

Farewell to the Father of Earth Day

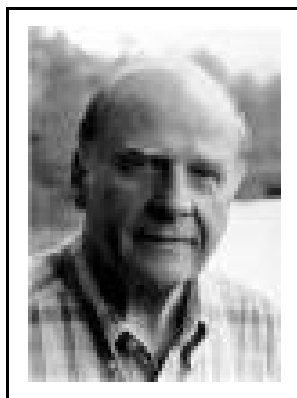
Gaylord Nelson, 1916-2005

by Leon Kolankiewicz

Early in 1999, I stopped by the Connecticut Avenue headquarters of the Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C., to visit an acquaintance of mine who worked for that venerable organization. The Wilderness Society was founded in the 1930' by such conservation legends as Aldo Leopold, Olaus Murie, Sigurd Olson, and Bob Marshall. Its timeless mission is to save the vestiges of Wild America that have somehow survived several centuries of unremitting human population growth and technological progress. My friend was now a counselor to the Society; I had first met him ten years before in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and later we had collaborated a bit through our mutual association with the Carrying Capacity Network. I was on its staff, he on its Board of Advisors.

On this occasion, we spent about an hour in his office lamenting the steadfast unwillingness of America's Environmental Establishment to support lower immigration levels. Both of us were indignant at this intransigence, when it was so obvious that mass immigration was driving the population hyper-growth which was the main cause of further environmental degradation in the United States. Indeed, during the 1990' an already bloated U.S. population had swollen by still another 33 million – the largest increase of any single decade in our history – to over 280 million.

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Two-thirds or more of this growth was directly or indirectly linked to immigration. California's malignant growth was metastasizing throughout the beleaguered West, to Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Oregon, Washington. Drove of harried Californians – both native-born and immigrant – were piling into these once thinly populated havens, bringing the traffic congestion, overcrowding, crime, smog, and sprawl they thought they were leaving behind. In turning a blind eye to ominous demographic projections and a deaf ear to those sounding the alarm, it was clear that mainstream environmental groups had

copped out – that they were sacrificing the nation's environment, quality of life, and prospects for sustainability on the altar of political correctness.

In particular we expressed dismay at the shameful conduct of certain staff and the national board of directors of the Sierra Club during a 1998 national referendum of Club members on the very topic of immigration and population growth. After a campaign marred not just with shenanigans and

chicanery by Club officials, but with scurrilous smears of "racism" and "xenophobia" against those of us favoring less immigration, six in 10 Club members voted for the Sierra Club to maintain its official, dubious "neutrality" on immigration levels.

My friend told me he was so disgusted, that later that year when a door-to-door Sierra Club fundraiser knocked at his Kensington, Maryland, home he gave the young man a lecture rather than a donation. This rejection takes on greater significance when one considers that my distinguished colleague was none other than the genial, good-natured Gaylord Nelson, former U.S. Senator and the founder or "father" of the first Earth Day in 1970. When the father of Earth Day

tells an organization to take a hike, they should know they're on the wrong path. Yet six years later, the Sierra Club still doesn't "get it." And they're not alone.

Gaylord Anton Nelson was born the third of four children in 1916 in tiny Clear Lake, Wisconsin, population 700. Clear Lake is located on the northwestern edge of that Midwestern state that had also been home to John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Sigurd Olson at different stages of their lives. Nelson's father was a country doctor while his mother dedicated herself to civic organizations and community service. As a boy, Gaylord was exposed to frequent discussions on local, state, and national politics. His father served as mayor of Clear Lake and his great-grandfather helped found the Republican Party in Wisconsin. Young Gaylord was drawn to politics from the tender age of 8 or 9 when his father took him to hear Robert "Fighting Bob" LaFollette, leader of the Progressive Party, speak from the back of a train. He was so impressed that when his father asked him if he wanted to enter politics, he replied: "Yes, but I'm afraid that by the time I grow up, Bob LaFollete will have already solved all the problems and there will be nothing for me to do."

