

Sleepless in Wisconsin? Not!

But Overpopulation Issue Is Getting a Closer Look

By Dave Gorak

In wake of the recent news that Wisconsin's population since 2000 has increased nearly five percent to 5.6 million people, it's still a very safe bet that a majority of this state's residents are not going to stay up nights worrying about overpopulation and the environment.

First things first, the old saying goes. Probably the most burning question in the minds of most Wisconsinites today is whether Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre still has what it takes to bring his team back to its traditional level of respectability.

No, adding 253,285 people to the state's 65,498 square miles of land can hardly be seen in the same light as the problems associated with cramming too many people in one area that, say, you will find associated with the 9.4 million people living in the six counties that comprise the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

Nevertheless, there is a renewed interest here and across the country in how rapid population growth can affect the environment and one's standard of living. And it's coming not only from what could be a new generation of genuine environmentalists

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Sen. Gaylord Nelson, the founder of "Earth Day," recognized the interrelated problems of environmental degradation, overpopulation, and unrestricted immigration.

like the former Wisconsin governor and U.S. senator Gaylord Nelson but—if you can imagine it—from a mainstream media known for their spineless refusal to confront the realities of this nation's immigration-driven population explosion that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, will mean a U.S. population of 420 million people by 2050 and 571 million people in 2100.

Vicky Markham, director of the Center for Environment and Population, a nonprofit research group in New Canaan, Conn., agrees that the subject no longer can be ignored. A report by her organization scheduled for release this fall was the subject of a lengthy piece that appeared in the Aug. 6 edition of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, "America: taking it to the limit?" [See full text of article on page .]

(Overpopulation) "is an issue whose time as come," Markham told the Union-Tribune. "The scientific data pretty much across the board shows that we in the U.S. are reaching many of the nation's ecological limits, one by one, and that many (limits) are

linked to population trends."

"That article reflects much of my thinking on this issue," said Wisconsin Secretary of State and former Sierra Club director Doug LaFollette, who stood with Nelson during the 1960s environmental movement. "It is important to understand better the connection between population and the environment."

Late last year, shortly after Nelson's death, *The Capital Times* in Madison ran a two-part series entitled "The People Problem" that asked, "Will Anyone Take up Gaylord Nelson's Fight Against Overpopulation?"

In Part I of this article, *Times* Associate Editor John Nichols notes that while 25 years ago the media would have been “comfortable” with the overpopulation issue, “Most of our newsrooms today are guided not by traditional journalistic values [but] by marketing values. And so the desire to make Gaylord Nelson into an easy iconic figure—the Earth Day founder and environmentalist who never did anything controversial.” (In April 2004, readers of the *Times*’ sister publication, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, many of whom probably didn’t know about Nelson’s repeated calls to severely restrict immigration, voted him their “favorite state environmentalist.”)

“Gaylord’s view was an honest one rooted in reality,” Nichols said in a recent interview for this issue of *The Social Contract*. “I actually think there now are an immense number of people who would accept the notion that overpopulation represents a serious problem. Our paper will use this as an opportunity to look at this issue and how we should we respond to it.”

Nichols quickly adds, however, that any discussion about the issue of overpopulation brought on by mass immigration is pure “fantasy” unless it includes accepting the fact that our trade policies play a major role in the migration of people.

“We have to recognize why people come here,” said Nichols, who opposes building a fence along our border with Mexico. “NAFTA forced Mexican farmers off their land and many of the U.S. factories that were built in Mexico have now moved to China. The current situation is no good for American or Mexican workers.

“It is unhealthy to have large numbers of people moving from rural areas to cities as is the case in Mexico and China. During the present immigration debate we have lost sight of the core reality. We don’t have to demonize illegal Mexican workers or Americans who oppose illegal immigration. What we have to do is develop a rational trade policy that encourages people to stay home and reap the benefits of their own economies. But too many of our politicians don’t want to address this aspect and never get beyond the clichés and biases.”

Nichols warns that now is the time we should be dealing with these issues because unlike the 20th century that saw the United States rise to world dominance, the twenty-first century may not



Sen. Russ Feingold supports environmental protection, curbing population growth, but voted for the Senate’s amnesty bill.

be as kind to us.

“We should be prepared for a rough ride,” he said. “If we don’t start addressing these problems now we will end up getting kicked in the teeth.”

L a F o l l e t t e agrees: “[Cheap labor] is like drugs; you can’t stop the supply until you stop the demand. And the way to do that is to enforce our immigration laws. But there is no leadership in the current legislature or in Washington.”

Lack of Political Leadership

Two Wisconsin politicians who exemplify this lack of leadership (but who are long on pandering to the “immigrant vote”) are Sen. Russ Feingold and Dane County Executive Katherine Falk. Both Democrats, Feingold and Falk, talk the talk about protecting the environment but their actions tell a different story.

