

STRICTLY ACCOUNTABLE: A CALL FOR THE TOUGH LOVE OF REAL SOLUTIONS

An NPG Forum Paper
by Karen I. Shragg

ABSTRACT

NPG is pleased to present a new paper by Dr. Karen I. Shragg. For those of you familiar with her writing, you know she does not shy away from speaking her mind and this latest paper does not disappoint.

Commenting on the current trend of renaming everything from schools and roads to birds and mountains, Dr. Shragg challenges the many environmentalists who are so “woke” that they fail to see the *forest for the trees*, as the old adage goes.

In her own words: “Worrying about what we call the people streaming over the border cannot matter more than how destabilizing immigration-driven population growth is to our country’s well-being and wildlife. No matter what term we use to distinguish those who come into the country with or without proper papers, the fact that we are already overpopulated remains the same. When we make the name change from ‘illegal aliens’ to ‘undocumented workers,’ we have done nothing to address the flooding of the country with those who will now need housing, food, water and jobs, or the additional stress they put on our social and physical infrastructure.”

We hope you find value in this thoughtful composition.

“More is required of public officials than slogans and handshakes and press releases. More is required. We must hold ourselves strictly accountable. We must provide the people with a vision of the future.”

Barbara Jordan, Chairwoman, US Commission on Immigration Reform 1994 – 1996

Language matters, but not as much as corrective actions. As comedian/commentator Bill Maher said on his recent podcast, “Woke is a joke, they don’t care about making real change just about not offending anyone.” Political correctness has landed us in a quagmire of debates about what to call certain people and places. Descriptions are changed to soften a concept so that it is more palatable to our collective understanding of what is currently acceptable. Our society initiates contortions of gymnastic proportions

to avoid offending people. We continue to promote the unsustainable goals of economic and population growth which should be number one on a list of things that should offend us due to the problems caused by adherence to the obsession with growth mentality. In the end we often waste our bandwidth debating words while leaving deeper issues unaddressed.

Language is the low hanging fruit, easy to attack without ever really delivering the rewards that are promised. We give our stories a different coat of paint, but a whole new narrative is required. Often, underlying problems are not addressed, but everyone involved can sleep better at night because they believe they did something significant. Statues are coming down, school names are being changed, and birds are getting name-lifts – all to stop honoring the dishonorable. These are tangible acts, and often appropriate, but they need to be the beginning of action, and not represent the finish line.

Nora McGreevy reported in the Smithsonian magazine on March 9, 2022, that, “The United States Department of the Interior (DOI) proposed a list of new names for more than 660 geographic features across the country last month, the agency announced in a statement. Led by the US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as cabinet secretary, the February 2022 release of the list marks the next step in a sweeping plan to remove the racist and misogynist slur ‘squaw’ from the national geographic landscape. Hundreds of US geographic sites, including mountains, rivers, lakes, remote islands and more, currently are named using the word, report Neil Vigdor and Christine Hauser for the *New York Times*. ”¹

That is a lot of effort to make the kind of changes we can certainly use but it is so much less than we actually need. We can’t pat ourselves on the back just yet. Changing names and inserting proper language doesn’t automatically shift us from why those names were offensive in the first place. Huge problems loom before us.

Just recently the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres declared that 2023 was the year of ‘global boiling,’ saying:

“The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived. The air is unbreathable. The heat is unbearable. And the level of fossil-fuel profits and climate inaction is unacceptable. Leaders must lead. No more hesitancy. No more excuses. No more waiting for others to move first. There is simply no more time for that.”²

In light of this, we need to call for more ink and movements addressing the human enterprise and how it should be dialed back rather than how we might be offending the marginalized. If we attack growth, offer steady state economy options, and curb mass migration we will make progress toward being able to live on this planet that will not be replaced with trips to Mars.

We are losing the war on our biosphere, the life-sustaining part of our planet. These renaming battles are not significantly moving the needle. As important as they may seem, they are window dressing compared to what we need to be accomplishing.

