

## **Yedlin: GE's Allan energized by innovation opportunities**

Deborah Yedlin, Calgary Herald

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**GE Canada president and CEO Elyse Allan was named the Energy Council of Canada's Energy Person of the Year on Thursday. Colleen De Neve / Calgary Herald**

The Energy Council of Canada's selection of Elyse Allan as its energy person of the year sent a powerful message about the organization focus on the sector's future and path forward.

"It's meant to be a forward-looking award, recognizing the contribution of the recipients to the energy sector, the economic future of our country, but also in the context of how they are mentoring the next generation and their philanthropic commitment to society," said council chairman Colin Anderson.

Allan, the president and CEO of GE Canada, accepted the award Thursday night in Toronto. She is only the second woman the council has named its Energy Person of the Year. The first was former politician and Inuvialuit Regional Corporation chair Nellie Cournoyea, in 2004.

A passionate and inspired advocate for innovation in energy, Allan is also committed to the community at large as a director with many not-for-profit organizations. She also gives her time to the advisory board of the Ecofiscal Commission and is part of the federal government's Advisory Council on Economic Growth.

Allan is determined to see GE continue to apply the mindset and discipline of innovation — a hallmark of the 124-year-old company's success — to the energy sector by working with players across the spectrum, from oil and gas to electricity and renewables.

The company's merger with Baker Hughes means it can marry the old industrial age — typified by oilfield services — with the new, like the Internet of things. The economic potential of GE applying its digital and technological expertise to an oilfield services giant is massive, and also constitutes a big, bullish bet on the future of energy.

For Allan, the answer to making progress on difficult challenges lies in collaboration, as demonstrated by her acceptance of the Energy Council award — on behalf of the GE team, she said — on Thursday.

"It's wonderful to be recognized but it's equally important to share that recognition with a great team that I have the opportunity to work with and learn from, every day," Allan said in an interview.

Whether it's about decreasing emissions from the extraction process, using less water, finding better methods to detect pipeline leaks or applying data analytics to increase efficiency, productivity and profitability, the end game is to increase competitiveness at every level. And decrease the endless criticism of the energy sector.

It's a key reason GE Canada was first to sign up as a supplier to the Canadian Oil Sands Innovation Alliance (COSIA), the organization formed by industry in 2012 to share technologies and improve environmental performance.

Environmental performance and operational excellence are not mutually exclusive.

Allan, like Cenovus CEO Brian Ferguson, believes the goal of an emissions-free barrel from the oilsands can be achieved. She sees Canada's role as an energy superpower through its leadership on innovation, not production capacity.

Allan is energized by the challenge of cracking the environmental nut, and, in her words, making sure carbon pricing ultimately forces the energy sector to be more competitive by investing in and adopting new technologies, systems and processes.

She is equally committed to ensuring the next generation has the skill set to become meaningful participants in an ever-changing economy.

That means supporting not-for-profit organizations such as Actua, which works with engineering schools in Canada to offer outreach programs in science, technology, engineering and math in places such as Nunavut and on First Nations reserves.

The fact not enough women are rising through the ranks and cracking the glass ceiling — highlighted by Tuesday's U.S. election results — rankles Allan, who is committed to fostering in girls an interest in science and math at younger ages.

That way, she says, we can create a critical mass of women ready to enter engineering.

“We need to have a robust pipeline coming through the system, not just in sixth grade but sticking to it in ninth grade and continuing to university,” said Allan. “The energy sector is an exciting and complex industry and I don’t know that we showcase it enough and tell that story enough to build that pipeline.”

Energy companies can also do better.

“We have to have leadership that builds a culture committed to diversity at the table. Appreciating diversity of opinion, the debate around an idea leads to a more robust solution and drives more creativity,” she said.

“The leadership is responsible for setting a table where ideas and different perspectives and voices can be heard. I think we have to look to ourselves and ask if we are doing all we can to set that table.”

One variable to solving that challenge, Allan suggested, lies in changing the energy dialogue and being more innovative in terms of how industry communicates with — and educates — the public.

“The nature of how messages are communicated and received has changed dramatically and we have to be totally on top of that, if not leading it,” she said.

Done right, it has the potential of turning protests into support. Ask a millennial if they’re interested in helping rid the world of energy poverty, where 1.2 billion people don’t have access to energy, and the chances of shifting both perception and dialogue are very good.

Either way, as Allan said Thursday night, the energy sector doesn’t have a generation to figure things out about how to accelerate the development and application of technology.

That means striking down many barriers – and quickly. It means ensuring diversity in the leadership ranks and around boardroom tables and fostering corporate cultures that are enthusiastic about innovation, eager to develop and adopt new practices and technologies.

All these elements, as Allan suggested, are ‘must haves’ in today’s competitive energy world, where driving the cost and emissions per barrel through the application of innovation are not negotiable.

To cast it a bit differently, it’s about industry having the right coach to make sure it’s skating to where the puck is going.

Allan might be the Energy Person of the Year, but given her leadership and indefatigable commitment to innovation, ‘coach’ is also appropriate.

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