

A weaponized AI chatbot is flooding city councils with climate misinformation

By

- [Rory White](#)
- [Investigations](#)

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#16 of 16 articles from the Special Report: [The Takeover](#)

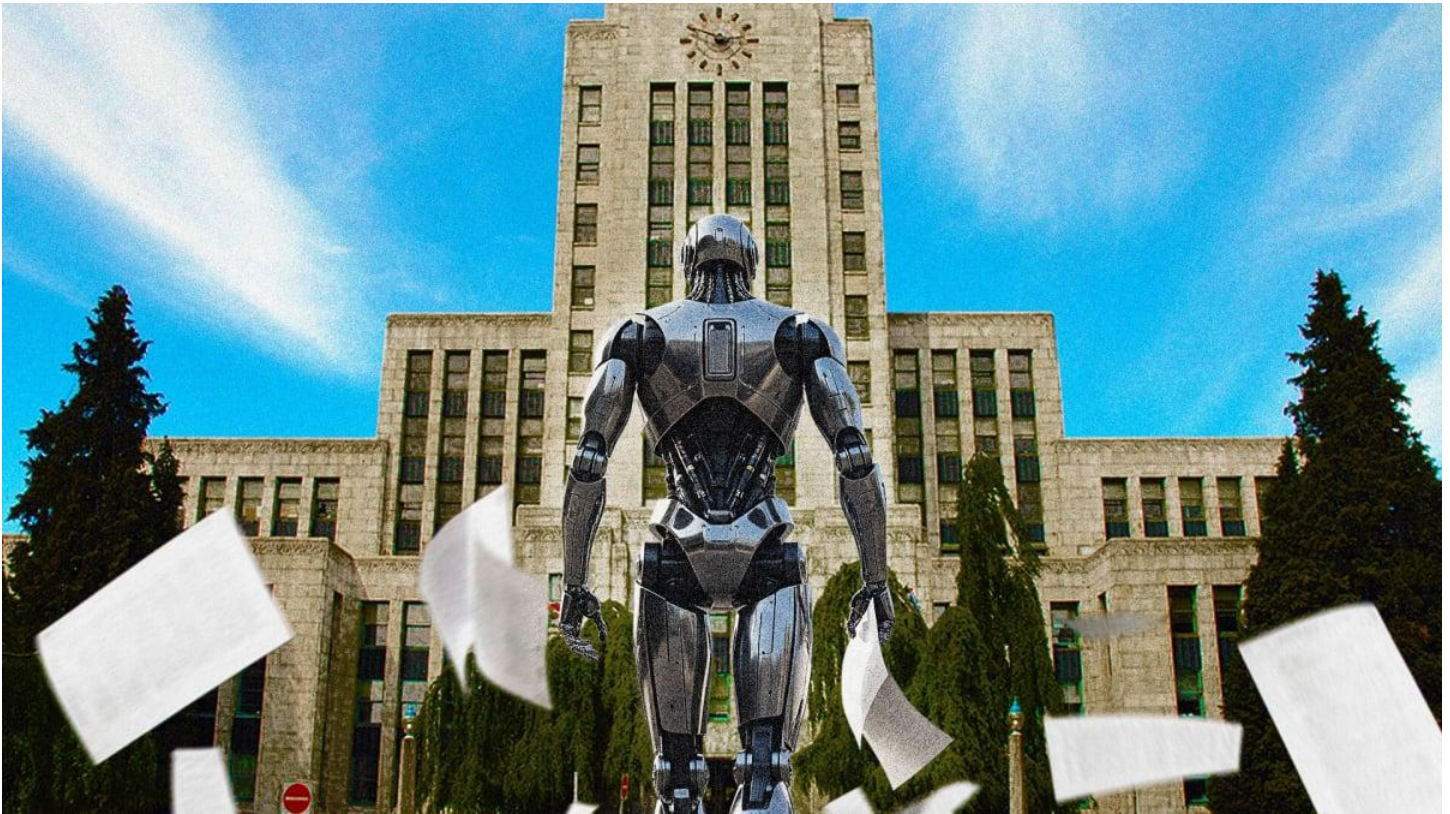


Illustration by Ata Ojani.

One morning in October of 2024, Fredericton city councillor Margo Sheppard received an email with the subject line: “The Real Policy Crisis: Prioritizing ‘Nature’ Over People.” It was polished — almost algorithmically smooth — and it calmly urged her to reconsider Fredericton’s net-zero policies.

