BILL McKIBBEN WXXI INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT:

>> From WXXI news, it's 1370 Connection.

[music]

>> Is environmental progress a luxury we can't afford, at a time when our state's likely to start next year ten billion dollars in the red, and President elect Obama faces a possible trillion dollar red ink bath? Or is it something we can't afford not to do for the sake of our survival. Or maybe both. How do we reconcile that conflict? Well the man we're about to talk to is gonna provide some answers for us. Bill McKibben is the best selling author of books, including his latest, Deep Economy, which this year all entering RIT students are reading. He's the latest in the Caroline Warner Gannett series of lecture speakers at RIT, he's going to be on the campus speaking in colloquia at the Gollisano Auditorium starting at two, and again for the general public at eight p.m. at Engell Auditorium on the RIT campus. But before that, he's talking with us right now. Thank you very much for being with us today, we appreciate it.

>> My pleasure to be here.

>> Want to talk a little bit about some things that happened at the ballot box this week, affecting the environment. California for example, which gets to submit to its voters a lot of different things on issues both substantive and not, defeated proposals to bond for things like ramping up renewable energy, and jump starting the use of cleaner natural gas vehicle production and sales. Was that a mistake on California voters part?

>> Actually the devil is always in the details on these things, and in those particular propositions as I understand it, even the Sierra Club said vote no, they were drawn badly and were gonna harm California's pretty remarkable effort to move towards greener energy sources. California, you know, the last eight years with no chance for progress in Washington, California's really emerged as the leader in the country on how to do this stuff.

>> Of course they've been the leader in things like vehicle emission standards for what, forty years or more, imposing tougher standards than the rest of the country, and really up to now joined only by New York. I'd be curious to know if that's beginning to have a wider impact than just those two big states at either end of the country.

>> Yeah. In fact now California passed a series of laws that would regulate, in effect regulate carbon dioxide, and raise automobile mileage for cars in California. And there are thirteen states I think have so far joined on, most of the northeast, including New York, and much of the upper Midwest, or some. The problem is that the Bush administration has sued California to keep them from adopting those higher mileage regulations, insisting that it's a federal prerogative. And the court I think has yet to rule on what will happen, but it's the kind of thing that we won't see as much of any more under an Obama administration. At the very least I think states and localities will be allowed to experiment freely.

>> Now we don't know who President elect Obama's attorney general is going to be. But would you be watching for example, to see if that individual, whoever he

or she may be, simply pulls that case out, drops the appeal, and lets the states go where they choose?

>> I would think that that would be very, very likely. Obama, you know, Obama is no instinctive environmentalist. He's a, he comes from Illinois, he's a, been very friendly with the big agriculture interests, he was deep into ethanol early on because they were into it. But his, we've spent a lot of time working with and talking with his people over the last couple of years, and his understanding of and sensitivity to environmental issues, especially climate change, has grown a lot.

>> Now he also comes from a city which has one of the best developed public transit systems in the United States. That being the case, can we expect him to pay more attention to public transit, at least in metropolitan areas, and perhaps find a way to provide a little help for the renewal of the infrastructure in that regard?

>> We couldn't, I mean it would be impossible to pay less attention to public transit that we've had. I think it's not only Obama. Remember, the one thing that everyone knows about Joe Biden is he rides the train to work. There's a chance we might actually get some decent funding for Amtrak at some point too, which would be nice. You know, I remember my friend, the author Jimmie Cunsler [assumed spelling] saying not long ago, saying that America has produced a train system of which Bulgaria would be ashamed. You know, time to get to work on that.

>> That used to be the engine, pardon the pun, that drove our economy a hundred years ago. One's entitled to ask, just from a historical perspective, hey what happened?

>> I think what happened is, as with so much else, you know, Detroit [inaudible] figured out that they needed to dismantle much of the efficient, I mean you used to be able to literally take public transit, switching from one local streetcar line to another, you could go from Boston to Wisconsin with one you know, sort of twenty mile gap in western New York where I'm sure you could have jumped on a canal boat to make up the difference.

>> Or taken the New York central train.

>> Exactly right, taking the train to Chicago. You know, there's no reason we couldn't have that again, and given what appears to be the coming shortage of oil, I think it's pretty likely that we'll at least try to move in that direction. Whether we have, and this is where you started this conversation, whether we have the money to do it is a different question.