In the taking down of a statue, in the renaming of

a national park, in the changing of a school name or a shift in what we call a given bird, the goal may be met to stop giving honors to those whose true history reveals a darker story. It is a tangible act, and long overdue, but never goes deep enough. Where did the racism go now that the Dixie Chicks have been renamed the Chicks? Nowhere. It just went underground.

Then, there is a heightened response to “microaggressions.” In “Microaggression: More Than Just Race” Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D. says that “Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.”³

During my college days, I heard a shopkeeper call his cash register a “Jew’s piano,” and I wished I had the language to show him then that his choice of description carried with it offensive baggage. I was also once asked how I could be a Jew if I did not have horns on my head. That time, I was able to explain that the Hebrew word for horn and light are the same and that the confusion has caused problems for decades. No doubt these language issues reveal deeper stories of dismissal, racism, and oppression. My point is that we cannot stop at the door of language correction. These corrections must be an entry point to a deeper look at what is going on in our culture and country. We are living at a time of macro-aggression against the source of life itself, our fragile biosphere, and our energy to right the wrongs of the world feels disproportionate to the real threat, the threat to life on earth. If the efforts to correct offensive language are heeded, that would be great, but it won’t be enough.

We are all trying to live under the umbrella of the Ponzi scheme of growth and that is the real culprit. It is the biggest ‘offender’ of our future. It is the nemesis of all we hold dear in this country. It flies in the face of physics and it treats ecological limits as if they

were just suggestions. The climate chaos we are experiencing will only get worse and it is exacerbated by the migration of people from low carbon countries to those which have been industrialized longer. Back in 2008, the Center for Immigration studies said: “Immigration to the United States significantly increases world-wide CO2 emissions because it transfers population from lower-polluting parts of the world to the United States, which is a higher-polluting country. On average immigrants increase their emissions four-fold by coming to America.”⁴ Still, we have not used this data to add to the reasons why migration from the undeveloped world to the developed world should be discouraged for the collective good of a livable planet.

The US, like every other country, has limits. We have limited water supplies and limited infrastructure. We cannot keep building on every square inch of soil to accommodate more and more newcomers without threatening our quality of life. The open arms of a caring citizenry, one that welcomes more and more immigrants, even as our current population sits at 336,000,000, creates a one-way ticket to more poverty, increased homelessness, and decreased wildlife populations. These “open arms” become a welcome mat to scarcity for our nation.

According to SprawlUSA.com, “By 2060, less than 40 years from now, the US Census Bureau projects that the US population will have grown from 330+ million today to 404 million Americans. This is an increase of approximately 70 million over four decades, or about 18 million per decade.”⁵

From a sustainability perspective, those millions of extra people will put pressure on the kind of resources which technology cannot provide. Artificial Intelligence (AI) may be able to replace our workforce but it cannot refill our aquifers. Only we can stop putting relentless demands on our limited resources. Endhomelessness.org released the following data: In 2022, 582,362 people were experiencing homelessness in America. This roughly amounts to 18 out of every 10,000 people.⁶ This is a problem that should be tackled before more poverty-stricken people are allowed into a country that has little to offer them.

According to an article published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “Two of the largest reservoirs in America, which provide water

and electricity to millions, are in danger of reaching ‘dead pool status.’ A result of the climate crisis and overconsumption of water, experts say. Lake Mead, in Nevada and Arizona, and Lake Powell, in Utah and Arizona, are currently at their lowest levels ever. ‘Dead pool’ status would mean the water level in the dams was so low it could no longer flow downstream and power the hydroelectric power stations.”

In the same report, Lis Mullin Bernhardt, an ecosystems expert at UNEP, shared: “The conditions in the American west, which we’re seeing around the Colorado River basin, have been so dry for more than 20 years that we’re no longer speaking of a drought. We refer to it as ‘aridification’ – a new very dry normal.”

