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Turning the Gulf Oil Spill into Lemonade

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The tragic deep water Horizon oil disaster in the gulf is an immediate call to action that requires us to focus our energies nationally and locally. Nationally we need to develop independent deep water drilling regulation policies and proven emergency procedures in order to assure safe drilling as we move forward. Locally we have the opportunity to harness this call to action to develop renewable energy resources that can be a great economic development tool for the nation and the entire Cali Baja Binational Mega Region.

Hopefully the implementation of these environmental and economic actions will not lag for decades as they have in the past. The Pemex spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 1979 had a devastating effect on the environment but received little attention regarding its economic fallout - yet portions of the Gulf still feel its effects. The Exxon Valdez spill in 1989 hit us on our own shores, but the environmental consequences and economic fallout seemed geographically distant. Now with the BP spill and its environmental devastation we finally seem to be more alert to its consequences in terms of job loss and business failures occurring on the coast from Louisiana to Florida.

As Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* coined so perfectly, the real issue is our addiction to oil. With emerging economies like China and India our global addiction will inevitably linger. Frequently this discussion is framed around climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, but these are really just precursors to a bigger conversation about a renewable energy revolution that is waiting for the innovative minds of our day (and our region) to capture and catapult into an economic boom that will mark a turning point in how we live sustainably and conscientiously on this planet. The San Diego region at its core has the perfect ingredients to play a big role in this birth - a strong entrepreneurial spirit with a proven record; global leaders in research and science; an educated workforce; our Pacific Rim connections; and a commitment to protecting our exquisite and unique environment.

It is clear that the long-term solution for our oil addiction is to develop alternate and renewable sources of energy. Thirty years ago Bill Gates and Steve Jobs were a couple of young nerds and the thought of a personal computer for everyone (or a cell phone) was unimaginable. Yet today both are ubiquitous. The visionary thinking of these types of entrepreneurs has redefined our global economy and how human beings connect. Our world is now ready for the next wave of nerdy high school science works to emerge. Regardless of what the old guard may believe, this new generation will be armed with visions of a world fueled by renewable energy. Their contributions will have far reaching potential and profound impacts on the future of this planet economically, environmentally and socially.

There is no doubt that we are moving into a global race for alternate sources of energy. It is much bigger than a few solar panels on our roofs or driving a hybrid vehicle. The big winners will be those economies that embrace such change, promote innovation, and become exporters of these technologies. The losers will be those economies that refuse to innovate. This is also how we will define the great cities and regions of the 21st Century.

At the turn of the 20th century Henry Ford essentially invented the modern automotive industry. For the better part of a century we built cars for the world and by doing so created millions of well paying jobs for American workers. We then lost our way. Now foreign automakers outsell domestics, many components of even American cars are produced offshore, and Chrysler and GM are lucky to be alive, due in large part to the largess of the U.S. taxpayer. This industry is no longer the U.S. economic engine it was, which is evident as we watch the City of Detroit literally bulldoze entire neighborhoods that have become vacant and blighted.

In the global energy race a handful of entrepreneurs will emerge as the next Ford, Microsoft or Apple. The others will rely on them. We believe that San Diego has the opportunity right now to emerge as a frontrunner in the energy technology race as we have cutting edge assets to compete. San Diego hosts a strong University network, an educated workforce, and exceedingly strong high tech, clean tech and biotech industries. In addition to those innovative assets and due to the economic pullback, we also have a lot of vacant office and industrial space, and many people who are ready to go back to work, create and innovate. How can we harness these assets into an opportunity?

Now is the time for our governmental and private sector technology leaders to align to make a full court press to attract business, investment and innovation. Governments can waive every conceivable fee, tax or processing

challenge for companies that are adding jobs related to the production of renewable energy. These jobs are our (local and global) future and they also have a multiplier effect which will help the overall economy. Florida and Nevada work very hard to attract California business through low cost and business friendly incentives. However, they do not offer the educated workforce and established tech centric economy that we have.

San Diego has the opportunity to attract industry not only from other States but from around the globe. Let's put our focus on an international marketing plan to attract the most innovative renewable energy minds, designers, engineers and venture capitalists from around the world in order to recreate ourselves as the center of the world for renewable energy technology and development.

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