Progressives for Immigration Reform

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The Day of Seven Billion and the World's Most Overpopulated Nation

By Kathleene Parker

The Day of Seven Billion, the day when United Nations demographers believe the planet will attain a population of seven billion people, occurred on October 31, 2011. Global population growth, and the problems associated with it, deserve more publicity and acknowledgement than they usually get. But so does population growth in the United States, a topic that many living in the United States need to better understand if for no other reason that we sometimes assume overpopulation is solely a problem of developing nations.

There are many pragmatic concerns with population growth, such as, that as domestic population expands, the U.S. exports fewer crops to help feed the world while we import more crops, meaning we increasingly compete with the world's poor nations for food. And there is the issue of the impacts of high U.S. population growth on the world's environment, despite seeming efforts by some, including the U.S. Census Bureau, to depict our population growth as non-existent or inconsequential. There are, after all, two types of overpopulation, one of which the United States is a world leader in. What it boils down to is a stark fact about which almost every American is unaware: The United States is the world's third-most populated nation, behind only China and India.[1] And the nation's population projections for the first half of this century — more accurately, the next 40 years, are troubling. We stand at 312 million in 2011, 336 million is projected for 2020, 363 million for 2030, with the next major hallmark — a whopping 400 million, projected for 2043. This trend will likely result in a population of 420 million by 2050, with even more dramatic increases likely to come between 2050 and 2100.[2]

Clearly, those numbers hardly indicate — as many would have us believe — that the United States "has its population problem solved" or that population

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growth simply isn't happening here. We are, by definition of our total numbers, one of the planet's population super giants, behind only India and China, with the implications of that multiplied by our high standard of living, our high carbon footprint and our high environmental footprint, including that we use one-quarter of the planet's energy, with no outlook for that to improve in the near future.[3]

That, in turn, touches on a subject on which I will describe only briefly here, but a topic worthy of deeper research by the reader: peak oil, or indications that the planet's oil supply likely peaked during 2004 to 2005. This means that while the global population will continue to increase for several decades to come, the planet might be required to get by on less energy than we did during the first half of the oil supply — when the planet's population was much smaller and when per-capita energy consumption was far less. That becomes particularly worrisome considering that the seven billion people alive on the planet today are almost all directly dependent on fossil fuels to grow and transport their food supply. In addition, oil shale, tar sands, or other "new" energy sources show little promise for the true new net energy they will supply.[4]

One particularly troubling bit of data, from the U.S. Department of Energy, posits the possibility of dramatic decreases in available oil supplies within the next 20 years, perhaps as early as the next three or four years, with the shortfalls to be made up via "unidentified projects" — in other words, no one is sure how the shortfalls will be met, even as global population and energy demands increase.[5]

Another accurate but misleading assertion is that the United States is growing by "only" 1 percent per year. Admittedly, a lower rate than nations with 2 or 3 percent growth rates (although many of them have far lower total populations), but still a high growth rate, particularly by the standards of developed nations. This assertion also ignores the fact that even a 1 percent growth rate, holding consistent over time, will cause the population to double in just 70 years. If that doubling happens in a nation of, say, 25 million, it obviously has different global ramification than if it happens in a nation of 312 million — incidentally the population of the United States today. Also of note, there are developed nations with far lower percentage growth rates; for example, Austria, at .33 percent and the Netherlands at .52 percent and those percentages based on far lower total population, about nine million and 16.6 million respectively, mean a far less dramatic total increase annually, resulting in far fewer global environmental ramifications.

In short, demographics and population trends are more complicated than the often misleading conclusions drawn and headlines written based on superficial examinations of growth rates, birth rates, and short-term demographic occurrences, such as depictions, by the U.S. Census Bureau, that United States growth from 2000 to 2010 was "the lowest in decades." This assertion was strictly true, but only by margins of a few thousand fewer arrivals (births or immigrants) annually. Within the larger context, the United States is still a nation growing by millions each year. A decrease of a few thousand in a nation increasing by over three million a year is hardly reason to headline the "lowest growth in decades," a point that few journalists grasped as this assertion was repeated without context or verification.[6]

But it is an illustration of how we need candid acknowledgment and honest discussion about the nation's demographic trends, if for no other reason than that these trends are likely a major factor in our current struggles with a faltering education system, crumbling infrastructure, and a failing healthcare system and perhaps they — along with rising energy prices and population growth — have played a part in the current economic slowdown. We have had, for example, little discussion of the fact that those cities and states hit hardest by the economic slowdown are those such as Las Vegas, Nevada, and Phoenix that had a high growth rate in recent decades and borrowed heavily to build infrastructure to accommodate that growth.

In addition, even as our population booms, there has been little discussion of whether much of what we confront might be a product of precisely that, our becoming increasingly populated and arguably, overpopulated. It is a simple concept of highly populated nations: high numbers of people equals congestion, often a diminished quality of life, more competition for limited resources and the worth of every individual compromised in an increasingly crowded situation. And, as Isaac Asimov warned, more people mean more regulation, or as he phrased it, "Democracy cannot survive overpopulation."[7]

But even more critical is that rarely do we hear discussion of anything happening in our 21st century reality that might be linked to one of the biggest trends changing this nation over the last several decades: high population growth.

There are others who argue that we owe resident poor and minorities an end to the silence about demographic forces that play a part in their ongoing, severe unemployment or economic stagnation, including that during the economic boom of the 1990s wages at the lower end of the earnings curve actually fell, often as employers hired illegal border crossers "off the books." United States demographic trends show disturbing tendencies, but first let's look at global numbers and the implications of human population growth.

