



LEADERSHIP

Tom Bender * North Coast Citizen * 21 February 2008

It's fascinating, sometimes, to wander the internet. People are doing the most amazing and wonderful things, rarely reported by big media. That's another story, but right now I'm intrigued by an interesting little question. Why does one person, or place, or community create leadership, while others just wring their hands?

A year ago, the Australian government (hardly a radical group) became the first country to ban incandescent light bulbs. With one stroke of the pen, they reduced energy use for lighting throughout the entire country by 75%, embarked the whole country on a commitment to change, and showed the rest of the world how easy it is to create major change.

And here?

Then the Chinese government a couple of weeks ago banned plastic bags. How radical. Must be a communist plot. They realized people were consuming *a billion* plastic bags *a day*, most of them blowing around as trash. So they simply began using cloth shopping bags again.

I've talked about building net-zero-energy affordable homes here. Ones that use little energy, get it from renewable sources, and put as much back on the grid as they do use. Compared to what I've seen, that felt doable, but pretty radical. The State of Oregon, with a one-time tradition of leadership in energy, isn't even thinking of such things. So, of course, I find on the internet that Great Britain and France have already mandated *all* new homes be net-zero-energy. And Germany is beginning a campaign for massive energy-upgrades of their *existing* housing.

It doesn't take a country to create leadership. People worry about global warming, peak oil, the rising price of energy. But who is doing something? Portland is. The City of Portland made a commitment to total renewable energy by 2010. "Impossible, ridiculous, can't be done," the Muggles said. But Portland is reaching their goal *this year*, not in 2010! And when people talk about sustainable communities, the place they point to is Portland.

Why has a single Lincoln County Commissioner energized our neighbors to the south to create a “Ten-Year Housing Plan to End Homelessness and the Affordability Crisis”? Homelessness? And here? Oh, we’re just a retirement community for the wealthy. Who cares about those folks?

Why did the City of Cannon Beach create a wetland sewage treatment system *twenty-five years ago*? And shared downtown parking, and a bus system, and controls on vacation rentals? And goodness, even called for impeachment of our D.C. politicians.

What, or who, sparked Oregon churches to become leaders in energy efficiency? Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon has an amazing project underway to install solar electric systems on the big roofs of their churches. They’re working with a company innovatively using state and federal energy tax credits to help non-profits do solar-electric projects. In six years, a church can own its own solar electric system, at a cost of pennies on the dollar. Anybody here thought about all our school roofs, city halls, and cow barns? What changes the energy of a place so people feel the excitement about doing impossible and unheard of things that can change the world?

Let’s ask the question differently. What’s keeping people, institutions, and government in our culture from the natural innovative creativity we’re supposed to be famous for? The answer that came to me is that old electronic drug – TV. People in villages around the world that don’t have TV seem to have a sparkle in their eyes, a joy and openness that makes us look like we eat only Paxil for dinner. TV breeds passivity. And sense of inadequacy. And muffles alternatives to business as usual.

Leadership is still possible. Ask Langley, Washington. They’re doing a different kind of “futures” planning. They said, “Let’s find out what’s possible!” In a great big town of 959 people, they have a hundred people working together, exploring that old internet, to find out what innovative things other communities are already doing. What does and doesn’t work. They have a Planning Advisory Board of volunteers that researches and recommends action on land use-related activities. Their city council even meets *twice a month*, because they’re doing so much interesting stuff.

Leadership is fun, and natural. It’s caused by heavy rainfall, so should be instinctive for Oregonians. It’s exciting to be part of responding to daunting problems by coming up with impossible solutions that work, and implementing them. And seeing lives change and our future change because of our actions. Even puts that sparkle of life back in your eyes. Maybe we should ask for a storm that just blows down TV towers!