



COMMENT



## Comment

# Fix the economy and the environment?

**Yes we can**

**C**ongratulations President Obama – you did it. Your historic campaign for the US Presidency inspired millions, cost billions and now you must figure out how to fix an economy that has haemorrhaged trillions. One of your major themes has been the need for a clean energy economy, and you have named individuals to your cabinet who seemingly share your passion and desire to make this a reality. While nobody knows what other opportunities or challenges may arise during your Presidency, if you do manage to stay true to this vision, this will be a legacy-making, earth-shattering, climate-changing accomplishment, for which the country and the world will forever be in your debt. However, you are also facing the worst economy since the Great Depression and people are losing their jobs, losing their homes and losing hope for their future.

As you know, it is not going to be easy. The rest of the world has also identified the potential for investment in green technology and infrastructure and, in many cases, is well ahead of the US in terms of commercialization and green job creation. In addition, while leadership on environmental issues has been forthcoming from the States, the financial crisis has hit some state and local budgets particularly hard. Governor Schwarzenegger is facing a deficit for California of around US\$15 billion – which will limit his state's appetite for tackling environmental issues and that might have an adverse impact on the budget.

The key is to fix both the economy *and* the environment. A recent report issued by Oak Ridge National Lab discussed the benefit of combined heat and power (CHP) as an effective solution for a sustainable future for the US. There were a number of striking findings in the report. The US currently gets about 12% of its power generation from CHP, and this alone is responsible

for avoiding 248 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions (the equivalent of removing 45 million cars from the road). With the right mix of policies the US could get 20% of its power from CHP, allowing us to save over 800 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, generate \$234 billion in new investments and create nearly one million new jobs.

WADE research bears this out: The WADE Economic Model has consistently demonstrated that greater deployment of decentralized energy can improve the environment and the economy.

So, President Obama, since we are learning more about your skills on the basketball court, you could say that you are coming into the game with the clock running, late in the fourth quarter and your team is down. You have a deadly three-point shot and now is the time to start knocking them down. We have the tools to deal with the twin challenges of the economy and the environment. Can we do this? As you have said countless times, 'yes we can.'

**David M Sweet**  
Executive Director  
World Alliance for Decentralized Energy  
dsweet@localpower.org