Since 1950, the United States has more or less matched India's growth rate a century earlier, and like India before us, we are on track to be a population of a billion people within about the same expanse of time.

The population of our species reached its first billion in 1802 after, however, many million years of human existence. But then, just 130 years later, we attained the second billion in about 1930, but by then exponential growth began in earnest and 30 years later, in 1960, the human species hit three billion; followed just 15 years later in 1975, by four billion; five billion 13 years later in 1988, and six billion in 1999 — the shortest expanse between billion increases, just 11 years. Population continues to increase by 160 people, net gain, every minute; or 84 million a year, so that every 12 years or so, Earth gains another billion residents.[8] As that last number indicates, growth is slowing. In 1975, the global birth rate was 4.45 children per woman, but by 2010 that number had fallen to 2.5, or somewhat above replacement level, although that is a global average and there are certainly nations, most of them deeply impoverished, that continue a far-above-replacement-level birth rate.[9] But, even at that lower birth rate, growth will continue for decades due to a powerful demographic force called "momentum." Stated as simply as possible, while women are having fewer babies per woman, more women than ever are having babies, so that even a lower birth rate will fuel population growth for decades to come. Put another way, population growth is like a speeding train, even once the brakes are applied, it has "momentum" and will take time to slow and then stop.

The concept of momentum also applies in the United States, where — though the U.S. Census Bureau eagerly portrayed otherwise as it announced the results of the last census — a declining birth rate does not particularly mean fewer total births and won't for years to come. In fact, journalists who happily write about the declining birth rate ignore, for example, that births in 2007 exceeded the 1957 peak of the Baby Boom.[10] Nor do they apparently understand that birth rates are not the same as growth rates, since immigration, too, fuels growth. Yet, it is rare to see a journalist report about growth beyond the birth rates, a setup for misreporting, since 60 percent of U.S. growth is directly attributable to immigration.[11]

Another key point largely ignored by some is that, since 1950, the United States has more or less matched India's growth rate a century earlier, and like India before us, we are on track to be a population of a billion people within about the same expanse of time.[12] Even more, and an underlying theme of this paper, is the absence of voices from the political left — who were once outspoken about domestic social issues associated with population growth, such as poverty and the environment. This includes the failure of any acknowledgement that births, though still high in total numbers, fuel only about 60 percent of our growth, again a reference to the high rate of U.S. population growth resulting from immigration. Thus, there is effectively no voice from the left today on two topics: domestic poverty and population's impact on the environment, a change from the past.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, for example, almost every major environmental group espoused the idea that population must be stabilized to protect the environment. That position included domestic and global population. In the 1980s, Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, called the United States "the world's most overpopulated nation," a reference to our high total population, our high annual growth rate by the standards of developed nations, and our high resource consumption rate and environmental footprint.

But then, just a few years later, the Sierra Club backed away from talking about population growth, most especially domestic population growth. Critics charge (this writer among them) that this change in policy was primarily due to a $103 million donation and stipulations that the club take no position on immigration, the primary driver of the nation's growth. The club has denied that link, but the record is clear that the organization, which was outspoken on the topic of domestic population growth just a few short decades ago, now refuses to consider immigration as a threat to the nation's environment and the global environment.[13]

Similarly, the records of almost all environmental groups show shocking silence—in contrast to their stances in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, on global population growth and on United States population growth in particular.

And, as the global population hallmark is observed, Americans—assuming they even think of what is in the minds of many, the politically incorrect term "overpopulation"—will inevitably think of the teeming masses of Bangladesh, the population-and-poverty-driven strife of Somalia, or maybe the suffering of earthquake-wracked Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's most troubling overpopulation hotspot. And, that is an illustration of an assumption most Americans hold. In most Americans' minds, overpopulation is a "their problem" or an "over there" problem. It simply never occurs to them to think about United States population one way or the other, or even what kind of demographic future lies in wait—unless we begin the conversation soon—for their children and grandchildren in what could easily be a China-like nation of one billion by late century or early next century. How can that be?

In part, American ignorance on population—what Dr. Al Bartlett, professor emeritus at Colorado State University, calls being innumerate[14] is understandable, since population has no voice from most quarters. It is a non-issue among the media and leaders—including those in the environmental movement. And, when it is reported, it is reported in the ways alluded to above that are misleading. Meanwhile, leaders—in government and outside of government—in contrast to many outspoken and eloquent leaders on the topic of population a few decades ago, dodge the issue. Either they are ignorant of the data and trends or they hope to ignore the topic for as long as they can for a number of questionable reasons at the expense of the wellbeing of the nation, the environment, and though it is rarely acknowledged, the economy.

One particularly vivid example was when Al Gore alluded to population as a major driver of global warming in his book *An Inconvenient Truth*. Yet, when he listed solutions, there was no mention of population, and

most particularly, of United States population, which is critical, since we are, along with China, a world leader in carbon emissions and that, in turn, is linked directly to population.

Indeed, there is evidence that population has overwhelming environmental consequences. This was illustrated in 1992 when 1,700 of the world's leading scientists warned:

> "Pressures resulting from unrestrained population growth put demands on the natural world that can overwhelm any efforts to achieve a sustainable future. If we are to halt the destruction of our environment, we must accept limits to growth. . . . [E]ven at this moment, one person in five lives in absolute poverty without enough to eat, and one in ten suffers from malnutrition. No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished."[15]

Yet, today, the politically correct among us argue with a straight face that it is not about population, it is about overconsumption, when actually it is irrefutably both.

