

Challenges present a turning point

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Future historians will look back at the year 2008 as a turning point in American history, but where this turn will take us is still to be determined. The election of Barack Obama as America's first African-American president is a watershed moment in our history. But his election will be viewed against a backdrop of economic turmoil and uncertainty unseen since the days of the Great Depression, environmental challenges that threaten our very way of life and a country that is at odds with many of its allies and at war with the forces of extremism.

As Albert Einstein observed, "in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity," which is what we need to keep in mind as we tackle the problems we face today. American history is testament to a people who rise to the challenge and conquer adversity with creativity, innovation and determination.

Global warming and our growing dependence on foreign sources of oil are two problems that are linked together by a solution. Each year we spend more than \$700 billion to import oil, much of it coming from countries that are not our friends. Nearly 60 percent of the oil we use comes from overseas, and most of the world's oil reserves are in the Middle East. While there are steps that we can take to increase domestic production, the effect will be marginal and temporary. The fact remains that our addiction to oil is the problem, a point that both President-elect Obama and President Bush agree on.

There is widespread consensus in the scientific community that human activity is the major contributor to the increase in greenhouse gases, such as CO₂ in our atmosphere, which is causing global warming. The U.S. must commit to reducing the pollution that causes global warming. We can do this by evolving from a carbon-based energy economy to a clean-energy economy. In addition to reducing our depen-

dence on oil and reducing global warming, the move to a clean-energy economy will create new industries, businesses and jobs, providing a needed boost to our economy. In fact, going green is already creating a sense of community among several large employers in the Roanoke region. These businesses have joined together to be part of a Green Business Coalition and are setting an example that other communities can follow.

Nationally, incentives may be needed to encourage even small businesses to do their part in reducing greenhouse gases. Whether driving less, changing one's fleet to hybrids or making sure that construction and renovation projects incorporate greener elements that reduce energy, there's a role for every business and every business person. There are already smart choices being made through the help of state programs. Yet, national incentive programs could help generate new efforts to increase energy efficiency by retrofitting buildings, improving the electrical grid, expanding and

enhancing mass transit and freight rail, and developing solar, wind and biomass projects. A national policy on global warming that includes a complementary market trading program could generate significant resources that could be redirected toward these pragmatic solutions.

Without a doubt, there are opportunities ahead for leaders and educators at all levels to change direction and chart a new, more energy efficient, green recovery-related course. Future jobs that could be created in the green jobs field would include a wide array of industries, including construction, engineering, manufacturing and transportation — all areas that are now suffering from the economic recession.

If we seize the challenges of today as opportunities to invest and grow in a new and better direction, we will help our economy and our environment. The resources that we need to make the turn in the right direction are vision, determination, creativity and faith. I believe we have those resources in abundance, and it is now the time to put them to work.