

STEVE MELINK

FUSION CAPITALISM

A CLEAN ENERGY VISION FOR CONSERVATIVES

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This book is dedicated to all the clean energy entrepreneurs, innovators, and early adopters who took significant risks to advance a cause greater than themselves. Though victory is yet to be won, the path forward is clear, and you have bequeathed a brighter tomorrow to all humanity.

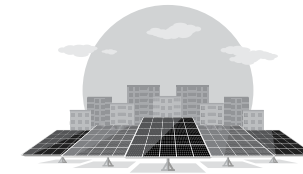
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*America, America, God Shed His Grace on Thee.
And Crown Thy Good with Brotherhood.
From Sea to Shing Sea.*
—KATHERINE LEE BATES, 1895



INTRODUCTION

Al Gore Invented the Environment

On any given day, I drive into Madeira to pick up some groceries, buy a few things at the pharmacy, or browse for parts at the hardware store. I live with my wife, Mary Frances, in Indian Hill, a small village northeast of Cincinnati. It's an idyllic midwestern community of 6,900 residents with beautiful homes and lawns, large shade trees dotting the landscape, and a brick firehouse and ranger station at the main intersection.

You can probably imagine the soft flow of traffic moving up and down the streets of this traditional bedroom community—the school buses picking up and dropping off children on weekdays, and everyone getting dressed up for church on Sunday. It reminds me of the quaint town I grew up in not far away. I appreciate the green

spaces, wholesome culture, and family values here.

Clearly, I'm no revolutionary. But I'm going to let you in on a secret: I love driving my all-electric Tesla down Miami Avenue and showcasing the future. It's not a status symbol; I just want to do my part to help promote the next great technology wave and hopefully inspire others to make the leap too. Electric cars are still a relative rarity in this area, but make no mistake: they're the way of the future. And once you drive one—well, it's all but impossible to go back to conventional gas-fueled cars.

I know some of my neighbors shake their heads, believing electric cars are a fringe, environmentalist curiosity—not a “real car.” I know they probably think the same of the solar panels installed on the side of my house. And even though the word *environmentalist* should be a compliment, they don't intend it that way. That's okay; they'll eventually come around ... because they'll have to.

In fact, clean energy technologies are not some passing fad. They're quickly going mainstream, and we can see this more and more every day. Just as smartphones have disrupted the telecom industry, e-commerce has disrupted brick-and-mortar retail, and so many other innovations have turned previously successful models into dinosaurs—clean energy technologies are poised to forever change the world, turning fossil fuel power plants and refineries into fossils themselves.

Having said this, I have to admit it's confusing and even frustrating that the conservative brand that I grew up and identified with for most of my life is dismissing much of the damage that coal, oil, and natural gas are doing to our health and environment—and missing out on the clean energy economy of the future. Why? I often wonder. Conservatives never fled aviation, space exploration, medical advances, computers, or the internet age. The power of inno-

vation and free markets has always been a core pillar of conservative politics. So why have the clean energy movement and all its benefits and promise become partisan issues and often resisted tooth and nail by the American right? Did it start when Al Gore released his climate change documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, in 2006 and then become doctrine when Barack Obama supported clean energy during his presidency?

Given the old punch line that “Al Gore invented the internet,” it's ironic that fellow conservatives have essentially credited him with inventing climate change science. Conservatives have long promoted the philosophy that we protect the environment for our children and future generations. Planet Earth is a speck in a vast universe with billions of galaxies and the only place we know of that supports life. Surely it is one of God's greatest gifts to us as human beings. Therefore, it is a practical and moral imperative that we give our planet the same respect that many of our conservative forebears did.

Teddy Roosevelt set aside millions of acres for national parks and wildlife. Dwight Eisenhower expanded the national park system, protecting forests, bird and game reserves, and fisheries. Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and signed the Endangered Species Act. George H. W. Bush strengthened the Clean Air Act and was the first president to identify climate change as a major federal priority. And during his presidency, George W. Bush signed legislation to promote solar and wind power as well as higher lighting efficiency standards. Caring for America's natural resources and taking action to counter climate change have not been, and should not now be, the purview of one party.

