

## **New Deal to New Society...Alternative Energy May Lead the Way**

Throughout his campaign, president-elect Barack Obama rallied supporters around his plans to expand America's alternative energy resources and in the process create new jobs and stimulate the struggling economy. On the eve of his inauguration, he has lived up to his campaign promises and nominated an administration populated by renewable energy experts, environmental academics, and eco-savvy politicians. Hopes are high that this dream team of analysts and activists can reduce the United States' dependency on foreign oil and improve the environment while kick-starting the recessed economy, however when goals and expectations are lofty what kind of a reality is truly reasonable?

In his recently released economic stimulus plan, Obama stated he wanted to increase America's amount of alternative energy production to comprise fourteen percent of the country's energy supply by 2012. Currently, renewable sources only cover seven percent. He plans on accomplishing this goal by encouraging the development and national expansion of solar, wind, hydroelectric and clean coal power endeavors. Obama's nominated Energy Secretary, Nobel Prize winner Steven Chu, has already met with leaders from the solar and wind power communities to lay the foundation for meeting the president-elect's energy goal.

However, while exiting Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman is excited for the new emphasis on energy, he is dubious of the incoming administration's ability to meet expectations. "I think it's going to be extremely difficult to get there in three years," Bodman told reporters in his last official address. Even members of Obama's new administration seem to be unsure about how much can be reasonably expected in terms of alternative energy production, like incoming Interior Department head Ken Salazar who referred to the energy plan as a "moon shot."

A significant strain affecting the president-elect's energy aspirations is the weakening economy that is threatening to sabotage the efforts made to correct it. For example, while the federal government has outlined an expansion of the solar energy tax credits program in the proposed stimulus plan, many states are pulling back on their own solar incentives due to economic stress. For instance, Massachusetts has had to reduce its solar energy discount by up to \$3,000 per solar panel system, while Connecticut eliminated its residential solar rebate program completely in October of 2008.

The country is ready and willing to move forward with clean domestic energy sources, yet cannot afford to do it without government subsidizing job creation and tax incentives at a minimum to businesses large and small. The Federal government must take the lead, but also offer pass through incentives to the States that is earmarked for industry and consumers. Homeowners need help too, and easing utility costs through residential alternative energy subsidies as the government provides ongoing low interest rates to address the real estate crisis can be accomplished with programs that provide residential and small business owner incentives that are both eco-friendly and result in cost-savings.

As a country, we have faced times of crisis in the past, and we have found solutions that changed society for the better as we rebounded from hard times. The New Deal comes to mind, and maybe now is the time for the "New Society," resulting in changes to return us to economic

stability for the masses, as we collectively improve expectations and great minds and teams find solutions in new and improved alternative energy options that are transformed into realities, and sustainable technologies for products and services continue to emerge in a greener and cleaner better world.

Timothy B. Cassidy  
January 17, 2009