

Google CEO Eric Schmidt Touts Green Energy Shock Doctrine.

If you believe author/activist Naomi Klein, there's a nefarious conservative conspiracy intent on making the world safe for capitalism by exploiting national crises to force political change. Whatever you think of Klein's "Shock Doctrine" thesis, Google CEO Eric Schmidt seems like an unlikely candidate for the cabal. But at a talk in Washington D.C. on Tuesday, the head-honcho of the Search Engine That Walks Like a Verb did see a green lining in the current financial crisis: an opportunity to "stimulate the economy" by launching an ambitious infrastructure program that aims to fundamentally alter the American energy system.

Eric Schmidt in Washington DC Schmidt spoke at an event sponsored by the New America Foundation. He argued that the green lining in the economic implosion is that it has created demand for a massive domestic stimulus, opening the door to large-scale public works programs of the sort undertaken by Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Instead of subsidies for the foundering U.S. auto industry, said Schmidt, we have an opportunity to leverage the bailout to "decarbonize our economy."

Clean energy sources like solar and wind power face a "grid problem," according to Schmidt: The optimal areas for renewable power generation aren't hooked up to the areas where the people who need power are. The effort to build out that infrastructure, said the Googler-in-Chief, could be sold as a jobs program for local contractors hard hit by the moribund housing market.

Federal pre-emption could be invoked to cut through the bramble of diverse state regulations and enable deployment of smart grids that manage power more efficiently, Schmidt believes. Citing the ARPANET-funded by the Defense Department, but partially built and then massively expanded by for-profit companies-Schmidt argued for a similar public-private collaboration to build a better power grid.

Schmidt drew several more specific suggestions from Google's Clean Energy 2030 Plan, a \$4.4 trillion proposal to drastically reduce American dependence on fossil fuels and foreign oil, which the company projects would return \$1 trillion in savings over its lifespan. Among these: a Federal Energy Lending Authority, modeled on the Farm Credit Act of 1916, and a cash-for-clunkers program that buys older polluting cars to get them off the roads.

A self-described "big fan of infrastructure," Schmidt argued that the technological innovation needed to improve our power networks will depend on the quality of our information networks. That means-in addition to traditional steps like offering matching grants for green companies and a permanent R&D tax credit-promoting wider network connectivity via both wired broadband and whites paces to "enable a whole new category of platforms."

Pressing a theme popular with Barack Obama's tech surrogates, Schmidt also waxed enthusiastic about the power of network technology to create a more transparent and participatory politics. "Government has not embraced, generically, the tools we all use every day," said Schmidt. "It's time." Pointing to the Patent Office's Peer-to-Patent program for crowdsourcing patent application analysis, Schmidt asked "why is that not true of every branch of government?" The same "police of the Internet" who debunked political rumors during the campaign could be turned on key legislative and regulatory issues. "A lot of people care passionately about them," joked Schmidt, "and they obviously have a lot of free time."

The one deviation from the generally upbeat tone of the proceedings came during the question and answer period, when a representative of the group ConsumerWatchdog.org challenged the CEO to adopt more privacy-protective practices on its websites and in the new Chrome browser. Schmidt was clearly familiar with the changes sought by the group, but suggested that some of them-such as default SSL connections and IP anonymizing in the browser's "incognito mode"-were unlikely. "The default is not to use the most secure form because it slows everything down," Schmidt explained.

So how realistic is the Google agenda? It certainly sounds as though Schmidt at least has the ear of incoming White House Chief-of-



Staff Rahm Emanuel, who this week told business leaders that an economic stimulus packaged focused on promoting "green infrastructure" and clean energy would be "the first order of business" for the Obama administration. Emanuel seems to have read The Shock Doctrine as well: He recently told The New York Times that one must "never allow a crisis to go to waste," because "they are opportunities to do big things."

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