

By *Alan Betts*



(HOST) *Commentator Alan Betts has been thinking about global warming and the challenge of building a new "American dream".*

(BETTS) Even though President Obama seems to understand the big picture issues (the Nobel Prize committee seems to think he does); the big picture itself seems far too scary. There are crises everywhere we dare to look: financial, economic, health-care and climate crises loom all around us.

Toss in growing debt and unemployment, a couple of wars, an arms budget that exceeds those of all the other countries of the world and a global population crisis - and it's clear that 'business-as-usual' is just not going to work. The trouble is: 'business-as-usual' was so comfortable, and it made us so rich. Well - it made some of us rich.

'Change' was an effective slogan; but no-one really wants to change - to admit that we were on the wrong path; that corruption is rampant in our financial, political and healthcare institutions.

So we would like a quick fix that will give us back 'growth' again. We long to return to an economy based on mindless consumerism. Something that will take our minds off the difficult issues: the deceits, the usury, the manipulation, the sorrow of all those around the world who are dying because of our self-absorption. "Please don't make me uncomfortable," we say to our leaders. "We elected you to fix these problems! If you can't, just say so; and we will try another sweet-talking politician instead."

But slowly like the drip, drip of icy water melting off the roof in winter, the shocking truth sinks into our consciousness. Perhaps there is no quick fix this time. For years we have ignored the needs of the real economy of goods and services, as well as the needs of the earth, in favor of chasing the fantasy wealth of an unregulated shadow economy. And now we have gambled our final trillions trying to prop up this dream. The old economy is mired in a quicksand of debt and unemployment; while Wall Street firms still profit. Perhaps our political system just cannot surmount its corruption and archaic short-term thinking.

But somewhere on firmer ground, we must build new foundations, new scaffolding from which we can throw a lifeline to those around us who are still sinking. That will take hope, trust, integrity, honesty and a sense of shared responsibility for each other and for this Earth.

Long ago, our ancestors left the security of Europe in desperate times, knowing they could not go back.

We must have equal courage, patience, grit, wisdom, and endurance. We must be willing to work with each other to rebuild our communities, to care for the poor and sick, knowing that we have a common destiny. We must pull back from globalization and rebuild our local economy, which we have ignored for too long. We must be willing to work with the Earth rather than against her; knowing that we need her support. Then we can recover the American dream.