

Transcript of The Gavin Newsom Show
August 9, 2008

Gavin Newsom: Well, welcome to the Gavin Newsom show and I'm so proud this afternoon to have in the studio an old friend of mine— someone that I admire greatly, and someone who's becoming a real bright light, a superstar on the scene and environmental movement, and that's Van Jones: civil rights lawyer, the founder of the Ella Baker Center over in Oakland and someone whose been very identified with the issue of criminal justice system and juvenile justice reform and initiatives like Books Not Bars and of course now as I stated more involved day in and day out in the whole issue of the environment and environmental stewardship and focusing on the opportunity to make sure that we're not just solving one problem; and that is the issue of global climate change – but that we're addressing the twin challenge- and one of the great challenges of our time- and that is environmental justice and social justice and the issues that vex communities of color across the nation, and so I'm very proud as well to introduce Van in the context of his new book that's coming out that's called "The Green-Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Two of America's Biggest Problems." Van, welcome to the studio.

Van Jones: I'm glad to be here, and it's a big honor and I think it's really appropriate... and you know, I first outed myself as an environmentalist three years ago when you had the courage and leadership to get the united nations to do the world environment day in San Francisco focus, for the first time, on green cities and I reached out to you and you were kind enough to let us have a role. We had been in the criminal justice organization working on prison issues and we sat down and talked and you let us come in and said, listen, we're gonna have a green economy let's not have any throw away resources or species; let's not have any throw away children either. I think these issues, these things, should be linked together and that's how I got my start and here we are, three years later.

GN: Yeah, that's great. And this book comes out in October and we'll talk about how folks can purchase some advanced copies or at least get in the queue and get the book the day it comes out. But one of the points that you brought up in the book that really capture the spirit of it and it's somewhat symbolic but to me it's very substantive, it's says let's not just save the polar bears, let's save poor people as well.

VJ: I'm not a polar bear basher – I'm not gonna hug one, or kiss one, but I love them – they're cute and they're precious and so are our children you know in the Mission or in Bayview Hunters Point. And the reality is that the solution to one is the solution to the other. If we build a green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty: put people to work weatherizing buildings, putting up solar panels, bringing food closer to the plate, community gardening, vertical farms, all the new technologies, you will beat poverty. And you will also beat global warming.

GN: This is the principle point: we talk so much in this country; we're very good at identifying problems with Democrats and Republicans, and so often we just explain them away and talk so much about what the world should be, but we're not necessarily very good at manifesting it. One of the things that we've all admitted is the issue of income equality, and you see that quite acutely in cities like San Francisco. I mean all the big urban centers in America, and we're not immune from the appropriate reflective, critical critique. But it is one constant that is increasingly obvious, to people like me and you've captured this in the book and you've captured this in terms of your tours, speaking across this country, and for that matter, around the world. And that is the dominant reality in inner city communities, where most of the pollutants, toxic waste dumps, power plants, wastewater facilities, tend to be concentrated in these areas that are disproportionately African-American communities.

VJ: One of the things that's so amazing to me is that often when we think about the environment we often think about more of the affluent communities who have taken the lead in protecting our world's species, which is incredibly important work, and has to continue, but the people – the human beings – who are directly being hurt on a daily basis are low income people they're black people, they're brown people, so we really need to move forward as a constituency for the environment. I don't understand why any African-American would be clinging fingers and toes to the pollution-based economy. We live next to the power plants with all the dirty pollutants. Our kids have the asthma, the cancer, frankly, the learning disabilities that come when you grow up in a super-polluted environment and, frankly, we drive the gas-guzzling cars because especially now with the whole mortgage crisis, we can't afford to get into those Priuses, and that kind of stuff, so we are the people who most need this dramatic transformation. Great thing about it though, there's nothing but opportunity. You know, we're not gonna get a lot more jobs, you know African-Americans, people of color, in the coal mines; they're kind of full up over there. But as far as the solar panels, the windmills, and geo-thermal and all the new technologies, new industries, new companies, there's entrepreneurial opportunities there, there's work, wealth and health benefits for us in the transition. So I think African Americans, people of color and folks who love justice should be leading the green charge, not critiquing it. And we can also throw a few kisses to the polar bears on the way, so it's all good.

GN: In Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco literally we just came out with a new health disparities study; it showed that the asthma rates are six times greater than where I grew up. Not outside of San Francisco, but just a few miles away in the Marina district 94123 area code. So this is real life and this is something that, again, sparks not only imagination, but my optimism about the future and the opportunities. So let's talk about how we manifest this optimism and some of the things you bring up in the book. You talk about green-collared jobs, but how do you define a green-collared job? What does that mean?

