

Saturday, June 11, 2011

[An Open Letter to My Great Grandchildren,](#)

I haven't met you yet, and I'm not sure if I ever will, but I wanted to take this opportunity to reach out and apologize for the mess that my generation has left you with. I am writing this letter to you in the year of 2011, but I suspect it will be somewhere around 2040 when you are old enough to read and understand what I have to say here.

Your Great Grandfather, that's me, was born in 1946 which is the first official birth year of the generation we called the baby boomers. That period lasted until 1964, which incidentally was the year I graduated from high school. Those born after 1964 were referred to as the "gen x'ers", then came the "y" generation and so on. I'm not sure what label they will assign to your generation, but I hope it is one that befits a valiant and dedicated effort to fix the awful mistakes of your ancestors and a commitment to avoid repeating them in the future.



As I write this letter, I am preparing to enter retirement as I will be turning 65 in a few months. This is the age that most of my generation began receiving social security payments and government paid health care benefits under a program we called medicare. I doubt that these programs will be available to you like they were to us, at least in their present form. I'm sorry for that. You see, the United States is currently \$14 Trillion in debt and counting and no one seems to have a clear understanding how to fix this. Our treasury keeps issuing more debt because we simply don't have enough money to pay for all of our expenditures. It is projected that by the year 2025 interest on our debt plus the cost of social security and medicare will exceed all revenue collected by the federal government. Meanwhile, our politicians are intent on keeping interest rates low, so our federal reserve is actually buying a large portion

of that debt on a regular basis. Where did they get the money to do that? They printed it. Really! Have you ever heard the expression, "*robbing Peter to pay Paul*"? I think this practice is dangerous and could ultimately destroy the purchasing power of our dollar, and it is clearly unsustainable. Regarding sustainability, we actually have a host of other problems of global proportions which, by the time you read this, should be of no surprise to you.

I have many concerns for your future. The three most pressing ones are the depletion of our natural resources, climate change, and unchecked population growth. I'll summarize these concerns one at a time.

The dinosaurs roamed the earth for 160 million years, and along with decaying vegetation, were largely believed to be the source of fossil fuels, i.e., oil, coal and natural gas. Peak oil production occurred in the United States in 1970, which implies that most of our country's oil reserves were used up in less than 100 years. Since then, we have feverishly pursued additional fossil fuel supplies around the globe, by whatever means possible, in order to feed our addiction and sustain our lifestyle. Currently the United States makes up less than 5% of the world's population, but we are consuming 25% of the world's oil production. There is a lot of talk about developing alternative energy sources, but so far it is just that – talk!

Climate change is a topic of great debate today. One's opinion of the cause of this phenomena largely depends upon which side of the political spectrum you fall. The Left attribute the drastic weather patterns to global warming caused by humans. Those on the Right that accept the notion that our climate is changing, say it is just due to natural weather cycles. Nonetheless, the problem is real and clearly getting worse. Among my chief concerns, besides the prospects of more devastating floods, tornadoes, and earthquakes, is the future of farming and our ability to produce an adequate food supply that is both safe and sustainable to feed an ever growing population exacerbated by immigration, both legal and illegal.

In my lifetime, the world's population has tripled from just over 2 Billion to the current level of 7 Billion. Certainly no one expects this rate of growth to continue, and in fact there has been meaningful progress to bring that rate down during the last few decades. Nonetheless, an ever increasing world population and the ensuing competition for scarce and declining resources will most surely pose serious challenges to future standards of living, while further straining the planet's overtaxed and fragile ecosystem.

So, other than apologizing for my generation's misdeeds without a list of specific solutions, why am I writing this letter to you? Well, it is my hope that others that are either now, or will be, in a position of power or influence will read this and gather some inspiration from it. And in doing so, they will accept the challenges and vow to make a difference before its too late. Meanwhile, I promise to do what I can to make things a little better for you, your children, and your grand children.



So this is the point in an essay that writers like to quote some famous person in history like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, or Leonardo Da Vinci (my personal favorite) to support their thesis. Instead I will take a more contemporary approach and repeat some words that I heard just yesterday at the Phoenix airport on my way home from a business trip. I

was making my way to my connecting gate along the moving sidewalk and thinking about just how good we have it today and wondering how long the party would last. Just as this brief journey was about to come to an end, I heard the following prophetic words spoken from a nameless recorded loop –

“The Walkway is ending, please watch your step” Hmmmm...