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Meanwhile, the planet endures the largest species extinction since the die off of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.[16] Thousands of plant and animal species are increasingly squeezed to the margins or over the extinction precipice during this, what some are calling the beginning of the "Anthropocene Era," a name couched in scientific recognition that human-driven changes are so great they equate with a geological force and are changing the very nature and life-base of the planet. Others predict we will enter the "Age of Solitude," when humankind will live on a planet devoid of many beloved plant and animal species. Imagine a world where the only surviving polar bears live in zoos or where rare botanical species that once thrived on the huge island of Madagascar, a particular biological treasure trove just east of Africa, are preserved only in botanical gardens in distant cities.[17] And there is global warming, perhaps already manifesting in terrible ways: epic droughts in Somalia and Texas; this year's wildfires, so-called "super fires," in the American Southwest that threaten to permanently change whole ecosystems; the crushing winter along the Eastern Seaboard, as the great heat-machine of the planet's oceans warm and produce more extreme weather — not just more warming, but more extremes.

Both species extinction and climate change are linked to human population growth, our demand for resources (such as the sheer number of people using fossil fuels that generate global-warming emissions and the removal of carbon-removing vegetation), and the impact of our numbers and the needs for human existence. This, in turn, points to United States population growth since, again, the United States, along with China, is the planet's leading producer of carbon emissions.

Fifty percent of the planet's landmasses have been converted to human use, with more converted daily: new houses and subdivisions, new highways, more fields for crops, cities spreading ever-outward, one acre here, five acres there, reservoirs to store water or divert rivers, the list grows in direct correlation to our numbers, our demands for resources, and an economic system predicated on endless growth.[18] As the late economist Kenneth Boulding warned with his usual affinity for humor, "anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever on a finite world is either a madman or an economist."[19]

But this comes back to the key point missed by many Americans: There are two different types of overpopulation, one of which is almost universally ignored, though both are hugely problematic for our planet. There is the overpopulation of highly populated "developing" nations, although many of them are not developing; and are not even holding their own against poverty, rapidly rising populations, or a new and appalling wrinkle, rising food prices linked to increased costs of fossil fuel (and competition for available food sources) increasingly triggering food riots and political instability. Literally, in many nations, a loaf of bread is all that stands between a family and starvation and when families live on pennies a day, a rise in the price of food has huge consequences, whether that rise is linked to the escalating cost of fossil fuels or competition in the market place from population "super giants" like the United States and China. This scenario includes countries like Kenya, Somalia, Egypt — where food is an increasingly volatile political issue — and Haiti, incidentally, a population and ecological disaster area long before the 2010 earthquake. Satellite images from space, for example, showed a clearly discernable difference in vegetation, marked by their borders, between Haiti and the adjoining Dominican Republic, an ecological reality that worsened the consequences of the earthquake and decreases the likelihood that the Haitian people will recover from the disaster until their numbers are brought into line with the carrying capacity of their lands. An important thing to remember about such nations is that, except for a few oil-rich states, no nation has risen from poverty while maintaining high fertility.[20]

The discussion above was a summary of one form of overpopulation. Now for an explanation of the other equally dangerous form of overpopulation — the type that exists in the United States, much of Europe and Australia, (albeit to a far lesser degree), and increasingly in industrializing nations everywhere, particularly in China and India, since both are industrializing rapidly and have huge populations, although economists would like us to believe that does not matter.

But the focus of this publication is on the United States. Lost on many Americans is that ours is a nation with a huge population — the third highest in the world — that we're overpopulated in numbers, in our resource consumption and in our environmental footprint. Arguably, it just does not get much worse than that.

So far, U.S. population density is not exceptionally high — although urbanization is heavy along the Eastern seaboard and rising densities are becoming common even in the West — but the United States has a land area similar to that of China. China is 3,705,473 square miles; the United States is 3,717,879 square miles.[21] And, like China — in addition to a high population — we have vast areas within our borders that are desert and that do not lend themselves well to human habitation without heavy modification of the environment. And, if current trends continue, like China and India before us, the United States will march inexorably to a population of one billion people in the not too distant future.

For those who assert there is still "plenty of room for more," a reminder: humans can survive like sardines in a can. It is not a matter of space that limits our numbers, but critical resources like food and water, with the former dependent upon the latter and, an increasingly critical point, fossil fuels to make fertilizers, pump water for irrigation, to harvest and transport crops or farm animals, and to process and distribute foods. The latter is often done using supply lines along which, the slightest interruption in distribution could mean grocery store shelves in major cities quickly emptying of goods.

In addition, this also begs the question of whether we are willing to leave enough space and resources to allow the planet's other inhabitants — the plants and animals — to survive. Indicators are, considering the massive species extinction already underway, that we are not overly concerned about their wellbeing.

And, even at our current population, there is growing evidence that we are beginning to exceed carrying capacity with that, in turn, begging the question of just how much we want to compromise our standard of living for growth. Put another way, how much of our freedom and quality of life are we willing to sacrifice for what is essentially a growth subsidy?

