

The Register-Guard

Opinion

Doppelt: Climate recovery can start locally

By Bob Doppelt

Posted Dec 27, 2018 at 12:01 AM

Humanity is on the brink of civilization-altering climate disruption, and the U.S. must lead solutions. No single policy can prevent catastrophe. As previously described, only a WWII-like mass mobilization can save us, and it is essential to expand our vision of what this could entail.

Historians describe the U.S. WWII mobilization as the most remarkable in history. The nation's leaders realized the stakes were too high to allow the economy to operate in a laissez-faire manner because it would produce non-essential goods rather than materials needed for the war. So immediate conversion to a war-time economy became the priority. Federal agencies like the Office of War Mobilization were established to oversee the conversion of raw material production, automobile manufacturing, gasoline usage, food production, consumer goods and more to wartime needs.

As with WWII, the risks are now far too high to allow the economy to continue in the status quo because it will continue to damage the climate and ecosystems that sequester carbon. An immediately conversion to an emissions-free, ecologically restorative economy — call it a Climate Recovery Economy — is imperative.

Ideally, the federal government would lead by establishing a Climate Recovery Administration to oversee the conversion. Just as Washington did in WWII with industries that refused to convert, one of the first tasks of the CRA would be to nationalize the fossil fuel corporations and Wall Street firms that block change.

Again emulating the WWII mobilization, the CRA would also oversee numerous agencies charged with quickly converting different industries to emissions-free, ecologically restorative sectors. This would include oil and natural gas producers, all forms of transportation, timber, agriculture, consumer goods and services, and more. Strong regulations would be indispensable in driving the conversion. When they proved insufficient, high-emission processes, practices, and products would be rationed or banned.

Even without federal leadership, the mobilization could begin here in Oregon. In addition to the passing the Clean Energy Jobs bill, Governor Brown could establish multi-disciplinary Climate Recovery Boards to direct swift emission cuts in all sectors and regions of the state. Change plays out at the local level, so communities like those in Lane County could work with the CRBs to rapidly build the new energy, transportation, reuse and recycling, and other infrastructures, and establish the training, finance and other programs needed to convert the local economy.

What might result? Despite the strong federal role in the WWII mobilization, historians say a tremendous entrepreneurial spirit existed nationwide. Most business and civic leaders eventually realized the failure to win the war would be catastrophic. This provided the ideological breakthrough that overcame opposition and spurred great innovation.

Similarly, once the corporations and right-wing billionaires who promote climate denial are sidelined, most Americans will realize that failure to convert to a Climate Recovery Economy will be devastating. This will discredit outdated ideologies and incite tremendous entrepreneurial invention.

The WWII mobilization created millions of new jobs and rescued western civilization. It will soon become evident that a similar mobilization is needed now to convert to a Climate Recovery Economy. This one will save all of civilization.

Bob Doppelt directs The Resource Innovation Group and writes a monthly column for the Register-Guard on climate change-related issues.