

# Hillary Institute laureate works on climate solutions

The Hillary Institute of International Leadership today announces its 2014 annual, global Hillary Laureate. Its Christchurch-based executive director, MARK PRIN, introduces Michael Brune of the Sierra Club (US).

Serial green entrepreneur Elon Musk's Tesla S electric sports-car has just entered UK markets, rivalling Jaguar and Mercedes sales, and the multi-billionaire's stock is soaring. His US retail fronts in downtown Santa Monica (90 metres from Apple's flagship store) are people magnets, and a mid-size Tesla is on the way for Mom and Pop. Charging stations are popping up like mushrooms and Musk is offering their 20-minute charge technology free to all electric vehicle manufacturers.

We are in a transition economy, away from fossil-fuels and towards carbon-benign renewables on multiple fronts. And the pace of that change is accelerating, not just in terms of the technical issues, but also the rapid decline in costs as consumer take-up accelerates with it. The question remains however, will that transfer be fast enough?

Global investment in the renewable energy sector is around

US\$250 billion (NZ\$292b) per annum.

Renowned author and chairman of the UK's largest solar provider, Jeremy Leggett (the 2009 Hillary Laureate), estimates we need to quadruple that in the next 20 years to head off irreversible warming this century. And at the same time older, dirtier carbon-based industries must be retired.

Enter Michael Brune, executive director of The Sierra Club, 2.4 million members and counting, founded in 1892 by John Muir, America's most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist.

Named today the Hillary Institute's 2014 global leadership laureate, Brune's is a seminal voice on this issue.

"I've been working on solutions to the climate crisis for a long time, but I never really expected that it would hit home for me quite the way it did," Brune says.

"[Hurricane] Sandy rocked our nation into awareness of a threat

to everything we hold dear. We must meet that challenge."

Hillary Institute international board governor Joan Shapiro, of Chicago, wastes no words: "Mike is a superbly able strategic thinker. Within every organisation he works, he identifies a core issue and develops a large-scale, long-term campaign to implement change."

Under Brune's leadership The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign received US\$50 million from Bloomberg Philanthropies to help phase out coal and replace it with a clean-energy US economy. More than 160 coal plants either have been, or are scheduled to retire in part because of the campaign. And now there's federal support with the Obama Administration's commitment to 30 per cent greenhouse gas cuts via EPA regulation – absent the need for the often infantile paralysis of congressional politics.

There is, of course, a human face to these changes. Here in New

Zealand, West Coasters are gradually coming to terms not just with the deep tragedy of Pike River, but also the decline of coal as a core livelihood for generations. Solid Energy's coal price is down 65 per cent this year with further attendant job losses.

A 2013 bi-partisan conference considered a range of "post coal economy" options in the US, including (interestingly from our current New Zealand viewpoint), development of high speed internet into rural areas, which has already created thousands of digital jobs at a visa processing centre in Williamsburg, Virginia, utilising state-of-the-art, facial recognition technology.

Similarly, Brune's vision is driven by this upside challenge. Last week re-affirming the "Blue-Green alliance" (14 large US labour unions and environmental NGOs), he addressed the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Detroit. Clean economy in the heartland of American car-culture?

The industry's recovery post Obama's bail-out (repaid early) has been dramatic. Take the Chevy Volt, head of its class on sales, but one example of smarter, vastly more fuel-efficient vehicles; Bush-era "Hummers" a distant, costly memory.

Moreover, a major UAW capital infusion in Musk's Tesla helped get the company through the global financial crisis and enabled Ford to upgrade five plants.

Brune says: "As we grow our clean energy economy, we cannot rely on the market alone to respect or create healthy communities. It is no consolation to families that have lost their sole means of livelihood or have suffered from years of underemployment to learn that some new jobs were created making solar panels in China, or even in the next state over.

"We not only need strong and just pollution standards like the one announced this week, we also need policies that create good jobs for affected workers and



Michael Brune

communities. And we need corporations to treat both their workers and the environment with greater respect."

As the biologists, behaviouralists and ad-men remind us, transition and game-change is dependent on helping less fearful parts of the human brain to see a way forward.

Brune is clearly not a naive optimist who believes absent direction society will simply "do the right thing". The challenge is to pragmatically and passionately build the economic, social and

## HILLARY INSTITUTE

» Launched by (the late) Sir Edmund Hillary and its patron, Helen Clark, in 2007, the Hillary Institute for International Leadership's 2012-15 focus is climate equity.

» See [www.hillaryinstitute.com](http://www.hillaryinstitute.com).

» Mike Brune is the 6th global Hillary Laureate for outstanding, mid-career leadership on climate change. Selected by an international board of governors chaired by David Caygill, former laureates are Jeremy Leggett (United Kingdom, 2009), Peggy Liu (China, 2010), Aimee Christensen (United States, 2011), President Anote Tong (Kiribati, 2012) and Amazon Watch founder Atossa Soltani (2013).

political 'climate' that enables a global, equitable, clean economy to take hold.

No-one believes (given entrenched interests), that will be easy – but it has to be done. As Brune says: "We will get there – the only question is how soon. The answer? The sooner the better."