I grew up in a conservative household and attended Catholic schools as a child. One of the most important ethics taught to us was to respect Mother Nature. We could all do simple things like not litter,

pollute, and prevent forest fires. This was back when dirty air, land, and water were becoming increasingly endemic across America. Smog was blanketing our cities, acid rain was destroying our forests, and ozone depletion was causing a hole to develop in Earth's atmosphere.

Through educational awareness programs as well as smart government policies, we successfully addressed these life-threatening problems over time. Our homes, communities, and country were getting safer and healthier again. Economic growth and environmentalism could coexist and, in fact, complement each other and yield a better total outcome. Clean air, water, and land was not a conservative issue or progressive issue. It was a human issue.

Enter the year 2000 and a closely contested presidential election. Al Gore had been vice president for eight years in the previous administration, and when he lost to George W. Bush, he retreated to what he knew best. Though many of his earlier positions were fair game for criticism from those on his right, it should be acknowledged that the

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emerging science of climate change was something he was studying when few others were. The reflexive muscle that caused many Republicans to oppose him and his views on this science came from the fossil fuel lobby and emotional partisanship, not the public interest or intellectual honesty.

In this book I'd like to make the case for conservatives to rethink

their position on climate change, as I have. And rather than simply adopting the talking points of the left, I'd like to make the case that the science of climate change and the extraordinary opportunities of the

clean energy economy are entirely in keeping with conservative values.

Time out, you say. Can we focus on the coronavirus pandemic since it is a far more immediate threat to the public and world at large? Let's solve this crisis first. And then let's focus on other big problems before we worry about a long-term issue like climate change.

Absolutely and unequivocally on the first point. I pray that when you read this, the world will have already turned the corner and the global pandemic of COVID-19 will be under control. However, as I write this, that day seems too far off. We still need to win the war against this pandemic. We still need to shore up our hospitals and healthcare systems for a possible second and third wave of mass infections as the coronavirus makes its rounds to the southern hemisphere and back again in late 2020 and possibly early 2021. We still need to become more disciplined about social distancing, wearing masks, and washing/sanitizing protocols even after this virus appears under control. And we still need a vaccine as soon as possible.

But the reality is that climate change is an even greater existential threat to humankind than this coronavirus. The only difference is that it is happening in slow motion. We therefore need to lead on this emerging crisis in parallel with other immediate threats. We cannot continue taking the serial approach and allow climate change to be the honorable mention of strategic priorities every year. We can and must walk and chew gum at the same time. In fact, the global economic, security, health, and environmental consequences of not doing this are already starting to mount with thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars of property damage every year. And they will only get worse in coming years and decades.

That is why I am advocating for conservative leaders across the United States to renew their commitment to our future and common good. It is when we work together on our most difficult challenges

and threats—even with people we disagree with—that we achieve our greatest contributions to mankind. America is great not because of any individual presidency or political party but because of our collective values, ingenuity, and courage to do the right thing.

Five years ago I wrote a book for CEOs to educate and inspire them on the strategic opportunities of clean energy in the twenty-first century. The premise was—and still is—that nothing is more important for their brands than leading with integrity. And given the preponderance of science and evidence on the growing threat of climate change, how can CEOs and boards of directors not want their enterprises to get on the right side of history and be part of this solution?

CEO Power & Light—Transcendent Leadership for a Sustainable World was laser focused on the top 0.1 percent who can do the most good the most quickly. Businesses are far more efficient in marshaling resources and achieving results than bureaucratic governments. Indeed, since I wrote this book, countless CEOs have seen the light ... and are being the light to their companies, industries, communities, and the world at large. They are truly transcendent leaders! And this gives me hope.

However ...

Climate change is hurtling toward us faster than ever. The scientific community is now saying the point of no return is coming within years, not decades. If we don't take bold action now, planet Earth will only become exponentially warmer over time, and the long-term effects will be catastrophic for life as we know it. And scientists are saying this—not corporate lobbyists, lawyers, and politicians—with greater certainty than ever before.

