

Whitney for Governor 2006

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The Times Demand Change: For a "New Deal" on Sustainable Energy

by Rich Whitney, Green Party candidate for Governor

The people of this State, this nation, and this planet, are now threatened by two related crises: the twin threats of global warming and the end of the era of cheap oil.

Global warming is an environmental catastrophe that is already in progress, and it increasingly threatens our economy as well.

The end of cheap oil – what some refer to as "peak oil," meaning the point at which the practical extraction of oil has reached or passed its peak – is an economic catastrophe that is already in progress, and it increasingly threatens our environment and quality of life as well, as it increasingly drives the current economic and political leadership of this country into disastrous wars.

The situation is critical, and yet the leadership of both the Democratic and Republican parties is maddeningly slow and astoundingly irresponsible. It's as if you saw a family's home on fire, right now, and you went and warned them – and their response was to debate whether maybe they ought to go out and by a hose sometime next week. Worse than that, half of the family would be arguing against buying a hose, since "some combustion is natural" and "there is no scientific proof that fire destroys wood."

Katrina and the record 2005 hurricane season weren't freak accidents. Since the 1970s, tropical storms in both the Atlantic and Pacific have increased in duration and intensity by about 50 percent. Two-thousand five was one of the two hottest years in recorded history. Nineteen of the hottest 20 years have occurred since 1980. It is a fact that the polar ice caps and glaciers of the world are melting. It is a fact that permafrost in the northern tundras is thawing, releasing even more greenhouse gases. A recent study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that CO2 levels in the atmosphere have now reached levels that have not been seen on Earth for over a million years. Industrially generated global warming is a fact, recognized by nearly every scientist not on the payroll of the oil companies – and yet, the leadership of the two corporate parties continue to bury their head in the sand.

It is outrageous that during this energy crisis, we do not have any significant tax incentives or purchasing requirements that will support the development and installation of solar, wind, geothermal and biomass energy production.

Meanwhile, not only has our oil-based energy system and oil-and-auto-based transportation system motivated the corporate parties to get us into a disastrous war, it's having a serious impact on our standard of living at home, not just because of the cost of war, but also because of the skyrocketing costs of heating our homes and commuting to work. Whatever we might think about the lifestyle choices that some people have made – and part of the answer does lie in educating people to make better ones – the fact is that we need to make genuine energy-efficient consumer and transportation alternatives more available and accessible to the people.

Yet the Republicans and Democrats in Congress have caved in to the demands of Big Oil, Big Auto and the highway lobby. For example, the corporate media didn't report it much, but average fuel economy for all 2006 motor vehicles actually declined from 2005. The figures came out just a few days after the House Rules Committee blocked an attempt to require an increase in fuel economy standards of 10% by 2016. This outrage illustrates how irresponsible corporations and their political prostitutes in Congress and the White House are taking us in the wrong direction. And the Big Three Auto makers wonder why their business is in decline!

The threats of global warming and the end of cheap oil are, as I said at the outset, a problem for the people of the world and our country, not just our State. But that doesn't mean that we can or should simply wait for action at the global or the federal level. We can't afford to wait, and the present leadership in Washington is part of the problem, not part of the solution. Illinois is the seventh-largest economy in the U.S. It has huge agrarian resources, it has a lot of farmland that could be put to good use making biomass and wind energy, it has a talented labor force, and it has a lot of unemployed people who certainly could use well-paying jobs performing socially useful work. We are well situated to turn a negative into a positive and help pull our nation, and then the world, in the right direction.

Unfortunately, our present leadership in Springfield is also part of the problem, not part of the solution. And nothing symbolizes that better than the television ads that are now running on behalf of Blagojevich re-election campaign. What is the big job promise that Rod Blagojevich is pushing right now? More roads. Yes, he does promise some mass transit and school construction projects, but the biggest single category: More road construction. That means more urban sprawl, more reliance on the automobile, more reliance on an outmoded and dangerous means of transportation. That's what Mr. Blagojevich offers: A bold leap into the 20th century.