The UNEP article goes on to report the severity of this burgeoning water crisis, noting: “Experts warn that as the crisis deepens, water cuts will need to be introduced, but this may not be enough.”⁷

And yet this is where many migrants are landing, smack dab in the middle of an increasingly desperate water crisis. Worrying about what we call the people streaming over the border cannot matter more than how destabilizing immigration-driven population growth is to our country’s well-being and wildlife. No matter what term we use to distinguish those who come into the country with or without proper papers, the fact that we are already overpopulated remains the same. When we make the name change from “illegal aliens” to “undocumented workers,” we have done nothing to address the flooding of the country with those who will now need housing, food, water and jobs, or the additional stress they put on our social and physical infrastructure. Americans have collectively refused to see that we are already overpopulated relative to our resources in the US which is why we can’t seem to stop the flow of immigrants currently streaming into our country at places like Eagle Pass, Texas where record numbers of migrants from all over the world are making their way into our overpopulated country.

According to a cbs.com news story dated December 24, 2023, by Camillo Montora-Galvez, “In just five days last week, Border Patrol processed nearly 50,000 migrants who entered the US illegally, with daily apprehensions surpassing 10,000 thrice, up from the 6,400 average last month, according to federal data obtained by CBS News. Roughly 1,500 additional migrants are being processed each day at

official border crossings under a Biden program powered by a phone app.”⁸

In what world is that sustainable? Yes, human rights matter and no one should be harmed in the handling of this crisis, but the collective harm of allowing a steady flow of people into our country should frighten us not because these people are harmful individually, but because the impact of trying to sustain all of them is impossible given our limited resources. When some states respond by sending buses and lunches and shipping them off to declared sanctuary cities, we ignore what this all means to the well-being of those Americans and to the cities which are struggling to handle their current residents let alone more who will need immediate attention and resources. We kick the can down the road and increase the instability their collective presence will bring to a country already struggling with homelessness and a myriad of ecological issues.

There is a deeper, longer-term humanity in the efforts to set and enforce limits at the border. It is in our common best interests to lobby and vote for immigration policies that carve out a new narrative that stands on the pillars of both ecological and economic realities. Of course, those who are first to get behind border closings play on our xenophobic fears. Pat Buchanan, commentator and politician, ran for president in 1992 and 1996. One of his big issues was closing the border which stoked the fears of those who did not want to be associated with the racial overtones of his message. Buchanan’s concern about the border had to do with two issues. He focused on WHO was coming in, not THAT they were coming in. He personified the white nationalist view when he said: “Where liberals see as an ever-more-splendid diversity of colors, creeds, ethnicities, ideologies, beliefs and lifestyles, the Right sees the disintegration of a country, a nation, a people, and its replacement with a Tower of Babel.”⁹

What Buchanan got right was his concern about how influxes of immigrants would out compete Americans for jobs. “Each year millions of immigrants pour illegally over our southern border, competing for jobs and social services with American citizens,” he said.¹⁰ His claim was corroborated by research done by Roy Beck in “Back of the Hiring Line, A 200-Year History of Immigration Surges, Employer Bias, and Depression

of Black Wealth.” In short, surges in immigration push Blacks to the back of the hiring line, since new immigrants are preferred due to their willingness to take lower wages.¹¹

Some within the Republican Party of today have embraced Buchanan’s stance and are not ashamed to lean into patriotic, pro-White European preservation tropes in their calls for closing the borders. This GOP angle represents the wrong conversation. Pinning mass immigration on xenophobic stereotypes in the present moment of our already swollen numbers is not helping to solve the nation’s ever-growing population crisis. Changing our language and what we call places and people needs to be the first step, but not the only step. It is easy to see why people recoil over talk about stopping US population growth. The issue has unfortunately been framed around racism instead of sustainability.

