



Eco-nomics: Environmentalism meets economics

By Cynthia Thielen

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While the effects of the economic crisis are far reaching in all of our lives, the financial meltdown provides us the opportunity to rebuild our country with a green thumb. Our environment and our economy are interconnected. Realizing this link and working to create a symbiotic relationship is the viable solution to our financial woes. "Eco-nomics," the fusion of environmentalism and economics, has the power to spur a sustainable revitalization. Real recovery from our mammoth financial meltdown depends upon the application of "eco-nomics" to government, business and our daily lives. We as citizens should take advantage of this opportunity.

Now that our economy appears to be at rock bottom, we have the opportunity to rebuild our system from the ground up. We have the chance to use our current crisis as a catalyst for green economic growth, and the potential to be part of a historic shift from short-term thinking to long-term management. From state lawmakers promoting environmental policy to citizens choosing not to drive to work once a week or buying local produce, we all have the opportunity to set the course to sustainability. By applying "eco-nomics" to our recovery plan we can change the global energy culture, preserve natural capital and promote a renaissance of sustainability.

By investing in renewable energy and green business, we can ensure a stable future for Hawaii, our country and our planet. As declared by President Obama, progressing toward a clean energy future would create entirely new industries and millions of new jobs.

Myriad wind, wave and solar energy sources have the potential to fulfill our energy needs and provide new opportunities for sustainable innovation. Wind farms on Maui, wave power projects off Oahu and the solar installation on Lanai all serve as a model of green growth that the world is encouraged to follow.

Our economic recovery depends also upon the health of our "natural capital"; water, forests, soil and air. We must transform our country to one that both values and respects our natural resources. We not only need these resources to thrive, we need them to survive. Trouncing our natural capital is no longer solely of environmental concern - it directly affects our economy and any hope for its revitalization.

An intact and flourishing ecosystem provides endless possibilities for growth. We have the opportunity to simultaneously preserve and employ our natural capital. Our powerful Pacific Ocean waves can create clean energy, our healthy Kau Forest Reserve on the Big Island can combat global warming and our nutrient-rich soil of Hawaii can produce organic agriculture.

It is imperative that we instill a sustainable approach to utilizing our natural capital in order to promote long-term ecological viability and the success of a green recovery plan.

Sustainability is no longer a buzz word; it has become a necessary way of life. As defined in 1987 at the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainability is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

This is very similar to the Native American Iroquois philosophy of the "seventh generation," in which one must consider the effects of one's actions on one's descendants seven generations in the future. The repercussions from the economic crisis have yielded an opportunity to apply a sustainable approach to our recovery.

Sustainable "eco-nomics" present solutions for both now and later; new jobs now and environmental security for the future. It is not only the responsibility of our government and business leaders to implement a sustainable "eco-nomic" recovery plan, but a responsibility of everyone.

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