



PERSPECTIVES



by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

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A Spacecraft Named Resilience *More Than a Rocket, a Metaphor for Our Times*

The crew capsule aboard the Falcon 9 SpaceX rocket that NASA successfully blasted into space last weekend achieved an amazing milestone. This incredible event was the remarkable result of the public-private sector partnership between NASA & SpaceX that will, for the first time in nine years, send astronauts directly from the US to the International Space Station. This is a demonstration of the very best that both sectors can accomplish by working together to solve national demands. The crew-chosen name of the “Resilience” capsule will permit us all to focus on the showcase of the resilient return to space aboard a uniquely powerful, reusable US spacecraft. In fact, naming it Resilience has given us all an opportunity to reflect on the years passed since the Space Shuttle was grounded in 2011.

Quoting Florida Today in describing the spacecraft; “It can withstand temperatures exceeding 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit as it barrels through Earth’s atmosphere but it’s more than a spacecraft. To the astronauts that named the capsule, it’s a symbol of what mankind can accomplish in the face of extreme adversity.”

The article goes on to quote Resilience’s Commander Mike Hopkins who observed; “I think all of us can agree 2020 has certainly been a challenging year: A global pandemic, economic hardships, civil unrest, isolation. And despite all of that SpaceX and NASA has kept the production line open and finished this amazing vehicle that’s on its maiden flight to the International Space Station.” Those two quotes best summarize the significance of the upcoming launch. With the Resilience launch, America will return to regularly scheduled trips into space (the next one reusing the same rocket will occur on March 30, 2021). This will be precisely what the private sector requires for our next bold move: space tourism. Resilience is a spacecraft, a metaphor, and a gateway to the heavens.

The noun “resilience” is defined as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness,” or in the alternative, “the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.” Wow, have we faced difficulties this year. Yet we continue to bounce back and achieve new heights. The victory of President-Elect Biden can be seen as proof of the electorate’s resilience with 77 million people voting for him – the most by far that ever voted for an American president. Americans were eager to “turn the page” on what has been the most vitriolic, politically poisonous, and medically challenging year for more than 100 years.

Here in Montecito/Santa Barbara we have been dealing with the question of resilience since the Thomas Fire of December 2017. In 2018 the World Business Academy volunteered a design for a microgrid that would power the Montecito Fire Station located in the upper village even if it lost power from the grid (it lost power in the fire and was unable to pump diesel to fire trucks, taking them out of service). The Montecito Community Microgrid would also

power the physically co-located water department facility that controls the dam even in a power loss, which once allowed hundreds of thousands of gallons of water to pour down the hillside causing the destruction we all witnessed. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the contractor the Academy brought in to supervise the actual microgrid implementation (the Clean Coalition team), the community has not yet been willing to fund the final implementation of the microgrid. Unfortunately, this leaves us as less than “resilient” and more likely to sustain one more future catastrophe at some point.

In a similar vein, the Academy has been advocating for a Santa Barbara county microgrid that would cover the electrical “load pocket” from Ventura to Goleta (approximately 250-300 megawatts) for several years. The purpose of this interconnected microgrid would be to replace, in a resilient way, the existing “umbilical cord” of Southern California Edison’s back country main parallel transmission lines so a future fire won’t incapacitate all of South County’s electrical system. And, despite the fact that both PG&E and Edison are staging Public Safety Power Shutoffs (“PSPS”), Edison has not dropped its continuing resistance to letting us create resilience for ourselves here on the Central Coast.

To obtain resilience we need to disconnect from our 100 percent reliance on a single transmission line that supplies our power and replace it with locally generated, locally distributed microgrid power. It is long past time that we, the residents, were freed from Edison’s total monopoly control of our electrical system and begin to construct resilient, 100 percent renewable and reliable local energy created and distributed by our own microgrid at a cost far below what Edison currently charges. Which, by the way, Edison has put in for yet another rate increase which will benefit them but not us as the ratepayers.

Other areas we should explore include how to make our politics more resilient, because clearly, we must come back from the precipice of a civil war that Mr. Trump is encouraging his followers to consider with his total denial of the legitimacy of our election. We also need to look at the resilience of our economy which has been shattered far worse than most people realize. We need to address the resilience of our employment markets where approximately 25 million people can’t currently find a full-time job.

Of course, we also have to think about creating resilience in our healthcare system which has been devastated by Covid, and now must develop resilience to successfully get 330 million people vaccinated. We have to build resilience into our education system from pre-K through postgraduate, as the entire system is now in shambles with every expectation that matters will get worse with this pandemic before they get better. We need to develop resilience in our labor markets as automation replaces yet more jobs.

Finally, we have to develop deep emotional resilience as the death toll from Covid when you read this column exceeds 260,000. Thank you, crew of Resilience, for reminding us that resilience is precisely what we need to achieve at this seminal point in history.