>> Of course then the question is can we afford to do it, can we afford not to do it. And that's going to be the paradox that we're going to be negotiating over the next few years. I'm gonna begin with this in a way, looking at it in the broad perspective, a historical perspective. Did we become so [inaudible] to the idea of personal transportation at our beck and call twenty four seven whenever we wanted it, which is what the automobile gives us, and let's not minimize that fact, that we just couldn't imagine any other way, couldn't imagine even waiting a few minutes for the next bus or the next train to come along.

>> Well that's a really good question. I think you can take it even deeper than that. I mean I think you can say that the easy access to abundant and cheap fossil fuel has created in Americans a deeper sense of kind of hyper individualism than any place on earth, and you can get a good contrast with that when you go to western Europe, okay? These are people who are as prosperous as we are, but they've had expensive gasoline ever since World War Two, you know, it's been eight bucks a gallon more or less in real terms, they've kept high taxes on it. And you get a sense of how differently not only their landscape developed without the kind of sprawling suburb, but also how their mindset developed. People are willing to go five minutes out of their way to travel with their community, in fact it doesn't even occur to them not to, it's just a kind of ingrained part of life. They have a slightly more communal sense of the world, and it's one reason, a big reason that the average western European uses half as much energy as the average American.

>> And of course most of them have their cars too.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> But they just don't use them the same way we do?

>> They're on the train or they're on the bus. And of course this is a chicken and egg thing. You know, if everybody's on the train, then politicians are gonna make sure that the trains as they say, run on time. And they do. If the train says it's going from Zurich to Paris at you know, eleven fifty four, by gosh the doors slide shut at eleven fifty four, and you're on your way.

>> And the systems are invariably clean and comfortable. I've ridden the London underground, I've seen the Paris metro. They're very good.

>> Absolutely, absolutely. Our sense sometimes in this country that we've figured out the best of everything is one of the problems we get into. You know, there are plenty of reasons to think that other people around the world have figured out lots of things that we haven't about how to make life better. In fact, you know, economists in recent years have begun to do a lot of work on how satisfied people are with their lives. And oddly, even though they have less disposable income, the western Europeans always show up as considerably more satisfied with their lives than we do.

>> Of course their infrastructure for services is very different from ours as well. The only communities I can think of that I've ever been to in North America that have comparable public transit networks to what you see commonly in Europe are New York City, Chicago, and Toronto, and maybe Montreal comes fairly close, although I don't remember it being as good as Toronto's. But everywhere else, if you don't have a car, you're nowhere.

>> There's a few cities that are now re-engineering themselves to get away from the car, and the best example is Portland, Oregon, where they've put in really extensive light rail, and its guided development in the city. That's where people are building new homes, that's where growth is occurring, and it's been very successful. But you're right, we are an auto dominated country. We began to sense the real problem with that last year when, or earlier this year when gas was suddenly four dollars a gallon. It's taken the threat of a next great depression to bring gas back down to two dollars a gallon or whatever it is at the moment. But one can be assured that the price is gonna go right back up,

because there's less and less of it all the time, that oil, and we're facing real problems even without taking into account the incredible environmental damage that we're doing by burning it in the first place. 4

>> Now two dollars and sixty nine cents a gallon, which is what I saw it selling for this morning in my neighborhood, still pretty high.

>> Yeah.

>> Still historically high.

>> I can remember, I can remember when the you know, digits went up slower than, when the dollars went up slower than the gallons, you know?

>> I can remember thirty nine cent a gallon gas. I was already a licensed driver at that time. I think it's just me, but it's not that many years ago. We're talking the 1970s here. And when you look at that, how things have gone, yet we don't make the investment in public transit. The last major infrastructure build of a rapid transit system in the upstate New York region was in Buffalo in the early eighties with the light rail system up and down Main Street toward the eastern suburbs. It's never come anywhere close to covering its costs. It's always been subsidized, gone deeply into the red, and it's discouraged everybody else from doing something similar whenever it caught up. I guess what I would ask is if we were to do a project like that now, today, twenty five years later, first of all, could we find the money in today's economy in upstate New York, to do it?

