

Schwarzenegger's green mask falls as he pushes road boondoggles

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
15 January 2009

Exposed: "Green" West Coast Governors

Culture Change Letter #228 -

It's easy to be a green techie; indeed there's a lot of money in it for a fair many. Since almost everyone we know is hooked into high tech and consuming manufactured products as the basis of our lifestyle, hardly anyone criticizes what has become the dominant "solution" to climate change and dependence on fossil fuels: renewable energy and energy efficiency. Too bad the scheme isn't going to work, and its promises serve to delay fundamental change critical for our survival.

The quicker solution to slashing greenhouse gas emissions is simple curtailment that involves lifestyle change. So when the corporate state decides "the economy comes first," and conservation and environmental protection go out the window, this reveals a stark distinction between environmentalism for a greener consumer economy and actually turning around our destructive ways. The enemies (or, charitably, the ignoramuses) of sustainability know where their material security comes from.

I was sickened when I read that California's urban-sprawl program and car domination were being placed at the top of spending priorities by the Governor -- in the name of economic "recovery." During an unfolding Depression, it's awfully cheeky for the Powers That Be to be pulling out all the stops for the same old patterns that got us into this mess in the first place.

As a long-time road fighter with the Alliance for a Paving Moratorium that published the Auto-Free Times magazine, I wish to raise the alarm that the following news item should have done. Part of my outrage is that the job-generation from road building is minimal and slow to take effect compared to many projects for sustainability that would prepare the population for the end of long-distance petrochemical-grown food.

When road or bridge boondoggles happen, it's not so much the vaunted "American love affair with the car," but a matter of "money talks." Consider the outgoing governor of Illinois' corruption: "Blagojevich Got \$80,000 from Road Builders" (headline from Associated Press, Jan. 13, 2009). Then consider this revealing article on California realpolitik, and the naivete of the disappointed members of the funded environmental establishment. - Jan Lundberg

Schwarzenegger upsets environmental allies

Citing jobs, he wants to exempt some public works projects from review

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Like any head of state managing a severe budget crisis, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has withstood criticism from all the usual suspects -- lawmakers from both parties, anti-tax groups, advocates for the poor. Now he's feeling heat from a group that has been among his staunchest allies: environmentalists.

As Schwarzenegger and lawmakers struggle to contain a ballooning deficit, he has insisted that any budget deal include a provision suspending state environmental review for certain public works projects.

The governor said that would fast-track infrastructure projects and put Californians back to work quickly. He said his

proposal would accelerate construction on 10 road projects around the state, noting at a recent news conference: "It's about jobs, jobs, jobs."

His demand has been one of the main sticking points in budget negotiations that so far have failed to produce a solution to the state's deficit, despite three special legislative sessions. California's shortfall is expected to reach nearly \$42 billion by June 2010 unless lawmakers act to close it.

Last week, Schwarzenegger vetoed a Democratic budget proposal, in part because it lacked the environmental rollbacks he and many in the business community desire.

Schwarzenegger also has asked President-elect Barack Obama to exempt road construction from key federal environmental reviews as part any congressional economic stimulus package.

Democrats who oppose the scope of the governor's demand contend the projects exempted from environmental review would fail to boost the economy quickly, while environmentalists are outright puzzled by his position. They have considered Schwarzenegger an ally because of his crusades against global climate change and his advocacy of alternative energy.

"The demand by the governor to do an end-run in environmental laws just flies in the face of his environmental agenda," said Ann Notthoff, California advocacy director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The governor's spokesman, Aaron McLear, said Schwarzenegger has earned his reputation as a defender of the environment.

"To suggest he is anything less than one of the most passionate protectors of the environment is laughable," McLear said.

Two of the freeway projects Schwarzenegger wants to fast-track through environmental exemptions have been the subject of legal battles over air pollution concerns.

One is a freeway expansion in the Sacramento area that was blocked last year by a judge because the state failed to analyze the potential effects of the added lanes on greenhouse gas emissions. Schwarzenegger's budget proposal would override the judge's ruling.

Tom Adams, president of the California League of Conservation Voters, said the governor should not try to subvert long-standing practices for reviewing public works projects.

"We have created a separate branch of government so these disputes are decided on the facts and the law in a way that's isolated from the political process," he said. "It's completely inappropriate for the administration to go to the political branch and have them start meddling in a lawsuit."

Schwarzenegger has argued that if he and lawmakers raise state taxes, they must also employ an economic stimulus to jump-start job growth.

California's unemployment rate, at 8.4 percent, is among the highest in the nation. He and other Republicans say the state's economy will deteriorate further if the government doesn't take swift action, including faster work on road projects.

"We want to build the roads in the next two or three months without any delays of red tape and environmental holding back and lawsuits that hold you up for another two, three years," Schwarzenegger said.