Areas of the American Southwest, for example, that hold high populations do so only because resources critical to survival, like water, are imported across vast distances via massive water projects and trans-mountain diversions used to create artificial oases in the desert at places like Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, and Los Angeles. But, this comes at a huge price in energy consumption and environmental impacts — as one area is deprived of water to take it elsewhere — and troubling indicators show that, with or without global warming, the system is in trouble and has potential to collapse due to prolonged drought, increased drought from global warming or, perhaps due to nothing more than a return to the drier norms common in the region except from 1960 through 1995. This is critical. Tree-ring studies and other research indicate that these years were the wettest period in the Southwest in nearly 2,000 years.[22] Growth has been predicated on the assumption that this trend was the norm when it is not.

Of course, critical is that most of the cities of the Southwest — Albuquerque, Denver, Salt Lake, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles, Tucson, and hundreds of towns in between — are dependent on the Colorado River for much of their water, most through trans-basin diversions. These high-tech, usually high-energy-consumption diversions take the waters of a relatively small river from where it has historically flowed, to where it never flowed before the diversions that began in earnest early in the 20th century. Such diversions continue even now; most recently, for example, with funding by Congress for a huge diversion project to take Colorado River waters onto the arid expanses of the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico — and that from a river not even meeting current water commitments.

The bottom line is that the Colorado River has been over-allocated for years, but it did not matter because, until the last few decades, the population of the American Southwest was small. But its cities are mushrooming in size, a trend, incidentally, common throughout the nation and reflecting the nation's overall decades-long high growth rate. Consider not just today's numbers, but the short time it took to achieve them:

- Los Angeles in 1900 was a mere 102,000 people; today — just over 110 years later — its metro area is 18 million.

- Phoenix — where summer temperatures routinely exceed 100 degrees and now a sprawling, irrigated oasis in the desert — was 5,554 citizens in 1900, and today exceeds four million in a city larger in physical size than Paris, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, combined.

- Denver — on the Atlantic, not Pacific drainage, but dependent on the Colorado, a Pacific-flowing river — was 133,859 people in 1900 and now exceeds 2.5 million.

- Albuquerque — on the banks of the Rio Grande, a river so undependable and relatively "un-grand" that humorist Will Rogers joked that it was the only river he had ever seen that looked like it needed to be irrigated — was a mere 8,000 people in 1900 and today is a metro area of close to one million. That occurs in a region that by September 2011 had received less than three inches of precipitation for the entire year, below even the paltry year-to-date norms of seven inches or so.

- And particularly noteworthy, Las Vegas, a relatively short distance from Death Valley, was non-existent in 1900. It began with roughly 2,000 "desert rats" in about 1920, but today numbers roughly two

million in a region so hot and dry the landscape is almost devoid of vegetation. It rests in a setting that, by contrast, makes Albuquerque's desert environment look lush and green.[23]

The list goes on of towns that have mushroomed in size since 1900 in the fastest growing region of the world's third most populated nation — a region resting in the midst of five deserts. Nonetheless, each of its six states — Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, California, Nevada — operate on the assumption they can continue to grow at the same high rates of the 20th century despite declining water tables in virtually every aquifer and the plight of the Colorado River, with or without global warming. That plight is relatively straightforward even if few in the region acknowledge it.

When the Colorado River was allocated, or legally divided among the six Colorado River Basin states under the 1922 Colorado River Compact, it was assumed that most years the river would carry 16.4 million acre-feet of water. The Upper Basin States — Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico — would get 7.5 million acre-feet; the Lower Basin States — California, Arizona, and Nevada — would get 7.5 million acre-feet, with the rest promised to Mexico.

But the 16.4 million acre-feet was based on measurements of the river during uncharacteristically high river flows due to unusually heavy snowfalls in the mountains of Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. Soon after the signing of the compact, the states and the federal government realized the compact had apportioned about 1.3 million acre-feet more water than what usually flows in the river.

But later studies of the flow history revealed worse news. They indicate that the river's flow — even without global warming — will probably average a whopping three million acre-feet less than allocated. The Southwest could well have to get by on 13.5 million acre-feet a year, a shocking reality that began to hit home in the 1990s as reservoirs — the equivalent of water savings banks and seemingly as vulnerable to downturns as our monetary banking system — began to shrink at appalling rates. Reservoirs began to be almost universally marked with the wide "bathtub" rings of mineral-stained cliffs rising far above dropping water levels, with Lake Mead and Lake Powell perhaps the most dramatic and grabbing the most headlines, since they are, respectively, the nation's first and second largest reservoirs.[24] At the same time, the region's population was exploding, a growth rate that, while it has slowed with the national economic slowdown, nonetheless continues at a high rate.

As a result, there are, for example, credible predictions that Lake Mead, the massive water project near Las Vegas that provides water to millions in Nevada and Arizona, could run dry, a reality alleviated — or at least delayed — by extremely heavy snowfall in Utah and Colorado during the winter of 2010-2011, even as drought worsened in New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona. But the long-term outlook continues to be grim, partly because it takes reservoirs several consecutive years of heavy runoff to make up shortfalls and the Southwest almost never has several consecutive winters of heavy snow runoff.