Over the next month, a flood of similar emails followed, all aimed at getting Fredericton to abandon global climate targets. Sheppard is used to emails from organizations on all kinds of issues, but not this many, not on this issue — and not so well crafted. She grew suspicious.

“If we’re getting them in Fredericton,” Sheppard thought, “councillors all across the country must be getting them too.”

She was right. Thousands of councillors in more than 500 municipalities have received these emails, according to KICLEI, the group behind them, whose name mimics the international environmental network [ICLEI](#). Screenshots of KICLEI’s internal database show the email addresses of local officials nationwide.

An investigation by *Canada’s National Observer* has now traced the digital infrastructure behind KICLEI’s campaign: a custom AI chatbot designed to express fears about United Nations control using moderate, civic language — messaging that is now shaping real decisions in town halls across Canada.

At least 14 municipal halls have received KICLEI presentations, with Thorold, Ont., already voting to withdraw from Canada’s flagship municipal net-zero scheme, [Partners for Climate Protection](#). This month, Lethbridge, Alberta, voted to cut its governmental emissions reduction target in half. These decisions followed receipt by the town councillors of letters, presentations and reports from KICLEI members. Some of these materials contain misinformation, according to three climate scientists interviewed by *Canada’s National Observer*.

The consequences for the communities and climate action are significant — but climate plans might be just the first target. These AI-enabled tactics could scale, according to Shane Gunster, an expert in environmental communication at Simon Fraser University, who warned that artificial intelligence “enables the cost of misinformation to come close to zero.”

The chatbot’s instructions tell it to “de-emphasize the climate catastrophe narrative,” to focus on “real pollution, not CO2.” The bot is told to frame these arguments in the most reasonable possible way.

The Canadian Civic Advisor

KICLEI (‘Kicking International Council out of Local Environmental Initiatives’) was founded in 2023 by Freedom Convoy activist [Maggie Hope Braun](#) with a singular aim: to convince towns and cities to quit the voluntary net-zero

program Partners for Climate Protection, due to its ties to the UN through its co-organizer, ICLEI Canada.

To achieve this, it has created its own custom AI chatbot: the “Canadian Civic Advisor,” powered by OpenAI’s ChatGPT. [Internal instructions](#) accessed by *Canada’s National Observer* show that the chatbot produces tailored scripts, petitions, reports and even speeches for council chambers. The messaging is often framed to resonate with municipal officials’ duty to represent local interests.

The chatbot’s instructions tell it to “de-emphasize the climate catastrophe narrative,” to focus on “practical environmental protection measures” and “real pollution, not CO2.” The bot is told to frame these arguments in the most reasonable possible way, “emphasizing collaboration” and “encouraging diplomacy and mutual understanding between citizens and elected officials.”

One prompt instructs the chatbot to draft critiques of a local Climate Action Plan based on KICLEI’s centralized materials. The latest version is provided with KICLEI’s Substack posts and scientific positions — content that, according to some of the scientists cited, contains climate misinformation.

Subject: Request for Council to Withdraw from the PCP Program

To: Mayor

Output of the Canadian Civic Advisor, shared by Maggie Hope Braun on Facebook with the prompt “Write a letter to the council in Peterborough to withdraw from PCP”

Many advocacy groups use AI but the potential for it to amplify inaccurate information is “disturbing,” even if real constituents are sending the messages, according to Gunster. He argues that the chatbot allows KICLEI to centralize local messaging and make it maximally persuasive for policymakers.

“You can tailor that communication so specifically to a particular region, to a particular individual, to a particular value set,” said Gunster. It is the first case Gunster has seen of AI being used to target municipal governments in Canada.

KICLEI founder Maggie Hope Braun refused Canada’s National Observer’s interview requests, choosing instead to respond to written questions. She rejected concerns that KICLEI’s chatbot was amplifying misinformation, describing it as “democracy in action.” She explained the chatbot helps citizens who are genuinely concerned about global agendas to “understand local policy and draft respectful, informed communications.”

Braun published her responses online, with reworded versions of our [original questions](#).

‘A gross misrepresentation of our work’

Since April 2024, KICLEI has published 172 Substack posts — about one every two days — which are sent to councillors across Canada. Titles include “Extreme Weather Events Are Not Increasing: Separating Fact from Fiction” and “CO2 Is Not the Primary Driver of Climate Change.”

Three prominent climate scientists told *Canada’s National Observer* that some of these posts contain misinformation about their research.

In March, 2024, Braun gave a deputation to Thorold, Ont.’s city council where she claimed that there is only a 0.3 per cent consensus among climate scientists that humans are the primary driver of climate change. In reality, the consensus is around 99.9 per cent, according to a 2021 review of over 88,000 papers.