>> Well let's back it up, and think about this more systematically, okay? The reason that it's very difficult to do anything like this is because the cost of fossil fuel is held unnaturally low. It's not asked to pay for the damage it does to the world around us. I wrote the first book about global warming twenty years ago. And I spend most of my time now working on issues of climate change and global warming, leading big national, international movement on this topic. And the thing that we're all aiming for is some way to put a cap on carbon that would in effect raise the price of fossil fuel. If we did, which is what Europe in essence did with its tax policy fifty years ago, then all kinds of alternatives would make sense. Just like they were beginning to make sense earlier this year when people were finally getting rid of SUVs and beginning you know, ridership on public transit soared 10, 20% in the course of a couple of months across the country. Now you ask a really difficult question. We've put ourselves in a deep fiscal hole. The wastefulness of our economy and our government at all levels in the last ten years means that we don't have much room to play around with. We're gonna have to be very smart about how we spend resources going forward. And you know, we obviously have lots and lots and lots of infrastructure spending to do. We got to make sure that we do it on things that are for the future, and not rebuilding the transit systems and whatever of the past, the automobile and airplane centered systems that aren't gonna work much longer in a world where we're running out of oil.

>> So first of all you're saying that two dollar and sixty nine cent a gallon gasoline, as painful as it seems to us every time we pull up to the pump and buy it, is still under priced, at least for our own good?

>> It's certainly environmentally. So here's how you solve this problem, and here's something that Obama has talked about, and I think you'll be hearing much

more about. Let's say you put a cap on the amount of carbon that America will emit next year, capita will go down year after year after year. Exxon and whoever have to buy permits on an auction basis each year in order to emit that carbon dioxide, to sell that fossil fuel, okay? The best estimate is that the cap in the first year of that would generate about three hundred billion dollars, okay? Now Exxon's gonna pass the price on to all of us, so the price goes up at the pump. The strategy that Obama's talking about is taking that three hundred billion dollars, and writing a check to everybody in the country. Just not sending the money through Congress to let them spend it on things, not sending the money to Albany for member items, you know? Just writing a check to every American for their share of the sky. So on one hand, you're getting a strong price signal to get the heck out of the SUV and abandon your Forest Ranger fantasies and things, okay? And on the other hand, you're getting enough money to keep you from going bankrupt, you're being made whole against these cost increases. If you're frugal, you come out ahead because you're you know, not spending much on fuel, and still you're getting this rebate back. So if some system like that can survive, we may be able to have our cake and eat it too a little bit.

>> I remember Al Gore persuading former President Clinton to propose a system that sounded a lot like that fifteen years ago as part of his initial ballot -

>> No.

>> - budget balancing procedure. Correct me if I'm wrong on this, but there was a carbon tax package in there.

>> There was a -

>> - slapped down like crazy.

>> It was just a straight BTU, they called it a BTU tax.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> But the money was just going to go into general revenues to get spent on things. It wasn't gonna, I mean and so politically this is a more plausible alternative. In fact it's been endorsed now by people on both sides of the isle who are interested in this kind of change. One of the things we're gonna have to figure out is how we're gonna get out of the deep, I mean you know, you've heard people using the word depression in the last few months, okay? A word that we haven't heard except in historical terms for seventy years. And one of the ways we're gonna have to get out of that is obviously with some strong stimulus to the economy. Everybody is talking about that. President Bush already tried sending everybody a check, and you know, that only sort of worked. One of the ways we're gonna get out of it is by, I think by rebuilding or building the green energy infrastructure that we need. It's a real, it's the only real new technology, new technological thing one can think of that might generate lots of jobs, and lots of jobs close to home. Cause you're not gonna send your house you know, to China to get it insulated. It's gonna have to be done here by people in need of jobs. So there's some possibilities as well as some pitfalls that this economic crisis opens for ecological progress.

>> Our number 263-WXXI, 263-9994, line's open right now, and so is our electronic mailbox at asktalk@wxxi.org. We are talking with best selling author

Bill McKibben. His books include Deep Economy, he's calling for a major rethinking of our concept of economic growth, and of the good life for our good, and maybe our own survival. Here with us right now, and I'd like to just before we go to the break, which we will in a moment, take a look at what might happen to us here in Rochester, in our local economy, if we were to embrace that concept, say with the kind of carbon tax that you're talking about, paid at the pump, recycled to us, recycled back into the economy. Where does that go, and how does it affect us in our lives directly.

