

“A Letter to President-Elect Barack Obama”

November 16, 2008

Dear Barack Obama,

Congratulations! You are the man who will lead a nation to embrace a new pact with nature.

To date, you have shown leadership with respect to numerous key components of what many ecologists term “natural capitalism” - meaning, the economy exists inside of nature; nature is not inside the economy. You have supported a market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions 80 percent by 2050; helped preserve the *Clean Air Act* while in Congress, as well as calling for stricter controls by the Environmental Protection Agency for tough pollution standards; advocated for wetlands protection and environmental justice in the U.S. You have worked to strengthen our network of national parks and other protected areas, with a special focus on regions like the Great Plains, the Great Lakes and Eastern forests.

Now, you have a remarkable opportunity. Global economic woes are an offspring of malfunctions at the very core of the planet’s life-support systems. They need urgent attention and here are three suggested arenas for action.

First: Biology Matters Most. Please address the drastic loss of global biodiversity. On the home front, despite passage of the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA) in 1973, over 100 North American species have gone extinct, while only 22 species (out of the 1,580 that are either listed or ready to be listed) have recovered to any appreciable degree. From whales and sea turtles to woodpeckers and cougars, our native wildlife is in serious trouble, mirroring a global crisis for wildlife. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed some 45,000 species at risk of extinction and the scientific community now recognizes that more than half of the projected 100 million species on Earth may go extinct by the end of the century. Such headlines reflect the most perplexing, numbing state of affairs ever confronted by our species. Addressing these problems will require courage, virtue, common sense and innovation at all levels of government, corporate, community and individual sectors.

With such shattering data facing us, it is imperative that the United States finally ratify the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*, a far-reaching outgrowth of the Rio Environmental Summit of 1992. America is virtually alone in the world of nations for not having ratified a treaty whose goals are the protection of life on Earth.

Second: A Population Policy. The United States of America needs to adopt a stabilizing population policy, in absence of which, we cannot grasp the effects of our consumerism which equates with an inordinate ecological footprint. U.S. census data forecasts a population of 500 million people in the U.S. by the end of this century; and a worldwide population of between 9 and 13 billion people. The Earth’s bio-capacity is overwhelmed by present numbers and projected

demographics. We need compassionate guidance and legislation to reverse this formula for disaster. Generous tax incentives for people choosing to have small families, or to adopt, would be an appropriate first step. Another would be an Executive Order reversing the Reagan/Bush “gag order” that denied women throughout the world assistance to help them obtain the fullest range of family planning services.

Third: Kindness. America’s reliance on violent industries is not the best model of compassion to pass along to future generations. If we are to tackle international security issues, we need also to recognize that children are impressionable and if we say it is “OK” to kill animals, where does the killing end? A meaningful approach would be to actively inspire kindness and courtesy so that all may benefit. Pigs, cows, turkeys and chickens are as much a part of the Creation as we are. While it is unlikely that Americans will “go vegetarian” (as was the recommendation of the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize), a non-violent administration *could* adopt creative tax support to families and companies that choose not to kill. Why not acknowledge the true cost of killing for our food? The U.S. Department of Agriculture began thinking in such terms when it placed fruit and vegetables atop its recommended food pyramids, reversing a long-guarded premise that meat should be at the top. The scientific and medical communities have recognized that meat-eating is not merely a serious health issue for humans, but a huge burden on fast-shrinking fresh water resources. Meat production undermines our ability to divert plant foods and compact units of protein in greater abundance to the hungry. Moreover, livestock emit their own considerable contributions to global warming. Yet, America continues to slaughter over ten billion animals per year, and under questionably “humane” circumstances.

By promising to bring a puppy to the White House for your family, you have already begun a path of peaceful reunification that involves us all – not just a population dreaming of change and hope, but the innocents of the world in need of policies of compassion. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi understood this well.

In summary: America cannot solve all of the world’s problems at once, nor can it stand by in worried isolation. But the United States of America has the power to promote virtue and true conscience. Extending the olive branch to all creatures great and small is our only way to realize true environmental security.

Kindest regards,

Dr. Michael Tobias

President, Dancing Star Foundation