

Another Shade of Green



By Keith Lindemulder

The Politics of GREEN

It would be pretty tough to be unaware of the upcoming elections in the next few weeks. Candidates from local level to the national level all have opinions which, to them, make them the best candidate for whatever position they are running. Among all the posturing and saber rattling the question that comes up is, "What does politics have to do with 'Green'?"

Sustainability, you'll recall, is a three legged stool that includes environmental, social AND economic legs. Affordability and profitability are part of the equation, so additional first-costs will need to be coupled with real benefits. Therefore, "green" is independent of arguments on global warming, greenhouse gases, ozone depletion or any other environmental issue.

Jim Gleeson, an architect in Charlotte, NC, wrote a paper in 2005 titled – The Politics of GREEN. In this paper he concludes that since buildings account for roughly 1/3 of the energy use, greenhouse gases and landfill volume, what matters most is that it makes good business sense to eliminate waste and "green up" our building stock regardless of politics. Instead of thinking of buildings as a whole bunch of individual parts and systems, he says, green building programs today force the design team to take a holistic approach and tightly integrate all the individual components into a single system.

Each of the major political parties has their ideas of what's best for the country. Both link environmental policies (including green building) with energy policies. Balancing the need to meet demands for more energy, along with the environmental cost it includes, will be a significant challenge for the next administration. As we've seen, green building programs are built around the concept of efficiency, waste reduction and recycling. Remember, the cheapest power plant is one that never needs to be built.

Since 1990, the American steel industry has *reduced* its energy consumption per ton of steel shipped by 29%! The American steel industry has reduced air and water emissions by 90% in the last 10 years! Almost 70% of all steel is recycled in the US each year – more than paper, aluminum, plastic and glass combined! Steel in North America has been recycled at a rate of more than 60% since 1970!

The point is it made good business sense for the steel industry to invest in these major leaps forward in efficiency. It took innovation and the desire to be industry leaders to achieve these goals and the benefits outweighed the costs (again, economically AND environmentally). Today, the steel industry is busy developing breakthrough technology which will allow us to produce steel even more efficiently and with little or no CO₂ emissions. If it makes sense for the environment it will have to make sense economically to be attainable and sustainable.

Whichever party is elected needs to seize the opportunity for the US to play a leadership role in a world economy based on innovation. To quote Jim Gleeson, "A green building can only be the result of a partnership of all stakeholders toward a shared mission. Greening our economy will be the result of creative partnerships and a shared mission for a sustainable, vibrant future. This is the Politics of GREEN."

Have a SAFE and Sustainable week!

Reduce!

Reuse!

Recycle!



STEEL
IS THE NEW GREEN.



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