

Dear President Obama,

Every 24 hours an average of 16 million tons of carbon dioxide from homes, businesses and transportation is spewed into the earth's atmosphere. Every 24 hours 170 square miles of rainforest is destroyed to make way for farms, dams, and mines, and only 17 square miles will be replanted in reforestation efforts. Every 24 hours, humans will incrementally and permanently alter the face of the Earth constantly rendering species extinct. The question that all people face is not an easy one, but one that must be answered. How can we create a world that can sustain our earth, and all the life it holds; while meeting human and economic needs as well? First, we will explore the root causes of environmental problems, then identify what we as a society must do to live sustainably. Next we will learn how we can incorporate these changes into our daily lives. Finally, we will realize the many positive effects sustainable living will have on the United States as well as the world as a whole, and the arguments for and against it.

What exactly is "sustainable living?" Well according to Merriam-Webster sustainable means, "of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged". Essentially, in order to live sustainably we would need to find a way to meet human needs while protecting our environment as well as the economy. And with a total population of over 6 billion, and limited resources, it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve a balance that is equally beneficial to everyone and everything on this planet.

Often we must make the difficult choice between what is best for the environment, and what is best for humanity. One example of the environment taking precedent over human needs is the spotted owl controversy in the late 1980s and early 90s. Because of old growth logging in Oregon, the spotted owl population had reached record lows. The government was then faced with a huge problem: jobs vs. owls. In the end, the Clinton administration put in place the

Northwest Forest Plan, which set aside millions of acres of old-growth forests for the spotted owl and other species. But thousands of people lost their jobs, and the logging economy in those areas declined by 80%.

However, this is a rare example where nature came first. For the majority of human existence, we have chosen human and economical needs over those of the environment. But these choices' negative effects are only recently begun to be felt. Because of our disregard for the planet and its resources, pollution and waste have become huge problems for our society, causing unnecessary death and disease. Hurricanes and other hydro-meteorological disasters, like typhoons, tsunamis, and droughts, have increased over the past 10 years with global warming. Over 61,000 people die each year from such natural disasters, and that's not counting the other thousands that die, from famine, floods, and drought. As global warming increases the temperatures of the Earth's oceans and atmosphere, storms and disasters will only get more intense, leading to severe droughts, floods, and famines. How many more lives must be lost before we realize how our poor treatment of the earth is hurting humanity?

We only deal with these environmental problems when they arise, and by that point it is generally too late to solve them. We need to start planning ahead, and trying to fix the root causes of these issues, not just the symptoms. It is imperative to humanity, and the world, that we learn to work together to find a solution. Most environmental reform movements have been spotty and unorganized at best, focusing mainly on developing countries. For sustainable living to truly be a success we must have a united approach to the issue. The U.S. has the influence needed to convince nations about the importance of going green. But so far, we haven't put any of our power to good use. The U.S. first step should be turning America into a sustainable and green country, thus leading the way for the world to follow.

To do this, we need to have big businesses become environmentally friendly, and the best way to do that is to prove to them that going green is economically sound. Newsweek's article on the "Greenest Big Companies in America" highlights the 500 largest companies in the U.S., and rates them on environmental impact, green policies, and reputations. The interesting thing about this article is that it also includes how becoming environmentally friendly has helped each company's bottom line. Hewlett-Packard, for example, was listed as the greenest company in America. However, aside from their environmentally friendly policies, the company also reclaimed 1.7 billion pounds of e-waste, which included valuable gold and copper that could later be re-sold. Reductions on packing material have helped cut fuel costs, and an effort to use renewable and clean energy has not just reduced Hewlett Packard's carbon footprint, but saved them millions of dollars a year.

We also need to include the people of America. The government needs to make clean energy a reliable power source, and increase programs like public transportation and recycling. For their part, Americans need to start actually using buses and subways, and maybe biking to work instead of driving. Little things, like using cloth bags and reducing water usage, can make a big impact, though this is just the beginning. Drastic reductions in energy consumption and CO₂ output must be put into place immediately, and many of our institutions like agriculture, housing, waste treatment and technology that serve our basic needs must be redesigned from the ground up, and made sustainable.

As the one of the largest and most influential countries in the world, the United States is a good place for sustainable development to start. It has already begun to be successfully implemented in several smaller countries, especially in the Netherlands. In 1989, the Netherlands created its National Environmental Policy Plan, also called the Green Plan, which is essentially a

set of voluntary agreements with key players such as industries, citizen groups, and other sections of the nation responsible for pollution and environmental destruction. The government allows the companies to find their own ways to reduce pollution; all which is demanded is that the companies meet certain requirements involving for example, pollution amounts, and clean energy usage. Failure to meet standards results in heavy fines. This allows each company to customize a plan that works well for them, instead of having to work around rigid environmental laws that many countries, (including the U.S.) have instead. A section of the Green plan called integrated lifecycle management holds companies responsible for the life cycle of their product, from production to consumption to disposal. Energy conservation laws mandate that companies must increase energy efficiency, renewable energy usage, and use or sell sustainable technology, giving them a lock on the blossoming demand for sustainable products. Finally, the government has started a campaign to improve public awareness, and the slogan "A better environment begins with you" is now more recognized the most popular brand of beer. The best part about the Green Plan is that it is an overwhelming success, negating the argument that environmental protection and economic growth can't go hand in hand. Holland has reduced 70% of their CO2 emissions, increased recycling by 80%, and improved waste disposal by 60%, while still maintaining a healthy, steady economy.

I therefore propose the following three part legislative plan to Congress titled "The Green Plan". First, the plan should include a set of requirements and standards for environmental protection that all companies in the United States must meet. The government will provide timetables and the targets while the target industrial, governmental, and citizens' groups will figure out a way to reach them. These groups will be free to pursue whatever new policies or technologies they feel might be effective, but there will be stiff penalties for failure. Second, we

should create a similar contract with the people of America, including clean energy usage, recycling increases, and awareness. Public awareness campaigns should be sponsored by the government, and broadcast on popular TV and radio shows, as well as published in newspapers and magazines. Third, the plan needs to aim to fix several sectors of our country, mainly waste disposal, CO2 output, transportation, energy usage, and development by mandating a 5% tax increase on all products and industries that are currently unsustainable, and using the surplus for research and new sustainable products and ideas. Tax breaks on clean energy and recyclable products will offer motivation to go green for companies and consumers alike. Creating a Green Plan in the United States is a huge step in the right direction. It would allow our country to show the rest of the world how to live sustainably while reducing poverty globally. As one of the most dominant countries on the planet, we have the power and influence to lead the way towards sustainable living and a better tomorrow for the people and the planet

Works Cited

Guynup, Sharon, and Nicolas Ruggia. "Owls Face Spotted Future."

Www.nationalgeographic.com. 22 July 2004. Web.

McGinn, Daniel. "The Greenest Big Companies In America." *Newsweek* 21 Sept. 2009. Print.

Shah, AnuP. "Poverty Facts and Stats." *Global Issues*. 22 Mar. 2009. Web.