

SAVING OUR CIVILIZATION

By Ed O'Rourke

The American fossil-fuel-based, automobile-centered, war, poverty, throwaway economy can not endure much longer. Lester Brown in *Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2008, 400pages) describes the bleak environmental situation, presents success stories, and a grand strategy that gives an outline of how we can get to there from here. Rich and poor nations must mobilize in a way reminiscent of the Allied effort to defeat the Axis Powers during the Second World War. Environmental casualties are not part of a distant future. The 2003 heat wave in Europe claimed 52,000 lives in 9 countries. The waters in the Gulf of Mexico in August, 2005 were the hottest since human beings have been recording them. These warm waters made Hurricane Katrina more lasting and violent.

These are not isolated incidents. Around the world, there are “shrinking forests, expanding deserts, falling water tables, collapsing fisheries, disappearing species and rising temperatures.” The astronauts used to use Africa’s Lake Chad as a landmark. The lake has shrunk 96% in the last 40 years. Finding Lake Chad is no longer so easy.

The International Institute for Environment and Development projected that the melting of Greenland and Antarctic ice sheet would result in a 10-meter (33-foot) rise in the world’s oceans and generate 600 million refugees.

People who think that Lester Brown’s proposals are too expensive are perhaps not aware that the world’s taxpayers provide an estimated \$700 billion in subsidies for environmentally destructive activities, such as fossil fuel burning, overpumping aquifers, clearcutting forests, and overfishing. The human race is subsidizing its own destruction.

Our economics system needs to create an honest market that reflects ecological truth. A carbon tax would be part of a solution. Former chief economist of The World

Bank, Nicolas Stern, described the failure to incorporate the costs of climate change in the price of fossil fuels as “a market failure on the greatest scale the world has ever seen.”

Lester Brown estimates the indirect costs of gasoline (climate change damage, oil industry tax breaks, oil supply protection in the Middle East, oil company subsidies, and respiratory illnesses) are about \$12 per gallon.

Brown offers success stories. Inexpensive solar thermal cookers decrease the need for firewood. The reforestation effort in South Korea offers a model for the rest of the world. China, Algeria, Morocco, and the African Union have made successful anti-desertification efforts.

Brown proposes many bold plans that you can't find anywhere else. “Mobilizing to save civilization means reconstructing the economy, restoring its natural support systems, eradicating poverty, stabilizing population and climate, and, above all, restoring hope.”

Second Marshall Plan:

He proposes investing \$190 billion per year in a type of second Marshall Plan for the world's poor and environmental restoration. The social goals component of \$77 billion per year include universal primary education, eradication of adult illiteracy, school lunch programs, assistance for preschool children and pregnant women, universal health care, and condom distribution. The earth restoration goals of \$113 billion include planting trees, protecting topsoil, restoring rangelands, restoring fisheries, protecting biodiversity, and stabilizing water tables.

Department of Global Security:

“The challenge is not to provide a high-tech military response to terrorism but to build a global society that is environmentally sustainable and equitable—one that restores hope for everyone.” Sometimes the world faces difficulties because states have become too powerful, such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Nowadays, a major concern is the collapse of a nation state into anarchy and chaos, such as in Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Haiti, Afghanistan, and others. United States efforts to achieve a strategy are fragmented. A cabinet level Department of Global Security would fashion a coherent strategy for each

weak and failing state. The new department would work “to stabilize population, restore environmental systems, eradicate poverty, provide universal primary education, and strengthen the rule of law through bolstering police forces and court systems.”

Reduced Consumption of Paper:

Looking at the growth of the Chinese economy, income per person will be equal to that of Americans today by 2030. At that time, the Chinese will need twice as much paper as today’s world production. To save the world’s forests, humankind can reduce paper use “by replacing facial tissue, paper napkins, disposable diapers, and paper shopping bags with reusable cloth alternatives.”

Ocean Conservancies:

To preserve fish for future generations, we must set aside no-fishing areas as conservancies.

Since Lester Brown has written two previous Plan B books, I anticipate Plan B 4.0 within three years. I hope he considers paying children in poor countries to go to school. That way, there will be no pressure for them to leave school to provide labor to keep the family from poverty. Also, institute a Social Security program for people in poor countries.

To build public support for Plan B, use e-mail, the postal service, or call your elected officials and candidates. Write letters to magazines and newspapers. Encourage environmental groups to think big while continuing important local initiatives.

Defeating the Axis Powers was not a spectator sport. Saving our civilization will not be one either. In remembering Casey Kasum, “Keep your feet on the ground. Keep reaching for the stars”.