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MY VISION FOR A DESIRABLE PLANET IN 2050, WITH UNFORTUNATELY NO CURRENT EVIDENCE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN

The global financial collapse of 2008 instructed humanity that the unconstrained, free market hyper-consumptive economies of the past were not sustainable in a finite world. The mantra, that economic growth of 4-6% per year was an essential part of all national planning, could not continue indefinitely. The dominance that global economics had on international governance in the 20th century gave way to a more cooperative goal of mutual security and shared prosperity, allowing dramatic decreases in national military expenditures and increased investment in human resources.

New global momentums slowly took hold defining a sustainable world order. A renewed commitment to stabilize global population emerged, so that by 2050, Earth hosted 7 billion inhabitants. An entire industry emerged around cradle to grave manufacturing efficiency and component recycling such that new resource extraction was minimal. So much focus was put on alternative energies and energy efficiency that electric power production was decarbonized much easier than expected. The key breakthrough turned out to be vast decentralization of power production. Virtually every building became a pico-power generator, and new battery technology allowed substantial on-site energy storage.

De carbonizing transportation proved more difficult. Initial improvements in personal vehicle efficiency were not enough, and massive shifts to public transport occurred driven by escalating fuel costs more than by ethical choices. At a more fundamental level of organization, cities began to evolve with efficient transport as a key development principle. Many of the most sprawling American cities gradually reorganized into city-pods of 0.6 to 1 million inhabitants with efficiently clustered housing, commercial and civic facilities and in many cases localized food production in the surrounding land. The most recalcitrant transport problem was decarbonizing airline travel. Ultimately high-speed trains replaced most short-haul air travel, but transcontinental travel simply diminished. Liquid biofuel production was perfected, but the global limits on feed-stock biomass were reached very quickly, propagating intense policy battles to preserve some natural landscapes from being converted into biofuel farms. Natural parks and wilderness areas became the most valuable land on Earth.

An unintended consequence of the push to biofuels was the complete over-appropriation of freshwater in many regions. As seasonal snowpack storage diminished, and groundwater reservoirs were drawn down, many arid regions were unable to optimize food and biofuel production. National economies were influenced more by rainfall patterns than by economic trends.

So, by 2050, more equitable personal living standards had emerged globally, reducing military and terrorist conflict. Economic activity had reached a sustainable level of resource utilization and recycling.And truthfully it is hard to imagine how this all can happen when our political leadership will not honestly discuss the coming difficult decisions with the voting public, especially in the US.