

Brian Yanity interviews Richard Seifert, Energy and Housing Specialist at Cooperative Extension Service for insurgent49.com

Yanity: Tell us a little about yourself and your efforts (going back decades) to bring truly sustainable development to Alaska:

Seifert: I was always interested in living the authentic life, and leaving the world better than I found it. One of the earliest discoveries which was life shaping for me was the Original Whole Earth Catalog, and its progeny. For those who don't know about this publication and its power, it is a worthy review to make. The WEC as it was abbreviated, was a catalog of tools for changing the world and your life in the world for the better, to a sustainable self-sufficiency. Way better than "Mother Earth News", by the way. Deeper, more sincere, very California. Before the time when you could go online and order the universe delivered to your door, it was the most vital source of information available to environmental and socially conscious people.

Yanity: Do you support a tax on oil and gas production to directly fund Alaska renewable energy development? If so, what is the best way to implement such a tax?

Seifert: Yes, and I, along with Todd Hoener, another Fairbanksan and other supporters have actually promoted this along with Alaska gasoline development. It is explained more fully on my website: www.sustainalaska.org The idea is called the Alaska Energy Futures Trust. The concept is to set aside a small portion of Gasline income for local energy infrastructure and technical development for financing the transition to a possible hydrogen future after the gasoline is spent out. It is crucial to build the infrastructure for a future renewable energy system to support the people of the state while we have the capital to do it, during the gasoline era. If we wait until the gas is gone, we won't be able to do it. Also, nearly everything from the professional skill base to the distribution system which we need for gas to be our staple energy source, will transition well into the same system we'll need for distributing and using renewably produced hydrogen. These decisions and this type of thinking must start immediately. Needless to say, legislators have not even noticed the proposed Energy Futures Trust concept, since it won't happen before the next election.

I have always thought that higher taxes should be placed on existing oil and gas production to help fund the University of Alaska system.

Yanity: Tell us a little about the university's land grant system. Is it environmentally friendly? What are the land grant system's future prospects?

Seifert: Well again, I have been an advocate for some time of fully developing the Land Grant system to not only support the University in perpetuity,

but also to manage the Land Grant lands sustainably for that purpose, and use students as trainee/interns in natural resource management to develop the professional cadre of people who manage their own state sustainably, developed by their own sustainable university through direct student experience. Ultimately these students would become the professional managers who keep the state sustained. If we did this, we'd be the first state in the union to ever achieve it. All this is a wondrous prospect, and I have also written university president Mark Hamilton suggesting just this sort of system (see again my website on the downloads page, letters on the land grant system, www.sustainalaska.org). This always happens when the legislature and the governor want to give federal land to the University to fulfill its land grant. However, the usual thing that happens when this land is given to the university is they simply turn it around and sell it, putting it into the private market and simply converting it to money. This is hardly sustainable, and really abuses the whole concept by putting the university in the role of being little more than a land bank. It is just a continuation of the American nightmare of land abuse and disrespect of the environment.

Yanity: How can we start a serious university research program for renewable energy here in Alaska?

Seifert: Disarm the oil lobby, i.e., VECO and their lackeys in the legislature (which is nearly all of them). Institute income taxes so that people have a reason to vote other than their Permanent Fund Dividend. This is a monumental task in light of the present reality. The state government does virtually NOTHING to encourage renewable energy or conservation. Nearly everything that is done is with federal money. Very pathetic. We could be world leaders in many respects with the wealth we should have. And yet again you've asked a question I've written about extensively, and which is (also) on my website: Could Alaska, the Last Frontier, be renewably powered? I have updated the original study to another one which is entitled "A Sustainable Alaska: Could We Do It?"

Simply by showing the feasibility of powering Alaska with renewable energy goes a long way toward helping people grasp its reality and desirability. First they must be persuaded that it is actually possible. It is, and I have demonstrated through calculation that it is.

Yanity: What advice do you have for young Alaskan activists who want to build a sustainable and just future?

Seifert: Work toward it, and know that it is one of most important and essential goals for civilization. Its importance cannot be overstated or overvalued. Without energy to do our work, help us travel, harvest and grow our food, and make our tools, the world will slide back into slavery.