Gaylord Nelson attended public schools in Clear Lake, graduated from San Jose State College (California) in 1939 and from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1942. He then served in the U.S. Army for four years, rising to first lieutenant and commanding a segregated quartermaster company of black soldiers. During World War II, he was shipped overseas and fought in the Pacific Theatre's Okinawa campaign. It was during this era that he also met his future wife, Carrie Lee, an Army nurse, at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; they crossed paths again months later in Okinawa. This war romance was profiled in a chapter of the best-selling 1998 book *The Greatest Generation* by NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brokaw.

Returning home, Nelson began practicing law in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1946 and soon was able to realize his childhood dream of entering politics. His 32-year political career started in 1948 when he ran for and was elected to the State Senate. He won again in 1952 and 1956, eventually serving four years as Democratic floor leader. In 1958 he was elected

Governor of Wisconsin, a post he held until state voters sent him to the United States Senate, where he began his first term in 1963. He was reelected to the Senate in 1968 and again in 1974, finally being swept out of office along with many other Democrats in the "Reagan Landslide" of 1980.

While Gaylord Nelson's most singular achievement was Earth Day, he was instrumental in the passage of many other landmark environmental conservation laws both in Wisconsin and Washington. In 1961, as Wisconsin's Governor, he created the Outdoor Recreation Acquisition Program, which resulted in the long-range acquisition, preservation and enhancement of a million acres of recreational land in

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the state, funded by a penny-a-pack tax on cigarettes. In the U.S. Senate, he was the author of legislation preserving the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail corridor and creating a national hiking trails system. He also sponsored or co-sponsored many other bills, including the Wilderness Act, Alaska Lands Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act, and the National Environmental Education Act. In his home state alone, his U.S. Senate legacy includes the St. Croix Wild and Scenic Riverway and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. A shaper of the nation's direction and destiny in tumultuous times, Nelson was one of only three Senators to vote against the \$700 million appropriation that signaled the start of the ground war in Vietnam. In

fact, it was the very protests and “teach-ins” against the Vietnam War that gave him the idea for Earth Day. For years he had been wondering, “how are we going to get the nation to wake up and pay attention to the most important challenge the human species faces on the planet?” In 1963, he had persuaded President John F. Kennedy to make an eight-state tour speaking on the need to conserve natural resources. But the idea was ahead of its time; even with this high-profile spokesman, the news media and the American public paid little heed to the tour and the concerns it raised.

Several years later, while reading an article on anti-Vietnam War teach-ins organized on college campuses across the nation to protest that war, it occurred to Nelson that this approach had potential. Why not promote a teach-in on behalf of the Earth? He began raising the funds to launch Earth Day on April 22, 1970. He wrote letters to all 50 governors and big city mayors asking them to issue Earth Day proclamations. He sent an Earth Day article to all college newspapers explaining the event and one to *Scholastic Magazine*, which went to most high schools and grade schools.

By this time the media and the nation were ready for the message behind Earth Day. Rachel Carson had issued a stark warning about pesticides causing a devastating “silent spring,” while Paul Ehrlich had sounded a jeremiad about the bursting of the “population bomb”. In 1969, a spill at an offshore oil rig blackened beaches in Santa Barbara, California, and the polluted Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, caught fire, burning a bridge. People and events had primed the pump of public receptivity.

The response was phenomenal: an estimated twenty million people participated in educational activities and community events around the country, demonstrating their concern for the environment. Across the nation, ten thousand grade schools and high schools, two thousand colleges, and one thousand communities participated in Earth Day activities. Even Congress recessed for the day, so that House and Senate members could speak about the environment and attend community events. The mayor of New York City closed Fifth Avenue to automobile traffic and 100,000 people attended an ecology fair in Central Park. It was a massive grassroots event in which schools and communities organized themselves once

they heard the idea. *American Heritage Magazine* described Earth Day as “one of the most remarkable happenings in the history of democracy.”

At an Earth Day celebration at the University of Wisconsin, Senator Nelson declared: “Our goal is an environment of decency, quality, and mutual respect for all other human creatures and for all living creatures....The battle to restore a proper relationship between man and his environment, between man and other living creatures will require a long, sustained, political, moral, ethical, and financial commitment – far beyond any effort made before.”

