

You Say You Want a Revolution? What About a 'Green' One?

Posted: Today at 6:52 a.m.

If the United States and the world are to successfully deal with rapidly growing energy, climate and economic challenges, government and private sector leaders must embrace innovation, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman told the Emerging Issues Forum on Monday.

Addressing a record crowd at the annual event put on by former N.C. Gov. Jim Hunt, Friedman said innovation, not conservation or increased energy production, is essential to deal with global warming and \$100-a-barrel oil.

"I'm an innovation guy," he said in a speech that lasted more than 40 minutes. No other measures can "scale" to transform the world's energy consumption and growing demand for billions of other people to live what Friedman called the American lifestyle.

Energy is the hottest topic in water cooler talk today as people discuss politics, economics and national security. Friedman, who wrote the best-seller on global competition "The World is Flat," is in the process of writing his next book "Green: The Next Red, White and Blue." On sabbatical from the Times, Friedman told the audience that going "green" is important. However, he noted that conservation and being environmentally friendly from the cars people drive to reducing carbon "footprints" are not enough to deal with energy and environmental problems.

"This has to be a movement about growth," Friedman said. The United States must lead the way, he added. And if the U.S. embraces "green" "it would be good for America."

Friedman spoke to over 1,000 attendees including academics, government officials, private sector businesses, economic developers, environmentalists, students and a few Cliffside Coal Plant protestors.

The world faces a perfect storm of convergence, he added:

1. Global Warming
2. Global Flattening
3. Global Crowding

Global Warming - Friedman found it weird that Washington D.C. was 73 degrees this weekend and allowed him to golf in February.

Global Flattening -Friedman pointed out that soon emerging economic markets will help millions of people in China and India achieve a more middle class standard of living and these people will soon become consumers and producers. For example, 1,000 new cars per day are sold each day in China. With additional purchasing power, these people will also require more energy.

Global Crowding -At that time he was born in 1953, Friedman were 2.6 billion people in the world. According to recent assumptions of population growth, there will be over 9 billion on planet earth by the time he dies - assuming he lives to 2050. There will be 3 to 4 billion more people living the "American lifestyle", meaning they will become more concerned with consumption.

If the world does not deal successfully with these challenges, Friedman warned that the world will “burn up, choke up, heat up.” Because more billions of people will want to live a U.S. lifestyle, he added, “resource demand will grow exponentially.”

Four “tipping points” must be addressed, he added:

1. Oil at \$100 a barrel
2. Climate change, as shown by the disaster of Hurricane Katrina
3. Biodiversity loss
4. Petro politics, as demonstrated by Russia’s use of energy to drive its political agenda in other countries such as the Ukraine.

“Did we make it hot, or did God make it hot,” Friedman said of climate change.

Innovation can lead to discoveries that can help meet energy demand and deal with climate change, he added.

Friedman also called for an energy tax or carbon tax.

He noted that his parents’ generation was inspired by the color red: “How to beat the Red Communists?”

Now, Friedman explained, the current generation must be inspired by green.

The Emerging Issues forum continues today. To listen in, check the Web site link to the conference.

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