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JEFF STUKEY: NATION NEEDS TO START PREPARING FOR FUTURE

BY JEFF STUKEY

We have become a nation that believes we can enjoy constant economic growth with no pain. Not only do we expect prosperity, but we expect a constantly increasing level of prosperity.

But prosperity without sacrifice produces many problems: high gasoline prices, the housing bubble, the broken health care system, Social Security and Medicare systems headed for bankruptcy, the environment headed for disaster.

The generation who lived through the Great Depression and World War II understood sacrifice, but wanted their children to have a "better" life. However, that better life is unsustainable, according to David Walker, former U.S. comptroller general.

In an interview on CBS' "60 Minutes," Walker said that even though we don't face an immediate crisis, we suffer from a fiscal cancer that, if not treated, could lead to catastrophic consequences. One of the biggest problems is that we have massive entitlement programs that we can no longer afford.

We don't like to deal with reality. Because of that, politicians often pander instead of lead. Instead of facing the reality that the stock market is overpriced because of the housing market meltdown, they give us a \$120 billion tax rebate. Instead of sustainable renewable energy strategies, a handful of congressmen in corn-growing states give us ethanol (which contributes to the world food shortage). Instead of better public transportation and more efficient automobiles, we get a proposed "tax holiday" on gasoline taxes.

One comparatively bright spot on the political landscape is our governor's courage in standing firm on the proposed coal-plant expansion in western Kansas. Good for her. We clearly need to recognize that the bill has come due for our cavalier use of fossil fuels. We must embrace the use of renewable energy and find a way to make it work.

We need leaders who have the courage to honestly contend with the many challenges we face and who are willing to lead, not pander. As a nation, we need lofty goals such as transitioning within the next 10 years to 50 percent renewable energy sources, and mandating a retirement program (in addition to Social Security) for all workers, funded by employers and employees, which would have a 401(k)-like option and a personal retirement annuity pension account option.

Now is not the time for us to shrink back and take the route of temporary, quick-and-easy fixes. We need to learn from the past and make bold, sustainable, long-term plans for the future.

We simply cannot afford any more quick and painless fixes. The future of our nation is at risk. We need to act now.

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