

A Quality of Life Issue

Americans do not seek population growth, sprawl

by Richard D. Lamm

A new and controversial public policy question is rapidly emerging in U.S. politics: how large a country do we want the United States to be? How many people do we want in California, Colorado, or Vermont? The "growth" issue, which hit California decades ago, is now one of the top three issues in most of the United States. People look at today's sprawl, traffic jams and disappearing amenities and grieve over the rapidly diminishing quality of life.

For the first time in America, many people are asking: what is our demographic destiny? How many people can live a quality life in Colorado, California, or the United States? The nation is slowly recognizing that, bottom line, this is a question of

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immigration. American women are averaging 2.1 children in their lifetime, a number that will stabilize the U.S. population by the year 2040 at about 305 million Americans. Whether America stabilizes its population or doubles its size depends on what we do about immigration.

I moved to San Francisco in 1957 when there were about 10 million Californians. California was a paradise. There are now 32 million people and, largely because of immigration, you will have about 50 million people by the year 2010. I have yet to meet a Californian who wants 50 million neighbors. Colorado has 3.3 million people, and is heading to 5 million. Few Coloradans want to increase our population at all. Yet, our destinies are interrelated. Polls tell us that 400,000 Californians have left the state since 1990, mainly because they feel their quality of life has diminished. Shouldn't that be a warning to us all?

Ultimately, the growth issue is an immigration issue. If the United States doubles its population, does anyone doubt that Colorado, California, Vermont, North Carolina, etc. will not at least double their population? We cannot have a livable state or nation without controlling immigration.

The first U.S. Census in 1790 found 4 million Americans. This means we have had six doublings in our 200 year history

(8,16,32, 64, 128, 256). Just one more doubling gives us 500 million Americans. Two more doublings gives us about as many people as currently live in China or India. Our own birth rate will stabilize the U.S. population; immigration will cause it to double. Which of these do we want for our grandchildren?

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There is a powerful, non-xenophobic case to close down the "age of immigration." Immigration made sense when we were an empty continent with an agricultural economy. But, today, we are a cash/wage society that requires tens of thousands of dollars to create a job. We have a desperate need to find jobs for our own underclass. As conditions change, so should our policy change. America must go back to the bedrock of immigration policy and ask what are the public policy reasons for immigration. Ask yourself:

- Do we really want an America of 500 million people? A California of 50 million people? Immigration will decide whether we stabilize or whether we continue to grow.

- Do we have insufficient labor to run our economy? Does California need more unskilled labor? If both parties now agree that we must “end welfare as we know it,” where are we going to get the jobs to start welfare recipients up the economic ladder?
- Does immigration help us to develop a more fair, egalitarian society? Does it advance the interests of America’s minorities?

The answers to these questions are crucial to the

immigration debate. Our society must look at the long term domestic impacts of immigration and answer the public’s hard questions. It is not enough to answer in slogans.

Twenty-five years ago, a presidential commission spent a lot of time and money looking at reasons for population growth. The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future reported:

We have looked for, and have not found, any continuing economic argument for continued

population growth. The health of our country does not depend on it, nor does the vitality of business nor the welfare of the average person.”

Since that time, we have added 60 million new Americans, and California has doubled its population.

Inquiring minds want to know why? Who benefits? Who loses? Will immigration leave a better place for our grandchildren to grow up?

These questions will not go away. □

Time for a Moratorium

Family analogies illustrate common-sense justification

by Jack C. Terrazas
and Yeh Ling-Ling

Much time and energy have been spent on the immigration debate. How about letting common sense guide our immigration policy for all?

Item: Po Wong, director of the Chinese Newcomers Service Center in San Francisco, indicated

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in 1993 that of the 11,000 new Chinese immigrants who were looking for work through his agency, only 2 percent were successfully placed. He has also said: “I don’t think our community is equipped to welcome this large a number . . . It’s very depressing to see so many people come here looking for work.”

Think of America as comparable to a family with 10 children, including Paul who is blind, Mary, who has learning disabilities, and Peter, who has severe emotional problems. Would it be wise and responsible for such a family to adopt their neighbors’ children, even if they were beautiful and talented?

If the parents adopted their neighbors’ children or have more of their own, fewer of their limited resources would be left, particularly for the three children

with disabilities. Although the new additions did not cause Paul, Mary and Peter’s problems, their presence would make it much more difficult financially for the family to afford expensive specialists. A significant portion of the family’s income would have to be spent on food, day care, health care and other expenses for the new members of the family.

Is the situation in the United States so different? We now have 263 million residents, versus 60 million, when the Statute of Liberty was erected. We have \$5 trillion in national debt and 39 million Americans live below the poverty line. Today’s high-tech economy requires fewer and fewer workers. Millions of our workers are unemployed, millions are underemployed, and we also have countless discouraged workers in addition to those who have never

found work.

meant a 10 percent increase in family size?

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Is it wise for the U.S. to continue to absorb about 12 million immigrants a year? Immigration is not the sole cause of America’s problems, but continued mass immigration, legal and illegal, makes existing educational, budgetary, social and economic problems much more difficult to solve. Our immigration policy is also a disincentive for developing nations to provide for their own citizens.

Proponents of mass immigration argue that the current percentage of immigrants in the U.S. today is much lower than around the turn of the century. Therefore, according to them, the U.S. should continue to maintain high levels of immigration. Those advocates fail to understand that America is similar to a family which once was very affluent and had only one child. Under those circumstances, the family could well afford to adopt four children, even though this would mean a 400 percent increase in family size.

Unfortunately, the parents have been laid off from work, are heavily in debt and now have 10 children, some of whom have not been fed three meals a day. Would it be wise to adopt one more child, even if this only

Many existing legal immigrants and citizens in this country are feeling the effects of mass immigration as our schools, labor markets and freeways are overflowing. A Roper Poll released this past

February showed that 78 percent of blacks and 52 percent of Hispanics want annual immigration to be less than 300,000 a year. A Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll in March showed that the majority of Americans favor a five-year moratorium on all immigration.

Reducing legal immigration only requires an act of Congress signed into law by the president at

no cost to taxpayers. Illegal immigration can be significantly curbed by taking away the job and benefit magnets in the United States through employer sanctions and tamper-proof documents to verify immigration status. Our national leaders should practice democracy and exercise some common sense by immediately enacting a five-year moratorium on legal immigration with an all-inclusive ceiling of 100,000 a year. Such a moratorium would allow us to address existing problems and to develop a long-term, sustainable immigration policy. □