Exempting the projects from the California Environmental Quality Act would accelerate construction timetables from five months to a year and put roughly 21,000 people to work earlier, said Will Kempton, director of the California Department of Transportation.

The administration also wants to speed permitting for the projects and create a special panel of cabinet members that could override or modify environmental conditions imposed by wildlife agencies or air pollution regulators.

Without those changes, most of the projects wouldn't start until 2010, Kempton said.

The Legislature has authorized environmental exemptions for levee projects in the past, but Democrats warn that what Schwarzenegger is seeking would set a harmful legal precedent and do little to solve the state's long-term financial crisis.

"We are not willing to say that a member of the public has no opportunity to challenge the environmental finding of a state agency," said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento.

Citizens and folks sharing this planet everywhere should write to President Obama to tell him to ignore the Republican pseudo-green Governor: the above article stated, "Schwarzenegger also has asked President-elect Barack Obama to exempt road construction from key federal environmental reviews as part any Congressional economic stimulus package." If you want to counter this, email Prez O by visiting Contact page at www.WhiteHouse.gov, or try using (uncertain if good) Barack_Obama@obama.senate.gov, or send a snail-mail letter to him at The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500, USA. Write letters to newspaper editors too, and call into talk shows on the air.

Pave Oregon?

The pave-over-the-Earth-for-"jobs" scam isn't limited to California. In Oregon, \$18 billion are planned by Governor Kulongoski for new and wider highways, in part to comply with policy to accommodate population growth. The biggest environmental groups of the state are silent about this, according to road fighter Mark Robinowitz (who gave me the goods in the form of a Peak Traffic flier at a protest on the capitol steps against LNG terminals). The lion's share of that dough is for Portland. After reading a not very critical Oregonian newspaper story about the Columbia River Crossing (at \$4 billion-plus), I sent the following letter to the Editor.

It evidently wasn't what the newspaper wants its readers to see, as it was ignored.

Dear Editor,

The Columbia River I-5 bridge reconstruction, despite "mediations" such as wind turbines, would be a commitment to yesterday's economy. The days of growth are over, not just because of global financial collapse: we have reached the

era of peak oil.

The unfolding Depression and petrocollapse are positive developments to help society to cut back drastically on climate-changing emissions. Spending our way to a renewable-energy powered utopia can only fail, when renewables' essentially function to enhance the existing grid -- unless we mean to create decentralized systems for modest local use.

The global peak in in oil extraction means the end of "never-ending" cheap energy and oil's many materials. It is folly to expand the petroleum-based infrastructure when it is already rusting away faster than it can be repaired. As applies to highways, funding for transportation has always favored construction for expansion and sprawl rather than safety, maintenance and efficiency. Moreover, adding capacity has always created more traffic congestion; highway engineers call the phenomenon "traffic generation."

If sustainability is to progress in Portland and Oregon, we have to realize what "putting the economy first" has to mean: strengthening local economics, and not trying to perpetuate the house-of-cards of oil-fueled growth. Growth must be redefined to be qualitative and life-giving.

Sincerely,

Jan Lundberg

Oil-industry analyst

Executive Director, CultureChange.org

January 14, 2009

Culture Change will be sharing more information on this boondoggle. Put it in the same category as collapse-bailout money, about as sensible as the blank checks given Wall Street and the banks when this Depression was dawning. When we consider the capacity of the present economy to wreck the ecosystem, particularly with more roads, we can hope that collapse and the beginnings of local economics will prevent most of these projects from getting off the ground.

As for Gov. Kulongoski's green credentials in the press, the Oregonian hailed him recently as having achieved wonderful greenness for his concern about Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions. This translates to Oregon's becoming the nation's number one solar panel manufacturer. Too bad the newspaper didn't consider what \$18 billion worth of added road and motor-vehicle capacity will do to not just Oregon but the planet. Maybe it would have been noticed if he had been as brazen as Schwarzenegger about ramming roads through, the ecosystem be damned.

* * * * *

"Schwarzenegger upsets environmental allies"

msnbc.msn.com

Oregon's Transportation Vision Report:

"Transportation committee in Oregon presents its transportation vision to the governor", by Tyler Graf, Daily Journal of

Commerce, Nov. 8 2008:

allbusiness.com

Mark Robinowitz' Peak Traffic/Peak Oil website (including NAFTA Superhighways):

road-scholar.org

Coalition for a Livable Future, Portland, OR: contact: info@clfuture.org

clfuture.org

Auto-Free Times magazine (and short-lived Culture Change magazine):

culturechange.org/auto_free_times.html

old Alliance for a Paving Moratorium webpage:

culturechange.org/apm_page.htm