

David Kyler: Healthy environment favors robust economy

As Earth Day 2017 approaches it's fitting for coastal Georgians to reconsider the importance of strong ties between our economy and environmental health. Too often, outmoded, poorly-informed viewpoints unfairly portray environmental quality as being contrary to jobs and a robust economy.

Yet, coastal Georgia's economic vitality thrives on the protection of marshes, fisheries, and waterways.

According to estimates of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, at least 40,000 [jobs and](#) \$2 billion a year in commerce depends in one way or another on a healthy environment here in our region

This includes business ventures involved in tourism, seafood processing, and outdoor recreation and all the local services upon which these activities depend.

Beyond these well-documented ties between coastal Georgia's [workforce](#) and natural resources, we now face a new realm of growth potential – on a global scale, but with special relevance to our region's future.

Here again, we must insist that conventional wisdom be set aside. I'm referring to the latest report from three giants of the business sector who urge stepping up the transition to a clean-energy economy — not only to improve environmental quality and provide investment opportunities, but also to drastically cut emission of [greenhouse gases](#) that are overheating global climate, raising sea-level, and jeopardizing vital marine food supplies.

In "From Risk to Return: Investing in a Clean-Energy Economy" co-authors Michael Bloomberg, Hank Paulson, Jr., and Tom Steyer, make a compelling case for boosting conversion to pollution-free sources of energy.

To quote Hank Paulson, Jr. (former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury), contrary to often-heard assertions, "We can reduce climate risks with existing clean technologies. We don't need an energy miracle."

The report calls for boosting three basic economic initiatives — which are already underway — to successfully (and profitably) curtail threats of catastrophic climate change:

1. Electrification of the economy, moving away from combustion-power and toward wider use of [electric motors](#).
2. De-carbonizing the power sources used to recharge electric-powered equipment and vehicles (i.e., shifting to solar and wind-powered electricity production), and
3. Advancing energy efficiency.

Despite claims by defenders of the status-quo, these steps are technically feasible and well within the realm of near-term realization, according to the proponents of the recommended transition. The report clearly asserts that with the right policy decisions, businesses and investors will drive the needed changes — both in the U.S. and worldwide.

These business-savvy authors remind us that the same ingenuity that "put billions of transistors on a single silicon chip and [a smartphone](#) in every

pocket can also bring clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to every American home” and business, while boosting energy efficiency and providing needed technological progress.

In calling for this shift in public policy, they recall the pivotal role played by the U.S. government in making past advancements — such as railways, rural electrification, and telecommunications.

Rather than continuing to use billions in tax-subsidies to support outmoded and polluting fossil fuels, they advocate reforming public policy to support the three-part program outlined above.

Timely action is needed to ensure both economic stability and effective safeguards against, flooding, drought, wildfires, and costly property damage brought by worsening climate change.

There’s no more appropriate time for this call to action. Let’s revitalize the meaning of Earth Day by reaffirming that creating jobs need not jeopardize our environment, and pragmatic options must be supported by public policy.

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