>> Sure. Let's, I mean it's easier to think about if you think about particular commodities, okay? Let's think about say food, cause it's an obvious one. At the moment, the average bite of food that we eat travels two thousand miles before it reaches our lips, right? It is marinated in crude oil before it gets to our table, because with relatively cheap oil that's made a certain kind of sense. Maybe not so much nutritional sense, maybe not so much you know, culinary sense, but it's been cheap. If energy cost what it should to reflect the unbelievably dangerous damage that it's doing climatically at the moment, then the two thousand mile tomato would be a lot less attractive economically, as well as taste-wise than the five mile tomato grown by somebody near here. And already, local farmers markets are the fastest growing part of the food economy in this country. They've been doubled and then doubled again in numbers in the last decade, sales are growing 15% a year. They can grow faster if we get the price of energy right, and you know, it's completely possible to imagine you know, Burlington, Vermont, the biggest, the nearest big city to me, not very big, but Burlington, Vermont, in one hundred and twenty acre patch of farm in the center of town grows almost 10% of the fresh food that it eats. You know, we're not talking impossible fantasies here, we're talking interesting change that probably has many benefits along with its environmental ones.

>> Now of course that might affect our diet in some respects, cause there are a lot of things that get grown in upstate New York, anything from a lot of different root vegetables to greens, to certainly dairy. We've got all the milk we can possibly drink, and all the cheese we could ask for.

>> Sauerkraut capital of the world.

>> Right.

>> Absolutely.

>> But you still got to bring in a lot of things. Meat, poultry.

>> To some degree, but partly that's because we've I think foolishly centralized all those agricultural production. Look, you know, there's not reason that you can't raise chickens in upstate New York. The thing that we're mainly lacking in much of the country now is the infrastructure that we've let lapse, the small and medium scale slaughterhouses, canneries, all those kind of things. You know, New York is such a profoundly agricultural state. It's always amazing to go to Syracuse and the state fair, and be reminded that this is the oldest state fair in the country, that New York is second, third, fourth, fifth in production in all kinds of agricultural, I mean you know, we're blessed with good soils, temperate climate, can do all kinds of things. And of course did. I mean you know, most people in upstate New York were completely self sufficient not that long ago. We may find ourselves wanting to do more of that. Not completely, you know, there's no reason not to have the odd banana. But you know, I spent a year

of my life with my family eating only food that was grown in our valley in Vermont, and it was probably the healthiest, and certainly the tastiest year I've spent. Not only that, I made lots of new friends. Which is one of the interesting things about this. A few years ago, para-sociologists followed shoppers, first around the supermarket, then around the farmers market. They found that people at the farmers market were having ten times more conversations per visit than people in the supermarket. They were rebuilding some of those eroded bonds of community that are one of the reasons Americans are not as happy with their lives as they used to be.

>> Our number 263-WXXI, we'll be getting to the phones in a moment as we continue our conversation with Bill McKibben, the author of Deep Economy, here on 1370 Connection. I'm Bob Smith, stay with us. More to come in a moment on WXXI AM at FMHD2.

[background music]

>> This is Curt Smith for Perspectives. This week, transformational elections. US Senate associate historian Donald Richie, a 1932's creation of the new deal. Author David Greenburg a 1968 and the silent majority's birth. And Jerry Zremsky [assumed spelling] of the Buffalo News on another election, the one just completed. Saturday afternoon at two, and Tuesday night at eleven on Perspectives, on WXXI AM Rochester, on WXXI FMHD2 Rochester.

>> 1370 Connection continues on WXXI AM and FMHD2. I'm Bob Smith, across the table from me, Bill McKibben, the best selling author of books, including his latest, Deep Economy. He's going to be speaking as part of the Caroline Warner Gannett series of lectures at RIT. Eight o'clock at Engell Auditorium in the RIT campus is when he speaks to the general public, before that he's talking with us right now, including you when you call in. To the phones we go at 263-WXXI. We have Mike in West [inaudible] on the line. Hi Mike, you're on the air.

>> Ah good evening, good, yes good afternoon gentlemen. As a rail fan, and watching rail service across the country deteriorate, it's always been a mystery to me why we feel that mass transportation must be self sufficient. We don't expect the police and other public service to be self supporting or making a profit. We don't expect the airports to make a profit, we don't expect the roads to make a profit. Yet we do expect that of mass transportation. That seems to be a tremendous inconsistency.

