

The Honorable Richard D. Lamm was governor of Colorado (1975-1987). Trained as both a lawyer and a CPA, he has a passion for the common good that has translated into efforts to reduce population growth (especially through limits to immigration), to protect the environment, and to challenge an unjust and financially crippled health care system. The Social Contract has published several essays and articles by Governor Lamm and featured his work in its Spring 2004 issue, but we select this concise statement of his thinking from our Summer 1995 edition.

A Humble Appeal

How would you have responded?

by Richard Lamm

I received this letter from a Bangladeshi student asking for help in migrating to the United States. The penmanship of the letter was impressive and it was accompanied by a photograph.

Dhaka
15.8.94

Dear Sir:

With great respect I beg to say that I shall remain ever grateful to you if you kindly read and respond to my following humble appeal.

I am K. S. Shahryer, a Bangladeshi student. I have no brother or sister. My mother died when I was one year old. My grandmother brought up me. She too died some years ago. Indeed, I am very lonely in this world. I had to struggle much from my childhood. In spite of much problems I have got graduation degree. Now I have to live on house tuition.

Sir, in order to get higher education (I prefer M.B.A.) then a job and a little happiness, I have been desirous and trying much for a long time to go to the U.S.A. or any rich country. I have to study there in undergraduate level, because Bangladeshi graduation (B.A.) degree is not valued everywhere. I

have none here to help me to go abroad. You know Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries. Jobs are scarce and salary is too little here.

So, I am writing you, a great person in this hope that you will help me to come to your country for higher education. It will be the best if you can help to get a scholarship. Of course, I shall work there for tuition fees.

Sir, I want your help in any condition. If you like I shall stay with your family and serve you as possible. I shall be very happy if you or anybody of your country takes me even as an adopted son.

Sir, if you are not able at all to help me to go abroad, yet kindly don't miss to send at least \$10.00 for postage to write to others. Even such mere postage cost is now hard to me to collect. With this I shall have been writing to many other rich and great persons in different rich countries untill (sic) some one helps me to go abroad. I do hope one day somebody will help me to go abroad. And why won't you be that very person who will help me to fulfil my desire as Lord has made you rich and famous? I am awaiting for your kind response. I beg your pardon for any wrong.

*Sincerely (sic),
/s/ Shahryer*

* * * *

Governor Richard D. Lamm
5401 East Dakota, #20
Denver, CO 80222

Mr. K. S. Shahryer
[Address]

Dear Mr. Shahryer:

I was impressed with your letter and with the

Richard D. Lamm, former governor of Colorado, is Co-Director of the Center for Public Policy at the University of Denver. He has written or co-authored six books including *Megatraumas: America in the Year 2000* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985) and, with Gary Imhoff, *The Immigration Time Bomb: The Fragmenting of America* (Dutton and Company 1985).

imagination, determination and initiative that it took to write and send. You have great talent and drive.

That said, I would like to explain to you (and perhaps partly to myself) why I must say no.

I believe a country's immigration policy should serve the needs of that country. America, at one time, was an empty continent and needed immigrants, skilled or unskilled. Today, we are no longer an empty continent, but live in crowded strip cities — there are no more blank spots on our map. Our economy has little need for new unskilled — and even skilled — labor. We count millions of our own people unemployed and underemployed, and there are millions more of discouraged workers who are uncounted in the unemployment figures. I believe America's first duty should be to our own unemployed and underemployed.

We are the destination of choice for literally hundreds of millions of people, many of them as deserving as you. All of them have stories that tug at our hearts. But we cannot build an immigration policy one individual at a time. Public policy must ask how many Shahryers we can accept, absorb into our economy, and assimilate into our society. In public policy, we must use both our hearts and our heads.

My heart wants to give you a chance, but my head says we must set limits. America's population, if current birthrates continue for 60 years, would level off in 2030 at about 305 million people — 50 million more than we now have. Adding in immigration under current policy, the U.S. population would increase (in 2030) to 436 million and still be growing. The difference between our population stabilizing at approximately 300 million and growing exponentially is our immigration policy.

I do not want my grandchildren living in an America which has two people for every one here today. I do not want the habitable parts of my country populated as densely as Bangladesh — or anything close.

I can think of no public policy reason why we should double the U.S. population. Would it improve our quality of life? Would it improve our own poor?

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country."***

Would it enhance our school systems, or our parks and recreation facilities? Does our economy, with all its current unemployed and underemployed, need more workers? Does our national security need more citizens?

And with all the demands by our own citizens for higher education, how can we pay for the education of others? Please, do not misunderstand me. I admire your asking, but my head says sadly we should use our limited resources on our own citizens. I learned in my 12 years as governor of Colorado that "to govern is to choose." It costs a lot of money to create a job in these high-technology days — about \$40,000. The economy and the quality of life in my country cannot accommodate the deserving millions who want to come here.

In a world of want, I am arguing we should dramatically *decrease* our immigration and adopt policies which make sense for our own people. I would bring in mainly *temporary* political refugees (who should return to their own country when the danger is passed), and spouses and minor children of people we have already accepted. I would, regretfully, say "no" to all the others who want to come. There are simply too many. Our most generous response would alleviate only an infinitesimal part of the need.

I would urge you to stay in Bangladesh and apply your obvious talents and drive toward improving your own country. Make it another Thailand, or Taiwan. Stay and fight for your country and its future. Let us know how we can help you in this. I believe it is better for America to help all of Bangladesh by economic development rather than to rescue one isolated individual by allowing him to migrate here.

I know your country is poor, but so were South Korea, Malaysia and Spain not many years ago. You can make a difference! I know the problems look immense, and doubtless you wonder what one person can do to make it better. But bright, motivated people are the most important economic resource — your country needs your talents.

I wish you good luck.

Yours very truly,

/s/ Richard D. Lamm
Governor of Colorado (1975-1987)