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Mayor Emanuel Interviews Tom Skilling on Chicago Stories

On this week's episode of [Chicago Stories](#), Mayor Emanuel welcomed Tom Skilling, Chicago's beloved WGN-TV chief meteorologist, to talk about Tom's remarkable career, lifelong passion for the weather and his increasing focus on climate change—or as he also puts it: “climate disruption”—and what we can do about it.

“There isn't another side to this story. Climate change is happening and it has profound implications to this country,” Tom said.

Tom Skilling has become an active and outspoken voice on the reality of climate change, but he didn't start that way. Like many people, Tom was initially skeptical when he first heard of about the possibility of our planet “warming” and the Arctic “melting.” But that began to change.

“When I used to hear that the Arctic was going to melt and this warming was going to take place I thought: ‘you're going to have to prove that to me,’” Tom told Mayor Emanuel, “but I've been doing this for about 50 years and I see the atmosphere doing things I've never have seen it do before.”

As he told Mayor Emanuel, what fully convinced him of the urgency of climate change were warm pools in the atmosphere he saw developing in the Arctic that buckle the jet stream and have a profound impact on our weather right here in the mid-Atlantic latitude.

Today, the biggest challenge to fighting climate change are the cynical efforts by the Trump administration and Republican policymakers to stonewall, deny and outright bury any effort to combat it or even acknowledge of its reality.

“We've got some real issues and we'd better address them,” Tom told Mayor Emanuel. “For anybody at this stage in the game to have their heads so deeply planted in the sand—it's just amazing to me that anybody could question what's going on.”

While the Trump administration is doing all it can to prevent any positive action on climate change, here in Chicago we have taken the lead by creating the Chicago Climate Action Plan, hosting the North American Climate Summit and creating the Chicago Climate Charter, which now represents 67 cities and tens of millions of people across the globe, along with other measures.

In fact, when the Trump administration removed research from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Change website, Mayor Emanuel worked with cities around the country to post the information on their own sites, ensuring they're still available online.

Under Mayor Emanuel's leadership, Chicago has enacted strong environmental protections and taken significant steps towards tackling climate change that demonstrate sustainability and economic growth go hand in hand. Recently, Mayor Emanuel announced that Chicago has significantly decreased its usage of carbon emissions and is now forty percent of the way to meeting its Paris Agreement goals.

Over the past decade, reductions came while the number of jobs within the city increased by seven percent, and is equivalent to shutting down a coal power plant for fourteen months.

This is due to efforts like the Chicago Energy Benchmarking Ordinance, which has led to a collective savings of more than \$39 million over three years according to a recent report. Building on this is the Chicago Energy Rating System, which will make energy use information for large buildings easily accessible to Chicagoans while encouraging a projected \$70 million annually in energy savings. By 2025, all of Chicago's public buildings will be powered by 100 percent renewable energy. That transition means that eight percent of the city-wide electricity load or 1.8 billion kilowatt hours will come from clean and renewable sources.

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Additional Quotes From Tom Skilling:

Tom Skilling on Climate Change:

"Climate change is not one extreme, it isn't one heat wave, it isn't one cold snap, it isn't one snowstorm. It's when these things start happening over and over and over again."

"Climate change is a collection of extremes on both sides of the ledger in precipitation. In both increased frequency of drought and increased frequency of rain. Increased instances of heat and cold."

"Every degree Fahrenheit that this planet warms the atmosphere holds four percent more water. We saw the impact with Harvey in Houston. Never has a tropical cyclone over the term of the instrument record in this country that goes back to the late-1800s has produced that level of rain."

Tom Skilling on Following Your Passion:

"I tell young people be too stupid to know that you're not supposed to do be able to do what you want to do and go for it, and that's pretty much the description of my career"

"I'm surprised at the way this career has unfolded...I've been able to do things I can only have dreamed about. From a little kid who used to dream about applying his newspaper route holdings to buying a bedroom radar set to where I am today."