VJ: Sure. Well, you know, we're talking about poverty, and it used to be the case that if you didn't go to college, it was alright because you can go get a blue-collared job, you can go work in a factory, we've got manufacturing going on, you can get vocational skills, now, a lot of those jobs have left the country. So what that means is, you wind up in a situation where low-income people, poor people, have to try to climb a six-story ladder out poverty, but the ladder only has four rungs on it. So when you talk about green-collared jobs, you're talking about putting some green rungs back into that ladder of opportunity. Much of what has to happen to retrofit a nation, it's not just about retrofitting buildings, weatherizing buildings, we've got to retrofit the entire country. You've got millions of buildings across the country that have got to be weatherized, tightened up so they don't leak so much energy, waste so much water, that's millions of jobs. You and I fly on airplanes probably too much; you look out the window, you look at rooftop after rooftop, city after city, no solar panels. There's the opportunity there to put up millions – tens of millions of solar panels. That's also thousands of contracts, millions of jobs. So when you think about a green-collared job, you're thinking about what would have been a blue-collared job, upgraded to a better-respecting environment, to bring these ecological solutions to scale. No matter what policies we put in place, senators don't put up solar panels. At the end of the day, if we pass the right policies, real people are gonna have to get up in the morning, put on their work boots, put on their green hardhats and get out there and do the work and that's how we beat poverty and pollution at the same time.

GN: So how do we do it, you started a program over in Oakland called green-collared job corps, and how do you scale that; how do cities replicate what you guys have done over and over?

VJ: That's great, well, the green jobs corps work which is starting in Oakland next month is something that Ron Dellums, Ignacio and all the people over there in Oakland politics have been fighting and feuding, the one thing that they can agree on is that they wanted to put the young people in Oakland in front of the line for the new clean and green jobs in solar, in wind. Not the back of the line, the last entries pollution-based jobs. The one common-ground issue that has brought that city together. And it's now got the attention of Nancy Pelosi. She got excited about it, she said that if could work in Oakland – if it can bring people together in Oakland – maybe it can bring the country together. She went to Congress and helped us to get Hilda Solis, the incredible, environmental Latina congresswoman from Southern California to work with others to create this Green Jobs Act. We want the federal government, through the Department of Labor, to begin to put money in the hands of community colleges, vocational schools, job training programs, to start greening up those curriculum. Because, once again, what we're seeing is our eco-entrepreneurs are unbelievable. Especially in Northern California. We have solar entrepreneurs, we have clean tech going on, every one of the employers says we can't find trained workers to come in, ready to get the job done. And so, in Northern California of all places, if you want to put up solar panels on your house, the policy environment is

right, the consumer demand is there, the entrepreneurs are there, you may have to wait two to six months sometimes because we don't happen to have green-collared workers trained to come out and put the solar panels up. Now, that happens in Northern California; what's gonna happen in the other 49 states? We could get the policy right, and still have a labor shortage - in the middle of a recession - have a labor shortage on actually implementing these policies. So what we gotta do, is get government on the side of this and make sure we are training our workers and make sure that our business community is being expected to meet a world-class challenge, gets world-class support from the government. There should be a price on carbon, so it's not free to dump carbon into the atmosphere, so that it costs the whole world, we should pay a little bit for that. And that money should go to help train people and move that technology revolution forward.

GN: So, again, the idea is great, but it doesn't seem like we've able to scale, I mean, we know what the problem is, we know that you can't have an economic development strategy without a workforce training strategy. How do you get a community college system as diverse as the system just even out here in the Bay Area, let alone the state of California and this country, to really hone in on these jobs? I mean, again, how do you manifest the specific criterion curriculum for a job to weatherize, for a job to put in solar take? What does it take? Does it take state legislation, does it take local initiative? Does it take people like yourself, doing it a more entrepreneurial way? Does it take a Nancy Pelosi and a new President?

VJ: Well, yes. The answer is yes it takes all of that, but the simplest way to say it is you need your job trainers supported and plugged in with your job creators. Now, your job creators, say, for instance, your solar industry, right now they're having to scratch, beg and plead in Congress just to get a little bit of extension on their tax credit-

GN: Amazing

VJ: It doesn't make any sense at all. You know the big polluters, oil, coal, they get the equivalent of I think 230 billion dollars in tax breaks and subsidies and our poor solar companies - the future of the whole country, the whole world - are having to beg for a little, tiny tax credit. And as a result, they're doing the same thing to the wind industry, as a result big wind projects are starting to stall out because they don't know if they're gonna have the tax credits they need to make a pencil. And the same thing's happening with big solar projects. So, that we're literally stalling out our renewable energy because Congress isn't able to swing around behind. So I would say, guess what, that's a civil rights issue, I would say, as an African-American, we should be jumping up and down saying you mean to tell me that there's a technology that will let us close these pollution-based power plants and get the asthma inhalers out of our daughter's pockets, and it's being held up? The African-American community should be marching down the street demanding that the solar industry gets the support it needs. And the solar industry should be demanding, guess what we want these schools to work, these community colleges to

work, so that man's child can get a job working for me. I'm gonna bring them up, let them be managers maybe they'll start their own company, be my competitor. Let's come together. For too long, we've seen the business community over here, environmentalists over there, laborers over there, civil rights is over there, and guess what, none of us are winning.

