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By Owen McShane

The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

Local Govt - thoughts for the new year

CLIMATE CHANGE

This year is shaping up to be the year of climate change – the year in which the general climate of opinion on “climate change” will itself begin to change as the whole “global warming” scenario begins to unravel. There are several signs already.

First, the hysterical announcements from the hysterics are becoming even more hysterical. The Editor of The Canadian has just announced that the population of the world may fall to 500 million by the year 2012. That’s right – 4.5 billion of us may die from global warming over the next five years.

Second, even the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) is starting to hedge its bets. The draft of the latest IPCC report, due out later this year, reduces the most likely scenario for sea level rise by the year 2100 from 80 cms to only 35 cms. Someone should tell Al Gore, whose predictions of 7 metre rises begin to look a bit flaky. Someone should also tell the retiring Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment whose latest newsletter tells us that Al Gore has “an impressive grasp” of the science around climate change and endorses Al’s recommendation that we should revise sea level rises over the next 50 years (not 100) to several metres. So it seems Al Gore knows more about the science than the IPCC – or perhaps he has access to top-secret information.

Third, other groups are starting to hedge the bets too. While some media alarmists rush to tell us that the Australian drought and bush are caused by global warming official sources are much less confident and express their reservations more frequently by the day.

Finally, members of the general public seem to be less convinced of falling skies than mainstream media editors believe. The NZ Climate Science Coalition continues to have difficulty getting its skeptical views reported in the mainstream media. But when Scoop (bless their heart) runs the Coalitions contrarian views, these reports immediately rise to the top three or four positions in the Scoop readership rankings – even beating out videos of executions.

Once people begin to lose money on their “green” energy investments watch the pack of cards truly tumble. Anyone like to pick the next dot.com or tulip boom?

P.S. Some may have picked up that NIWA is blaming New Zealand’s cooling temperatures on El Nino, while their American counterparts are blaming America’s warm winter temperatures on the same El Nino. The “little boy” works in mysterious ways.

SMART GROWTH – WHO WANTS IT?

Like most of you, we have Sky television at home, and hence we have access to about 130 channels broadcasting a huge range of programmes covering news, sports, history, art, and of course the lifestyles of the rich and famous and even the not so rich and famous.

Many of these programmes tell us about the delights and travails of people moving to some new home in search of a better life. We are introduced to people seeking a “Place in the Sun”, a more “sustainable” lifestyle, returning to their “roots”, or generally seeking peace and quiet and privacy. In every programme we have watched, these people all share one thing in common. They are hoping to find an affordable single family home on its own piece of land, set on the coast or in the countryside. These eager migrants are leaving the city and congestion and noise to find peace and quiet and privacy and a piece of land on which they can grow their own fruit and vegetables. Some are even willing to raise their own hens, pigs, sheep and other livestock.

Yet, if the Smart Growth planners are right, these stories are hopelessly biased and misleading. After all, we have pointed our remote at channels high and low, but have been unable to find a single programme promoting the delights of moving from the suburbs or countryside into a city apartment next to a railway station or bus depot and the consequent joys of using public transport. Not one home seeker in the programmes we watch gives such pleasures even a passing thought!

Given that council planners everywhere assure us that their plans for urban intensification, growth management, and Smart Growth and public transport use are based on public transportation and enjoy strong “community support” we have to accept that we do not subscribe to the right channels or that there is some conspiracy among producers and programme buyers to conceal the obvious truth.

So there must be some programmes out there which

would balance this obvious bias and distortion. Can someone please tell us where to find them?

After all, those of us who know what is really the correct way people ought to live should be concerned. Even though the bias in these programmes should be self-evident to all right-thinking people, eventually the power of television and film must surely persuade many people a place in low density self sustaining environments, with peace and quiet and home grown produce, is an acceptable way of life. And we can't have that, can we?

In the name of "sustainable urban form", we must all call for a ban on such programmes or at least have them relegated to late night viewing only – along with junk food advertisements, porn movies, people who don't cry on camera, and other "inappropriate" viewing. (As Thomas Sowell reminds us, isn't it time we renamed "Ivan the Terrible", "Ivan the Inappropriate"?)

REDISCOVERING O'ROURKE

This year is surely the time to re-read P.J. O'Rourke's *All the Trouble in the World* – the lighter side of famine, pestilence, destruction and death, and send a copy to your local MP and Mayor.

I decided to browse through this old favourite over a coffee in the sun, and was surprised to find it was published back in 1994 – which seems sufficiently long ago to qualify as "the good old days". I am normally skeptical of long range forecasts but given P.J.'s opening paragraphs I would give his crystal balls more credit than most. For example:

"Writing this book required an enormous amount of help from friends. To them goes the credit. I'll take the money. Writing this book also required an enormous amount of help from enemies. Particularly, I'd like to thank Vice President Al Gore for being the perfect straw man on such subjects as the environment, ecology and population. Sorry Al, for repeatedly calling you a fascist twinkie and intellectual dolt. It's nothing personal. I just think you have repulsive totalitarian inclinations and the brains of a King Charles spaniel." And later:

"Fretting makes us important. Say you're an adult male and you're skipping down the street whistling *Last Train to Clarksville*. People will call you a fool. But lean over to the person next to you on a subway and say 'How can you smile while innocents are dying in Tibet?'. You'll acquire a reputation for great seriousness and also more room to sit down. ... Worrying is less work than doing something to fix the worry. This is especially true if we're careful to pick the biggest possible problems to worry

about. Everybody wants to save the planet; nobody wants to help Mom do the dishes."

If that doesn't persuade you to re-read this classic, surely you must revisit any author whose frontispiece reminds us that F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, in *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925:

"I read somewhere that the sun's getting hotter every year," said Tom genially. "It seems that pretty soon the earth's going to fall into the sun – or wait a minute – it's the opposite – the sun's getting colder every year." There really is nothing new under the sun.

LONG TERM PLANS

As part of its plan to promote central planning everywhere, the Government is encouraging Local Bodies to engage in "long term planning". The main lesson our leaders seem to have learnt from the Great Soviet Experiment is that five year plans were just not long enough. Ten year, twenty year, and even one hundred year plans are now the rage. We should remind these "intellectual dolts" that it's not just that we cannot predict future knowledge about science and technology that makes such long term planning useless. We are even less able to predict future values and attitudes.

Only forty years ago, I joined the Auckland City Council where one of my first tasks was to joint the team taking a second look at the proposal to raze to the ground all the dreadful slum housing in Freemans Bay and Ponsonby. Fortunately we challenged the conventional planning consensus of the time, and the rest, as they say, is history. The same planning profession has now decided that these areas are now Heritage Zones, which must be protected from damage by the same private citizens who rescued them in the first place.

They forget the only time these houses were ever under threat of destruction was from town planners promoting "slum clearance".

Just as we should not trust computer models of the future which cannot even explain the past, we should not trust a profession with such short memories to plan anything beyond next week.

P.S. My apologies for insulting King Charles spaniels.

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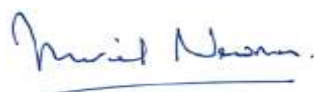
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