

Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Much as I dislike doing so, I must complain about the title and some of the contents of my good friend Roy Beck's lead article in the Summer 1994 issue. The title, "The U.S. Congress and U.S. Population Growth" is misleading. The same incorrect implication is noted throughout the article.

The author is carried away with the impact of immigration on population size. It is an important ingredient but so is fertility. To label a legislator as responsible for population growth because he or she has voted for continued high levels of immigration is grossly unfair, particularly if such legislators have worked diligently over the years to assure Americans access to family planning and abortion services.

Fertility is barely mentioned and then only to argue (incorrectly, in my view) that "Congress could set the nation on the road to stabilization tomorrow with the simple passage of a single immigration bill with low enough numbers" (p.241). But even if immigration was reduced to zero, the population would still rise to well above 300 million before peaking if fertility remained at current levels. However, even a slight decline in fertility would have a tremendous impact on future population size. According to the latest Census Bureau projections, gradually reducing fertility from 2.1 to 1.8 [births per woman] would mean a difference of 42 million people by 2050.

I do not minimize the importance of reducing immigration. This is crucial if the nation is to stop population growth and perhaps even reverse its path. Both, immigration *and* fertility, must decrease if we are ever to attain such a goal.

I repeat: to criticize legislators solely on the basis of votes on immigration and label them responsible for population growth is incorrect and unfair. It results in ridiculous groupings of such true advocates of population limitation as Anthony Bielensen with a right-wing anti-family planning congressman like Robert Dornan!

To his credit, the author does point out that some "guardians of population growth" have stellar environmental records and are in the forefront of advocacy for family-planning. However, he never names these legislators. Given the overwhelming importance of lower fertility on both the individual and societal level, isn't it time that we praise those legislators who have long fought the good battle against the positions held by the two previous administrations?

May I suggest that Roy delve deeper into the records of our legislators to see how they have voted on family planning expenditures; on various abortion bills; on environmental issues; and, yes, on immigration legislation. Then, and only then, can he argue that legislator A is more or less favorable to population

growth than legislator B.

Sincerely,
Leon F. Bouvier
Lady Lake, Florida

Roy Beck Responds:

Leon Bouvier helpfully reminds us that we cannot keep our 260-million population from expanding to above 300 million through immigration reduction alone. Therefore, even though Americans long have maintained an environmentally responsible fertility rate of below-replacement level, there is need to lower it still further, especially by trying to prevent unplanned pregnancies to women who say they want no more children, and to lower the very high fertility of immigrant women. Nonetheless, I stand by my central analysis that the members of Congress listed as "Guardians of Rapid Population Growth" — regardless of how aggressively they support birth control efforts — indeed are forcing population congestion and expansion on the American people through their support of present immigration policies. I concede Leon's argument, however, that my "Supporters of Population Stabilization" charts give too much credit to those who are trying to limit immigration but continue to oppose efforts to prevent unwanted fertility. I accept the challenge to create a measure for the next Congress that takes that into account. Any suggestions, readers?

Editor:

I agree with you that it is foolish to invite people from all over the world to migrate to the United States as a means of solving their problems. The problems of Haiti need to be solved in Haiti, not in the U.S.A. The problems of Mexico need to be solved in Mexico, not in the U.S.A. The problems of Iran need to be solved in Iran, not in the U.S.A. It is the problems of the U.S.A. that need to be solved in the U.S.A. We focus on our problems and let them focus on theirs. Immigration is not the answer.

John H. Broy
Monterey Park, CA

Editor:

For over four years I have reiterated the opinion that population growth, exacerbated by immigration, legal and illegal, has been one of the root causes of the depletion of water supply, especially in California. I have advocated the adoption of Drought Safety Standards (adopted by Placer County [CA] on April 5, 1994) and have advanced the Placer County Immigration Reform Resolution as means to address the water crisis.

Unfortunately, environmental groups in the U.S. have neglected the multiplying effect of population

growth on domestic environmental problems such as California's depleted water supply. Former U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, now of the Wilderness Society, said in a keynote speech that the disconnection between efforts to protect the environment and those to stabilize population has occurred primarily "due to lack of attention to the concept of carrying capacity."

Most legislators are in the same position as former U.S. Representative Claudine Schneider who stated in an article in the Fall 1992 issue of **THE SOCIAL CONTRACT** that "despite her strong conservation credentials during 10 years in the House, it was only in 1990 that she began really to grasp the connection between immigration and environment."

California State Senator Art Torres has said, "It's time to reduce the flow of immigrants into the United States. Both the state and the nation have reached the point where we have to be much more restrictive. There is just so much our resources can handle."

In my view the water issue in California can easily be connected to immigration numbers.

Wendell Peart, DVM
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