There is something we should be afraid of, and it’s the ongoing threat to biodiversity. We should be afraid of overloading our boat. It may also be the case that existing in overshoot is not as big of an issue to the general public as it is to scientists. When there are discrepancies in these types of issues, public policy doesn’t necessarily follow the science. According to Pew Research, scientists are more concerned about the impact of population growth than the general public, by 23%.¹²

Resources and Population Growth

% of each group saying the growing world population will or will not be a major problem because...

- There won’t be enough food and resources
- We will find a way to stretch natural resources



Survey of U.S. adults August 15-25, 2014. Q28. AAAS scientists survey Sept. 11 - Oct. 13, 2014. Q24. Those saying don't know or giving no response are not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In a 2015 Pew Research article, author George Gao wrote, “Just 17% of AAAS scientists and 38% of Americans said population growth won’t be a problem because we will find a way to stretch natural

resources.” We should be deeply afraid of overbooking our resources of today and sentencing ourselves to a dismal tomorrow. Denial is a huge problem when it comes to recognizing that we cannot continue business as usual.

Humanity has a key failing – we tend to *deny* our problems. Humanity denies some things because acknowledging them would force us to confront change, others because they are just too painful, or make us afraid. This human incapacity to listen and digest bad news makes it hard to solve the environmental crisis.

I argue that the attention being paid to the renaming of people, places, animals, and things is a part of that denial. Those in our society who place so much power on trying not to be offensive function as a distraction from the deeper issues which must be faced.

Can we feel sorry for the desperate and also see that this is a slippery slope of creating more desperation within our own borders? Paving the way forward is not with the asphalt of hatred. But we must turn the conversation toward the topic of sustainability, so rarely mentioned in our political discourse. Adding more people to our country puts a terrible strain on our resources. As NPG articulates in their proposal for a consensus on this issue which is tearing our country apart, we have to have a reality check when it comes to carving out a national policy on mass immigration. “A population policy, for the United States or elsewhere, must come out of a consensus that the perils of not having a policy far outweigh the inconveniences of having one.”¹³ Indeed we are not doing the world a favor by offering our country as a release valve for the problems of the world.

We must take a reality check as to what the lack of solid enforceable immigration policy is doing to our country. We must face the reality of what is possible and not possible given what we know about how pain and struggle lie between the growing gap of supply and demand.

Our relationship with nature is one of too much demand and limited supply and we try to bridge that gap with technology and hope. We only need to look at places around the globe with bloated populations and witness their struggles with procuring fresh water to see our near future. We cannot look at places like Cape Town, South Africa or Mexico City, Mexico and

pretend to believe their water issues will stay within their borders, not when we are inviting more people in to use our natural resources. Perhaps the lack of concern can be attributed to racism, that somehow overshooting your resources only happens to ‘those’ people. As Mark Cromer said in his NPG paper, *Spoiler Alert: Smart Growth Won’t Save the Day*: “It is time to recognize, however, that we are not somehow protected by providence from a fate similar to that which has already befallen every corner of our shared world if we do not stop population growth and then reduce our overall numbers to sustainable levels that comport to available domestic resources.”¹⁴

HR-2 is a piece of legislation that can help stop the hemorrhaging at our borders. It is entitled “Secure the Border Act” and the Democratic side of the aisle has refused to get behind it. Democrats take their marching orders from those whose focus is on the well-being of individual immigrants. Say “border security” and they hear “kids in cages” and “separated families” and label such talking points as heartless political maneuvering. Which means they have thrown in the towel and given up on this crisis. Left-leaning Democrats have demonstrated with their lack of action that they would rather watch the degrading of America’s people and resources than change their thoughts about immigration policies and securing our border. Repeatedly, they choose to sacrifice the collective good so that they may appear to be the ones who care about the downtrodden. If the downtrodden were redefined to be underemployed Black Americans or the wildlife being squeezed out of the American landscape – the discussion might take on a new and improved twist.