>> You know, it's actually very true. We're used to subsidizing a lot of other things. I mean the interstate highway system was one of the great subsidized projects of all time. You know, we couldn't have air traffic system if we weren't subsidizing everything from building new airports and runways to air traffic control, on and on and on. It makes great sense for many reasons to give the money that we need to get a good rail system going. And if we do, the amount that we'll have to subsidize, it will be steadily reduced because people will be taking it. I remember once being in a, spending some time in a city in Brazil, wondering city of about three million called [inaudible], that I've written about a good deal. They have the best bus system in the world. More people take the bus, higher percentage than anyplace in the world. The fare is low, it's about a quarter cause it's a fairly poor community. But so many people take it that they're able to not only run the system without tax subsidy at this point, they pay for their own capital expansion through the fare box. This is, the problem is that we always, we sort of starve Amtrak and give it just enough

money to make it mediocre. And when it's mediocre, it's hard to get very many people excited about taking it. We need to build a system that actually works. And that money has to come from someplace, and we have to set priorities. And at a certain point we're gonna have to decide whether we're more interested in public transportation, or in private transportation. That's gonna be a very hard call for Americans to make, cause as Bob said, it's hard wired by this point in us to think about going wherever we want by ourselves, at exactly the moment we want to go.

>> And yet when you, when you look at places like southern California where Cal Trans has just been expanding like crazy, of course gas there was closing on five dollars a gallon, and when it did people took to the trains like crazy. Unfortunately, it would seem the only impact we understand is having our wallets dinged like crazy, until we almost have no financial choice.

>> Yeah. This, it's you know, inertia is a strong human trait, and it does seem as if it takes real pain sometimes to make that happen. And of course one of the problems is that in our political system there are not many politicians who are eager to inflict any pain at all, because they know they'll get dinged as a result. That'll be an interesting question. And it's one of the things that will test I think the political maturity of the Obama administration. And you know, clearly the guy takes office with more problems than any president has faced since FDR, and you know, God be with him. I mean I'm glad I'm not taking over. But this is gonna be one, just the perfect example of the kind of conundrum that he'll face from the moment he sets foot in the Oval Office.

>> And of course we do thank you very much for calling. A program reminder incidentally, not on this station but on our sister website, WXXI.org, today starting at one o'clock National Public Radio will be hosting a live text chat on the election outcome. National Public Radio's Ken Ruden, Dick Meyer, and Beth Donovan will be online, waiting to hear from you, and chat with you. All you have to do is go to WXXI.org/election, and you can be part of that, starting in the one o'clock hour. Meanwhile, here on 1317 Connection, you can be a part of the conversation by dialing up 263-WXXI. We have David in Pittsford on the line, hello David, you're on the air.

>> Yeah, hi. Thanks for taking my call. I wanted to just mention that the FCC gave approval to the use of what they call white space for internet access. And it means that areas that are not practical to cover with internet because of their rural nature will be able to be covered with internet access.

>> This is -

>> It makes farming, farms I think more attractive, especially for young people to stay on farms, because they can have internet access, and -

>> It's Wi-Fi on steroids basically.

>> That's what they call it, exactly.

>> Yeah. And I agree with it. I just wrote a little piece about this this week, and I think it's very important. You know, we need that broadband access in rural communities. The internet actually gives us a luxury that people haven't had before. The prospect of being very local, of being very entrenched in your place, in your community has always been attractive for certain reasons, but

it's also always meant a kind of parochialism. You're sort of cut off from the larger world in certain ways. We don't have to make that choice quite as much any more. With the advent of the internet, you know, there's always a window open on the outside world for new ideas to blow in, and old prejudices to get blown out. So I'm, I think that that's actually a very important part of this dynamic. It changes the equation a little bit, and it may make it much easier to see the kind of rural renaissance that we probably need.

>> Okay, I do thank you David.

>> Okay, thanks.

>> Do appreciate it. Is that also going to mean that we're not going to be traveling quite so much, because we can interface with each other, connect with each other a lot more easily through technological electronic means?

>> It better mean that. In fact it may not mean just not just us traveling so much, but our stuff traveling so much. Someone pointed out not long ago, it's a lot more efficient to kind of share recipes around the web than it is to share ingredients, you know, across the globe. The spread of information is gonna have to start to substitute for the spread of stuff, because the energy cost of taking everything and moving it thousands of miles is becoming a serious drag.