The 0.3 per cent statistic is attributed to a 2013 study by John Cook, an expert on climate misinformation at the University of Melbourne, who spoke to *Canada’s National Observer* from his office in Melbourne, Australia.

“It’s a gross misrepresentation of our work, clearly designed to mislead the public,” Cook said. The figure comes from a widely-debunked paper that he claims distorted his data to “minimize the consensus as much as possible” by counting only studies that used very specific language.

Using this methodology, he argues, “you would say that there's zero per cent consensus that the Earth is revolving around the Sun.”

Thorold councillors ultimately voted 7–1 to withdraw from the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program. *Canada’s National Observer* covered this decision in a [recent investigation](#) into an anonymous oil and gas ad campaign targeting the same town.

The motion to withdraw from PCP was introduced by councillor David Jim Handley, listed as a KICLEI member on Facebook. He described KICLEI’s role in shifting council opinion as “instrumental” and described Maggie Hope Braun as a “catalyst” who guided his thinking.

“You could replicate it, easily,” he said. “You gotta find one city councillor that’s on your side.”

At least 14 other municipalities — primarily in Ontario and Alberta — have received KICLEI presentations. Among them is Lethbridge, Alta., which voted on May 13, 2025, to cut its 2030 operational greenhouse gas reduction target in half. This decision followed a presentation from a KICLEI member, coordinated emails from constituents, and an unrelated staff recommendation.

The scale of KICLEI’s email campaign is even greater. Maggie Hope Braun recently [claimed in an interview](#) with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy that KICLEI is sending reports to 8,000 elected officials. [Screenshots reveal an internal KICLEI database](#), packed with the email addresses of mayors, councillors, clerks, and chief administrative officers nationwide.

Microsoft Excel - Current Partners Of The PCP From East To West & When They Joined - March 15 2024 - Mark Solomon.xls