In March 2008, the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, in a report bleakly entitled, "When Will Lake Mead Run Dry?" warned, "There is a 50 percent chance Lake Mead, a key source of water for millions of people in the southwestern United States, will be dry by 2021 if climate changes as expected and future water usage is not curtailed."[25]

Even the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, traditionally not one to portray any but the most optimistic conditions for its reservoirs, in 2006 announced that, indeed, the reservoir will likely never again reach the "full" mark due partly to drought, partly due to increased population, and partly due to a new agreement requiring different management of the river to soften shortfalls.[26] Lake Powell, the nation's second largest reservoir,

has similar issues. The scientists associated with the Lake Mead study repeatedly raised concerns about population. Arguably, there is insufficient water for those already in the Southwest, much less a population predicted to nearly double by 2050 or 2060. And there is the global warming factor, a complication even beyond the Southwest's usually arid circumstances. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change related how all but one of 19 climate models showed increasing aridity likely in the Southwest due to climate change.[27] In 2009, the journal for the National Academy of Sciences focused on climate change and predicted that the Colorado will not be able to meet allocations for water delivery 60 percent to 90 percent of the time by 2050, meaning that water savings accounts in reservoirs will be further drawn down and far more rapidly.[28]

Also in 2007, the National Academy, in a report on Colorado River management, prefaced the report by saying, "it became clear [during the study] that a broad understanding of Colorado River management issues is not possible unless both water and demand issues are adequately considered." They continued, "our report presents population growth data for much of the western United States that is served by Colorado River water. The cities in the region are collectively the fastest growing in the nation. *Of further concern is that the growth seems to be occurring with little regard to long-term availability of future water supplies.*" (emphasis added.)[29] All of this was perhaps summed up by Brad Udall, director of the University of Colorado's Western Water Assessment, when he said, "we're on a collision course between supply and demand."[30]

So, obvious to the problem of a region representing a huge percentage of the population of the United States land area is that its growth is driven, in large measure, by national policies, particularly immigration, which seem to occur in a vacuum as far as its implications to population.

Yes, growth is driven by resident citizens relocating, for example, to the sunny Southwest. Nonetheless, half of the region's growth post-2000 was directly driven by immigration, with immigration responsible for virtually all of California's growth. California is indeed the region's and the nation's own version of a population "super giant," with a population approaching 40 million, to be perhaps as high as 60 million by 2050. In other words, virtually all the recent growth in the nation's most populous state — roughly two times the 20 million total population of New York state — was driven by immigration. The environmental ramification manifests in many ways, including the state's enormous water demands and a key component of stresses on the Colorado River, Colorado River allocations and growing frictions in the region politically over water.[31]

Warnings Unheeded, National Population Policies Undrafted

This brings us to the topic of the 1972 Presidential Commission that urged (to no avail, partly because it made the mistake of getting into hot-button issues like birth control and abortion), the drafting and passage of a national population policy to guide Congress as it considers such major growth drivers as immigration. Currently, we have no acknowledgement or discussion about "where we are growing" from the stand point, for example, of the arid American Southwest — which scientists have cautioned will be hit first, worst, and hardest by global warming — as we continue immigration at upwards of five-times historical norms and as our national population increases by a whopping three million people a year. Put metaphorically, most people would not think of holding a banquet without deciding how many guests they can realistically invite and afford to feed. Yet, our nation booms with no discussion of whether that is wise, will benefit the nation, what outcome it will produce, or whether that outcome is what we want for our descendents.

Restated in question form: How can we continue immigration or any other such huge population drivers (unless we are profoundly irresponsible) without having the discussion about demographic and growth-driving implications? That question might be expanded: How can we continue the nation's high, mostly immigration-driven growth rate, without having the discussion of the demographic implications to the nation in general, infrastructure, education, medicine, the environment, and the economy?

Now a brief review of United States population. In 1790, the year of the first census, there were just under four million Americans. By 1900, there were 76 million. The United States reached its first 100 million in about 1918. But then, only a bit over 50 years later, in about 1967, during the Johnson Administration, the nation reached 200 million. Of note, that is an increase of about two million a year during the early-century 50-year time span, an annual increase much less than today's three million per year. And, as alluded to earlier, the projections, based on current trends, are troubling: over 336 million by 2020; 365 million by 2030; the hallmark of 402 million projected for 2043, and over 422 million projected by 2050, this in a nation struggling at our current numbers to provide for its citizens on so many levels.[32]

In 1972, when the population was about 210 million, the bi-partisan Presidential Commission, the so-called Rockefeller Commission, issued a report after an extensive two-year study and hearings nationwide. The report was called, "Population and the American Future: The Report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future."[33]

The commission was made up of respected citizens and members of Congress, such as philanthropist John D. Rockefeller III, Sen. Bob Packwood (R-OR), Alan Cranston (D-CA), and representatives of business, environmental and conservation groups, clergy, banking, education, medicine, industry, unions, and government, with a housewife or two thrown into the mix. The commission raised deep concerns about the dangers the nation would risk if it ever become 300 million people. Those concerns were summed up in a brief comment in the report:

> "We have concluded that, in the long run, no substantial benefits will result from further growth of the nation's population, rather than a gradual stabilization of our population *through voluntary means*[34] [emphasis added] would contribute significantly to the nation's ability to solve its problems. We have looked for, and have not found, any convincing economic argument for continued growth. The health of our country does not depend upon it, nor does the vitality of business nor the welfare of the average person."[35]

The commission, in particular, was concerned about the big picture. They feared, prophetically, it seems, that as the nation continued to grow toward a population of 300 million — incidentally reached on October 17, 2006 — that government would be unable to adequately educate its citizens, that healthcare would falter and its quality would be compromised, and that governments (local, state and federal), struggling to build new infrastructure to accommodate growth, would insufficiently maintain existing infrastructure and might face a crisis of crumbling older infrastructure: utilities, streets, public buildings, dams. Again, how prophetic.

