

An Open Letter to the AAAS

By LEON KOLANKIEWICZ

The following letter was transmitted via email to the Board of Directors of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on October 30, 2011, in support of the effort spearheaded by Stu Hurlbert, Madeline Weld, and David Schindler to allow Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS) and/or the Population Institute of Canada to operate an educational booth at the February 2012 AAAS meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia. **Leon Kolankiewicz**, an environmental scientist and national natural resources planner, has a B.S. in forestry and wildlife management from Virginia Tech and an M.S. in environmental planning and natural resources management from the University of British Columbia.

Dear AAAS President and Board,

I am very disappointed to learn that AAAS has denied the non-profit advocacy organization Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS) the opportunity to operate an educational booth at the upcoming February 2012 meeting of AAAS in Vancouver, Canada.

Only 12 years after it reached 6 billion, the human population on earth is now surging past 7 billion, provoking a good deal of consternation, discussion, and debate over the implications of this unsustainable population trajectory. Thus, CAPS' presence in Vancouver could hardly be more timely.

Your rescinding of CAPS' proposed exhibit is especially ironic and unfortunate in view of these two pertinent facts:

In 1968, AAAS' flagship journal *Science* published the classic essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" by Professor Garrett Hardin of UC Santa Barbara, which for several decades was the subject of more reprint requests than any other paper ever published in *Science*. I used to see it reprinted all the time in environmental anthologies, with appropriate reference to its first appearance in *Science*. Dr. Hardin was a founder of CAPS in 1986 and closely associated with it until his death in 2003. The late Constance Holden wrote a remembrance on Hardin for *Science* to mark his passing.

Vancouver, BC, specifically the University of British Columbia, my alma mater, is the birthplace of the Ecological Footprint (EF) concept and analysis, co-developed in the nineties by UBC Professor William E. Rees (my M.Sc. thesis advisor) and his PhD student Mathis Wackernagel. EF explicitly acknowledges the roles of both population size and per capita consumption in driving environmental degradation on earth, and in undermining the prospects of sustainability for our civilization. EF calculates that even now, with current population and consumption levels, to say nothing of those predicted for later this century, humanity in aggregate is consuming the equivalent of about 1.5 earths. This "ecological deficit" is made possible only by the continuous drawdown of natural capital like the fossil fuels and the corresponding buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The growing "ecological debt" cannot continue indefinitely.

To deny a population advocacy and educational organization like CAPS the chance to share its perspective on these important matters is ill-considered, and I earnestly hope you will reconsider.

Alternatively, and as requested by the Canadian and American petitioners, I hope you will allow the Population Institute of Canada to operate a booth in lieu of CAPS. The population issue is too important, and in the last couple of decades, it has been consistently and irresponsibly avoided by a variety of institutions. AAAS should be part of the solution, not the problem.

Sincerely,

Leon Kolankiewicz

"...A story that was the subject of every variety of misrepresentation, not only by those who then lived but likewise in succeeding times: so true is it that all transactions of preeminent importance are wrapt in doubt and obscurity; while some hold for certain facts the most precarious hearsays, others turn facts into falsehood; and both are exaggerated by posterity."

—Tacitus (CE 56–117) as quoted by Robert Graves in *I, Claudius* (1934)