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
	Canadian Mayors & Councillors (From East To West)						
	Location	Province	2024 Mayor/Reeve/Warden	M/R/W Email	Councillor 1 (Deputy Mayor)	C1 Email	Councillor 2
356	Municipality of Emerson-Franklin	Manitoba	David Carlson (Reeve)	dcarlson@emersonfranklin.com	Dennis Weiss (Deputy Reeve)	dennis@emersonfranklin.com	Todd Nichols
357	Municipality of Lorne	Manitoba	Axel Pantel (Reeve)				
358	Municipality of Norfolk-Treherne	Manitoba	Gilles Guerin (Reeve)	guerin@nortfolk.com	Ryan Gaudier (Deputy Reeve)	ryan_gaudier@hotmail.com	Jackie Johnson
359	Municipality of North Cypress-Langford	Manitoba	Ray Drayson (Reeve)	ray.drayson@northcypress.ca	Dale Olinstead	dale_olinstead@northcypress.ca	Rob Van Kesteren
360	Municipality of Rhineland	Manitoba	Don Wiebe (Reeve)	don.wiebe@rhineland.ca	Brad Braun	brad.braun@rhineland.ca	Brad Wiebe
361	Municipality of Russell-Bonscath	Manitoba	Judy Sontyasky	jontyasky@russell.ca	Estha Baszley	estha@russell.ca	Wes Anderson
362	Municipality of West Interlake	Manitoba	Arthor Jonasson (Reeve)	ArthorJonasson@westinterlake.com	Randy Halgason (Deputy Reeve)	RandyHalgason@westinterlake.com	John Bezemer
363	Rural Municipality of Alexander	Manitoba	Jack Brice	jbrice@alexander.ca	Mac Kington	mac_kington@alexander.ca	Gordon Kaye
364	Rural Municipality of Carleton Place	Manitoba	Christa Vann Mitchell (Reeve)	christa.vannmitchell@carletonplace.ca	Dan Bouchard (Deputy Reeve)	councillor.bouchard@carletonplace.ca	James Kraft
365	Rural Municipality of De Salaberry	Manitoba	Daniel Curt (Reeve)	dcurt@desalaberry.mb.ca	Lois Councillor (Deputy Reeve)	councillor@desalaberry.mb.ca	Bruce Hilbert
366	Rural Municipality of East St. Paul	Manitoba	Carla Devin	carla.devin@eaststpaul.com	Orest Horoshko	orest.horoshko@eaststpaul.com	Brian Imhoff
367	Rural Municipality of Ellice-Archie	Manitoba					
368	Rural Municipality of Etan	Manitoba					
369	Rural Municipality of Hanover	Manitoba					
370	Rural Municipality of La Broquerie	Manitoba	Ivan Normandeau (Reeve)	inormandeau@labroquerie.ca			
371	Rural Municipality of Minto-Odessa	Manitoba	Doug Downsett (Reeve)		Ron Cui		Barry Cook
372	Rural Municipality of Montclair	Manitoba	Paul Gilmore	gilmore@montclair.com			
373	Rural Municipality of Morris	Manitoba	Scott Siemens (Reeve)	siemens@morris.ca	Marin Duack (Deputy Reeve)		Rick Giesbrecht
374	Rural Municipality of Richelieu	Manitoba	Chris Ewen	chris.ewen@richelieu.ca	Shane Pelletier	Shane@richelieu.com	Jason Bodnaruk
375	Rural Municipality of Saint-François Xavier	Manitoba	Delmer Holt (Reeve)	delmer.holt@stfrancois.ca			
376	Rural Municipality of Springfield	Manitoba	Patrick Thiem	patrick.thiem@springfield.ca	Glen Fuhl	glenfuhl@springfield.ca	Andy Kuczyński
377	Rural Municipality of St. Andrews	Manitoba	Jay Sol	jay@standrews.ca	Ken Doornbos	ken@standrews.ca	Chris Monitor
378	Rural Municipality of St. Clements	Manitoba	Debbie Fabelsson	debbie@stclements.com			
379	Rural Municipality of St. Laurent	Manitoba	Richard Chantard (Reeve)	richardchantard@gmail.com			
380	Rural Municipality of Stanley	Manitoba	Ira Friesen (Reeve)	ifriesen@stanley.ca	Pete Friesen (Deputy Reeve)	pfriesen@stanley.ca	Ray Unrau
381	Rural Municipality of Site Anne	Manitoba	Richard Pelletier (Reeve)	rpelletier@siteanne.com	Randy Eris (Deputy Reeve)	randy@site.net	Sarah Normandeau
382	Rural Municipality of Stuartton	Manitoba	Michelle Gawronsky (Reeve)	michellegawronsky@gmail.com	Dan Bode (Deputy Reeve)	dan.bode@stuartton.ca	Dylan Gorman
383	Rural Municipality of Taché	Manitoba	Armand Poirer	armand@tache.ca	Colin McGregor	colin@tache.ca	Steven Bessier
384	Rural Municipality of Thompson	Manitoba	Brian Callum	brian@thompson.ca			
385	Rural Municipality of Victoria	Manitoba	Ray Huggart (Reeve)		Rag Margaret (Deputy Reeve)		Rick Lee
386	Rural Municipality of Wallace-Woodworth	Manitoba	Clayton Carst (Reeve)	c.carst@wallace-woodworth.com	Val Carst (Deputy Reeve)	v.carst@wallace-woodworth.com	Diana MacDonald
387	Rural Municipality of West St. Paul	Manitoba	Peter Ingers	peter.ingers@weststpaul.com	Mike Pagliathan	mike.pagliathan@weststpaul.com	Peter Campbell
388	Town of Altona	Manitoba	How Schneider	how@schneider.ca	Denna Rising-Williams	denna.williams@altona.ca	Jordan Simms
389	Town of Carberry	Manitoba	Ray Murhead	ray.murhead@carberry.ca	Bill Kalmenech	bill.kalmenech@carberry.ca	Mike Sudan
390	Town of Minnedosa	Manitoba	Kan Cameron	kan@minnedosa.com			
391	Town of Morris	Manitoba	Scott Cnck	scott@townofmorris.ca	Chris Hamilton	chris.hamilton@townofmorris.ca	Dave Funk
392	Town of Neepawa	Manitoba	Brian Hedley	brian.hedley@neepawadistrict.ca	Chris Weir	weir@neepawa.ca	Daryl Genard
393	Town of Nevenille	Manitoba	Myron Dyck	myron.dyck@nevenille.ca	Chris Weir	chris@nevenille.ca	Ruthie Durr
394	Town of Pownseville-Pine Falls	Manitoba	Les Barclay	les@pownseville.ca	Estha Picher	estha.picher@pownseville.ca	Judy LeMay
395	Town of Stonewall	Manitoba	Sandra Smith	sandra@stonewall.ca	Peter Bulward	peter@stonewall.ca	Walter Badger
396	Town of Swan River	Manitoba	Lance Jacobson	l.jacobson@swanriver.ca	David Morau	dmorau@swanriver.ca	Don Boback
397	Town of The Pas	Manitoba	Andre Murphy	amurphy@thepas.ca			
398	Town of Virden	Manitoba	Tina Williams	tina@virden.ca	Mar. Slay	m.slay@virden.ca	Tara Cowan
399	Village of Dumortier - Mayor's Email Supersedes From Structures Of C	Manitoba	Richard Gamble	richard@villageofdumortier.ca	Michel Forest	michel.forest@villageofdumortier.ca	Suzanne Jolicoeur
400	Village of St-Pierre-Jolys	Manitoba	Raymond Maynard	raymond.maynard@st-pierre-jolys.ca			
401	City of Iqaluit	Nunavut	Solomon Awa		Kim Smith		Harry Flaherty (Alternative Deputy Mayor)