Critical is that, comparatively speaking, at the time, legal immigration was a "mere" 500,000 a year, down from today's 700,000 legal immigrants. Even that number, however, was up from historic norms of only about 250,000 a year, that held between 1920 to 1965, and raised concerns by the commission, "that Congress immediately consider the serious situation of legal immigration and pass legislation which will impose civil and criminal sanctions on employers of illegal border-crossers or aliens in an immigration status in which employment is not authorized." The commission recognized that jobs are at the root of illegal border crossings and that employers, not just border crossers, should be targeted, to help remove the incentive for aliens to enter illegally, a concern that remains to this day.

But, on the topics of the environment and other liberal causes, like resident poor and minorities, two other commissions have had key recommendations ignored:

- President Clinton's 1993 Council on Sustainable Development, which recommended that immigration be slashed sufficiently to allow population stabilization.[36]

- The 1998 bi-partisan U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, otherwise known as the Jordan Commission, chaired by Barbara Jordan (D-Texas), a liberal black Congresswoman. The Commission recommended cuts to immigration to protect the jobs and the opportunities of resident poor and minorities from unfair economic competition.[37]

The eloquent Jordan seemed not to be as burdened by political correctness as liberals of today when she summed up the situation in February 1995: "credibility in immigration policy can be summed up in one sentence: those who should get in, get in; those who should be kept out, are kept out; and those who should not be here will be required to leave."[38]

Yet, in contrast, today we endlessly debate the "rights" of illegal border crossers while at the same time ignore the impacts of unfettered legal immigration and unregulated and un-rectified illegal immigration on the resident poor. There is no discussion of the "rights" of the resident poor to better job opportunities that originate best when the labor market is not flooded by too many people seeking work.

Perhaps more dramatic and ironic, even as open-border advocates use his name as an "advocate for immigrant rights," is a fact lost on many open-border advocates. Labor activist Cesar Chavez was profoundly frustrated with the border situation, at one point even offered his United Farm Workers to do that which the government would not do effectively: patrol the southern border against illegal border crossers. In 1979, he told a Senate committee, "when the farm workers strike and their strike is successful, the employers go to Mexico and have unlimited, unrestricted use of illegal-alien strikebreakers to break the strike. And, for over 30 years, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has looked the other way and assisted in the strikebreaking."[39]

All of this returns to the silence of liberals and progressives today on unfettered immigration's impact on the environment, the unemployed, and the poor and minorities. While organized labor, for example, stood firmly aligned on the side of low immigration through most of this nation's history, much of organized labor today advocates for immigrant rights and open borders.

Along the same progressive theme, two major activists of American history, Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, stood firmly for low immigration, with Washington's 1895 pleas to American business particularly touching. The early black activist begged capitalists to "cast down your bucket where you stand," or to hire black workers — many of them freed from slavery by the Civil War — rather than hire from the multitude of Great Wave immigrants post-1880. His plea fell on deaf ears, assumedly for racist reasons, with employers continuing to hire Irish, Italians, and Asians, arriving in droves from distant shores.[40]

Immigration in the Great Depression vs. the Great Recession

There is an adage about the futility of mopping the floor without turning off the faucet first. Yet, our leaders and others, especially organized labor, who should be quite outspoken, seem to believe that the nation can

continue the highest levels of immigration in our history, by a margin of several hundred thousand a year and at five-times historical norms, while solving its unemployment and economic problems. In fact, it does not seem unreasonable to assert that one reason the current economic downturn has continued for so long is a lack of pragmatism and willingness to change policies affecting immigration, outsourcing, loss of jobs to technology and globalization that are not working out very well for the American worker and, by extension, the greater economy.

Before the 2008 economic collapse, we heard a phrase so often that it became cliché: "immigrants only take jobs that Americans don't want," a relatively hollow assertion even then, considering the high unemployment and stagnating wages, especially among workers at the lower end of the wage scale, including during the 1990s economic boom.

That mantra continued to be uttered, albeit less frequently, during the Great Recession, an economic downturn that, despite some assertions that it has ended, still feels to many Americans as if it continues. Roughly 14 million are unemployed, with uncorrected unemployment (a figure that includes those who have taken part-time work or have given up looking for work) hovering near 16 percent, with over 40 percent of the unemployed having been so for six months or more. Phrased another way, those unemployed or underemployed total 22 million.[41]

And, as we, evening after evening, watch interviews of people on television who say they will "take any job," while lines at job fairs stretch for blocks, the assertion that "immigrants take only jobs Americans don't want" sounds even more hollow, especially when a report released by the Federation for American Immigration Reform found that upwards of seven million jobs are occupied by illegal border crossers.[42] The fact that jobs are filled by legal immigrants or visa workers is another issue worthy of discussion, albeit only within the context that we should not at any time blame legal immigrants for problems caused by our own poorly considered immigration policy. Meanwhile, a report by the Center for Immigration Studies found "the standard unemployment rate for U.S.-born adults over 18 who had not completed high school was over 20 percent; for young adults 18 to 30 who have not completed high school it was 30.7 percent."[43] There is also the stark data out of Nevada, California, South Carolina, Michigan, Rhode Island, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina and Georgia, all with unemployment in excess of 10 percent, with Nevada surpassing 13 percent.[44]

It is not an unreasonable statement to say that those poorly educated youth and young adults would seem to be a good fit for many of the jobs taken by the preponderance of poorly educated workers represented by many illegal border crossers. Moreover, even high-skilled jobs, such as those in the computer industry, often go to immigrant or H-1B workers.

