

Obama's Staff Meeting

By Chris Clugston

The following candid exchange between President Obama and his staff regarding America's future is fictionalized; or is it?

Obama: Good morning ladies and gentlemen; thank you for coming here today on such short notice. We are experiencing difficult times, as you know; probably more difficult than at any other time in our country's history. We also find ourselves in a different position than we've ever been in before—fewer natural resources, higher debt levels, greater foreign dependence, lower productive capacity... In short, we are currently less in control of our destiny than we have been since the founding of our country.

I've asked you to come here today to help me develop an honest assessment of our current situation and of our options going forward—be advised that what we say here today must never leave this room...

Obama: Is our American way of life sustainable?

Staff: No—it's not even close...

Obama: What do you mean?

Staff: Supplies of critical natural resources such as oil, natural gas, coal, phosphorous, potassium, and various metals—even water and arable land—upon which our American way of life depend, and which were once abundant and cheap, are becoming increasingly scarce and expensive. Available natural resource supplies will soon be insufficient to support our existing population at our current living standard...

Obama: How is that possible?

Staff: We, all Americans, have been living beyond our means, ecologically and economically, for centuries—especially since our industrial revolution. We have been persistently and systematically depleting the natural resources and degrading the natural habitats upon which our American way of life and our very existence depend...

Obama: How bad is it?

Staff: Appalling; our best case estimates for sustainable US population and living standard levels are less than 20% of our current levels; realistically, the numbers are probably less than half that...

Obama: What's the solution?

Staff: Transition to a sustainable lifestyle ASAP; live within our means, ecologically and economically, forever...

Obama: What does that entail?

Staff: Living exclusively on domestically available renewable natural resources—water, croplands, grazing lands, forests, and wildlife. The bad news is that we will experience devastating reductions in our population level and living standards as a result; the good news is that we will actually optimize our sustainable population level and living standards going forward.

Obama: Go back to living in caves; are you insane; what's the alternative?

Staff: Allow Nature to orchestrate our transition to sustainability through societal collapse, and experience apocalyptic reductions in our population level and living standards through famine, disease, and pestilence...

Obama: Totally unacceptable; how can you say that?

Staff: The exact timing and circumstances associated with our collapse are unknown, but available evidence indicates that the timing is imminent and the circumstances will be horrific. The actual outcome itself—societal collapse—is not subject to speculation; it is simply an unavoidable geophysical reality. A protracted supply shortfall associated with a critical natural resource such as one of the fossil fuels is inevitable; and such a shortfall will be sufficient to crash our economy and collapse our society...

Obama: How much time do we have?

Staff: Collapse could occur at any time; probably within a few years; almost certainly within a decade or so...

Obama: Can we buy time?

Staff: Possibly, if we can convince the American people to voluntarily reduce their numbers and their living standards. We might be able to buy a few years at most—but it would be a stay of execution, not a pardon...

Obama: No way; they'll never go for it—plus, they might panic. Can't we buy our way out?

Staff: We've been trying to do that for decades—as you know, we're currently printing and borrowing money as fast as we can; it might buy us one more brief economic recovery, at best. The problem is that all the money in the world can't create additional natural resources—and, ironically, the more robust our economic recovery, the faster we'll use the remaining natural resources we have...

Obama: What about our foreign suppliers?

Staff: We're near, at, or past global peak production for an increasing number of critical energy resources and non-energy resources. So there are fewer countries with surplus natural resources, and they have less to export; AND, they have new customers—the developing countries...

Obama: How about a foreign policy or military solution?

Staff: We might be able to continue to buy influence—and “favorable” natural resource prices—in some countries for awhile; but given our already enormous current and projected budget deficits, we would have to count on countries that are eyeing the same resources that we're after to finance any outright conquests—not likely...

Obama: Is there no way that we can preserve our American way of life?

Staff: We would need an almost inconceivable series of 11th hour miracles—major viable new energy sources; enormous domestic energy, metal, and mineral resource discoveries; trillions of dollars in real US-generated capital investment—right now; the chances are less than one in a million... Are you willing to bet Michelle's life, and the lives of your kids on a one in a million shot?

Obama: No... Since we're on the subject, what about us?

Staff: When the time comes, we've got a bunker set up for you, Michelle, and the kids in the middle of nowhere—plenty of provisions and protection, enough to last for a year or so. The worst should be over by then...

Staff: What should we tell the public?

Obama: Keep talking about “better times ahead”, “imminent recovery”, and “green shoots”; thank you ladies and gentlemen for your time...

Author Bio (Chris Clugston): For the past three years I have conducted extensive independent research into the area of sustainability, the goals of which are to quantify from a combined ecological and economic perspective the extent to which our American society is currently overextended—living unsustainably beyond our means—and to understand the causes, implications, and possible solutions associated with our predicament.

Prior to that I spent thirty years working with information technology sector companies in marketing, sales, finance, M&A, and general management—the last twenty as a corporate chief executive and management consultant. I received an AB/Political Science, Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Penn State University, and an MBA/Finance with High Distinction from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. I can be reached at coclugston “at” comcast “dot” net.