Blagojevich's proposed budget for 2007 simply holds the line on spending for AmTrak. That's not nearly enough. I say that we need a major state commitment to mass transit, including high-speed rail. A person should be able to get on a train in Chicago and get to Springfield in an hour, St. Louis in two hours, or Carbondale in three. The trains should be running frequently so that people will take them more. We need more of a commitment to mass transit. We need to expand light-rail options to medium and then small-size cities. This is not pie in the sky. It is doable. It just takes the political will.

A major commitment to rail will be good for the environment and our economy. On average, the emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, for rail transit per passenger, are 4.5 times lower than those of a car and 7.5 times lower than those of an airplane. More importantly, there is greater potential for using renewable energy systems to run electric-powered rail than there is to run individual automobiles. Electric locomotives powered via 3rd rail or catenary wires will require no modification to be able to use power from renewable energy sources like wind, solar or biomass. Rail transit also produces far fewer of other toxic emissions than cars. Similarly, rail freight produces far

fewer emissions per ton-mile than hauling by trucks. Rail travel is more energy efficient than automobile or air travel and reduces our dependence on fossil fuels. Even if we were to just complete the high-speed rail project on the Chicago to St. Louis corridor, projections indicate that we would save more than 6-1/2 million gallons of fuel each year.

Rail transit also means more jobs. A billion dollars spent on rail transit creates 7,000 more jobs than a billion dollars spent on highways. So while Mr. Blagojevich keeps talking about jobs, his public works priorities are not the best job creators.

But more energy efficient and less polluting transit is only one part of the solution. We also need major new commitments to clean and sustainable energy production and to energy conservation.

Rod Blagojevich promised in 2002 that he would push sustainable energy sources like bio-diesel and wind power – and yet only two-tenths of one percent of our State's energy needs are now being provided by such sources. In fact, he raided the Renewable Energy Resources Trust Fund for \$9.5 million and the Energy Efficiency Trust Fund for \$3 million, to put into the general fund, as part of his strategy to fund his improvident budgets so that he can continue to brag that he balanced the budget without raising taxes – even though the money for these funds comes from you, the taxpayers, every time you pay your electricity or gas bills. So he has taken your money, that by law is supposed to be devoted to grants and loans to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in Illinois, and shoveled it into the general budget – just like he's done with money for pensions, money for social service agencies, money for other special use funds – all so that he can turn around and pretend to be a fiscal conservative. One consequence of this is that some people who installed solar water heating or photovoltaics in their homes, expecting a rebate under a program administered by the Renewable Energy Resources Trust Fund got the unpleasant surprise of finding out that the money was gone.

Similarly, Blagojevich promised to retire or clean up the dirty old coal-fired plants that slowly kill thousands of people every year with their emissions, and not permit new plants unless they use the best available technology. He broke both promises, earning him a grade of "D" from the Illinois Environmental Council in the area of air quality and energy. In short, his record on energy has been dismal. This in a State that is well poised to be a leader in developing sustainable energy.

I can and will do better because the times demand change – we have to do better. I am proposing what I have described as a "New Deal" for sustainable energy development – because a serious effort to build a sustainable energy future is not only necessary for all life on the planet; it will be good for our economy, creating tens of thousands of new, quality jobs.

By "sustainable energy," I mean conversion from fossil fuels and nuclear power to safe, clean, renewable sources of energy like solar, wind, geothermal, biomass and fuel cell technologies. Equally important are energy conservation and efficiency, including energy-efficient transportation. The savings to businesses and consumers alike would provide more disposable income, stimulating our lackluster economy.

I do not need to recite the details of my proposed New Deal here. Why? Because the work has already been done by other organizations in the environmental movement.

I am basing this plan primarily on the work of three organizations:

First, is Repowering the Midwest: The Clean Energy Plan for the Heartland, a coalition project led by the Environmental Law & Policy Center, the Union of Concerned Scientists and several regional environmental groups, whose work is found on the web at repowermidwest.org.