As was reported by the Center for Immigration Studies,

> "While it would be a mistake to think that every job taken by an immigrant is a job lost by a native, it would also be a mistake to imagine that allowing illegal immigrants to stay permanently in their jobs and giving many work authorization has no impact on the labor market outcomes for U.S.-born workers. The findings in this analysis make clear that Americans with relatively little education have been very hard hit by the current downturn."[45]

There is also the nagging data that hovers over many of our major cities and has for years shown chronic, acute unemployment among minorities, especially black youth. Black youth are unemployed at rates in excess of 33 percent, twice the also troubling unemployment rate of white youth, which now rests at 16 percent.[46] Meanwhile, the silence from the political left is deafening when it comes to continuing poverty and unemployment on Native American reservations, in Appalachia, and in states like New Mexico.

Coincidentally, New Mexico is a huge recipient of illegal border crossers, including from Arizona after they fled that state's crackdown on illegal immigration.

And, as to the assumption there are jobs "Americans won't do," in June 2011, the Center for Immigration Studies released data showing otherwise. For example, 75 percent of janitors are native-born; 65 percent of construction workers, 65 percent of landscape workers, and 55 percent of maids and housekeepers. As the Center correctly noted at the time, it is not the work that is deterring citizens, it's the substandard wages and poor working conditions, all of which are perpetuated by illegal immigration.[47]

In my own region, this is dramatically illustrated in Santa Fe, NM, where illegal border crossers arrive every morning near "the plaza" and are hired, openly, as day laborers by local employers while federal authorities ignore an activity known by everyone in the region. They are paid "off the books," and make it hard, for example, for contractors who want to pay "on the books" and within the full sanction of the law to compete when bidding for jobs against those who depend on illegal border crossers, pay substandard wages with no benefits, and who certainly don't pay worker compensation.

And now for a brief, but considering our economic times, historical, perspective on immigration.

During the Great Wave of Immigration, between 1880 and 1920, legal immigration averaged about 600,000 per year, far lower than today's 700,000 legal immigrants a year. At that time, legal immigrants migrated into a far more urban, crowded, arguably resource-strapped United States. In the early part of the 20th century, Americans — led by labor and progressive advocates who stood firmly aligned against big business and the "robber barons," demanded reductions in immigration numbers that were overwhelming cities and flooding labor markets, forcing down wages and working conditions that often incited worker rebellions. These rebellions were sometimes violently suppressed, such as Colorado's Ludlow Massacre, the 100th anniversary of which was observed this year, where the Colorado militia was used to forcibly halt a strike organized by the United Mine Workers. Eighteen people were killed.[48] Finally, as a result of the tide of public opinion, including from cities overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of arriving immigrants, immigration in 1920 was slashed to about 250,000 a year, a maximum that held through 1965 and not incidentally, the dawning of a strengthening of organized labor, the burgeoning of the American middle class and in some ways likely the basis for the mobilization of the civil-rights movement and the empowerment of minorities.[49]

But during the Great Depression, immigration was even lower — partly from government prudence as President Roosevelt and others feared the continuing economic crisis could quite literally, result in a revolution, and partly from increased emigration, as those desperate for work left for other ports. Contrast that with today's legal immigration at about 700,000, and illegal (though falling with the economic downturn) perhaps as high as 500,000 immigrants annually. (They are, after all, illegal and therefore do not want to be counted, but in 2010 just the number apprehended at the border was over 500,000, so assumedly many made it into the country.)[50]

Point of fact: More immigrants are accepted into the United States annually than into all other nations of the world combined, with that unacknowledged trend continuing – even during a recession.

Even as millions stand unemployed, and as house foreclosure rates continue to be appallingly high, 150,000 jobs must be created each month just to keep pace with population growth and new entries into the labor force. The sluggish economy is unable to keep up. In August 2011, for example, a total of zero net new jobs were created.[51] Common sense would seem to dictate that even legal immigration should be reduced, as it

was in the 1930s. Of course, even this kind of reduction would not address other challenges facing American workers, such as outsourcing to cheaper labor markets and jobs lost to adaptation of new technologies. We seem to be suffering from what some are calling "immigration overload," yet no one, including most of our leaders or the political left seems to want to talk about it. So, perhaps too, we suffer from a heavy case of "immigration denial." Perhaps it is the product of the political right and political left trying to ignore the issue — based on different motives, but resulting in the same effect — a demographic tsunami sweeping our shores even if their denial conjures up reminders of Lewis Carol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* From the economic right and business interests eager to continue booming population growth, we get denial that United States population growth is a problem — or even happening. We certainly get no discussion that it affects the labor market or causes increased competition for too-few jobs. In contrast, much of the rest of the right, while perhaps motivated by other concerns, grasps that there is a population implication to our current high growth rate. They, at least, are willing to talk about it and, indeed, are forcing changes in immigration policy at state levels.

Doing with less to save the global environment must mean doing with a lot less, unless we also reduce the numbers of Americans demanding resources.

From the left, eager to be politically correct and silent about the United States' main growth driver — immigration at five times historical norms, we get denial that United States population growth is a problem — or even happening, in short, a belief paradigm almost identical to the economic right they once opposed. The politically-correct mantra from the left is, "it is not a matter of overpopulation; it is a problem of overconsumption." In fact, it is both.

