

ECONEWS

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Promoting the Vision of a Sustainable Vancouver Island

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GREEN STIMULUS FOR A NEW FUTURE

When a civilization is rushing down the road to ecological catastrophe, and its economy falters because its bankers and investors have tripped over their own shoelaces in their rush to make money... in this situation, does it make sense to attempt to restart the same economy, and get it back on the road to catastrophe?

That would surely be foolishness of the highest degree. This road leads directly to the collapse of ocean ecosystems, the continued loss of forests, topsoil, and species, and the warming of the atmosphere, bringing a possible two-metre sea-level rise this century, among other devastating consequences, and that will cost our economy up to 20% of its GDP.

Only a stupid, careless, scientifically-illiterate person would recommend continuing down this path - and yet that is *exactly* what Canada's government is proposing in its new economic stimulus package. We are about to borrow \$33 billion and spend it on tax cuts, roads, bridges, and a host of smaller things designed to get the old economy pumping again.

Maybe this is all we should expect from a government that hankers after life in the 1950s - and yet all the Liberals ask for is a quarterly progress report to make sure the economy is getting back on the road to catastrophe.

Greenpeace's analysis, by Matthew Bramley, a very competent climate and energy expert, shows that out of \$33 billion borrowing, only 4% (\$1.2 billion) will steer us in a new direction by investing in green energy and infrastructure. 96% will re-accelerate our trip down catastrophe alley, using tax breaks to encourage Canadians to spend, spend, spend on the same old stuff. Even the home improvement tax credits carry no requirement that people should also make their homes more energy efficient.

Obama's stimulus package is investing four times more than Canada proportionally, including commitments to put a million plug-in hybrid cars that get up to 150 mpg on the road by 2015; to double the amount of solar and wind energy that America generates by 2012 (25% by 2025); and to weatherize a million home annually.



Harper, on the other hand, is scrapping Canada's commitment to wind energy (see Action of the Month, inside) while giving \$315 million to the nuclear industry and \$125 million to clean coal, technologies that will do little to get us off the road to catastrophe, but which are darlings of the oil patch. ("Clean coal is a lie. It's like healthy cigarettes" - Al Gore.)

Even Obama's \$825 billion stimulus package contains nowhere near enough green commitments. So what is required to get us off the road to ruin?

First, we need to indicate that we have understood why the economy crashed. Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist at the World Bank and the most cited economist in the world states it clearly in his article *Capitalist Fools* in January's *Vanity Fair*: "The truth is that most of the individual mistakes boil down to just one: a belief that markets are self-adjusting and that the role of governments should be minimal." At

Congressional Hearings last fall, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, said, "I have found a flaw." Congressman Waxman: "In other words, you found that your view of the world, your ideology, was not right; it was not working?" Greenspan: "Absolutely, precisely."

Having acknowledged this, and the utter foolishness of presuming that something as mindless as a market could be trusted to guide the direction of the economy, we need to re-empower our governments to be interventionist, to take back the reins of the economy, and to use them to steer it towards an ecologically sustainable, carbon-natural future. Specifically, we need to:

- * Retrofit every building to make it carbon-neutral by 2030 - a million buildings a year, 10 million in the USA.

- * Build enough wind, solar, and geothermal energy etc to produce 100% renewable electricity within ten years, as Al Gore is calling for, and close down every coal-fired power plant by 2020, with support for their workers.

- * Get a million plug-in hybrid and electric vehicles on the roads by 2015 - 10 million in the USA - and require all vehicles to be zero-carbon by 2030.

- * Help communities build enough bike trails, transit, and light rail transit to cover 50% of all our trips.

- * Help farmers and foresters to change their ways so that they store far more carbon in their soils and trees.

- * Build a high-speed train network, as Europe has done... and much more.

- * Train a new generation of workers in the new green technologies.

This activity will generate more than enough green collar jobs to restart the economy; and most importantly, lead us away from catastrophe, and towards a future that our children will anticipate with delight, not fear. The time is critical. We just *have* to change.

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