GN: Well, you're listening to the voice of Van Jones, my guest on the Gavin Newsom Show on Green 960, and when we come back I'm gonna pick up on this new green deal Green Deal 2.0, and again, my guest in the studio, Van Jones.

GN: We're back, live in the studio with Van Jones, my guest on the Gavin Newsom Show on Green 960 and we've been talking about his new book: "Green-Collared Economy: How One Solution Can Fix America's Two Biggest Problems" and in particular, talking about the opportunities of developing a different kind of thinking, strategy, a way of acting that Van refers to as the New Green Deal – Green Deal 2.0. And deal with the challenges of focusing on how we can partner a hybrid solution, as you call it in the book Van, how we can work together. It's not either/or it's not us versus them, it's a Velcro solution that you refer to.

VJ: Well I think that's right and to me it speaks to what's great about this country. When we pull together, there's very little we can't get done. You know we've been using oil since – we went from whale oil to this stuff 150 years ago. The United States of America can come up with something better than oil. And we've got enough sunlight hitting the earth every hour to fuel the whole world's economy for a whole year.

GN: And by the way, just repeat that. People, I mean, that should not be a throw away line. You're saying that right now an hour of sunlight around this planet, we have enough energy to produced by mother nature, to power us for an entire year.

VJ: For a whole year. And, I mean, here the choice before-

GN: And your people are saying we have to do off-shore oil drilling, there's no way to deal with energy policy. These environmentalists are nuts they call us.

VJ: I mean, to me, it's an appalling lack of patriotism and it's an appalling lack of love-of-country. When you have people saying defeatism, saying, we can't come up with something better than oil. So now we have to risk America's beauty, throw America's beauty down the toilet, chasing the last drop of oil. Risk the coastline, the families, the health of everybody on those coastline communities, to chase the last drop of oil, because they don't believe America can come up with something better. I think that we've got to be very very clear that we're a can-do country, this is the biggest challenge we've ever faced as a human civilization period. That's probably why this country was created, by the Creator, to be able to get us through and to hold us back from the destiny I think we

have to be the world leader. Not in pollution, but in solutions; and anybody who stands in the way of that with this defeatism and this name-calling I think needs to be challenged. We have a Saudi Arabia of wind in the middle of our country right now, our plains states. The hold up is just two things: one, we need a smart enough grid to be able to get that energy from the hot and windy places to the places where it's not hot and windy, you're telling me America can't figure that one out? We can't come up with hyper-conductive electricity so we don't lose power on the lines, that's what's holding up the whole revolution of clean energy? We can fix that. The other thing is, no price on carbon. So you and I get to drive our cars and dump carbon out the back and it's free to us; it's gonna cost us the whole world. You fix those two problems, smart grid and you put a price on carbon, you unleash a tsunami of technological innovation that could save the world.

GN: When you talk about a price on carbon, you're talking about a national reversion of the payroll tax and taxing, again, a bad thing, pollution, and stop taxing a good thing, jobs?

VJ: Yeah, I mean I think we should tax bads not goods. You know, I think that's the easiest way –

GN: That's a radical plan...

VJ: I know it's like, you know, people say oh you want to raise taxes, no I don't want to raise taxes, I want to do a tax swap, I want to lower taxes on good stuff, like work, and I want to raise taxes on bad stuff, like waste. The problem that people don't get is that markets work. You don't want markets on everything, but, pure essentials, you gotta make sure you have essentials like welfare and stuff like that, but, here's the challenge: markets work according to rules. And if you have wacky rules, then markets start to give you bad outcomes. Right now you've got wacky rules, that rewards waste, punishes thrift, and, you know, is propelling us in a negative direction. The minute you change the rules, you're suddenly gonna see a tsunami of innovation; we're gonna be shocked at how quickly we solve this problem. The minute we get the naysayers out of there.

