

Double Dip: A GOP Senate Candidate's Shameless Opportunism On Climate

Tim Sheehy pitches his aerial firefighting company as a leader in the climate change fight. On the campaign trail, he's attacking a so-called "climate cult."

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See also his connections on ESG [here](#)

When it came to growing and promoting his aerial firefighting company, Montana businessman Tim Sheehy was, for years, outspoken about the need to combat global climate change, even publicly supporting a major initiative to curb emissions and invest in climate resilience.

But since launching his Republican bid for Senate in June, Sheehy has toed the party line on climate, railing against what he calls the "climate cult" and the "disastrous socialist Green New Deal."

On one hand, his sudden shift is unsurprising, given he's seeking the Republican nomination in an increasingly deep-red state. Here's how Montana writer James Conner recently [summarized](#) the political landscape: "This is what a candidate does to prepare for a Republican primary. Acknowledging that the globe is warming won't hurt him in a general election, but it will in a primary."

On the other hand, it is a shameless display of opportunism and partisan rhetoric that comes as the nation suffers rapidly worsening climate impacts — and as Sheehy's company, Bridger Aerospace, continues to tout itself as a leader in the fight against planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

Sheehy and his campaign did not respond to HuffPost's request for comment by press time.

A decorated former Navy SEAL, Sheehy is campaigning for a chance to take on Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) in 2024. He is widely expected to face far-right Rep. Matt Rosedale (R-Mont.) in the Republican primary, although Rosedale has not officially announced his candidacy.



Tim Sheehy, founder and CEO of Bridger Aerospace, pauses during a tour of the company's facility on Aug. 30, 2022, in Belgrade, Montana. Sheehy announced in June that he'll seek the 2024 GOP nomination to challenge Montana's Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Tester. RACHEL LEATHE/BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE VIA AP

Sheehy founded Bridger Aerospace in 2014 after retiring from the military. The company has grown exponentially in recent years, with a fleet of [28 aircraft](#), including several water scoopers, that have assisted in battling fires across the Western U.S. and parts of Canada. In 2022, the company raked in more than \$46 million in revenue — 96% of which came from federal contracts, according to [company filings](#) with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Sheehy earned [nearly \\$5 million](#) in salary and bonuses as the company's CEO last year and owns company stock that as of Friday was valued at \$83 million.

Sheehy has [continued](#) to serve as Bridger's chief executive officer since launching his Senate bid, and campaign advertisements have prominently [featured](#) the company's aircraft. If elected to the Senate, he would have oversight over the same federal agencies that have bankrolled his business. All of this has raised conflict of interest questions, as [Bloomberg](#) and [NBC News](#) have reported.

Climate change has been a major part of Bridger Aerospace's marketing and business strategy.

In a [presentation](#) to investors this month, the company boasted that its mission is to “directly attack CO2 emissions to combat climate change.” One slide includes a graphic detailing the “vicious cycle” between increasingly catastrophic wildfires, carbon pollution and planetary warming. Another notes that “climate change has elongated the active northern hemisphere fire season.”

In a separate [presentation](#) this month about its second-quarter earnings, Bridger wrote that “demand for aerial firefighting continues to grow driven by climate change, population moving to wildfire prone areas and shift from ground to air-based suppression.”

A Bridger [filing](#) with the SEC for the 2022 fiscal year features the word “climate” dozens of times, mostly in the context of how climate change could impact the company’s future business.

“We are not able to accurately predict the materiality of any potential losses or costs associated with the physical effects of climate change,” it reads. “We believe that rising global temperatures have been, and in the future are expected to be, one factor contributing to increasing rates and severity of wildfires. Climate change and global temperatures are impacted by [sic] many variables, however, and cannot be predicted with certainty.”



One of Bridger Aerospace's aircraft, known as a "super scooper," battles the Hermits Peak and Calf Canyon Fires in the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico in April 2022.

J. MICHAEL JOHNSON/U.S. FOREST SERVICE VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.), chair of the powerful National Republican Senatorial Committee, is among several Republicans who have endorsed Sheehy, citing his experience as a combat veteran, successful businessman and job creator.

