

The Most Innovative Nation in the World

In 1776, America was the most innovative nation in the world. Farmers and ship captains, northern Yankees and southern plantation owners got together and stated, for the first time in human history, that “All men are created equal.” Thomas Jefferson wrote the words, but they rang true in almost every American heart, and they still ring true today.

The Founding Fathers created a new sort of nation, one which believed in the worth, and the abilities, of the average man. Thus, when they wrote the Constitution in 1787, they began with another phrase unprecedented in human history, “We the People”. The people were now able to speak freely, to worship freely, and to vote for their own representatives in the new government. They could even run for office themselves.

This was **innovation** on the highest level, for it not only granted the people of that day a completely new way of life; it also looked to the welfare of future generations.

On Friday, January 20, America took a large step backwards, toward the Dark Ages. One ugly voice now encourages all of the evils which still plague us. But on Saturday, January 21, the entire world took a huge step forward, toward the Renaissance of the 21st century. Millions of determined voices now encourage the *best* that is in us, as together we build a global community—based on harmony with each other, based on harmony with Mother Earth—a global community unprecedented in all of human history.

On Friday, one ugly, empty man paraded around in his wig. On Saturday, millions of mothers and fathers showed their children a glimpse of the peaceful, compassionate, healthy world which they hope their children will inherit.

As a Norwegian-American who has lived and worked (as a teacher) in both countries, I deeply believe that Norway could become **the most innovative nation in the world**. We cannot wait another four years while the Oil Boys suck the final billion dollars out of a dying, poisonous industry. We cannot sit back and “hope for the best” while ships from a half-dozen countries search for oil in the Arctic, because those oil ships will be accompanied by military ships from a half-dozen countries, all fully armed, on the surface and hidden below the surface . . . turning the Arctic region into potentially our planet’s final battleground.

Norway has two great traditions which could nurture **the innovation** which we urgently need today. Fridtjof Nansen was a bold polar explorer, who powered the lights of the *Fram* through three dark winters with a wind turbine spinning on the ship's deck (as you can see in Nansen's photograph of his ship lodged in ice). Then Nansen did something extraordinary: he moved on to a second career, as an international humanitarian who was trusted by Lenin to bring trainloads of food and medicine into Russia during the Russian Famine of the early 1920s. Further, he helped thousands of refugees from many countries to make their way home, in part because they had been given a Nansen Passport.

This tradition of international humanitarian work is deeply Norwegian. Norwegian women and men have worn, for over half a century, the blue beret as United Nations peacekeepers. The Oslo Accords of 1993, perhaps the most successful of all efforts to bring peace to the Middle East, resulted from Norwegian determination to bring the opposing parties together in a neutral but deeply committed country.

I myself was a part of this Norwegian effort to be a good neighbor, when, as a teacher at the Bodø Graduate School of Business, I helped to build a program of cooperation between Bodø and Baltic State University in Saint Petersburg, Russia. During the Russian Depression of the 1990s—during those dark, cold, dangerous years—teachers from Bodø worked with their Russian colleagues to create a flourishing business school within a technical university, so that Russian students could eventually help to weave the Russian and European economies more closely together. Here was Neighbor Norway, reaching out to help Neighbor Russia, who had helped Neighbor Norway, in Finnmark, during the final winter of World War Two.

The second great Norwegian tradition is her determination to provide an excellent education to all of her people. (As a teacher who has experienced the shabby, archaic, shameful state of American schools, I greatly appreciated what I found during ten years in the classrooms of Alta, Kautokeino, and Bodø.) In keeping with the first tradition, Norway welcomes a large number of students from countries around the world, providing them with generous economic support while enabling them to learn about health care, about economics, about agriculture, about clean energy. Yes, Norway provides a world-class education which thousands of foreign students take back to their own countries, to everyone's benefit.

