

What's so funny about global warming?

December 10 2009, By Michael Davies-Venn

Ian Leung has wanted to do something about global warming for almost two decades. Ever since he switched careers in 1991 from science advisor to the Ontario Ministry of Environment to pursue a career as an actor, the environment-and how to communicate its importance to the public-has been on his mind.

"I felt bad about the fact that there was this important issue, and I left the ministry to pursue my dreams. I said to myself [that] one day I would write a play about the environment."

The play, *U: The Comedy of Global Warming* opens at the University of Alberta's Fine Arts Building media room on Thursday and makes true Leung's 18 year-old promise. For Albertans itching to know what will happen to the province once the effects of global warming intensify, they may find some answers in Leung's deceptively titled multimedia play, because, he says, there's nothing funny about global warming.

The idea that hundreds of millions of poor people in developing countries could, for example, lose their homes due to ocean levels rising and be unable to relocate, is not a funny idea, he says. However, he adds, the positions of governments on the issue merit satire.

"Both the federal and provincial governments are taking positions that are so absurdly counterproductive that the idea of taking a satirical approach to their policies seemed more logical and to my aesthetic taste," Leung said. "The way the Canadian and Alberta governments are behaving internationally on this issue seems to be a form of denial."

Leung says the play has several subplots, including that of a young attractive climate refugee from Tuvalu, who had a questionable love affair with Albert A. Oil, the CEO of a fictional Albertan oil and gas company, and who brought the Tuvaluan to Edmonton to work as his houseboy. Another involves an actor who convinces his audience that they are, in fact, watching a live taping of a television show called Hot Stove Planet and video interviews with federal, local and provincial politicians, along with scientists and environmental activists.

At the centre of all this is a question as to whether it is OK to continue profiting from oil and gas exploration when doing so causes environmental problems elsewhere in the world. That's a moral question and is one that some will object to being asked, because they may feel it's a simplification of the issues on global warming, Leung says. But, he says, the arrival of the climate-change refugee from Tuvalu illustrates the complex consequences of global warming.

"One of the central issues of this play is that things will happen here [in Alberta], but things will happen in other parts of the world that will affect us here.

"One of those is the potential for people around the world who could lose their homes as a result of global warming-where are they going to go?" Leung said. "Canada is a place that would likely be viewed as a source of refuge for climate refugees."

There is an argument that the effects of global warming could be a good thing as it may mean longer growing seasons, Leung says. But, he says, an indication of global warming is not something that can be assessed by looking out the window, and that people are not necessarily aware, for instance, that drought in Alberta is also a possible outcome of global warming.

Leung hopes the play, which addresses Alberta's tar sands and coal industries, raises awareness about global warming. He believes everyone has the ability to make a difference on the issue and that people who become motivated by the play can lobby governments on the issue.

"I think it's too easy for us to say right now that our economy is so important to us that we're not going to do anything about [global warming](#)," Leung said. "I recognize that it will be tough on some people here, but we don't seem to have qualms about making decisions that would make it tough on people elsewhere who share this planet with us."

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: What's so funny about global warming? (2009, December 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-funny-global.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.