This wasn’t always the case. Back in the 90s, Representative Barbara Jordan was a Texan Democrat. She chaired the US Commission on Immigration Reform from 1994 until her death in 1996. Under her leadership the commission recommended a reduction in immigration, deciding that it should be cut by 1/3 to approximately 550,000 per year. Even though by today’s standards that would still be too much, her commission supported increased enforcement against undocumented workers and putting employers under more scrutiny.

The commission’s report to Congress said that it was “a right and responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the

national interest,” and concluded that “legal immigration has strengthened and can continue to strengthen this country” and “decried hostility and discrimination against immigrants as antithetical to the traditions and interests of the country.” The commission recommended that the United States reduce the number of refugees admitted annually to a floor of 50,000 (this level would be lifted during emergencies).¹⁵

Barbara Jordan’s leadership was cut off with her untimely death at the age of 59. Hers was a bipartisan attempt to stop illegal immigration as well as reduce legal immigration. But the forces that benefit in the short term from more immigration fought against her reforms and this has been a losing battle ever since. Businesses like it when they can hire cheaper labor and ones not as prone to organize into unions. Jordan knew it was in the national interest to get on top of immigration laws, but those who tried to please individual group interests have won for the time being.

In the months following Jordan’s death, those special interests came together to defeat legislation that would have humanely restricted immigration as Jordan recommended when she declared: “It is both a right and a responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest.”¹⁶

One of Jordan’s goals was to reduce legal immigration by eliminating the right for citizens and legal immigrants to sponsor the immigration of siblings. President Clinton endorsed that aim but then backed off, in what the *Boston Globe* described as a favor to Chinese-Americans who had donated heavily to the Democratic Party.¹⁷

If we enforce E-Verify, a system to make sure employers are hiring those who are legally authorized to work in the US, if we end the Visa Lottery, if we end Birthright Citizenship so that children of permanent residents do not become automatic citizens, we are not monsters.¹⁸ We are protecting what is left of our resources, honoring our workers (especially our marginalized ones), and saving our remaining open lands which may otherwise be turned into affordable housing and developments. We are being good Americans, not bad ones.

To give up on the fight to protect our resources is to give up on Americans, and more deeply to give up

on the American Dream, however much of a fantasy that ever was. We must re-imagine a more stable world which is impossible without reducing our numbers. We cannot keep patting ourselves on the back for responding to a world of injustice with environmental lip service which in the end will simply open the doors for more injustice.

Climate change exacerbates the need to restrict demand on our resources, particularly our water supplies. A report by Jon Hegge in *National Geographic* on May 12, 2020, states the grim news that “while the wettest regions of the US are getting wetter, the drier areas are getting drier, and there are some seasonal shifts in water patterns – rising temperatures mean the snowmelt that feeds many rivers begins and ends earlier, contributing to summer water shortages. Even where precipitation is projected to increase, mostly in the nation’s northern regions, the trend is toward more intense concentrations of rainfall that are difficult to capture and use. At the same time, 145 basins are expected to be drier, especially in the Southwest, southern Great Plains, and Florida. In the West, California has already faced some of its worst droughts in recorded history.”¹⁹

What we need to be addressing is at the core of this article. Decreasing supply and increasing demand are creating a perfect water storm, the effects of which are already being felt. The Colorado River carved its way 1,450 miles from the Rockies to the Gulf of California for millions of years, but now no longer reaches the sea. In 2018, parts of the Rio Grande recorded their lowest water levels ever; Arizona essentially lives under permanent drought conditions; and in South Florida, freshwater aquifers are increasingly susceptible to salt water intrusion due to over-extraction.²⁰ Water is not something money can buy. Money can clean our existing water supplies but not create more volume to keep up with demand especially in a climate altered world.

