

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

Day of reckoning Too many greens reject pragmatism, reason

This Earth Day finds environmentalists with more power to pursue (and impose) their agenda than ever. This agenda, however, is more worrisome than ever. Once driven by a simple desire for cleaner air and water, the green movement has mutated into something that in fundamental ways resembles a religion – a movement animated by a messianic desire to remake the planet and a contempt for those who worry about how this vast overhaul might actually affect people's lives.

We share the concerns of economist Vaclav Klaus, president of the Czech Republic. Many environmentalists, he wrote, “do not believe in the long-term positive impact of economic growth ... They are Malthusian pessimists.”

The extremity of this worldview is plainest in the hope of many greens that Africans remain desperate and impoverished rather than risk Africa's environmental desecration by building roads and dams and using pesticides.

In the developed world, greens are more likely to mask this extreme view. Instead, they hide behind the hallucinatory claim that there is no downside of any kind to heavy environmental regulation.

California is the global epicenter when it comes to such claims. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger insists that AB 32 – the landmark anti-global warming law adopted by the state in 2006 to require a switch to cleaner but much costlier energy – will create jobs and fuel growth by spurring technological innovation.

The governor never addresses the obvious question: Why would such innovation occur here and not in states and nations where it costs far less to do business?

Alas, Schwarzenegger's grandiose thinking is the norm in California. And so the governor and the Democrats who control the Legislature forge ahead with job-killing, growth-stifling rules that for years will burden California and California alone – even as President Barack Obama vows to work to establish a coordinated, share-the-pain approach among industrialized nations to limit the emissions that contribute to global warming; even as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi vows to adopt a law establishing a federal approach covering all 50 states.

And so the state Air Resources Board blocks any effort to limit the pain of AB 32's implementation – even as manufacturers, farmers, transportation companies and small businesses plead for relief; even as the respected, nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office and a group of distinguished economists ridicule claims that the law is an economic bonanza.

And so Schwarzenegger continues to insist with a straight face that preserving and creating jobs is his top priority, even as the jobless rate tops 11 percent and even as CEOs grow ever more gloomy about California's future.

This is folly – folly that will lead to ruin.

Nevertheless, even as the state's economy sinks deeper into recession, the greens' happy talk persists. But that's what happens when public policy is driven not by reason or common sense but by the religious faith of true believers.