

The Green Schools & Community Colleges Revolution

Remarks of Henry A. J. Ramos before the Summit's Day 1 Plenary
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Pasadena, CA

California Greening: Community Colleges Can Lead the Way on Environmental Change

Greeting

Thank you for that marvelous introduction and warm welcome!

Good morning everyone! I am very excited to be here with you!

Thank you and congratulations to all who have had a hand in shaping this essential series of discussions on green schools and community colleges.

I am very anxious indeed to learn over the course of this conference, and to meet and exchange with you about the important issues we will be focusing on here in Pasadena.

Timeliness and Import of Gathering

There can be no more timely or important long term focus for all of us than to help advance our education mission and social value added by leading efforts to green our state. That's why this gathering is so significant.

Some History

Back in the day, when I was growing up and we named the larger call for sustainability "the ecology movement," much of our focus on promoting

attention to the environment was driven by a sense of moral concern for the planet's well being.

In those days, the battle to make the case was often difficult, the resistance to needed change formidable. You might say that the great spiritual guide of popular culture at the time – Kermit the Frog, got it right when he went on record in the early '80s to testify: “It’s not easy being green!”

Sadly, when the Green Revolution first entered the scene, it was too often joked about. Indeed, here in California, during my formative years – I am talking about the late 1970s and early 1980s, we had a young governor who foresaw the need for greening our state. He was often rebuked for being whacked out and ostracized among his detractors who called him “Governor Moonbeam”. Governor Moonbeam talked about high speed rail in California and the building of wind and solar plantations that would revolutionize not only our state and national economy, but also the global economy. Mr. Moonbeam was largely laughed out of office, despite two successful terms as our governor.

But, thankfully, in more recent years, our thinking has evolved, out of necessity. Unwittingly, we have all learned that Kermit and Governor Moonbeam had important lessons to teach us back in the day. If only we had listened then! Imagine how many billions of dollars and years we could have saved relative to converting our state to greater sustainability and profitability!

For better or for worse, we are now increasingly compelled to accept that climate change is a scientific fact; and that in order to ensure our very survival we need to invoke a radical shift in our established habits with a much greater eye to our collective impact on the environment.

Gratefully, as we have gotten this scary news, we have also increased our capacities to produce reliable renewable energies; and we have seen the slow but steady growth of a whole new sector of our economy – the green economy, that promises to provide the world's next major leap in technology, workforce development and building best practice.

In short, green is where the future is! Kermit the Frog is nowadays not so hard put to find love for his dangling green limbs and planet-friendly outlook. And Mr. Moonbeam is back in Sacramento serving as Governor again!

With all that we have learned and now know, with all of the benefit of hindsight, I think there is still great hope for California to lead the way towards a more sustainable world. Now, the question is not whether we need to build a green economy, but rather *how* to do so.

Thankfully, we are already well on our way to that future. And our institutions have a significant role to play in advancing this work.

Our Role

Education leaders, especially those operating in the public space, have a unique role to play in promoting the green economy, through our own energy efficiency efforts, our training of the next generation's green professionals and technicians, and the development of our massive building footprint around renewables and multi-use facilities.

In taking on this work, especially to the extent that we can do it intentionally and in harmony with one another, California public educational institutions can help to move the needle in this space in ways that drive economic vitality in our state for the next generation.

Our Many Assets

Consider our many assets...

To begin, our faculty and staff leadership includes some of the smartest and most committed individuals you will ever meet. We have tens of thousands of human capital assets to draw on in this domain for brain power, know how and reference that are unmatched.

Add to that our students, who are some of the hungriest and untapped talents around; and our vast facilities which cover virtually every part of the state; our relationships with the business and labor communities; and our growing role as the "go to" place for the state's and nation's next generation workforce development needs...and you have the makings of a powerful platform for advancing California

greening from a leadership, career development, and infrastructure enhancement standpoint.

New Vehicles to Advance Our Forward Movement

In order to make best and highest use of our still largely untapped potential to advance our state's movement into the green economy, we have happily seen the development in recent years of several important new organizational vehicles.

This series of conferences that leaders like you have developed has been central to this trend. By advancing cross learning and knowledge transfer based on the identification of models and strategies that work, you have helped to frame our path forward. And you will continue to do so at this gathering and others to follow.

Second, within the state community college system, through the leadership of our outgoing Chancellor Dr. Jack Scott and leaders like West Hills Community College District Superintendent Frank Gornick, we have seen growing attention to green concerns in our facilities development work and planning. In fact, up in Butte, we have seen one of our districts officially go off the power grid with the recent establishment of its own self-sustaining solar energy system. This work has tremendous implications for all of us.

Lastly, through the leadership of the state Community College Chancellor's Office, namely by staff members like Fred Harris and Dan Estrada, we have seen the forging of key new partnerships with

campus facilities leaders, for example in the use of powerful new design software made possible by statewide development capacity and procurement economies.

We have also seen the development of important new partnerships with the state's leading investor-owned utility companies, which have resulted in vast advances in our system's energy efficiency.

Through this work, moreover, we have seen important new sub-initiatives evolve. These efforts include awards and recognition of system leaders who are showing the way towards more greening and allied public benefits.

They include expanded efforts to educate, train and place community college students in jobs and careers geared towards the green economy, many of them in the investor-owned utility industry.

They include the development of standard sustainability and benchmarking templates designed to help all of our colleges inform their renovation and expansion efforts building on essential measures of environmental responsibility and optimal resource utility.

Finally, these growing partnerships have begun to pave the way towards exciting new collaborations with leading environmental and public interest groups, that can also help us to advance our mission and sustainability goals across California.

Taking Next Steps Forward

This gathering will enable us to learn more about and track all of these efforts and others not mentioned – the combination of which will make us an even bolder leader in the green development movement for the foreseeable future.

I hope we can take this work on not only with the seriousness it deserves given all that is at stake; but also with the excitement of our best optimism, instincts and sentiments. This is indeed an opportunity for all of us, working in our respective ways, to make history – to change the world around us!

From all of our seemingly disconnected energies can emerge one bold new fact of California life: that we can *all* benefit and advance together in a way that is good for our planet, good for our communities, good for our institutions, and good for the generations coming behind us, if only we aggressively “go green!”

Close

While it is good that practical politics and economics have recently re-awakened our sense that sustainability is the way forward, it should not be lost on us that there is still a moral imperative at work on us in this area. It should not be lost on any of us that we have special responsibilities given who we are and where we sit.

The move to a green future remains indeed a moral calling, as much as a practical imperative. It is as the great native leader Chief Seattle once said:

*Whatever befalls the earth,
Befalls the sons and daughters of the earth
Man did not weave the web of life;
He is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web,
He does to himself.*

These words are as strong as any I can think of to underscore the import of what we are here to do together over these next two days.

Our charge is fundamentally to help lead change within our systems of education and training so that those systems and the larger society they serve are able to thrive and succeed in the future that awaits us. For it is as Chief Seattle reminds us: we are all in this together. And what we do while we are at it together will ultimately be an important measure of our service and civic contributions.

So let us not shirk from the charge at hand, and let's take it on with all of the energy, compassion, humor, humility, and wit that we have to bring to it. If we just do that, there is no way we can fail!

Thank you again for all that you do and for all that you will continue to do in the future to advance the cause of greening our state, nation and world. I am so terribly inspired by your leadership and example!