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In a February 2, 2006, letter to the editor of the *Times* defending his environmental record, Feingold said he has “steadfastly worked to ensure that Wisconsinites have clean air and clean water, and during his April 20 “listening session” in Monroe

immigration in part because of her Irish and German ancestry. (Gaylord Nelson is on record as saying that environmentalists who oppose reduced immigration levels are “phonies.”)

A year ago Falk told the *Times* that she had

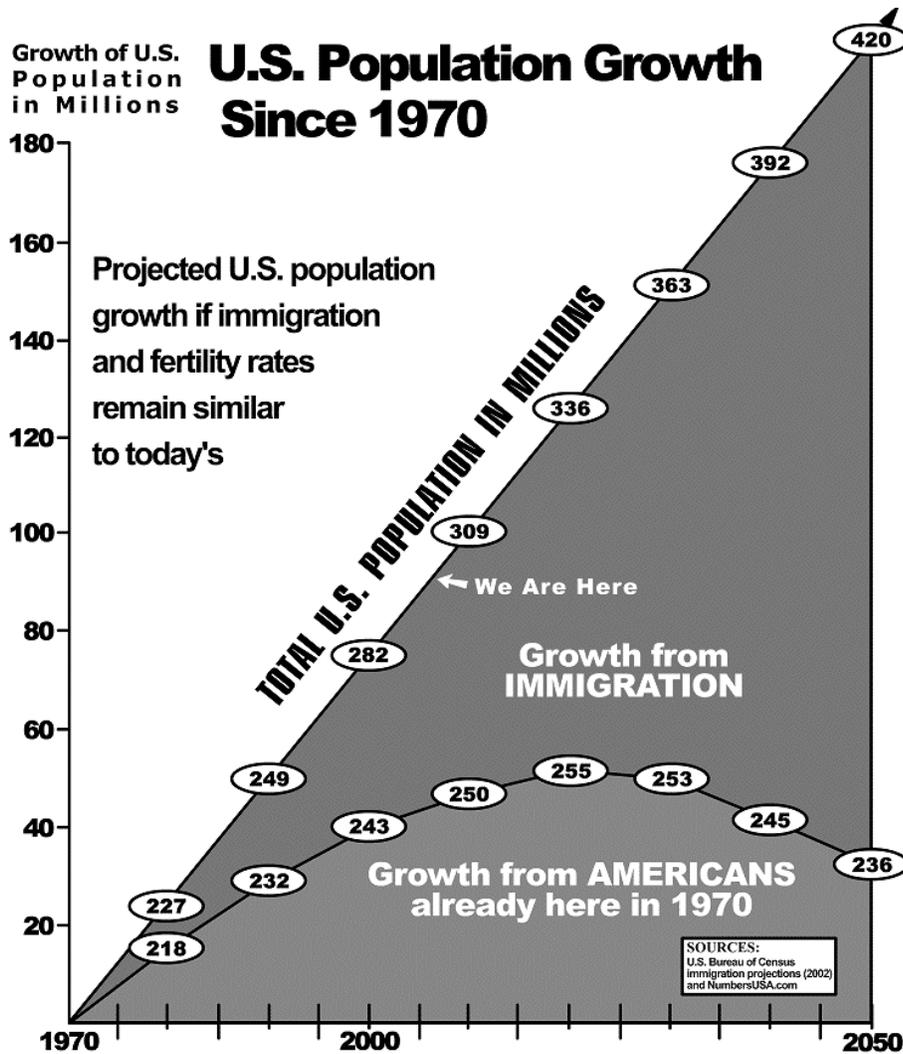
listened to residents in her fast growing county and shares their concerns about excessive growth, but these days her campaign web site says she’s also giving considerable attention to her “commitment to Latino people and Issues.”

Among her list of achievements that demonstrate this new “commitment:”

- “Kathleen sent a letter to United State (sic) House and Senate Leaders urging them to reject the hateful House bill (H.R. 4437).”

- “Kathleen signed into law and vigorously supported a “don’t ask, don’t tell ordinance for county law enforcement to ensure undocumented residents don’t place themselves or their families at risk when receiving rights and services.”

(Falk also made points April 10 when she spoke to a crowd of anarchists during the “Day Without Latinos” rally in Madison.)



County he told an audience of his constituents that he “opposed” unrestrained population growth.

But five week later, on May 25, he joined 61 of his Senate colleagues in voting for an amnesty (S. 2611) that not only would double our annual level of legal immigration to 2 million people but would add to our population more than 60 million foreign workers and their families over a 20-year period.

Falk, who this year is running for attorney general, is described as a “staunch environmentalist” but one who opposes the idea of restricting

Citing a busy schedule that included “back to back budget meetings,” a Falk spokeswoman said the candidate was unable to take part in a telephone interview for this article.

The question Wisconsin voters should be asking Feingold and Falk, respectively, is why they are looking the other way at the state’s estimated 41,000 illegal aliens at the same time they say they oppose unrestrained population growth and are committed to “taking some of the fuel out of the sprawl engine.” ■