After his defeat in the November 1980 elections, in January 1981, at the age of 64, with a long and illustrious career already behind him, Nelson could well have just retired to his beloved Wisconsin woods. Instead, because he saw his life’s work on behalf of the Earth as unfinished business, he went to work for the Wilderness Society for the next quarter-century, first as its chairman and later as counselor. He dedicated himself to a wide range of land preservation issues, including elimination of logging subsidies, protection of national parks, and expansion of the National Wilderness Preservation System. And increasingly he spoke out on the need to stop U.S. population growth.

At the time of the first Earth Day, population stabilization, or as it was known then, “population control”, had been embraced by many cutting-edge environmentalists. But by the late eighties and especially the nineties, in spite of soaring U.S. population growth, environmentalist leaders increasingly ducked the issue. A well-attended, day-long environmental conference in Los Angeles in the early nineties barely touched on overpopulation; speaking at this event, environmentalist and Native American spiritual leader and “Faithkeeper” Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation gingerly referred to it as the big issue no one wanted to talk about. Why? Perhaps because by then a certain complacency had emerged due to U.S. birthrates that had declined sharply (at least among the white majority). Also, a backlash had set in because of the increasingly nasty politics of abortion, which was all too often entangled with population, though it was more of a women’s rights and moral issue.

Most important of all, however, was immigration.

Immigration rates had tripled or quadrupled from the 1960s to the 1990s. The number of immigrants and their political and financial clout – as well as the clout of their defenders and those who gained (or profited) from the entire mass immigration enterprise – had all

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multiplied enormously. Addressing immigration forthrightly and as a legitimate environmental issue carried a cost, or at least a real risk of costs, both political and financial, for environmental organizations. It divided their own memberships and alienated certain political allies on the left as well as some immigrant and ethnic groups themselves. And so mainstream environmental groups and leaders – the Environmental Establishment – punted on this political hot potato.

Behind the scenes, Sierra Club leaders appear to have been influenced by large donors and prospective donors who made their preferences for high immigration (and, thus, high U.S. population growth) known, in particular one wealthy man with a very personal, and sentimental attachment to immigration. Super-rich philanthropist David Gelbaum, a math prodigy who earned hundreds of millions on Wall Street picking hedge funds for other super-rich investors, anonymously handed the Club a cool \$101.5 million to support a variety of programs. This donation dwarfed all other private gifts in the Club’s history. Gelbaum said his views on immigration were shaped by the memory of his grandfather, who had come to America before World War I fleeing persecution of

Jews in the Ukraine. It wasn’t until 2004 that *Los Angeles Times* reporter Kenneth Weiss broke the story of the tightly-guarded, secret donation. Gelbaum told Weiss that, ‘I did tell [Sierra Club Executive Director] Carl Pope in 1994 or 1995 that if they ever came out anti-immigration, they would never get a dollar from me.’

There remained, however, a bulwark of well-known, established environmentalists and scientists who refused to abandon fundamental ecological principles for the sake of political expediency or financial gain. Among this veritable “Who’s Who” of modern environmentalists were the likes of Anthony Beilenson, David Brower, Lester Brown, Herman Daly, Dave Foreman, Henry Kendall, Norman Myers, Gaylord Nelson, Galen Rowell, Claudine Schneider, Stewart Udall, Paul Watson, Edward O. Wilson, and others. This group included a former Congressman with many perfect scores from the League of Conservation Voters (Beilenson); the former executive director of the Sierra Club and founder of Friends of the Earth, the League of Conservation Voters, and Earth Island Institute (Brower); the founder of the Worldwatch Institute (Brown); a pioneering ecological economist (Daly); a former Secretary of the Interior from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations (Udall), the founder of Earth First! (Foreman); a Nobel laureate in physics and founder of the Union of Concerned Scientists (Kendall); a founder of Greenpeace (Watson); and a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and distinguished Harvard biologist (Wilson). To say nothing of the founder of Earth Day himself, Gaylord Nelson.

