

Promoting an environment for change

Over the past 16 months, we have run a series of commentaries in this space discussing some of the most vexing challenges facing the health of our planet. We haven't downplayed problems such as climate change, energy or habitat depletion, but neither have we told you the sky is falling.

Great as these challenges are, they have solutions.

As we charge headlong into the 21st century, the human population—all of us, from Canton, Ohio, to Canton, China—must come to grips with, and recognize, some fundamental truths that no amount of denial or political spin can change. Many of our essential natural resources are limited. We cannot drive our economy on the oil of the Persian Gulf forever. We cannot deplete our forested lands faster than they can rejuvenate. We cannot stretch our water supply any farther than it will go.

To deny these truths would, at best, only force more painful decisions on our children and grandchildren.

The magnitude of the problems must not overwhelm us. We still have time to switch to a path of sustainability, if we begin the switch now. We must act.

What should we do? First, we need to reorient the way we perceive our environmental choices. Nearly every institution in American culture is myopic by nature. Two-year House election cycles. Four-year Presidential cycles. Quarterly earnings reports. Hourly news updates. Is it any wonder we have such difficulty

focusing on how our choices will affect us, or our children, years from now?

We must fight to make these future consequences part of the decision-making process. We must find a way to reframe the problems so that everyone understands the limitations of our natural resources, and the inevitable need to find sustainable approaches for managing them—approaches that fit within the evolution of our economy and society.

The Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions was launched this year with the mission of finding and communicating these new approaches.

The Institute unites the broad resources of the Duke University community with the expertise of partners in industry, government and environmental organizations. Our common mission: To provide decision makers with independent, science-driven evaluations of policy risks and rewards, and to work with them to develop innovative, pragmatic solutions to the fundamental questions facing us all.

We are at a crossroads. We can continue down the same path or we can blaze a new trail. The stakes are high. The threats to our health and economy are real. The need for sensible, bipartisan solutions—based on the best science and economics,

not hype—is urgent.

The Nicholas Institute stands ready to help decision makers throughout the world find those solutions. Will you join us?



What do you think? visit us at www.nicholas.duke.edu/institute



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