What do we do? Continue to implore government to get its act together—in vain? Conveniently assume other countries or companies

will solve this for us? Pretend we do not know enough of the facts to make a commitment and difference? Hope our kids and grandkids will forgive our ignorance and/or arrogance amid the bleaker future they will undoubtedly inherit?

Most conservatives believe in the power of innovation and free markets to improve our quality of life and offer the chance at prosperity. Most believe in the importance of fiscal responsibility and not leaving our children and grandchildren with trillions of dollars of debt. Most believe in a strong national defense and defending our way of life at any cost. And most believe in the sanctity of life, whether it be in the womb, the last stage of life, or the promise of future generations. These principles and values have helped raise America from a colonial experiment to the greatest superpower in human history.

But we must continue to learn and grow as a nation while holding these values and principles near and dear to our hearts. In fact, any individual, company, or organization that does not learn and grow is doomed to fail. In other words, success is a function of evolution and sometimes reinvention, while failure is a function of intransigence and often arrogance. These are lessons I have learned in both my personal life and professional career.

It's against this backdrop and perspective that I present to you my new book.

Fusion Capitalism—A Clean Energy Vision for Conservatives is an update to many of the topics covered in my previous book and a wider appeal to all Americans, particularly conservatives. It's also a personal story of my quest for success and how happiness became defined by purpose, not just profits. I hold the conviction that our American economic system is uniquely capable of solving the world's greatest problem: climate change. Despite its weaknesses, which I am quick to point out, capitalism has improved our quality of life over generations

better than any other economic system ever tried. Greed may be an unfortunate offspring of this system, but so is employment, education, and philanthropy. There is a reason America is considered the land of opportunity ... and in many ways the envy of the world.

Of course, you already know about capitalism and its power to drive national and global economies, as well as mainstream new technologies, at warp speed and efficiency. You already know about its pros and cons. But why *fusion capitalism*?

Our sun is a million times larger than Earth and radiates more energy onto Earth every second of every day than what we humans have consumed over the millennia of our existence. It has been burning for billions of years and will burn for billions more. Its source of energy is a thermonuclear reaction called *fusion*, in which hydrogen atoms collide with great speed and become fused, releasing enormous amounts of new energy in light and heat. This happens ninety-three million miles from us. Yet the energy released is so abundant and powerful that we need hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen to protect our bodies. What's more, it is free.

Why is this relevant to capitalism? Because energy more than any other input to our economy is what powers our homes, cities, and way of life. Energy is the lifeblood of our very existence. We draw upon a wide, complex web of energy sources to power our lives, and yet nothing is more predictable, risk-free, and cost-free than the sun rising every morning and giving us more energy every day than we'll ever use. Why mine, transport, burn, and dispose of limited fossil fuels found underground when the costs are higher than capturing unlimited and free renewable energy above ground? This is not to mention the escalating external costs to our security, health, and environment.

In fact, fusion is widely considered the ultimate energy source.

Several countries are investing billions of dollars to tame the power of "stars" in laboratories. But some experts say it could take ten to thirty years to develop these technologies and make them economically viable. Others even say the energy to start and sustain this type of reaction will always be more than the energy generated. Given the existential threat of climate change, we don't have the luxury of waiting decades to hope for a new and better solution. The sun can and will serve us perfectly.

In fact, fusion from the sun is our best option—not fossil fuels, not man-made fusion, and not man-made fission (more than enough evidence on the disproportionately higher costs and dangers of fission prove this is true). Our future is just clean, abundant, free, and forever sun power. Sun power will provide us many times the amount of energy the human population on Earth will ever need in raw heat and light, and many times the amount of electricity we will ever need.

What we need to fully harness the sun's power and retool our energy economy is

the biggest technological and economic revolution in human history. And I believe this is exactly the kind of challenge America is built for!

The steam engine is widely viewed as having launched the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s. The power that steam engines unleashed provided a platform for many new industrial technologies in factories and farms such as water pumps, locomotives, and mining equipment, which freed production from the limitations of manpower.

