

Denial and Delusion

Why we're not seeing true sustainability

Alan Pittman's "Carbon Footprint" cover story (9/17) showed just how backward Eugene's "leaders" are in addressing climate change. But it failed to address two other important and related issues: peak oil and the psychological state of the people in government.

Peak oil refers to the all-time peak in world oil production, after which production will permanently decline. Many experts believe that peak oil occurred in July of 2008. Within a very few years, world oil production will be declining by approximately 5 percent annually. Our current economic slump will be made to look positively rosy by comparison.

It is within the context of peak oil that the Eugene City Council's goal of "reducing fossil fuel consumption by 50 percent by the year 2030" is quite hollow and cynical. Production of oil and natural gas will probably decline 50 percent by 2030 for simple geological reasons. (Coal will probably peak in production 20 years after oil; but then coal is not typically used for transportation).

The good news is that what is necessary to address peak oil also applies to climate change. We need a rigorous program to wrench ourselves off of fossil fuels. Indeed, when one examines peak oil, climate change and the size and scale of economic collapse and human suffering that will accompany them, it's not an exaggeration to say that we need a complete bottom-to-top restructuring of human civilization and we need it *right now*. (Actually, we needed it 20 years ago.)

The required changes are so great that any politician attempting to do even 10 percent of what is actually necessary would be committing political suicide. So environmentally leaning politicians will attempt to do only 2 percent of what needs to happen. Those who actually understand the gravity of the situation believe that it's better to do very little to address these issues than lose the next election to an opponent who will do even less.

As those running the world presumably look favorably at themselves in the mirror every morning, we can assume one, or a combination of three things: 1) Our "leaders" are grossly ignorant; 2) they are in deep denial and delusion; or 3) they are sociopaths who have no qualms with doing a viciously gross disservice to future generations. In either case, it is high time that we begin examining the psychological condition of those in charge.

Politicians believe that they can't be expected to bring about dramatic, sweeping change for which there isn't widespread popular support. This is essentially the same as believing that getting re-elected to another term in office is more important than leaving a viable planet to future generations.

Politicians who understand what's happening need to get serious; they need to start doing what needs to be done! While this may mean enduring the most hideous political storm of their careers, they can use the deafening howl of protest as a forum in which to educate our abysmally dumbed-down public. And if they end up getting voted out of office, their successor will then come under the same pressure to do what has to be done.

The necessary changes *will* happen because to do anything less is unsustainable. The only questions are whether the human family will change voluntarily or involuntarily and what will the end result look like.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNPRODUCTIVE CYNICISM

Mark Robinowitz's letter ("Regime Rotation," 9/17), expresses a convenient black-and-white view of the world. Good cop/ bad cop. Obama=McCain/Bush. Bush=Gore. Piercy=Torrey. Yeah, right! How many climate initiatives did Bush launch (or wars would have Gore launched)? How many sustainable initiatives did Torrey start? And exactly how would Bush be approaching health care?

Capitalism=good (or bad, depending on your viewpoint), Socialism=bad (or good, maybe, if we like Sweden, Norway and the bulk of Europe). The world is in living, human color, and when we reduce it to the simple binary good/bad or bad/bad, we miss the rich texture that is there.

Sure they (whoever "they" are) may be two flavors of ice cream, but I sure like some better than others. We can dislike much of what we see happening, but I fail to see a constructive world built from a massively cynical viewpoint.

Neal Spangler
Eugene

WHERE'S THE WASTE?

Sean McKenzie described the chemistry of composting wood for the purpose of harvesting methane fuel ("Digesters Are Better," 9/10). Interesting stuff, however in his enthusiasm to practice chemistry, McKenzie overlooked the ecological realities.

Northwest forests need decomposing organic material. Compost is built on the forest floor through a series of symbiotic relationships. Fungi bind the soil, decreasing erosion and increasing the absorptive capacity. Mycorrhizae connect the roots of the forest allowing the fungi to provide water to trees when they need it the most. Ferns, alder and maple protect the soil and make nutrients available. Every species has a role to play in sustaining the forest.

The Seneca deforestation plan currently under way involves clearcutting natural forests and altering the environment so that forests will not grow again. Seneca poisons the land, killing plants, fungi and most of the animals. The nutrient cycle is disrupted, the hydrological cycle is disrupted, soil washes away and fish die. The land is becoming a desert! Seneca's monoculture plantations reduce the web of life down to a single species, Douglas fir, little trees grown for the machines that eat them.

Seneca's enhanced plan is to grow "waste" on this land while they are turning it to desert. The "waste" could then be converted to electricity. The plan is more about collecting subsidies and legitimizing ruthless destructive company than it is about harnessing energy.

Fabian Lawrence
Drain

UNHEALTHY PROTESTS

I would like to say that "healthy" civil disobedience is a great thing. As much as I often disagree with protesters in this area, I fully support their right to do so. This is mainly because I did so in front of my high school in 1999. The problem is that a lot of people on the far fringe of the matter want what I call "violent disobedience" to be justified. The problem with that is there is

no justification. This kind of protesting only creates more problems than it solves.

You might be asking what I consider "violent." This term covers knocking down AM radio towers, burning down ranger stations, setting fire to U-Haul trucks or violent protests like the Nike store debacle of October 1999. I witnessed protesters tossing 20-pound pumpkins off the top floor of the Fifth Street Market to where parents had been sitting with their children just moments before.

This kind of protesting achieves nothing as to the outside it looks like thugs being criminal, much like the WTO riots. Now I know that not everyone there was a violent person; I am saddened by this misconception. But I am talking about the violent people who took over the spotlight and proceeded to smash up storefronts and make a mess out of what started to be a beautiful example of the right kind of protesting.

That kind of reprehensible behavior cannot be tolerated in Seattle, Eugene or anywhere else.

James Ready
Springfield

RESPOND TO THE HATERS

I am responding back to the man who commented on my letter re: "Town Hall Yellers" (8/27). The population I was talking about were "the town hall haters, gun-toting radical, right wingers," and not "conservative, Republican African-Americans," who are probably not having a problem with having a black president.

Former President Jimmy Carter recently said that a far right fringe are people, the majority of which are white people, who can't believe that a black man can be president.

The "American Patriots" rally (organized by Glenn Beck, who called our president a racist against white people), marched in our capitol with signs saying Obama is not an American citizen, and Obama is Hitler. Some of them even shouted, "White power" and "McCarthy was right." There wasn't one person of color in the group as far as I could see.

I think people should put aside their political beliefs and stand up for what is right. Is allowing a man in Arizona to come to a public gathering with an assault rifle what we want in America?

What are they so afraid of?

The man also implied that I knew nothing about racism, living in Eugene, which is dead wrong, I was raised near Milwaukee WI, one of the hot beds of racial unrest, and worked in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The most oppression I have felt in my life is sexism. Can you image what people would be saying if Hillary Clinton had won the election?

Diane DeVillers
Eugene

NEW ENERGY SOURCE

I enjoyed the "Carbon Footprint: Will Eugene Green Its Sooty Foot?" story (9/17). Reading that story makes it clear that given population growth and economic growth trends, a radical new source of alternative energy will be needed to combat climate change. Otherwise, Eugene's carbon footprint will nearly double in a decade. I know just what that source of energy is. In fact, I wrote a book about it.

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