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Survival depends on a well-informed electorate

Kathryn Gemmell, Oceanside Star
Published: Monday, September 22, 2008

I've just finished reading a very good interview with Gus Speth, founder of World Resources Institute, in Orion magazine (available free online at



<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/3222>).

In the article, titled "Change everything now," he observes:

"We know we're not just going to keep doing what we're doing. We're going to grow phenomenally. At the current rates, the world economy will be twice as big as it is today in 17 years. That carries the potential for enormous additional destruction. The environmental movement has a lot of wonderful things about it, and it's accomplished a lot. But it's not up to this challenge of dealing with this amount of environmental loss and destruction.

"The fundamental thing that's happened is that our efforts to clean up the environment are being overwhelmed by the sheer increase in the size of the economy. And there's no reason to think that won't continue. So we have to ask, what is it about our society that puts such an extraordinary premium on growth? Is it justified? Why is that growth so destructive? And what do we do about it?"

Good question: what do we do about it?

I'm always surprised when I talk to people and they reveal how under-informed they are about the current state of our physical world. A person might tell you what's going on in Afghanistan or give you the latest hurricane update. They may also have the scoop on the upcoming elections. But there seems to be a disconnect or even denial about the bigger environmental challenges that will soon change our lives and those of our children.

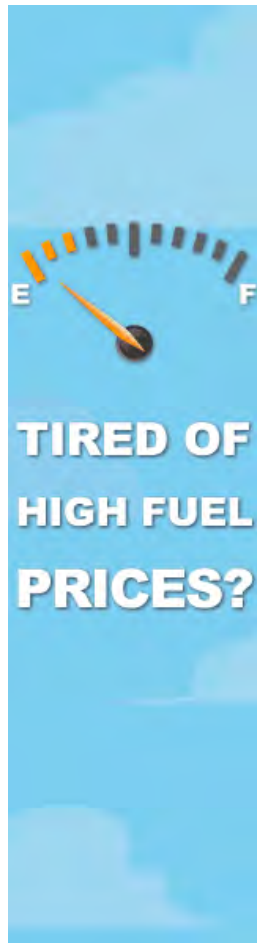
In our local politics I read with disbelief that people who are running for current office either have no plan or still support the old paradigm of continued growth.

The current state of our environment should be of concern to everyone; after all, we are totally dependent on it for our survival. Prospective local leaders should at least have a plan to deal with the inevitable changes that will soon come into our lives as a result of climate change and peak oil, for example.

Unfortunately the larger media doesn't discuss to any balanced degree what is going on or how we can find some way to soften the projected impacts. There appears to be an assumption by both governments and the citizenry that there is a technological fix to our problems. But consider that today we have the highest technological advances in our history and, at the same time, the worst environmental impacts. The real solution has to be a huge shift in our way of thinking and our behaviour. And it has to begin at the grassroots.

The key to dealing with these significant issues is a well-informed electorate.

Fortunately, it doesn't take much nowadays to gain at least the gist of the significant issues. So here are a few books, online magazines, and films that will get you started. These resources can help fill in some information gaps, and could perhaps even motivate you to move towards a sustainable lifestyle and encourage politicians and others to start dealing with these environmental issues. For, as former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev observed, "If not me, who? And if not now, when?"



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Books: The transition handbook by Rob Hopkins, A short history of progress by Ronald Wright, Collapse by Jared Diamond, Shovelling fuel for a runaway train by Brian Czech, Beyond growth by Herman Daly, The growth illusion by Richard Douthwaite.

Films: What a Way to Go, Sharkwater, End of Food, End of Suburbia.

Online Sources: The Tye, <http://thetye.ca/>; Orion, <http://www.orionmagazine.org/>; Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>; Center for the advancement of the steady state economy, www.steadystate.org/; Intergovernmental panel on climate change, <http://www.ipcc.ch/>; The oil drum, <http://www.theoil drum.com>.

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