Yet not even these all-stars could prevail against the new reigning orthodoxy. The group Zero Population Growth was founded by Paul Ehrlich in the same heady, hopeful days that produced the first Earth Day; yet by the mid-to-late 1990’ s, it refused to endorse immigration limits, then retreated from its mission of zero population growth in the USA and the world, and finally surrendered its name altogether, along with its vision and relevance. As noted above, in 1998 the Sierra Club brass convinced rank-and-file members (who were unaware of the possible influence of the \$100+ million donation with very notable string attached) not to adopt a comprehensive population policy that included reducing immigration. Several

other Club votes denying demographic realities followed, most recently in 2005.

With one or two exceptions like the Wilderness Society and the Izaak Walton League, large, well-heeled environmental groups such as the National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, and Natural Resources Defense Council assiduously avoided immigration altogether or disparaged any notion that it was even an environmental issue. The Wilderness Society, prodded by none other than Gaylord Nelson, did adopt a position in favor of U.S. population stabilization that acknowledged the necessity of immigration reductions, but left it at that. The National Audubon Society established an active and valuable population education program but did not take a stand on the need for immigration limits in the context of the imperative of U.S. population stabilization. And not one large group lobbied actively against bills or administrative actions that raised immigration levels; neither were any willing even just to lend their names to those small groups who did lobby against such measures.

Even as environmental groups increasingly distanced themselves from the population issue, Nelson's concern with U.S. overpopulation through the years never wavered. If anything, it intensified. Among other things, he lent his name to many initiatives such as the various Sierra Club referenda and Board of Director candidacies promoted by Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization (SUSPS), to Alan Kuper's Comprehensive U.S. Sustainable Population (CUSP), and to the stillborn U.S. Sustainable Population Policy Project spearheaded by Wisconsin Secretary of State Doug LaFollette. He served actively on Carrying Capacity Network's Board of Advisors, participating in studies, press releases, and news conferences. He introduced an environmentally-oriented version of Roy Beck's widely seen video *Immigration by the Numbers*. He issued a public statement lauding a study Roy and I made of why American environmentalists had turned their backs on U.S. population stabilization. And he wrote me personally that our thesis that confronting U.S. population growth was now taboo primarily because of immigration and fears of being labeled racist was "right on target."

His speeches around the country on

environmental sustainability highlighted the U.S. population problem. A newspaper article describing an Earth Day 1998 speech began: "Senator Gaylord Nelson spoke to a standing-room only audience at Beloit College's Richardson Auditorium [in his home state of Wisconsin], advocating that the U.S. limit immigration before U.S. resources are depleted." Later that year, in a Washington, D.C., press conference, Nelson bristled at the idea that what really motivates attempts to limit immigration is racism. He said that such accusations only served to silence a debate that was long overdue: "We ought to discuss it in a rational way. We have to decide if we're going to be comfortable with half a billion people or more." In a March 2000 speech to a civic group in Madison, Wisconsin, Nelson warned that if immigration and fertility rates continued, the U.S. could become as overpopulated as China and India. "With twice the population, will there be any wilderness left? Any quiet place? Any habitat for song birds? Waterfalls? Other wild creatures? Not much," he said. Perhaps remarkably for a prominent Democrat from Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy's home state of Wisconsin, Nelson went as far as invoking McCarthyism and demagoguery in describing the tactics of the open borders campaigners and self-styled "progressives" when reviling those environmentalists who advocated reduced immigration as racist or nativist.

Yet not even the Father of Earth Day's irreproachable reputation, peerless stature, and keen concern about U.S. overpopulation swayed the new environmental establishment and its avant-garde VIP friends. In April 2000 in Washington, D.C.'s historic Mayflower Hotel, Nelson was honored with a standing ovation by the organizers of the 30th anniversary Earth Day celebration on the National Mall. This event drew celebrities and performers the likes of Vice-President Al Gore, actors Leonardo DiCaprio, Edward James Olmos, Chevy Chase, and Melanie Griffith, and musicians Clint Black, Carole King, James Taylor and David Crosby. I attended a portion of the celebration on the National Mall, with the Capitol dome looming behind, and listened to a succession of earnest speeches and exhortations. Not one mentioned overpopulation.

