

In 1933, newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised his country change. During his inaugural speech, as unemployment approached 25%—the highest ever in the nation’s history—Roosevelt called for action: “This nation asks for action, and action now. Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. We must act, and act quickly.”

President Barack Obama echoed these sentiments as he sought big government help and dramatic change in his own inaugural address this past January:

“The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act—not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth.”

Much like Roosevelt, Obama is calling for government intervention during an economic crisis.

The first days of Roosevelt’s administration brought banking reform laws, emergency relief; and industrial and agricultural programs. Under this first New Deal, these programs helped bring swift relief to the American people. Later during his administration, a second New Deal evolved, which included the Works Progress Administration, labor union protection programs, the Social Security Act; and programs to aid tenant farmers and migrant workers.

Roosevelt was able to leverage the economic depression of the 1930s as an opportunity for change. His New Deal programs not only brought an immediate assistance to the economy, but also helped to bring about a shift in thinking of the American people.

Today, our nation faces a similar, if not greater, economic crisis. And much like Roosevelt’s era, the opportunity to implement massive change is presenting itself. The recession brings the chance to lay the groundwork for environmental programs that will last for generations to come. Obama has the unique opportunity to bring environmental issues to the forefront of the national discussion, and to ignite the social change necessary to save our planet. Roosevelt implemented “The New Deal,” Obama must implement “The New *Green* Deal”.

Certainly there is an argument that the Great Depression ended as World War II revived the American economy; and that the New Deal brought only temporary relief to the economy. What cannot be argued is that the programs that came out of the New Deal helped to bring hope and self-respect to millions of Americans. More importantly still, its lasting changes and programs helped create a shift in domestic policy that resonates today. We can still see the effects of the New Deal in the national infrastructure, and the Social Security System. We also see the effects of the New Deal in the acceptance of trade unions and increased government control over the economy and money supply.

As unemployment has reached an all time high since the Great Depression, we are in need of another shift of thinking. In the month of January alone, our nation’s economy lost 598,000 jobs, which is nearly the equivalent of losing every single job in the state of Maine. It is in the midst of this recession that Obama has taken office, and like Roosevelt, he has promised to take action on the economy.

“It is only government that can break the vicious cycle where lost jobs lead to people spending less money, which leads to even more layoffs. And breaking that cycle is exactly what the plan that’s moving through Congress is designed to do.”

Also, like Roosevelt, Obama is being given an opportunity to reshape the economy and lay the foundation for a better nation. Not only is this president in a position to help to “break the cycle” of the downward spiraling economy, he is also in a position to inspire a change of thinking among the American people.

In order to seize such an opportunity, it is crucial that Obama create a New Green Deal: a series of programs and green initiatives that not only stimulate the economy, but also lay the foundation for environmental reform.

The Awakening Consumer recognizes that the Obama administration has the opportunity to invest in environmental change. In fact, in a recent survey of Awakening Consumers, creating green infrastructure jobs was cited as being the most effective way to get the world out of the current economic crisis. Awakening Consumers understand green investments not only bring immediate economic stimulation, but also will ultimately support much needed action to help protect the environment.

With any luck, the passing of the \$787 billion stimulus package will lead to such reform. If the money in the stimulus package is invested heavily in renewable energy, energy efficiency and public transit, green jobs will be created, and consumers will ultimately save money. Investments made in weatherizing homes and office buildings will help utility bills to go down; investments in public transit will bring safer air to breathe and lower costs in healthcare; and investments in renewable energy could help energy dollars here in the US. In turn, green investments create jobs. A recent green jobs study by the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found that a two-year, \$100 billion green investment program would create 2 million green jobs for workers in the United States. Thus, not only are jobs created, but also consumers and taxpayers are ultimately saving enough money that these investments more than pay for themselves.

A New Green Deal would provide The United States with long-term dividends in good paying jobs; it would lay the foundation for lasting programs and needed changes. The recession is an opportunity, just as it was in the 1930s, for an adjustment in thinking. It is high time Americans make the environment a priority; and Obama, as a man who promises change, action, and hope, must seize the opportunity to create green change we can believe in.