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Santa Barbara Independent

Global Warming in a Time of Economic Meltdown

Invest in Alternative Energies

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by WALTER KOHN, ALAN HEEGER AND HERBERT KROEMER

California has been America's leader in addressing two simultaneous and unprecedented global crises: The impending exhaustion of affordable oil and gas; and the ominous rise of the atmospheric, greenhouse gas carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that cause global warming. The United States, especially the federal government, has been by far the biggest cause of these crises, denying until quite recently that they even existed. (Think SUVs, lagging in alternative energies, etc.) The point of no return is not far.

Suddenly, the entire world has been hit by a credit crunch of a fury unheard of since the Great Depression, with a strong consensus among economists that it will take years before we can hope to fully recover.

Obviously, this credit crisis threatens progress on the energy/global warming front, since the needed major research and development on renewable energies, as well as the needed new infrastructure, require credit which has become very scarce. Unfortunately, the need for energy and the continuing threat of potentially catastrophic global warming must be effectively addressed at the same time as the current economic crisis. The world cannot afford a time-out lasting many years.

We suggest the following broad national energy and global warming policies in a time of economic meltdown.

First, a clear prioritization of renewable energy projects through increased R&D funding and long-term tax credits for all types of renewable energy. (A stop-and-go R&D strategy wastes time and money.)

Second, energy conservation and efficiency in the use of fossil fuels need to be sharply increased. They will extend availability of oil and gas, reduce the growth of atmospheric greenhouse gases, and happily, in most cases, reduce expenditures. (For many years we have lagged far behind Europe in this respect.)

Finally, make the best use of the more than 60 already licensed onshore and underwater oil and gas fields to help tide us over.

The November 4 ballot carries Proposition 7, “The Solar and Clean Energy Act of 2008” which requires increasing percentages of clean, renewable energies. It helps to conserve oil and natural gas. Because Prop. 7 requires additional R&D and infrastructure, it is estimated that, after three to five years startup time, and

lasting for about six to eight years, it will raise our electricity bills by an additional five to 10 percent, much less than other increases in recent years. After that period, solar power and wind (and possibly other alternative energies) will very likely undercut oil and gas. We are very much aware that, in this economic meltdown, many hard-hit Americans will find even this fairly modest and temporary increase very difficult to manage, and hope that our society will help them. When you think about Prop. 7, please think also about future generations in America and elsewhere.

Although nobody claims that Prop. 7 is perfect, it will maintain the momentum in our Legislature, which is currently stalled without pending energy and global warming legislation. Prop. 7 has also been endorsed by Finn Kydland, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2007, as well as by UCSB's Bren School of Environmental Science and Management's Dean Ernst Ulrich von Weizacker, and by Santa Barbara's Community Environmental Council.

By Walter Kohn, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry 1998 and professor emeritus in the UCSB Department of Physics. Co-authored by Kohn's colleagues in the physics department professors Alan Heeger and Herbert Kroemer, who won Nobel Prizes in 2000 for their contributions to the fields of chemistry and physics, respectively.

For additional information about the Solar and Clean Energy Act, please visit:
<http://www.yeson7.net> (end)