



Let's not kid ourselves—it's time for Canada to go its own way on the environment

The Canadian environmental policy of “waiting on the Americans” has amounted to a failed policy. That's because even with the strongest mandate given to a left-leaning administration in recent memory, the Obama administration has not done enough to develop a viable alternative energy industry. That includes more use of forestry biomass particularly as an alternative to coal to generate power and for development of biofuels and biochemicals.

What's amazing to me is the cumbersome nature of the American political system. While I have sometimes complained about Canadian politics, there's no question that a majority government in this country, or even a strong minority as is the case now, still manages to get things done. Yet an overwhelming majority in the Senate, control of Congress, and a Democrat president was still not enough for Obama to bring about a much-needed revolution in development of alternative energy sources.

I've heard that the definition of 'crazy' is doing the same thing over and over, and expecting a different outcome. That seems to be the case with our neighbors to the south, given their priorities for bailouts. If they keep propping up the same industries that put them in a hole in the first place, how can they expect a different outcome?

An \$800 billion investment in energy self-sufficiency had the potential to spawn a truly new, space age-type industry in the U.S., reminiscent of John F. Kennedy who inspired the nation by making a moon landing a priority despite the risks and unknown outcomes. It would create much-needed jobs, and pull the U.S. out of its financial hole, much in the same way that industrial activity to support the World War II effort pulled the U.S. out of the Great Depression.

I believe the great “bio” opportunity in the U.S. has sadly been missed, and unless the Canadian government adjusts its shade of green, we will lose our opportunity to show true leadership in developing energy sources, products, and policies that significantly reduce our footprint on the environment.

There are also export opportunities through support of bio-industries. Countries like India are ripe for the picking, considering that the country's demand for fossil fuels is set to soar by 40 per cent over the next decade. Listening to India's Prime Minister, it seems they are willing to consider greener alternatives.

I doubt that the American government's second wave of stimulus to kick start the American economy will benefit the forest industry with Congress controlled by the Republican Party. A stimulus bill negotiated in this political environment will likely have so many earmarks that the only money being invested will be for underground sprinkler systems installed at the public's expense for party bagmen.

Recently, a senior advisor to President Barack Obama stated that there is “no chance of the Americans adopting a Cap and Trade System over the next two years.” In other words, Obama has lost the political clout following the outcome of the recent mid-term election to bring about fundamental change in American energy policy that really had a chance of reducing their dependence not only on oil from the Middle East, but fossil fuels in general. Big Oil is back and that spells bad



news for those seriously interested in starting the 21st Century focussed on a new way of life with a softer footprint on the environment. Some pundits have even suggested that existing subsidies and tax breaks for development of alternative energy projects could be scaled back or eliminated as a budget cutting measure.

If the plan to transform the forest industry through more involvement in the bio-economy is to move forward domestically—and as a potential export industry—it's time for forest industry lobbyists to meet with Canadian politicians right now about developing a “Made in Canada” environmental policy.

To its credit, the Canadian forest industry has really done an incredible job over the past five years to prepare itself as a legitimate provider of alternative products, and the federal government has been a willing and positive contributor to the overall effort. Its major investment of \$80 million in the forest industry's Transformative Technologies Program, which spawned the Future Bio-pathways Framework, is exactly what the industry has needed to help fill knowledge gaps and develop viable business models to allow forest companies to evolve beyond traditional forest products.

The \$20 million federal investment in the Domtar/FPIInnovations strategic partnership to build a nanocrystalline cellulose (NCC) plant capable of producing one tonne of NCC per day is another excellent example of industry and government working together to develop a wood-based material that can be used to develop an amazing variety of ‘green’ alternative products for the chemical industry, the automotive industry, pharmaceuticals, and aerospace. NCC can also be used to enhance existing forest products with coatings that make wood harder, scratchproof and resistant to biological degradation.

On the provincial front, B.C.'s decision to allow six-storey all-wood construction of multi-residential buildings, Ontario's decision to phase out power generation using coal, and Quebec's development of wood-hybrid buildings as well as a cross-laminated timber plant, are all excellent initiatives in wood's favour.

So, what are we waiting for? If it's for some sanity and clarity in the American political landscape, let's not kid ourselves any more.