But what Daines and others aren't talking about is how the Republican hopeful made his fortune helping confront a crisis that the GOP has for decades denied and downplayed while working to boost the production of planet-warming fossil fuels.

Sheehy also seems to be distancing himself from that legacy. Sometime before Sheehy announced his Senate bid, Bridger scrubbed climate language from its website, including a line about the company "fighting on the front lines of climate change," [ABC News reported](#) last month.

A spokesperson for Sheehy told ABC at the time that it was nothing more than a routine website update.

Yet his rhetoric on the campaign trail would suggest otherwise.

Sheehy's campaign website features an [issues page](#) that is chock-full of favorite Republican talking points. In a section on forest management, Sheehy touts having created 200 jobs in the aerial firefighting sector before railing against both the federal government — his company's biggest client — and "radical environmentalists."

"I have a unique perspective on what the federal government is failing to address when it comes to tackling wildfires—they need to let Montana start managing our federal lands," the website reads, seemingly flirting with a full embrace of the unpopular movement to transfer control of federal lands to states. "We also need to stand strong against the radical environmentalists who are suing and shutting down timber projects with frivolous litigation. If we can responsibly manage our forests, we can harvest timber, create high-paying jobs, and reduce the threat of wildfires."

Another section of the website, on the economy and energy, notes that the U.S. must "take a strong stand against the disastrous socialist Green New Deal that would destroy Montana's economy and jobs and devastate our communities."



Tim Sheehy, a former Navy SEAL and successful Montana businessman, announced his candidacy for U.S. Senate in June.

TIM SHEEHY FOR MONTANA

But as recently as two years ago, Sheehy publicly supported major climate initiatives, including a blue state legislative package with provisions that mirror aspects of the Green New Deal, a progressive set of guiding principles to rein in greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience.

In March 2021, a few weeks after President Joe Biden reentered the United States into the Paris climate accord, Sheehy published an [op-ed](#) in the Salt Lake Tribune applauding a newly formed, bipartisan wildfire caucus in Congress. In it, he called for global cooperation to fight climate change.

“There are several explanations for the proliferation and escalating damage of wildfires, and addressing those causes requires renewed attention of local, state and federal governments and — when it comes to climate change — international cooperation,” Sheehy wrote.

Several months later, Sheehy [appeared on CBS News](#) to discuss the growing threat of wildfires in the West and a \$15 billion climate package that California had recently passed into law. In the interview, he discussed the many complex factors driving extreme fire,

including climate change and decades of fire suppression that have left forests choked in excess fuels.

“Ultimately what he’s doing is finally bringing the necessary legislative and government focus to the wildland fire issue, which has been plaguing the U.S. for decades,” Sheehy said of California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom. “And how we’ve addressed it has really been antiquated and an incremental approach that is underfunded, under-resourced, undermanned, and put the entire situation into a category where we’re always reacting to the fires instead of being prepared for them ahead of time.”

“It’s great to see at least one of our state leaders now stepping up and providing the proper amount of funding and resources to address the issue,” he added.

The California climate [package](#) that impressed Sheehy so much contained billions for wildfire, forest and drought resilience. But it also funded Green New Deal-esque initiatives that have become a target of the GOP’s environmental culture wars, including \$3.9 billion for electric vehicle investments and grants for environmental justice projects.

In the weeks since announcing his Senate campaign, Sheehy’s rhetoric has only grown increasingly partisan and bizarre. In an [interview](#) with Fox News last month, he called American fossil fuels “the cleanest form of energy known to man” — a wildly inaccurate statement.

Earlier this week, a Montana judge [ruled](#) in favor of 16 youth plaintiffs who sued the state in 2020 and argued that state agencies had violated their constitutional right to a “clean and healthful environment” by approving fossil fuel projects without considering climate impacts. Sheehy joined Daines and other Montana Republicans in [attacking the judge, the young Montana plaintiffs](#) — his would-be constituents — and Democratic climate policies.

“The latest example of a liberal activist judge trying to legislate radical Green New Deal disastrous policies from the bench,” Sheehy [wrote](#) on social media. “We must fight back and take a strong stand against the climate cult and their job-killing agenda.”

Just not when it involves securing government contracts to confront the threat of climate-exacerbated wildfire, apparently.