PCP Mayors, Clerks, CAO's, PCP Mayors & Councillors, Past Mayoral Candidates, Additional Helpful Info

Screenshot of KICLEI's database with email addresses of mayors, councillors, clerks and CAOs in all PCP member municipalities, screen-captured from a KICLEI meeting recording from May 2024

One of KICLEI's published reports, "CO2 is not the Primary Driver of Climate Change" cites the work of NASA atmospheric scientist Andrew Lacis on the logarithmic impact of CO2, claiming "this diminishing effect challenges the assumption that rising CO2 levels alone will result in catastrophic global warming."

Lacis says this is "disinformation." Far from rising CO2 not being a concern, he explained that CO2 accumulates in the atmosphere, causing a "virtually permanent increase" in the Earth's heat absorption. That drives long-term global warming and may trigger powerful feedback loops which pose "an existential threat."

The same KICLEI report cites Kevin Trenberth, a prominent climate scientist at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research, to claim that "water vapour is far more influential [than CO2] in regulating global temperatures."

This is not accurate, according to Trenberth: “Water vapour is an important feedback but not a cause or primary driver,” he said. “If there is no CO2 then there is no water vapour.”

In her emailed response to Canada’s National Observer, Braun rejected the concerns of the three scientists, calling them a “disagreement over interpretation.” She denied that KICLEI’s reports contain misinformation or disinformation. “Our references to water vapour, CO2 forcing, and consensus data are grounded in published research,” she said, despite being informed that the authors of those peer-reviewed studies directly contradict her assertions.

A firehose of emails

Councillors in several provinces say they feel overwhelmed by KICLEI’s outreach. Late in 2024 in Simcoe County, Ont., local officials described a “firehose” of correspondence, according to Adam Ballah, policy and communications lead at the [Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition](#).

“It makes their jobs really difficult, having to wade through this stuff,” Ballah explained. In response, he wrote a [detailed blog post](#) rebutting KICLEI’s claims.

In one municipality, Tiny Township, a KICLEI deputation told councillors that the costs of the PCP program were “unsustainable.” Alarmed, councillors ordered a [review](#) — which found the township was paying \$12,700 a year.

Tiny Township has reached Milestone 3 of the PCP program, creating a Climate Action Plan, which gives it access to grants from the [Green Municipal Fund](#). KICLEI estimates that implementing all five milestones costs between \$8 million and \$212 million dollars, including up to \$50 million for a “15 Minute City Model.”

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which co-organizes the PCP program, did not provide alternative figures when asked directly. Instead, it released a statement from its President Rebecca Bligh, saying “to combat misinformation spread by KICLEI, FCM is proactively communicating results and progress.”



Councillor Margo Sheppard was targeted by KICLEI's emails Photo by Patty Smith

In New Brunswick, Fredericton councillor Margo Sheppard attempted to block incoming KICLEI emails but was advised by the city solicitor that they couldn't be filtered.

She reported the messages as spam to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) — but never received a response. The CRTC declined to comment on the complaint, or whether they had received it.

"It's very distressing," said Sheppard. "I don't have time in the day to research people who are peddling misinformation or disinformation."

She was surprised to find out that KICLEI is using AI. "I wouldn't know how to detect it," she said.

Whether or not we can detect it, AI has entered the conversation — and local councillors like Sheppard, once peripheral to digital politics, are now on the front lines of a new era of persuasive misinformation.

“This is the beginning,” Sheppard said. “We’re in for a deluge.”

Rory White is an independent investigative journalist who builds technical systems to uncover coordinated campaigns targeting democratic processes. He has contributed to a Bellingcat investigation by geolocating sports betting operations in Russia, and published research analyses in The Lancet Psychiatry and Nature Mental Health. He holds a Masters in Data Science from the University of British Columbia and an M.Sc in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

May 28th 2025



[Rory White](#)