It occurred to me that Gaylord Nelson was

revered by mainstream environmentalists because of his seminal contributions to the movement and *in spite of* his position on population and immigration, not *because of* it. These were tolerated, but disagreed with and politely ignored out of respect. Nelson told me that no one ever attacked him personally as a racist for his views, although apparently he did get some flak. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. generously wrote a glowing foreword to Nelson's final book *Beyond Earth Day* (2002). The book took environmentalists to task for not facing up to the threat posed by excessive immigration, yet Kennedy himself was among the nation's contemporary environmentalist elite who excoriated those in the environmental movement who dared broach immigration.

Even living legends are not immortal, and age inevitably began to take its toll on this tireless crusader for Mother Earth. On July 3, 2005, Gaylord Anton Nelson died quietly at his Maryland home of cardiovascular failure, at the age of 89, with his beloved wife of nearly 60 years at his side. His remains were cremated and buried at the family plot in Clear Lake, Wisconsin.

How does one regard the vast contributions of such a life? Thankfully, in his lifetime, Gaylord received all manner of accolades and recognition, all

the way up to the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the most distinguished award given to any civilian in the United States. And yet Nelson himself acknowledged that, in spite of all his tangible environmental achievements and all of his awards recognizing those achievements, the prize that he desired most – moving his country onto an authentically, environmentally sustainable footing – had eluded him. While chatting with him before a 1998 news conference at the National Press Club in downtown Washington, he startled me by announcing that when all was said *and done*, he considered himself a failure because the U.S. was moving away from, not toward, sustainability. He said this matter-of-factly, with a touch of regret but no self-recrimination, and certainly not attempting to elicit any fawning protest from me. It was, after all, the truth, and he was willing to face it unflinchingly.

And yet, Gaylord, because of your indefatigable efforts, Earth and these United States of America, as your home and the part of the planet to which you dedicated most of your energies, still have a fighting chance. It may be just a chance of realizing your most fervent hope, one now shared by millions, but it's a much better chance than if you hadn't been here to lead us and inspire us. As you yourself said at the first Earth Day 35 years ago, 'The battle to restore a proper

Our Southern Border is Trashed, Dangerous

by Robert Park, Founder of the Article IV, Section 4 Foundation in a letter to the *Arizona Republic*

The governors of Arizona and New Mexico have made a gesture toward dealing with our crisis on the border, all the while continuing to hold hands with their counterparts in Mexico.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter declared an emergency in Florida over a paltry 125,000 Cubans and sent troops to deal with it. Among that group were some serious bad guys and some mental cases.

Twenty plus years later, by some estimates, three million illegals cross our nation's southern border annually, laying waste to thousands of acres of private, state, federal and Indian lands. Fires are set in national forests; the fragile Sonoran Desert is being trampled to dust; tons and tons of clothing, trash and human waste are discarded randomly in such places as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, and Cabeza Prieta Refuge where the Sonoran Pronghorn is being driven to extinction -- extinction, as in forever – damage only a tank armada can surpass. No one living today will see much, if any, of it restored. Not even tax dollars can help.

After years of mis- or malfeasance in Washington, the Border Patrol was finally given a most important tool: direct access to the FBI criminal fingerprint data base known as IAFIS. Get this: in its first nine months of operation, it identified 102,024 lookouts involving major crimes to include 391 homicide suspects, 136 kidnapping suspects, 525 sexual assault suspects, 849 robbery suspects, 5,154 suspects for assaults of other types, and 10,394 suspects involved with dangerous narcotics. All this as a direct result of IAFIS technology.

Go back just 5 years. That's approximately 650,000 criminals who made it, lurking in neighborhoods across America – awaiting amnesty.

Ten years have passed since six states charged the federal government with having failed to meet its obligation under the Invasion Clause, Article IV, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution. As mentioned above, matters have grown exponentially worse.

American patience has grown thin – a fact made highly visible by the recent heroic Minuteman Project. Let's go back to court!

relationship between man and his environment, between man and other living creatures will require a long, sustained, political, moral, ethical, and financial

commitment – far beyond any effort made before.” This battle for the ages has really only just begun.