This is a blueprint for producing economically and environmentally sound power by unleashing the Midwest's homegrown clean energy potential and reducing our overreliance on some of the Midwest's oldest and most polluting coal and nuclear generating plants that currently account for about 95 percent of the region's electricity generation. To achieve this, the Clean Energy Development Plan calls for:

1. Implementing cost-effective energy efficiency technologies to level off the region's overall electricity demand. These energy efficiency technologies, ranging from efficient lighting and ballasts to Energy Star® appliances to state-of-the-art industrial motors, can save business and residential consumers money. On average, these new technologies cost less than the cost of generating, transmitting and distributing electricity from coal, gas or nuclear plants. And
2. Reducing the region's overdependence on coal and nuclear plants by developing more renewable energy generating technologies: wind and solar power, and biomass energy from agricultural crops. This transition to cleaner, smarter energy would energize our economy. The new jobs created would be more than twice the total employment in the Midwest electric utility industry, and they would be distributed in both metropolitan and rural areas. This transition would create jobs, for example, in manufacturing and installing modern commercial lighting and efficient ballasts, and Energy Star®-rated appliances. It would create jobs manufacturing and assembling wind turbines and solar panels. It would generate new sources of farm income from wind turbine leases and growing and processing biomass energy crops.

The Clean Energy Development Plan identifies six concrete policy initiatives that will get us where we need to be. These include building up a State Energy Efficiency Investment Fund and Renewable Energy Investment Fund, improving our efficiency standards and building codes and monitoring and enforcement practices, establishing an Illinois Renewables Portfolio Standard that requires all retail electricity suppliers to provide eight percent of their power from renewable resources by 2010, and 22 percent by 2020, and taking steps to improve small generators' ability to connect to the grid. One of the failures of the Blagojevich administration is that it still has not established and enforced statewide interconnection standards for distributed generation, so that small producers of solar and wind power can reap the economic rewards of their investment.

Adoption of this plan would reduce global warming-causing carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂) by 51 percent, acid rain-causing sulfur dioxide emissions (SO₂) by 56 percent, and smog-causing nitrogen oxide emissions (NO_x) by 71 percent. Emissions of particulates, mercury and other heavy metals would also be cut, leading to a significant reduction in asthma, respiratory ailments and other public health problems. The catastrophic risks of a nuclear power plant accident and the volume of radioactive nuclear wastes would also be reduced as nuclear plants could be retired. Another benefit would be better electricity reliability. Increased energy efficiency will ease the strain on transmission and distribution systems.

It is estimated that adoption of this plan will create 57,000 net new jobs in Illinois by 2020 – and that's on top of providing a new revenue stream for our often struggling farmers.

Second, the Apollo Alliance has a similar set of policy prescriptions, detailed in a report called *New Energy States: Energy-Saving Policies for Governors and Legislators*. The Apollo Alliance is a broad coalition of labor, environmental, and more forward-looking business groups that aims to achieve sustainable energy independence within a decade. Their program, found on the web at www.apolloalliance.org, is organized around 10 basic policy objectives, including some of the same points included in *Repowering the Midwest*, but including other objectives, such as smart urban redesign. What is especially impressive about this organization and its site is that it surveys measures and policies that have been tried out in all 50 states and provides information on what works.

Third, the Illinois Public Interest Research Group, or IL-PIRG, one of the non-profit public interest consumer and environmental advocacy organizations founded by Ralph Nader, found on the web at www.illinoispirg.org, is constantly coming up with new energy-efficiency and sustainable energy policy proposals. For example, in one recent report, it noted that the following 10 commonly used consumer and business products sold in Illinois are not currently required to meet minimum energy efficiency standards: Ceiling fans, commercial clothes washers, commercial refrigerators and freezers, exit signs, large packaged commercial air conditioners, low-voltage distribution transformers, set-top boxes (cable, satellite, digital TV converter boxes), torchiere lighting fixtures, traffic signs, and unit heaters. If these 10 items were simply required to meet existing minimum energy efficiency standards:

