



# FOOTNOTES

## Down With Growthism!

*by Leon F. Bouvier, Ph.D.*

Acceptance of Proposition 187 by California voters will undoubtedly lead to an acceleration of name calling by advocates of continued high levels of immigration. Racists, xenophobics, nativists, and worse are typical epithets aimed at those of us who favor reductions in immigration, legal and illegal.

Let me be candid about this. Sadly, a few Americans do favor immigration reduction for the wrong reasons. The “browning of America” bothers them. I totally reject the arguments of people like Pat Buchanan. Whether immigrants speak Swahili or Cockney is no matter to me, their numbers are my concern.

U.S. population should be reduced if the quality of life of all Americans is to remain high. The evidence is overwhelming that 260 million is far above the carrying capacity of the nation. Our resources are being depleted; our environment is worsening; our infrastructure cannot keep pace with growth. Now is the time to say enough. Let’s get started on the road to an eventual population of 150 million, or about the same as it was in 1950.

That number is not carved in stone. For example, the eminent statesman, George Kennan, has written: “This (optimal) balance, in the case of the United States, would seem to me to have been surpassed when the American population reached, at a very maximum, two hundred million people, and perhaps a good deal less.” We should begin now to work at reducing our numbers until such time as we are more comfortable.

The population can be reduced in three ways: lower fertility, higher mortality, and/or lower migration. Although increased longevity would contribute to raising the population, any measures that would allow all

Americans to live longer and healthier lives should be favored by all of us. That leaves births and migration.

If population size could be reduced solely through lower fertility, I wouldn’t even be talking about immigration. However, that is not feasible. Even if fertility fell from its present rate of 2.0 births per woman to 1.7 in 2000 and down to 1.5 by 2050, (no country has ever exhibited such a low rate for so long a period) the nation’s population would grow to 337 million in 2050 and still be just under 300 million in 2100, if current net immigration levels (of about 1 million per year) remained constant.

If our population problems are to be taken seriously and reductions in size is our goal, we must consider lowering immigration — not for racist or nativist reasons — but for sheer numbers. With the same extremely low assumptions about future fertility, and with net immigration (legal and illegal) limited to 200,000 annually, the population would still grow to 290 million in 2040 before falling to just under 200 million in 2100. To attain the preferred goal of 150 million would require even lower immigration (perhaps 100,000 per year) or fertility even lower than 1.5 births per woman.

Those advocating more immigration and, in some cases, higher fertility never tell us what the impact of such policies would be. We do know, from Census Bureau projections, that a population of 382 million Americans is highly likely by the middle of next century; their high scenario suggests that population could be as high as 507 million. But what if American women had an “extra” child from now on (that is, 3 births as advocated by some) and what if immigration doubled to 2 million (as advocated by some)? What would that mean

demographically? By 2050, the U.S. population would surpass 677 million; by 2075 it would have reached 1 billion and be still growing rapidly! Those are the sort of numbers that are in store if we listen to pro-growth advocates. Surely, that is not in the best interests of the nation.

Whether the labelling is racism, nativism or whatever, these clearly do not apply to my position. But isn't it about time to turn the tables and begin labelling those who would give the nation permanent unlimited growth?

I propose the term "growthism." Let those in favor of continued massive immigration and (in some cases) higher fertility be called population growthists. There is precedence for this negative labelling. Already in many cities and counties in fast growing states, pro-growth mayors and commissioners (usually financed

by realtors and developers) are being voted out of office and the expression "pro-growth" is taking on a negative connotation.

When Americans look at the alternatives: 1 billion people or 200 million people, I am confident that they will agree with my position. Now is the time to get to work on reducing population size as soon as possible. Down with "growthism!"

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