

Halt Immigration While Reform Is Debated

By Jeffrey Hart

I'd like to call attention to a remarkable article published by former Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm. The column was printed in April in the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver and recently reprinted in the local New Hampshire press. It has the potential impact of the theses nailed to the church door by Martin Luther in 1517.

Lamm is a clear and courageous thinker who is not afraid to speak his mind, and he tells the sharp-edged truth on the issue of immigration to the United States.

The immigration issue is hitting hard even in New Hampshire, which is far from the Rio Grande and from the Caribbean.

But before we get to Lamm and to immigration, I want to say a word about sharp-edged issues.

As the election year of 1996 approaches, an enormous number of the issues that are "up" have sharp edges. They are not very available to consensus and compromises.

That is because those issues go to the heart of the nature of these United States, and both or all sides of the issues have moral and theoretical dimensions.

It is certainly true of the vexed "affirmative action" issue. It is true about fiscal policy, and the deficit, and the duties of this generation to the next. It is true about welfare — about whether it is an "entitlement," and about whether illegitimacy should be subsidized.

Next year there will be a powerful urge to postpone the ultimate confrontation and choice. Sen. Bob Dole's experience and temperament lead him to seek compromise, but he is being pushed toward confrontations he hates by dynamics of the Republican Party, as witness his recent speech demanding English as our official national language.

President Clinton would like to fudge things, as in his recent speech arguing that "the problem is wages, not welfare or immigrants."

The vague idea of Colin Powell is also a fudge, of course. Powell is Mr. Soft Edge in a sharp-edged time.

Richard Lamm puts the basic questions bluntly. Do we need more people in the United States? Are we under-populated?

"The average American woman has 2.1 children in her lifetime — a number that would stabilize the U.S. population by the year 2040 at approximately 305 million Americans," the former Democratic governor writes. "Whether we grow to 400 million or 500 million Americans depends almost entirely on immigration."

He asks, Do we need more labor to run our economy? Does America really need more unskilled labor? Does it need more skilled labor?

"The issue before us is not illegal immigration. That should be terminated in any case. The issue is legal immigration."

Lamm reminds us that 25 years ago the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future concluded: "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."

Lamm considers in his short article the issue of decent space. Are things even now too crowded? Anyone who has driven, or tried to drive, along the Los Angeles freeway can talk about that. Anyone who has tackled the Long Island Expressway — "the world's longest parking lot" — can chime in. If you want to use the New Jersey Turnpike, try driving around 3 a.m.

The population drain upon our natural resources is prodigious. The water table in Florida and in parts of California is dangerously low. The New York City water system is collapsing underground, and renewal is unaffordable. The beaches in California, New York and elsewhere are increasingly crowded or private.

Lamm does not touch upon the 1965 law that reformed immigration to America, unintentionally opening the gates to a huge influx from the Third World.

One result has been an exodus of English-speakers and traditional Americans from the large cities and the consequent rapid growth of small cities, of fewer than 1 million people. Is it acceptable that traditional Americans should feel like strangers in their own land?

Sometimes it is said that we are a "nation of immigrants." That is not true.

The original settlers were "colonists," makers of a nation. There was a huge surge of immigration in the latter half of the 19th century. And that was about it, until the 1965 law brought in the Third World.

The Statue of Liberty had nothing to do with

immigration. It was given to us by republican France to symbolize "liberty enlightening the world."

Years later, Emma Lazarus' famous lines were added: "Give me your tired, your poor..." Lazarus' sentiments are not found in the Constitution, and they are not in the Declaration of Independence.

When Lazarus wrote them, the United States had vast open spaces and a tiny population. There was work for strong backs, and for nation-building.

That is not the case today, not by a long shot.

At the very most, access to America's bounty should be available to those who can make a different kind of contribution — the men and women who bring rare skills and high education.

The issue before us is not illegal immigration. That should be terminated in any case. The issue is legal immigration.

We need a moratorium on all immigration — four years, say — while we discuss and debate the issue.

[Editor's Note: Copies of former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm's paper entitled "Immigration — More Means Less for All" can be obtained by writing the editors of *The Social Contract*, 316 1/2 East Mitchell Street, #4, Petoskey, MI 49770 or calling 1-800-352-4843.]