- Illinois businesses and consumers would save in excess of \$160 million a year in electric and natural gas bills by 2010. Savings would reach more than \$260 million a year by 2020.
- Illinois businesses and consumers would net more than \$1.7 billion in savings between 2005 and 2030.
- By 2010, electricity consumption would be cut by 1.9 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh). By 2020, the annual electricity savings would reach 2.9 billion kWh, an amount equal to about 2.5 percent of total electricity sales in Illinois in the year 2000, enough to power the cities of Springfield and Naperville combined.
- By 2020, the new standards would save 42 million therms a year, enough to heat about 46,000 Illinois homes during a typical winter. They would eliminate the need for three average size (300 MW) power plants by 2020.
- By 2020, new standards would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 1.3 million metric tons per year, equivalent to removing 1.1 million cars from the road.
- Because government facilities use several of the products covered by these standards, the State would also save an estimated \$850,000 per year from just two of the standards, far outweighing any modest

implementation cost.

In sum, my proposed "New Deal" for job-creating sustainable energy and transportation in Illinois is not "new" in terms of the specific ideas and policy proposals it contains. But a lack of good ideas has never been the problem. There has never been a shortage of sound, feasible, well-thought-out proposals for solving the energy crisis or the environmental crisis or meeting the need for quality jobs that serve the public good.

The problem is not that no one has come up with good solutions. The problem is that the political institutions that have dominated our government for far too long won't permit them to be implemented. The leadership and office-holders of the Democratic and Republican Parties are corporate-sponsored. They are financially supported by the same giant corporate and monied interests that have always profited from using the natural environment as a toxic waste dump, that profited from the destruction of train and trolley lines in order to push us into relying on individual gas-burning vehicles, that have profited from shrinking the public-interest sectors of government in order to keep their taxes low, even as they have expanded the military-industrial complex and private-contract sectors of government, so that they can profit from corporate welfare.

That is precisely why the Green Party, and getting Greens elected to office, is the solution. We don't play the corporations' game. We are not corporate-sponsored. We do not accept corporate campaign contributions, period. We are a party based on principles, starting with the four pillars of grassroots democracy, ecological wisdom, social justice and non-violence.

That is why I, and the other Green candidates, do not need to be persuaded or lobbied by the environmental movement in order to move us toward a sustainable energy and transportation future. We are part of the environmental movement.

That is why we do not need to be persuaded or lobbied to oppose militarism and war. We are part of the peace movement.

That is why we do not need to be persuaded or lobbied to recognize that government has a responsibility to ensure full employment at a living wage – in part by providing public works and conservation jobs that will truly serve the public good. We are part of the labor and social justice movements.

We are part of, and work with, these and other progressive movements – but the difference is that we are actually trying to get elected and gain control of government, so that all of the good policies that these organizations fight for can finally get enacted, and we can restore government of, by and for the people, instead of government of, by and for the wealthiest and most powerful corporate bankrollers. The further difference is that, by doing so, we can combat the root causes of the social ills that plague us today, instead of constantly fighting the symptoms.

I have described this program as a "New Deal" for sustainable energy and transportation for several reasons. First, the scale of the effort needed to create a sustainable energy future is comparable to the effort needed to combat the Great Depression of the 1930s – and the crises that presently confront us today are every bit as serious as those of that era.

Second, as with the New Deal, the programs I am proposing are built on the principle that government public works programs can be dedicated to protecting and enhancing our natural environment and resources rather than promoting their desecration. Some of the programs I have in mind could even be modeled on the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Finally, while I am not suggesting that Franklin Delano Roosevelt is a model to be emulated in every respect, he recognized the threat posed to democracy and government in the public interest by what he described (in his 1936 Address to Congress, for example) as an "economic autocracy" of monied interests. He even warned of the dangers that would befall us should this economic autocracy regain control of the reins of government. In that regard, his understanding of the root causes of the problems confronting us ring true today.

So it is fitting that we adopt the name of his programs that were aimed at promoting full employment, conservation and the public good, as we combat the economic autocracy of today.

Our struggle, the struggle to elect our first-ever Green administration in Springfield, is part of our larger struggle to dismantle economic autocracy once and for all, so that we can all enjoy the fruits of both political and economic democracy. Please join with us and support this struggle to gain a Green foothold in government and win a mandate of the people – so that we can usher in a new era of peace, prosperity, full economic opportunity and living in harmony with nature.

Thank you.