

More than slogans needed

In anticipation of the inauguration, here is a tale with a moral — one worthy of the genial storyteller who will soon exit the Oval Office.

Around 1975, in a typical lunch-hour discussion about the sorry state of the world, I contributed an account of the conclusions of the Club of Rome, a group of international scientists who commissioned a study at MIT entitled "Limits to Growth."

Based on a computer model of interacting global parameters such as population growth, diminishing resources, and increasing pollution (including the carbon dioxide buildup), the report concluded that the world political, social, and environmental order would "crash" sometime around 2050.

This sober assessment was "duly noted" by the crew, and one even went so far as to say that it didn't matter much to him. I asked if he wasn't concerned about the world we would be leaving to our children, and especially to the grandchildren he could expect from his newly married daughter.

"Nah," he deadpanned, "we solved our problems, they can solve theirs." Chuckles all around, and I admired his candor.

The moral of my story? During the campaign, President-elect Bush offered not a single substantive idea as to the problems that lie ahead. So far, he has tried to convince us that he is serious only by appointing non-ideologues to Cabinet and staff positions.

That is not enough. The time for "muddling through" is past, and we must demand hard-nosed leadership instead of slogans like "a kinder, gentler America." If we are lulled into complacency, the melancholy predictions of the Club of Rome may well become a reality.

As the Great Communicator himself might say, "You know, 2050 isn't that far off, folks."

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