USC Annenberg
School for Communication and Journalism
Center for Climate Journalism and Communication

USC Launches First-of-its-Kind Podcast Series and Research Focused on the Energy Transition

Electric Futures *Available Across Podcasting Platforms on January 24, 2024*

The USC Annenberg Center for Climate Journalism and Communication (CCJC) announced today the launch of Electric Futures, a podcast series exploring lesser known stories of the energy transition, from the perspectives of the people most impacted by the changes that transition will bring. Over six episodes in season one, Charles Zukoski, former USC provost and current Viterbi professor of engineering, gets to know people living and working in a corner of Southern California rich with community – and critical minerals – on the brink of a transformation so big, it could reverberate across the globe.

Imperial Valley, an agricultural area east of San Diego and bordering Mexico, is suddenly in the spotlight thanks to its vast deposits of lithium, a chemical element necessary for the production of batteries needed for electric vehicles, grid storage, and consumer products. The extraction and processing of this "white gold" is poised to bring a massive influx of capital to the Imperial Valley, which has the highest unemployment rate in California at 21.1% and a poverty level of 17.3%. *Electric Futures* explores the tradeoffs the community must make as it weighs economic opportunity, environmental impact, and a worldwide hunger for lithium.

"Growing up, I always felt like my community was unknown to the world," said Imperial Valley resident Natalie Lopez, an associate producer on the podcast and a sophomore environmental studies major at USC's Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. "Considering the massive amount of green energy and agricultural produce that is coming out of the Imperial Valley, it is important that people begin to understand the stakes in my hometown."

Electric Futures brings to the podcast world a commitment to using research-based climate communications best practices, including a narrative storytelling approach. Additionally, an audience research study conducted by USC Norman Lear Center will be the first to measure trends in engagement for a climate podcast. The research will be published by the Center for Climate Journalism and Communication upon completion.

"In my extensive experience in the podcasting industry, there is nothing as in-depth as this storytelling podcast and study," said lead producer Mallory Carra, a veteran of Spotify's top podcasting studios and a USC Annenberg adjunct professor, who teaches audio journalism. "We're excited to take listeners on a

deep journey into the heart of Imperial Valley and learn crucial details about the impact of climate storytelling that can steer the podcasting industry going forward."

Electric Futures debuts January 24, 2024, on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music. In addition to Zukoski, Lopez, and Carra, the team includes CCJC director Allison Agsten as executive producer, USC Annenberg public diplomacy graduate Spencer Cline as associate producer, and USC Annenberg communication undergraduate Cindy Chai as researcher with cover art by School of Cinematic Arts graduate Matthew Buxbaum.

Funding for the podcast and associated research is provided by USC's Office of the Provost, with additional support from the USC Viterbi School of Engineering.

For media inquiries, including to schedule interviews with host Charles Zukoski or executive producer Allison Agsten, contact the Center for Climate Journalism and Communication at redhot@usc.edu.

Electric Futures was recorded on-location at the University of Southern California, the Imperial Valley, and the Kwaaymii Homeland (Laguna Mountain, California). We collectively acknowledge these are lands that occupy the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Gabrielino-Tongva, Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneno, Luiseno, Quechan, CoCoPah, Pai Pai, Kumeyaay, and Kwaaymii (Languna band) peoples. We honor them and other Indigenous caretakers of these lands and waters, the elders who lived here before, the Indigenous today, and the generations to come. We pay respects to their past and present. Let this acknowledgement serve as an ongoing reminder of the original inhabitants where you reside.

USC Annenberg's Climate Journalism and Communication was established in 2022 to empower journalists and other communicators to tell stories about climate change. It is supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Beedie Foundation, the Manaaki Foundation, and Vere Initiatives.