

America Is Still Missing the Real Solution

By TRACY CANADA

Just a few days after his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama followed through on his promise to work against climate change. According to *USA Today*, he “ordered the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Transportation Department’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to develop and issue new fuel-efficiency and greenhouse gas standards by March 31, 2016.”

This was the second wave of such standards imposed by the President since 2011. A White House press release on the President’s new order noted: “The first round...finalized in September 2011, is projected to save 530 million barrels of oil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 270 million metric tons...over the lifetimes of the vehicles covered.” Environmentalists hailed the program as a victory, expecting the new order to further the progress of the 2011 standards.

Negative Population Growth (NPG) certainly applauds this effort — as we will encourage any reasonable, responsible methods to curb America’s disproportionate and insatiable consumption of limited natural resources. We must become far better stewards of our environment, and we must learn to live on less. However, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), in 2011 America consumed a total of 6.87 billion barrels of refined petroleum products and biofuels — that is 18.83 million barrels per day. *At that rate, President Obama’s 2011 mandate would only save our nation 28 days’ worth of oil.* Is this really the “solution” it was heralded as, or just another misleading promise — one that buys us a little more time with the status quo, so that America doesn’t have to change?

One of President Obama’s other comments highlights what NPG sees as the real root of our nation’s

challenge: “Every time someone says you can’t grow the economy while bringing down pollution, it turns out they’ve been wrong.” *It seems, once again, Americans are being told we must grow-grow-grow our way to “freedom” from our environmental and economic challenges.*

In a *President’s Column* last summer, NPG drew attention to the state of our nation’s energy sector and infrastructure. In its *2013 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) noted: “the availability of energy...will become a greater challenge...as the population increases.” Yet another *President’s Column* explored the link between population growth and greenhouse gas emissions, concluding: “our population size is the principal determinant of the size of our greenhouse gas emissions.”

The reality, often dismissed or ignored by our elected officials and business leaders, is this: no matter what technological advances, usage limitations, improved efficiencies, and conservation efforts the United States implements, *we will never succeed in undoing the damage of our nation’s population growth.*

Consider this report by the EIA: in 2011, the U.S. was responsible for over 5,490 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from the consumption of energy.

- The entire continent of North America emitted 6,507 million metric tons in 2011 — *making the U.S. responsible for nearly 85 percent of our continent’s emissions.*

- The worldwide emissions for 2011 were 32,579 million metric tons — *making the U.S. responsible for nearly 17 percent of the world’s emissions.*

- In 2011, world population was nearing 7 billion and U.S. population was estimated at roughly 312.8 million. *With less than 5 percent of world population, we were emitting 17 percent of the carbon dioxide.*

- Obama’s strategy, while a step in the right direction, would only eliminate 270 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions — *less than 5 percent of our annual emissions.*

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According to the Worldwatch Institute, 2012 yielded the world's highest annual total of CO₂ emissions in history. That same year, world population exceeded 7 billion and U.S. population reached over 315 million — and both continued to grow...and grow...and grow. *It seems painfully clear that our world's overall emissions continue to rise — despite global efforts to decrease them.* We must recognize the link between this trend and the growth of both U.S. and world population.

In 2013, NPG updated and republished its Forum paper *Overpopulation and Overconsumption: Where Should We Focus?* Author Michael G. Hanauer thoroughly explores this important question, and concludes:

- Technology rarely produces lasting solutions — only additional difficult choices and tradeoffs;
- Overpopulation actually occurs at a lower point with a higher standard of living; and
- *Population growth directly drives increasing overall consumption.*

The U.S. provides perhaps the world's best evidence to support these conclusions. According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, over 80 percent of U.S. population growth is due to immigration — legal, ille-

gal, and the children of immigrants. While this migration does not impact global population numbers, it certainly increases global CO₂ emissions. The Center for Immigration Studies found that “immigrants in the U.S. produce an estimated four times more CO₂ in the U.S. as they would have in their countries of origin.” This is because, once settled here, they adopt our high-consumption and high-emissions lifestyle. And these figures do not even include the impact of children born to U.S. immigrants — their emissions would make the final totals much higher.

It is not difficult to see that as our population grows, overall global consumption and emissions are gravely impacted. While President Obama's efficiency mandate may reduce our grossly inflated emissions — and any step to protect our fragile environment is crucial — this will come nowhere near to solving our problem. This effort will not create a lasting, sustainable America for generations to come.

The only permanent solution to America's problem — or that of the world at large — is for us to slow, halt, and eventually reverse our population growth. We must reduce the overall number of consumers making demands on our environment and natural resources. Only then can we preserve a livable future, one that is sustainable over the very long term. ■