A great example of how we waste our collective energies is in our response to how bird numbers are plummeting in mind-numbing ways. According to the American Bird Conservancy, across Canada 3 billion birds have been lost coming mostly from just 12 bird families.²¹

And yet if you comb the websites of the major birding NGO’s or look at any local birding

organizations there is a haunting absence of any connection between human overpopulation and birds in decline. USDA research claims that birdwatching as a hobby is growing in popularity.²² But while millions more are intrigued by this hobby which I share, they are ironically growing in numbers while our feathered friends are in sharp decline. None of the new birders get to hear the truth about growth and how negatively it impacts their beloved creatures. Instead, they plug into the jargon of equity and work to change birds' names. Instead of looking at immigration policies which should be rewritten to slow and stop growth, the birding community is spending time and energy trying to change the names of birds like Bachman's sparrow because someone found out that he was not worthy of that honor. We are being inundated by more and more immigrants at a time when US birthrates are stable. That is an ironic kick in the teeth, for our growth is both unsustainable and should be more easily stoppable, but it must come from a deep understanding that to manage growth is to do so from a tough love perspective.

Many of our policies are based on false premises and bad science. According to MAHB (Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere) it's just another Ponzi scheme we are being tricked to play.

"Many people are concerned about the economic consequences of low fertility and ageing population in Europe and see immigrants as a tool to fill the expected shortage of workers. But accommodating ever-more people to sustain an ever-growing society is not a solution: it is just a delusional temporary fix, which fuels a Ponzi scheme that is clearly not sustainable in the medium/long term. On the contrary, immigration may exacerbate actual problems that many European countries are facing today, such as shortage of resources (especially energy and water) and high rates of unemployment. Accepting more immigrants than can be integrated creates social conflicts, whose first victims are often the immigrants themselves. Vice versa, limiting the number could facilitate their integration."

They further observed, "It is worth noticing that the concerns about population decline and its economic implications are not supported by evidence. Indeed, the poorest countries of the world are not countries with shrinking populations but, on the

contrary, are all countries with high fertility and rapid population growth with the only exception of North Korea. Vice versa, Japan is still one of the wealthiest and most innovative countries in the world although its population has been ageing and shrinking for more than 20 years."²³

We must devote our energies to stopping the human enterprise from polluting and bulldozing their habitat, a much more difficult chore to be sure. We cannot for a moment allow ourselves to think that any name changes will help birds survive our obsession with growth. Our time will be much better spent wrestling with 336,000,000 non-feathered bi-pedal hominids in our country who seem to love distraction more than action.

It is offensive to destroy our country with the fear of appearing to do badly instead of a fear of actually doing badly. Doing badly means collectively ignoring the ugly side of continued growth which can potentially be curbed with the proper enforcement of the border and a signaling to the world, that though we are working towards a greater acceptance of all people we cannot continue to accept people on mass because we are full and overflowing relative to our resources. Giving lip service to the environment by changing names and otherwise focusing on the downstream side of growth will continue to allow our country to rot from the inside out because we did not do our homework on the limits to growth. Again, according to MAHB, "Anti-immigration positions are usually equated to racism. It is time to break such a dangerous equation. There are reasons to support immigration that are anything but humanitarian: many people want immigrants just to exploit them and see them as an opportunity of cheap labor. Vice versa, there are reasons to support lowering immigration that are anything but racist: good, environmental, and humanitarian reasons. It is time to raise awareness of this so that we can concentrate on the root of the problem instead of its symptoms."

Indeed, it is time to better allocate our time and resources to issues which address the overpopulation-infused emergency we face.

NOTES:

1. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/more-than-600-places-in-the-us-will-remove-racist-slur-from-their-names-180979733/>
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3. https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/m/microaggressions_by_derald_wing_sue_ph.d._pdf
4. [https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-United-States-and-WorldWide-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions.](https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-United-States-and-WorldWide-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions)
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17. <https://cis.org/Report/Remembering-Barbara-Jordan-and-Her-Immigration-Legacy#2>
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23. https://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/eurasp_statement_migration.pdf



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