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Those who govern should be required to be eco-literate

Sharon Abercrombie | Jun. 13, 2012 Eco Catholic

Political candidates, economists and business school graduates should be required to take eco-literacy tests to determine if they are qualified to govern and make earth-friendly policy decisions, recommends The World Future Council, an international public advocacy organization based in Hamburg, Germany.

"Ecological literacy is vital for those in positions of power and influence," states the council's founder and chair, Jakob von Uexküll.

In a June 5 article [1] on Nation of Change, von Uexküll wonders how policymakers can be taken seriously if they don't understand the real risks and dangers, which he says are largely responsible for the crises that are unraveling the planet's life support system.

The unintended consequences of these uninformed policies are climate change, desertification, biodiversity decline, ocean pollution and the destruction of forests, the article states.

Von Uexküll, founder of the Right Livelihood Award -- the "alternative Nobel Prize" -- and a former member of the European Parliament, says traditional economic theory positions the environment as a subset of the economy, a "profoundly scary" proposition on which decisions are made.

However, "the economic system we've created is wholly dependent on the natural environment," he said.

"Many economists actually believe that if food production collapses, we can just make more iPods to keep the economy going," he said. "With the best laws and right policy incentives we can mobilize human inventiveness and entrepreneurship to safeguard a healthy planet for future generations."

One possible law would require full-cost accounting for the energy sector and eliminating subsidies for the fossil fuel and nuclear energy industries. Such policies would level the playing field, enabling renewal energy projects to "explode," von Uexküll said.

Present-day government policies allow 3,000 of the world's biggest corporations to escape more than $2.2. trillion in annual costs through their impacts on the natural environment, he pointed out, citing a UN environmental report.

Von Uexküll's comments are part of a new emergency policy agenda just released by The World Future Council. It is made up of 24 tipping points necessary to maintaining the health of the planet. The report, "Saving Our Shared Future: Best Policies to Regenerate our World," [2] debuted June 5, World Environment Day.

"Saving Our Shared Future" is the result of more than five years of work by a broad range of environmental experts from around the world. Its tipping-point policies include suggestions for speeding up the global transition to renewal energy, policies regulating financial instruments, securing sustainable ecosystems, granting

equal educational opportunities for women and outlawing nuclear weapons. Many of the ideas are based on successful programs that are already working around the world.

For example, in 2000, the German government created a tariff policy that launched a renewal energy revolution. The policy has helped Germany to generate 22 percent of its electricity from renewals today, and has opened up a new business sector employing more people than its automotive industry.

View the full report [2].

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