

Architects with integrity should challenge sustainability

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5176>

Each year, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) holds its annual convention at a different major city each year and this year it was in New Orleans.

Over the past several years, the convention has focused on sustainability issues and this year was no different. The keynote speaker was Thomas Friedman, (who is not an architect) who sounded the warning that architects and others must fundamentally change to prevent an environmental calamity.

Friedman said that a green revolution is in the interest of national security, and appealing to the patriotic said, “Green is the new red, white and blue – don’t let anyone tell you otherwise,” and “ultimately, we need to make the word ‘green’ disappear. There should be no such thing as a ‘green’ car – it’s just a car, and you can’t buy it otherwise.”

He also said, “We have to create systems and put in place an ecosystem of rules, laws, processes and prices. Leaders write rules, and rules shape the environment. When we impose an ecosystem on the market, we will see this Green Revolution take off, ordered from the top down.”

I’ve been a member of the AIA for many years. I serve on the AIA Oklahoma Board, and though I don’t agree with the AIA on everything, I believe it is a very good professional organization. As such, this article represents my own opinion, not that of the board.

I deeply disagree with Friedman’s statements, and while I am sure that many in our organization believe in the sustainability movement, I believe that the majority of our members do not accept Friedman’s definition of sustainability. That is because the majority of the responses from architects to a series of articles that I wrote on global warming last year were in agreement with me.

As scientific evidence that global warming is not caused by man becomes more public, proponents have become more radical in their rhetoric. Friedman seems to have no concern that a heavy-handed mandate for sustainability might create a solution to a problem that doesn’t exist. It’s not that we don’t have problems to solve, but it seems to me that spending so much time and energy on a problem that does not exist poses not just an ethical problem, but detracts us from real problems.

Climategate has almost been forgotten, thanks to a media that would like to see that we do. They want us to believe that the infamous e-mails do not discredit global warming. But the American Tradition Institute (ATI) has been working for months to get The University of Virginia to release those documents under the Freedom of Information Act. ATI has finally gone to court to obtain their release.

When Climategate occurred in 2009, even the United Nations stopped publishing the famous “hockey stick” graph, yet groups like the ACLU and People for the American Way are reported to be trying to prevent the release of the documents.

If there is nothing to be concerned about, why the secrecy? Shouldn't we find this kind of activity in America troubling?

Friedman also said, “Mother Nature is just chemistry, biology and physics. Mother Nature is going to do whatever chemistry, biology and physics want, and Mother Nature always bats lasts and bats a thousand.”

I don't disagree with that statement, but why do we need to embrace bad science? Can't good science be just as profitable, or perhaps more, financially or otherwise, as bad science?

A report was released last week regarding a scientist who had worked to promote global warming for years. Now that scientist has completely rejected global warming as a man-made event, explaining it with chemistry, biology and physics. He claimed that it has been well known among scientists since the 1990s that it was a false theory, and said that it had become a “gravy train that was too big, with too many jobs, industries, trading profits, political careers, and the possibility of world government and total control riding on the outcome.”

I believe that we as architects and citizens do have a responsibility to manage our resources well, so in that regard the basic premise of sustainability is good. But we have to get it right. We have to keep our integrity. We have to embrace good science and reject bad science, and be intelligent enough to know the difference. In America, we don't need sustainability to mean the imposition of burdensome laws and regulations for us to be responsible citizens. We need only to look at the EPA as an example of how badly things can go wrong when agencies are created that can impose regulations at will and without the consent of the People.

As for us architects, I would call on my colleagues to critically look at all sustainability issues before they recommend unnecessary and/or expensive features in our projects. At the very least, our corporate integrity should demand it.

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