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What do students need to learn about today? Urgently, they need to learn about the twin themes of Climate Change, the Problem . . . and Clean Energy, the Solution. My experience as a teacher, and as an author who has done extensive research on those twin themes for the past twenty years, is that most schools—high school, college or university—have a limited number of courses, taken by a limited number of students, in a small, peripheral program called Environmental Studies. I ask students again and again, everywhere I go, “What are you learning in school about the melting polar ice cap? What are you learning about the thawing of the permafrost, and the release of methane? What are you learning about the warming of the oceans, the increased acidity of the oceans? What are you learning about drought, about monster hurricanes, about the unnatural wobbles in the jet stream?” Most of the students shrug as they tell me, “Not much. A little bit in biology class. We saw a movie about the polar bears.”

I find little sense of urgency among young people who will soon inherit unprecedented catastrophes on a planetary scale.

Every school in the world—high school, college and university—needs two full, serious courses which every student must take in order to graduate. In the autumn semester, Climate Change, the Problem, a course during which students do not listen to one teacher and read one text book in preparation for an exam, but who instead listen to a broad range of speakers—scientists, economists, farmers, fishermen, Sami reindeer herders—speakers with whom the students can engage in vibrant discussions.

In addition, the students should do their own research, into some topic within Climate Change which interests them. They learn *how* to do the research—online, in a library, and by doing interviews—so that for the rest of their lives they can continue to do their own research.

Rather than take an exam, they submit a short essay (five to ten pages), well documented, about what they have learned. They share their knowledge with other students with a ten-minute oral presentation. In that way, people get a taste of what is going on, all around the world.

And then, during the spring semester, Clean Energy, the Solution. The visiting speakers are again from a broad range of backgrounds—clean energy

entrepreneurs, solar and wind engineers, farmers who have installed wind turbines on their land, fishermen who have installed electric motors in their boats, visionaries who want to design the next generation of wind turbine kites. Some of these speakers introduce the students to educational programs that could lead to a great job, to a lifetime career. They enable the students to see that the 21st century can be *their* century.

Now, here is how Norway could become the most innovative country in the world. First, by designing and implementing these twin courses in the schools of Norway. While speakers are making their presentations, the students can film them, and then contribute these films to a growing online library of presentations which all the schools of Norway can use. The students can also contribute their own research to a growing library of research. The students of one school, who are researching the changes in snowfall during the winter, rainfall during the summer, and the shift of the seasons, can team up with students from another school—in Russia, in Nepal, in Alaska—who are working on the same subject. And then they contribute their research to a growing online library which can be used by students in schools around the world.

Thus what begins in one high school in Norway, can become an international network of shared research. Now the kids are not just passing an exam; they are becoming Citizens of the World.

Norwegian companies can contribute to this research, with speakers, with tours of their workplaces, with professional articles, with their visions of the future.

Norwegian universities and research labs can contribute enormously to the growing international library of information.

The goal is to enable a school in Tibet, in Vietnam, in Ethiopia, in Cuba, in Russia, in China, and in Henningsvær, to be able, using the internet, to design and teach the twin courses on Climate Change and Clean Energy, at very little expense, and with the most up-to-date information. The goal is to tap this enormous source of energy—young people—so that they can build a far better world.

The first global generation in human history is ready to go to work. Let's give them the education, let's give them the encouragement, let's give them the jobs, so that they can become the architects of a global renaissance.

Norway has an international seed bank on Svalbard. Now we need an international information bank on the twin themes which require our urgent attention,

so that we can plant the seeds of understanding, the seeds of new visions, and the seeds of hope, in schools around the world.

Then . . . I'm sorry, but it will matter less and less what the Neanderthals are doing in Washington. Because the rest of the world will be moving steadily in a completely different direction.

Norway, with your decades of humanitarian work, and with your deep belief in education, you have the opportunity to launch a global educational program which we might call, "Build a Better World".

The polar ice cap is melting. The kids are bored, waiting for a real purpose in life. Norway, your finest hour has arrived.

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John Slade

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