>> 263-WXXI, 263-9994, for you to be part of the 1370 Connection conversation. I'm Bob Smith with you on WXXI AM and FMHD2. Bill McKibben, author of Deep Economy, our guest this hour. And we're going next to Jeremy in Rochester. Jeremy, you're on the air.

>> Hi, good afternoon. Bill, I've had a chance to see you talk a couple times, and RIT's very lucky to have you come, you're a great speaker.

>> Thank you.

>> My question was about kind of the election that we just had. And how much lip service was being paid to alternative sources of energy, many of which you know, enjoy incredibly small market share. Do you see any possibility in terms of upping the market share of geothermal, or solar wind? Or are they just kind of something people pay lip service to and don't really offer all that much upswing?

>> It's a great question. You know, we're seeing serious penetration into the market of some of these technologies. Wind is the fastest growing source of electric generation around the world. But it starts, as you say, from a small base. It could grow much more quickly. We need a few things to make that happen. Key above all is getting the price of carbon, of fossil fuel right, making, I mean it enjoys an unfair advantage cause it is not asked to pay for the hideous damage that it's doing to the planet's climate. We can talk about that damage if you want in a minute. But getting that price right, you know, would suddenly mean a huge boom in all the alternative technologies. We're gonna see some of it anyway, I mean just the price rise we've seen in oil this year was enough until we came to this financial crunch to really spur investment in these technologies. But you asked exactly the right question. These things have got to go from being curiosities to being main, the main backbone of our energy system.

>> Of course here in New York, looking at what we are doing here, we're doing some things to try to reduce our overall carbon footprint. We started up our cap and trade system of auctions under the regional greenhouse gas initiative, that so far pretty much affects the power companies, because they're some of the main sources of airborne pollutants. First round of auctions just happened. Nobody's complaining much about the cost. The control targets so far pretty modest. Are the complaints likely to grow louder when the emission targets get tougher?

>> Absolutely. And this is why it's so, I mean this is gonna be so tough. And I'm not certain that we're gonna figure it out. I mean the name of the book, the cheerful title of the book that I wrote twenty years ago about climate change was the end of nature. You know, I'm not convinced we're gonna make this work. On the other hand, there is real public sentiment. Last year me and six college kids organized with no money and no you know, organization behind us, managed to organize a day with fourteen hundred rallies and protests and demonstrations across the country in all fifty states, demanding real action on climate change. The biggest day of grassroots environmental protests since the first Earth Day. People, many people understand that of all the questions we face, this question of the fate of the planet is the most important, that the financial meltdown is scary, but the meltdown meltdown is really scary. And watching you know, two summers in a row, ice just disappear from the arctic is a pretty good sign that we better get our act together, and get it together quick.

>> The weird, wildly fluctuating weather we've experienced, with extremes at both ends, certainly has gotten our attention, no question about it, and made us aware that there is a problem out there. On the other hand of course, you look, especially at a place like New York, but maybe across the whole United States, we're seeing little or no growth, we're coping with a wrenching transition from our traditional manufacturing based value added economy. Are we looking at potential sacrifices and saying my God, not now, not here, not yet. And is this especially true in communities like western and central New York, which have had it rough for a long time, and missed the boom of the nineties?

>> Yeah. Well you know, it's funny cause we didn't do anything in the boom of the nineties. I can remember everybody in the Clinton administration saying well you know, times are so good, we don't want to interfere you know, with that by doing, putting regulations in or anything. Look, this is a classic case of whether or not we deal with short-term pain or long-term pain, whether or not we make some sacrifices now. And as I say, I don't think it's all sacrifice. I mean if one was trying to figure out a plausible economic future for upstate New York that required you know, that offered some possibility for manufacturing jobs and things, the transition to green energy comes closer than anything else you can name I think. You know, it's a heck of a lot more jobs than you know, even the IT revolution, or biotechnology, or any of the things we kind of clutch at, and many more of those jobs are suited for you know, people without advanced degrees or whatever it is. But there's no question that change is gonna be tough, and it may be tougher, it may be almost impossible if we've basically run out of money, about the same time we've run out of oil. You know, we're in a real fix. And I think you know, that the great virtue of the election this week was simply the fact that we're going to have an intellectually curious president who's smart enough to figure out how these things connect, climate and energy and the economy are three sides of the same problem. And you can't take on any one of them alone without making the others worse. We somehow have to make dealing with the energy and climate mess that we're in the solution to the economic crisis that we've been allowed to stumble into.

