Clean Tech Nation: How the U.S. Can Lead in the New Global Economy

By Ron Pernick and Clint Wilder
Price: $29, pp. 308

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Journal of High Technology Law
Suffolk University Law School

Clean Tech Nation: How the U.S. Can Lead in the New Global Economy analyzes patent filing data to determine what cities and countries are poised to succeed as the clean technology sector expands. Authors Ron Pernick and Clint Wilder make it clear from the outset that the United States is not in the lead when it comes to clean technology. In order to win the race to global supremacy in clean technology, Pernick and Wilder write, the U.S. must make a concerted effort to foster and grow the clean technology industry. Some of the most important tools available to the United States when it comes to clean technology are the “robust” patent-protection laws and “unparalleled” venture capital networks. After analyzing the geographic dispersion of clean technology patents and the current “hodgepodge of policies” in place Pernick and Wilder set out a seven-point action plan to solidify the American clean technology industry.

Ron Pernick and Clint Wilder work at Clean Edge¹, a clean technology research and advisory firm. Pernick and Wilder also co-authored The Clean Tech Revolution²

¹ See www.cleanege.com for more information on the type of research and consulting work Pernick and Wilder perform at their company.
Ron Pernick has worked as a clean technology consultant in both the government and corporate sector. In addition to his consulting work Pernick has taught MBA courses at both New College and Portland State University. When not doing work at Clean Edge, Clint Wilder works as a clean-energy journalist and a green business public speaker. Wilder has given speeches at the Clinton Global Initiative and is an award-winning business journalist. Together, Pernick and Wilder bring a expansive knowledge of the disjointed clean technologies policies currently in place at the federal level and a keen understanding of the way current businesses are struggling to implement cost-effective clean technology.

The book begins with an analysis of the “Global Landscape” of the clean technology industry. Pernick and Wilder also outline the “pillars” of business activity and job creation that boost clean technology opportunities for countries. According to the authors an environment that fosters clean technology will have centers of commoditized manufacturing, the inability to outsource manufacturing, and strong protection of intellectual property. The country that succeeds in these three categories will do well in fostering a clean tech nation. Using data from investment activity and patent applications Pernick and Wilder set out to determine which country is winning the clean technology race and which country will eventually dominate the sector.

As a result of the analysis of patent and investment activity the authors delineate the “Top Ten Clean-Tech Country Leaders.” Unsurprisingly the authors pinpoint China as the current global leader in green technology with the United States in second place.

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followed by Germany and Japan in third and fourth place respectively. In discussing
China’s current global dominance of clean technology Pernick and Wilder are quick to
point out that while China succeeds through have a government organized behind a
unified goal the country falters in it’s lax enforcement of patent protection. This
disregard for the protection of ideas stifles innovation in China, the authors determine.
Conversely, while the United States enjoys strong patent protection, the U.S. lacks
organized leadership at the federal level, Pernick and Wilder write.

The “Seven-Point Action Plan for Reporting America” presents Pernick and
Wilder’s opinion as to how the U.S. can become a powerhouse in the clean technology
industry. The proposed action plan is focused largely on public policy and keeps with the
overall theme of the book that the United States’ current efforts toward enhancing clean
technology are disjointed and lacking continuity. The action plan is simple enough for
someone with a limited clean technology background to fully understand:

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<tr>
<th>SEVEN-POINT ACTION PLAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Enact a National Renewable Electricity Standard of 30 Percent by 2030</td>
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<td>2. Create and Fund a National Smart Infrastructure Bank</td>
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<td>3. Leverage Proven Investment Tools from the Oil, Gas, and Real Estate Sectors</td>
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<td>4. Phase Out All Energy Subsidies within Ten Years</td>
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<td>5. Foster Open-Source Collaboration to Set Clean-Tech Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Launch Federally Backed Prizes for Clean-Tech Innovation</td>
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Source: Clean Edge, Inc., 2012.
On its face, the seven-point action plan set forth by Pernick and Wilder seems to offer a reasonable roadmap for the United States to focus on fostering the growth of the clean-technology industry. The plan, the authors write, was designed to “elicit bipartisan support,” and the authors write that they purposely did not include “highly controversial” action points such as a national carbon tax. Most of the proposed action points are sure to garner the bipartisan support Pernick and Wilder seek – what legislature would vote against prizes for innovation? What Pernick and Wilder forget in their proposal however is the “800 pound gorilla” that is the American Oil and Gas Lobby. Surely propositions such as “phase out all energy subsidies within ten years” make perfect sense, they’re inefficient and promote technology status quo rather than innovation, but it just is not going to happen any time soon.

Wilder and Pernick set out their action plan and follow-up each point with a careful analysis even someone with a modest understand of clean technology would understand. Certainly their points are well researched and reflect the years of experience both have in the clean technology industry. Unfortunately for Pernick and Wilder a well-reasoned argument does not go far in Congress these days. *Clean Tech Nation* is the result of many years of analyzing clean technology patents and the types of environments that foster clean technology innovation. While Wilder and Pernick have succeeded in presenting Americans with a clear-cut and easy to follow action plan for clean technology success I fear the pair still has much of their work cut out for them. Until the legislature is convinced of the merit of *Clean Tech Nation*’s argument this book will remain the most dangerous kind of idea - an idea without action.