for American Petroleum Institute (API) and American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

In the wake of this controversy, Daniel Edelman [wrote a blog](#) that stated that his firm would no longer engage in astroturfing, which would appear to contradict the "pressure" tactics identified in the Energy East strategy documents.

7. Contrast with Environmental Groups.

Environmentalists have been clear on why we oppose the Energy East pipeline. We argue that it will enable an expansion of the tar sands that will result in [an additional 30 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions going into the atmosphere each year](#), which is the equivalent of putting an additional seven million cars on the road. [It is a threat to drinking water, air quality, First Nations treaty rights and sensitive habitat like that of the beluga whale](#). We have published research arguing that project proponents have [overstated the economic benefits](#) and understated the risks. We believe that the threat posed by this pipeline is an unnecessary one because we have better options available to us to meet our energy needs. When we engage in public debates, we put our names to these statements and publish the evidence to support them. We believe that oil companies should do the same.

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