>> Of course doing that kind of holistic approach requires a real commitment of investment, and of people. People of course we've got plenty of, talent we got plenty of. We got three hundred million people who can be easily marshaled to a cause when the cause is going to help them. Question is, have we got the capital to back up their efforts at this point, and how can we raise it. Are we caught in the paradox of can't afford to do it, can't afford not to.

>> We may well be. I mean you know, we have a trillion dollars less than we did last month. I mean don't ask me quite where it's gone, or exactly how it's disappeared. But you know, there's a trillion dollars added to our national debt that we didn't have last month. And all we've gotten for it is not having the, we got nothing good for it, the only thing we got was not having the absolute collapse of our financial system, which I guess is a great, something to be thankful for. You know, as I say, we're gonna have to try to pull ourselves out of this economic hole, and I haven't heard any good suggestion other than the transition to green energy as a way to, sort of the next driver for our economy.

>> Ironically, is that going to mean more public investment, more public expenditure, and yes collection of some taxes that we otherwise wouldn't have had to collect.

>> It could well. As I say, I think we have to do it at this point in such a way that we don't bankrupt individuals. And I think sending a price signal while rebating that money back to families makes a lot of sense at this point.

>> Bill McKibben, author of The Deep Economy is here with us right now at 1370 Connection. We have David in Avon calling in. Hello David, you're on the air.

>> Hi Bob, thanks for the call. Love the show. I just want to make a quick comment in relation to the mass transit. And I find that having traveled around not just this country, but other countries, that the stigma that goes with traveling on mass transit is far different than in places like here in upstate New York, where people are, it's like a class system where people don't want to take mass transit because you know, they're put in a certain category. And I find that in other places, especially bigger cities, you don't tend to have that sort of mindset. And I'll take my comments off the air.

>> I think that's a very astute observation. And it's all part and parcel, you know, since we don't have, since we've allowed mass transit to become shabby, you know, shabby people are the ones who are forced to take it, cause they have no options. It's completely different from the situation that you get in a city where mass transit works well. You know, if you go to New York or Boston, the subway is a reasonable cross section of everybody in town. If you go to Europe, you know, all the smartest, fanciest people are there on the train with you, looking very you know, European and wealthy while you look a little American and shabby going along.

>> But we've got a stigma of poverty, and a sort of a classicism going on here, associated with getting on the bus and paying a buck a ride.

>> Yeah. Hopefully a kind of new, one of the things that'll happen, you could almost see it starting to happen this year as gas prices rose, that a kind of new aesthetic almost of what is seen as cool and interesting will arise. And if that happens, then there'll be real momentum. You know, if suddenly there are 10

or 20% more people taking the bus, because that's what they can afford, or because they understand how important it is, that's 10 or 20% more people who will be calling their state senator and saying why is the bus so slow, why is the bus station so shabby? You know, and we'll start to respond to that more than we respond to the guy saying why is there a toll booth on my highway, you know, how dare they, or whatever it is.

>> Here in Rochester, it's very interesting. We want bus service, and people say they want more of it going to more places within the metropolitan area. But at the same time, there's huge controversy over the construction of a complex that would include a new main transportation bus hub. Huge controversy over it. Are we sending essentially mixed messages to the politicians? Or should we look at it that way, should we just look at it as an objection to a specific project without necessarily objecting to the concept of enhanced mass transit overall?

>> I think in general, I mean I think there's a lot of those kind of tradeoffs, you know, the sort of fight over wind power, and whether or not you want to look at the windmill or whatever it is. We haven't quite yet reached the breaking point, you know, where we understand that the way of life that we've been living for the last fifty years isn't gonna work any more, that we're gonna have to make alterations, some of them subtle and some of them profound, if we're gonna be able to keep a decent life and a decent community together. You know, I think that the ultimate direction that we're headed in, as you know from reading Deep Economy, is toward more localized, more regionalized economies, that the kind of endless globalization that's marked our economy for the last fifty years will diminish, will need to diminish. And I think that that'll be wrenching in certain ways, and I also think it'll be salutary. You know, in the end we haven't benefited all that much from that rampant globalization, it'll be good to get back to stronger local economies.