GN: Well, speaking of naysayers, seems the biggest enemy is us. Even in your book, and again your book comes out in October – Green Collared Economy- you refer and reflect on California's failure to do what many other states are already doing and that's actually taxing oil companies for oil exploration. And it was an initiative that was supported quite handsomely by folks like Steve Bing and others that literally put tens of millions of dollars of their own money -

VJ: Forty million bucks

GN: - in an effort to do that prop. 87. And it was overwhelmingly defeated. What happened? I mean, are we – who's to blame, is it just the oil companies? I mean they spent exponentially more than forty million to defeat it but, aren't we to blame? I just saw a poll the other day that said now for the first time in years, the majority -51% - of Californians now support off-shore oil drilling. Now, there may be ten other polls that suggest otherwise, but it was the first time I've ever seen a poll in my lifetime that showed a majority. What's going on? I mean seriously. If we're gonna get serious about this, I mean let's move away from the rhetoric and the optimism in this room – and I share it by the way – but how do we manifest that optimism with change by getting folks to do things differently?

VJ: People are scared now because of the energy prices going up. The big factor now that's creating some motion, some backslide, is energy prices and the false idea that we can drill and burn our way out of this problem. Now, we have an obligation, on shows like this, and wherever we go, to tell the truth about it. We're not gonna be able to drill and burn our way back to a dollar a gallon, or two dollars a gallon, or three dollars a gallon, of the demand from India and China for fossil fuels will continue to go up. It's only gonna accelerate and therefore, we are on a permanent escalator now on energy price. And it's very hard to grow an economy when energy prices are going up because when energy prices go up, all prices go up. It takes energy to make everything, and jobs start going down, that's called stagflation. And, Jimmy Carter, who I had the pleasure to meet very recently, was a victim of it. One of the most humanitarian presidents we've ever had, was thrown out of office because of this effect on the economy and energy prices rising. We can not drill and burn our way out. We can invent and invest our way out. That is possible. Americans don't go against the laws of Adam Smith. We can – if we cut demand – by conservation, weatherization, rail, et cetera – that begins to bring some prices down. If we diversify supply, solar, wind, geothermal, that also begins to bring the prices down. So more demand, I mean less demand, more supply, gets you your price drop. We have not explained that to the American people. We have not said that the only way – if you believe in markets – if you believe in economics – the only way to beat this thing is to cut demand, diversify supply, that's a green solution. It's not a drill and burn solution.

GN: Again, you're listening to the voice of Van Jones on the Gavin Newsom Show on Green 960. Van, we were together just a few weeks ago in Texas, down in Austin, for Netroots Nations, and you gave a speech and you talked a lot about this presidential election and the importance of it. Put yourself in a position, and you may actually be there, of advising the next President of the United States, what are the simple things that the president can do, quickly, to get us on the right course?

VJ: I think the most important thing that we don't often understand about the president is, the president can do an awful lot without having to ask Congress to do anything. Cause the president has these huge departments and on Day 1, just ordering the departments to

do an audit of their own carbon footprint, and begin to set targets inside the federal government, which is one of the biggest forces in the U.S. economy, you can start to move things down right there. The other thing I'll say is that the President of the United States needs to understand: they cannot win reelection in a stagflation environment so on Day 1, you've gotta begin to drive demand down. You know, we had this proposal, let people trade in their hoopdees for hybrids. Uh, hoopdees is street slang for a broken-down gas guzzler, we say let them trade in their hoopdees for hybrids. Here's an almost-revenue, zero way to do it, let people drive down to city hall, turn in the keys to their old, gas guzzling car, and then, if they pass the remotest screen, give them a federally-guaranteed loan for a fuel-efficient car. The green economy shouldn't just be a place for affluent people to spend money, that's very important because they're the pioneers, they're the ones who got this thing started. They should be able to earn money, it also should be a place for poor people to save money. Let's start weatherizing these buildings, getting people into more fuel-efficient cars, cutting their gas bills, you'll be the most beloved president in the history of the country. Or, you'll be a one-termer. You either go green as president, or you may as well keep your keys to your house 'cause you're only gonna be gone for about four years.

GN: Well, speaking of gone, we've run out of time and I wanna thank, again, my guest, on Green 960, Gavin Newsom Show, Van Jones who's here, and we have been talking the environment, we've been talking about opportunities the next president and this new Green Deal which you can learn a lot more about by picking up Van's book called "The Green-Collared Economy: How One Solution Can Fix America's Two Biggest Problems" and, Van, if people want to get a copy of that book or reserve a copy of that book, how do they find out?

VJ: They can go on the Harper-Collins website it should be right there, smiling at you. And you can also come to greenforall.org which is the organization for which I work; that's greenforall.org, no numerals, all letters. And we should be able to help you there.

GN: Fantastic, well Van, thanks for coming in and I can't encourage folks more, this is one of the most fundamental, important issues of our time; not just the environment, but the issues of equality, social justice, environmental justice. And no one has put it together better than Van Jones, so I encourage everyone to pick up the phone or get online and get this book "Green-Collared Economy," Van, thanks for being here.

VJ: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.