

# Governor Lamm's Prescient Book

## *A second look at Megatraumas*

Book Review by Wayne Lutton

As he was finishing his third term as Governor of Colorado in 1985, Richard Lamm's book, *Megatraumas*, was released. It opens at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the first woman elected U.S. President, Susan J. Hesperus (which means "evening star") preparing her State of the Union address. While we never get to read her speech, we do review a heterogeneous collection of papers, articles, speeches, and memoranda submitted by members of her Cabinet for use in preparing it. Governor Lamm employed the device of looking backward from the year 2000 to delineate his views on what was wrong with America in the mid-1980s. These were not predictions, but rather a series of *projections* of trends as he thought they might develop over the following 15 years. The prospects were not encouraging. By 2000, he suggested:

- The U.S. economy would be debt-ridden, with structural unemployment nearing 20 percent, and high inflation leading to bank failures and riots. The U.S. came to have the lowest percentage of capital investment and the lowest growth in productivity and savings of any major industrialized country. America acquired the reputation of producing shoddy goods (auto-rental companies reported that U.S.-made cars required two or three times more servicing than comparable Japanese models). The middle class would be virtually wiped out by these inter-related economic predicaments.

- The U.S. has the most expensive and inefficient health-care system in the world. Americans still drink too

much, smoke too much, and fail to wear seatbelts while driving. Yet, the federal government continues to subsidize the tobacco industry and downplays preventive medicine. After abusing their bodies for years, Americans turn to the government for expensive re-fits (artificial hearts, kidneys, cancer treatment, etc.)

- Immigration would be out of control. At a time when the U.S. economy was not creating enough new jobs for our own citizens, the federal government allowed millions of new immigrants to enter. The Southwest had become a "Hispanic Quebec." Taking their cue from Castro's success in 1980, when he released thousands of criminals, mental defectives, and deviants into Jimmy Carter's open arms, likewise other countries sent political terrorists, agents, and common criminals across the porous U.S. borders.

- America's educational system had entered a new Dark Age. Prosperous countries were training scientists and engineers. U.S. schools turned out tax accountants, real-estate salesmen, and lawyers. By 2000, two-thirds of all the world's lawyers would be practicing in the United States.

- America had become a dangerous, crime-infested country. "Gentrification" failed in the long run, and the desperately poor and criminal classes largely populated U.S. cities. In Lamm's book, the Department of Housing and Urban Development submits a plan calling for the federalization of large urban areas, which are then placed under martial law. The victimized poor are relocated to safe areas where housing and employment are available. The criminals and drug addicts are sent to prison camps and rehabilitation centers. It is recommended that Cleveland undergo salvaging for all usable materials "and then be bulldozed and its site finally reforested as a national park."

### **Megatraumas: America at the Year 2000**

by Richard D.  
Lamm

New York: Houghton Mifflin  
290 pages, out of print, used copies  
available.




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- Our groundwater is badly contaminated.
- The U.S. has an international welfare load to match its domestic one. An effort to increase exports to what a Treasury report characterizes as the “never-to-be-developed countries” has led to a dangerous overexploitation of American farmland.

Governor Lamm did not believe that our future was necessarily a dark one. Over the last quarter of *Megatraumas*, a new President is elected, following the “near disaster” of the Bush Administration. The fictional President Morgenstern (“morning star”) manages to balance the budget and even starts paying off the national debt toward the end of his first term; means-testing for all welfare applicants leads to further budget cuts; health-care costs are reduced as prevention is stressed; the pension system is overhauled; the Federal Government regains control of our borders; the infrastructure – roads, highways, bridges, railroads, port facilities – is being rebuilt; U.S. food and economic aid is limited to countries that make genuine efforts to help themselves.

At the time his book first appeared, I wrote in *National Review* (September 12, 1986), Lamm has:

*Performed a valuable public service by identifying problems that we must not continue to cover over with a glaze of shallow, contrived optimism, as so many presidential contenders and think-tank spokesmen are doing at present.*

During a symposium on “The Conservative Movement: Then and Now,” Russell Kirk suggested that “It has happened from time to time in the history of civilization that a period of decadence and discouragement has been followed by a period of renewal and hope. It can be so with our American civilization.” Kirk may have been right, but for such a rebirth to occur, the traumas outlined by Governor Lamm will have to be addressed with more than just another dose of supply-side happy talk. In the mid-1980s, Lamm saw the United States as “a nation in liquidation.” He was not alone in this concern. At about the same time, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn warned, “Seen from the outside, the massive upheaval in American society is approaching the limit beyond which it will become ‘meta-stable’ and must collapse.”

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