>> You and James Kemplar [assumed spelling] are on the same page in a lot of ways. I remember in a conversation I had with him a few years ago though, that he was saying it might very well end up even changing how we live and where we live, and force a ratchening [assumed spelling] back of metropolitan sprawl. Could it get to the point where we may have to decide to leave the suburbs and come back into the center city, or at least come back closer to it?

>> Bob, it's already happening. Look at the statistics around the country in this last housing bust that we've been going through. The only places that are holding their value are homes near center cities, or right on rapid transit lines, the first ring of suburbs with good commuter connections. Those houses are holding most of their value, the kind of starter castles for entry level monarchs at the last ring of the suburbs are you know, dead in the water. They're gonna be tomorrow's you know, slums with granite countertops cause nobody wants to or can afford to live out there.

>> Are you saying we're going to go the way of Paris in that regard, where everybody wants to live in the center of town if they can afford it?

>> Heavens that would be terrible, wouldn't it? Paris would really be, I mean you know, Rochester's a great town, but more people I know sort of head for Paris on their honeymoon I got to say.

>> Well we'll concede that, even though our commute times are slower, or are lower. 263-WXXI, Ellen and Henrietta. Hi Ellen, you're on the air.

>> Yes hi, thanks for taking my call. I just had a quick question. It feels like I'm going backwards here, but what was the role of the corporations in developing this? Iacocca, Lee Iacocca, I'm not blaming him for everything, but his name comes to mind as an example, all right? The use of the gas and oil, the dealerships, the land use, huge networks of dealerships, production of the cars, stock in the corporations, would we have that same problem today if we wanted to go in the direction that you're describing? I know there's a lot of people here, I'm not originally from here, I'm from a Massachusetts town. We had busses coming every fifteen to, ten to fifteen minutes on either end of my street in the suburbs. Good, nobody was ashamed to ride the bus. And of course it was using gas and oil, we had trolleys I think down in more central systems. And people here remember the trolley system that used to run, that people used to take in the fifties, sixties. There were pressures I think -

>> Absolutely.

>> - from the corporations.

>> I mean it was quite direct. GM in particular literally bought up many of the country's mass transit systems, and ripped up the rails in the forties and fifties. So here's one way we'll be able to tell how on top of this the Obama administration is. Some time in the next year Detroit has made it clear that it's coming to the federal government for a bailout, and they're talking serious money, twenty five to fifty billion dollars that they want, okay? And they're gonna get something because they obviously have enormous political clout. The question is what will be asked in return. And if the answer is stop, in return for our money, in return for us allowing you to continue, we want you to stop building SUVs, and start building plug in hybrid cars if you're gonna build cars, and start building locomotives you know, I mean do the same kind of things we asked Detroit to do with great success at the beginning of the second world war, when in a course of a year they went from making cars to making airplanes. We're asking less of a stretch than that here, but we're gonna have to ask something, because we can't let this go on too much longer.

>> It appears the quid pro quo most likely to be asked of Detroit won't be in terms of the types of vehicles they make, but where they make them, i.e. North America as opposed to elsewhere. If the quid pro quo that the administration demands of Detroit is one that deals with trade and job preservation, are they missing the point?

>> Yes, they're missing the point, and in fact they won't have the jobs, whatever jobs are created for much longer, because the business model of relying on building big gas guzzling cars only works when you have lots of gas to guzzle. And we don't, and we can't afford to keep guzzling it anyway, because we're gonna destroy the climate system of the planet in very short order.

>> Yes, thank you very much and that point about this coming up, the bailout coming up. Everybody will be watching that then -

>> Absolutely.

>> - to see what they do.

>> Thanks very much Ellen for calling in. That unfortunately has to be the last word for today because we have no more time this hour except to say thank you to our guest. Bill Mcibben, author of Deep Economy.

[background music] He's speaking on the campus of RIT, at the Engell Auditorium tonight at eight p.m. And we thank you for joining us here now, on 1370 Connection this hour, on WXXI AM and FMHD2 Rochester. Reminder, just a few minutes from now National Public Radio hosts a live text chat on the election outcome, with Ken Ruden, Dick Meyer, and Beth Donovan of the NPR election team. All you have to do is go to WXXI.org/election, and you'll be able to join in that. You'll be able to join with us again in minutes for more of 1370 Connection here on WXXI AM 1370. I'm Bob Smith, and we'll see you right after the news.

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