Our standard of living is an environmental problem, but what those arguing overconsumption do not consider is that even a relatively small house (by United States standards) in suburbia with a Prius in the driveway represents a huge environmental footprint by global standards. Doing with less to save the global environment must mean doing with a lot less, unless we also reduce the numbers of Americans demanding resources.

We also deserve a national discussion about how much of our standard of living we want to sacrifice as a continuing growth subsidy. When I, living in New Mexico, for example, conserve water, it does not help solve the Southwest's water crisis. Instead, the conserved water goes to fuel more growth, with those increasing numbers of people, in turn, making us more vulnerable to drought, since more people make the water situation more "brittle" and will draw down finite water supplies more quickly. So, residents of New Mexico and others in the Southwest are apparently expected to sacrifice quality of life — not to alleviate a water crisis, but to fuel more growth.

There is also the nagging global issue that at least one study, based on known resources in relation to population, showed that, long-term, Earth can only sustain a population of about two billion.[52] That number might be adjusted up or down, based on just how much impoverishment and sacrifice each of us wants to accept to continue to subsidize economic and population growth, but environmentalists must get past their naive assumption that we are going to save the planet by driving a hybrid car, using squiggly-shaped light bulbs, or bringing our own shopping bags to the grocery store.

Point of fact, to save the environment of the planet is going to require stabilizing and then slowly decreasing human numbers. It is going to require less consumption, specifically moving toward a steady-state economy in which resources are consumed not predicated on endless "economic growth," (in short, a several-centuries-

old, outdated, economic paradigm). Rather, saving the environment of the planet will require application of an economy based on consumption that will not draw down or permanently destroy resources. For example, in the American Southwest, only as many people could live in the region as can be accommodated with water from reservoirs maintained as "sustainable water accounts," without "mining" or drawing down aquifers, and without harming other creatures who also require water for their survival.

One in 20 people alive on the planet today is a resident of the United States, and that combined with our resource consumption is unsustainable by every definition.

The United States became 300 million in 2006, and today, just five years later, we are already 312 million.[53] The silence as to the dynamics driving such growth and the implications to us and the world, is deafening, particularly for those of us old enough to remember when environmentalists and others on the political left were outspoken about the dangers of overpopulation, to the extent of calling it the basis for most environmental problems.

The voices, not that many years ago were many, well known, and respected, but one in particular stands out, Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-WI), a founder of Earth Day, who was deeply concerned about the growing silence on population before his death in 2007. His feelings were summed up by this quote: "the bigger the population gets, the more serious the problems become …. We have to address the population issue. The United Nations, with the United States supporting it, took the position in Cairo in 1994 that every country was responsible for stabilizing its own population. It can be done. But in this country, it's phony to say 'I'm for the environment, but not for limiting immigration.'"[54]

Nelson and other environmentalists who have spoken out — often to be labeled as racist or xenophobic (no matter their legacy on civil-rights, human-rights, or related causes) — perhaps understood the numbers, and irrefutably, 60 percent of those numbers relating to population increase in the United States are driven by the highest immigration in our nation's history. Therefore we have a right and a duty to talk about the implication of our immigration policy. To do otherwise is disingenuous, dangerous, and a disservice to us, our children, and indeed a planet vulnerable to a United States population super giant.

For those who chant the mantra that "we are a nation of immigrants," yes we are, as is every nation in one context or another, but so too are we a nation that, until about 1965 closely controlled and limited its immigration. That reflects a philosophy begun by founders Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, and George Washington, who all cautiously voiced concerns that immigration be closely controlled and that it serve the well-being of the nation.

Being anti-immigration, after all, does not equate with being anti-immigrant. Moreover, no nation, no matter its generosity or good intentions can continue immigration at rates of those of the United States post-1965. Each year, 84 million people are added to the world's population. We cannot possibly accept enough of the seven billion of the planet's inhabitants, many of whom are arguably deserving of the right to immigrate, especially for humanitarian reasons. (Of note, most immigrants today do so for economic, not humanitarian, reasons.)

Instead of assuming wrongly that we can invite all of the world's poor or downtrodden to our shores, we must find more and better ways to help the world's poor "in situ," or where they are. We must help them make their own countries work. This would include more concerted United States leadership and funding for voluntary family planning, education (especially of women and girls), and changes in the very

demographic trends that are keeping nations impoverished — such as exploding populations that keep people expending all of their energies just to put food on the table for another day.

One in 20 people alive on the planet today is a resident of the United States, so we need to have the conversation, urgently, about just how many more Americans the planet can stand. It would be particularly nice if rather than remaining silent for political-correctness or whatever reasons, those on the left would join the conversation about the implications of United States population growth on the global environment and the implications of unfettered immigration on native-born poor and minorities. The current silence from too many progressives and liberals cannot continue.

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Progressives for Immigration Reform

Progressives for Immigration Reform is a non-profit organization seeking to educate the public on the unintended consequences of mass migration.

PFIR concurs with the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform that "it is both a right and a responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest."

It is the position of PFIR that immigration policy should consider the effects of policy on population size, population growth, skill composition of the labor force, the working conditions and wages of both immigrants and native born workers, domestic water and energy supplies, open space and preservation of biodiversity, and the emission of greenhouse gases from the United States.

PFIR favors policies toward developing countries to lessen the "push" factors of poverty and unemployment that drive emigration.

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