What we need to fully harness the sun's power and retool our energy economy is the biggest technological and economic revolution in human history. And I believe this is exactly the kind of challenge America is built for!

The electrification of homes and cities is widely viewed as having begun the electrical revolution of the 1900s. Just as steam power had done on an industrial level, electricity powered new household technologies like light bulbs, radios, TVs, refrigerators, and washing machines that freed individuals, particularly women, from countless time-consuming and tedious domestic tasks.

We are now more than primed for the technological revolution of the 2000s. Of course, it is already here with the internet, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. But I believe energy will represent the greatest opportunity and will always be the platform upon which most new technologies depend at their core. And now that the world population has ballooned to seven billion, it's time fusion energy (from the sun) is harnessed to its full potential.

Don't just take it from me, though. Take it from the most successful business leaders in the world, from companies like Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Walmart, Amazon, and many others. In fact, the top brands in most categories have already started a clean energy movement. They are either installing their own solar and wind farms to power their operations or contracting with utilities and clean energy developers to purchase the solar and wind energy that will power their companies going forward.

Why? They want to build their brands into great ones. They want favorable PR and a mass following on social media. They want to hire the best and brightest talent. They want to erase the liabilities of fossil fuel investments from their balance sheets. They want to minimize the costs and risks of future lawsuits. But most of all, if they are authentic, they just want to do the right thing, because that is what great leaders do. We just need to follow that lead and then lead ourselves to help turn the clean energy movement into a clean energy revolution!

Though the United States barely cracks the top-ten list of clean

energy economies in the world, and China is handing us our lunch in renewable energy exports, we can change this if conservatives embrace a fresh approach and rally around this once-in-a-century opportunity. The world population is going to increase another 50 percent within the next thirty years, and so time is of the essence.

This will not only be good for our national debt, deficit, and trade imbalance; it will be good for our global economy, security, health, and environment. Imagine the cumulative economic boom resulting from every company in America investing in and saving energy. Imagine the reduced threat of wars and terrorism that will result from reducing the demand for, and thereby the price of, oil in unstable parts of the world. Imagine the benefit to millions of people who suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases of the elimination of coal-fired plants and oil-burning vehicles. And above all, imagine the countless lives and generations saved, not to mention the world's coastlines and infrastructure, by mitigating climate change such that feedback loops do not overtake and accelerate the warming process.

Fusion capitalism is not just my story; it is a story about all of us, about the human race, and the incredible planet we share. Some of what I have to say is sobering. I am not one to pull punches where science and facts disprove personal opinions and political biases. But I am also not one to hold back on recognizing and seizing strategic opportunities that are becoming increasingly obvious. The future that I see for America and indeed the human race is bright and abundant, but to reach it we must remove the scales from our eyes.

I was spurred to write this book out of a spiritual conviction and love for my children. I am also motivated by the strong belief that many of us who identify with conservative values have, up until now, missed the bus on clean energy. Conservatism, as I've always

understood it, stands for, well, conserving ... preserving our most important values as well as competing and innovating to have a chance at the American Dream. And I've found great happiness and success applying these tenets in my own life and business.

Clean energy is our future. And embracing this future is completely aligned with American principles, family values, and conservative ethics. It is completely aligned with the health and happiness of all Americans, including neighbors and family members whom we don't always agree with. In other words, this is one of the largest issues where the right and left can and should unite, with all the enthusiasm and commitment we can muster. Because it will be a war far more real than the current coronavirus pandemic if we don't. It will be a war far worse and longer than any we have fought on the battlefield. The laws of physics tell us this ... and we are just starting to see the early signs of it.

Fusion capitalism. The greatest economic system ever developed by man combined with the greatest energy source in our solar system created by God. And the coming together of America and humankind with a shared vision. It's time for the clean energy revolution to begin!

As for my electric car and home solar panels in my quaint, traditional community—they're not a statement; they're a promise.

PART 1 MELINK STORY