

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Don Mann, President, NPG, Inc.

NPG Statement on Population

We believe that the optimum rate of population growth is negative.

We believe that the optimum rate of population growth for the United States (and for the world) is **negative**, until such time as the **scale** of economic activity – and its environmental effects – is reduced to a level that would be sustainable indefinitely. We are convinced that if present rates of population and economic growth were allowed to continue, the end result – within the lifetimes of many of us – would inevitably be near-universal poverty in a hopelessly polluted nation and world.

We agree with Professor Herman Daly, who has pointed out that the human economy is a subset of the biosphere, and that **the current scale of economic activity relative to the biosphere is already far too large to be sustainable indefinitely.**

Stabilization is Not Enough

We believe that calls for merely slowing down rapid population growth, or for stabilizing population at present or even higher levels, **are totally inadequate.**

Such proposals, while presented as a solution, **fail to address the central issue:** how to create an economy that would be sustainable indefinitely. At present or at even higher levels of population, neither the application of science and technology nor simplifying lifestyles – nor any combination of the two – can offer any hope of reducing our impact on the environment to a sustainable level.

We Need a Smaller Population

We recognize that our impact on the environment, in terms of pollution and resource depletion, is the product of our numbers times our per capita consumption of energy and materials. Thus, there are only three ways by which that impact can be reduced:

- By reducing the size of our population by a negative rate of population growth.
- By reducing overconsumption by simplifying lifestyles.
- By reducing resource depletion and pollution per unit of consumption through more efficient use of energy and materials.

Population size is by far the most critical of those three variables. **Nevertheless, our present scale of economic**

activity is so large relative to the biosphere that all three measures are needed in order to reduce it to a sustainable level.

An Urgent Need

Over 40 years ago, when our U.S. population was far smaller (about 203 million, rather than our present 321 million) Professor John Holdren correctly saw the urgent need for a negative rate of population growth. At that time “...he wrote: “What is surprising... is that there is not more agreement concerning what the rate of change of population size should be. For given the uncertain, but possibly grave, risks associated with substantially increasing our impact on the environment, and given that population growth aggravates or impedes the solution of a wide variety of other problems... **it should be obvious that the optimum rate of population growth is zero or negative until such time as the uncertainties have been removed and the problems solved.**”

A Population Goal for Our Country

We must have, first of all, a nationally determined population goal for our country, accompanied by effective policies to achieve it.

We urge Congress and President Obama to set, as a top priority national goal, **the achievement of a negative rate of population growth for the United States until such time as the scale of our economic activity is reduced to a sustainable level.**

It would be relatively easy for the U.S. to achieve a negative rate of population growth. But to do so we must first be willing to address the only two factors that cause our present growth: fertility and immigration.

If almost all couples had no more than two children, and if we reduced immigration to not over 200,000 a year, our population would soon stop growing and then begin a gradual decline before stabilizing at a sustainable level of around 150 million.

By contrast, we are now heading rapidly toward disaster. Our population growth is destroying our environment, our resources, and our standard of living. If mass immigration is allowed to continue, the Census Bureau projects our U.S. population will grow to 417 million people by 2060 – reaching over half a billion by the end of this century.

Why We Need A Smaller U.S. Population And How We Can Achieve It

We need a smaller population in order to halt the destruction of our environment, and to create an economy that would be **sustainable** over the very long term. We are trying to address our steadily worsening environmental problems without coming to grips with the root cause – overpopulation.

If present mass immigration rates are allowed to continue, our population, now 321 million, would reach 400 million by the year 2050 – and still be growing rapidly! All efforts to save our environment will ultimately be futile unless we not only halt U.S. population growth, but reverse it, so that our population can eventually be stabilized at a **sustainable** level – far lower than it is today.

The Optimum U.S. Population Size

The central issue is surely this: **at what size should we seek to stabilize U.S. population?** Unless we know in what direction we should be headed, how can we possibly devise sensible policies to get us there? The size at which our population is eventually stabilized is supremely important because of the effect of sheer numbers of people on such vitally important national goals as a healthy environment, and a sustainable economy.

We believe these goals can best be achieved with a U.S. population in the range of 150 million. This optimum size could be reached, if we do two things now that are well within our grasp.

How to Get There

- 1. Halt illegal immigration, and reduce annual immigration to not over 200,000.** Then immigration would no longer contribute significantly to our population growth, as it does now.
- 2. Continue the trend of lowering fertility rates** (the average number of children per woman) from the present 1.88 to around 1.5, and maintain it at that level for

several decades. We believe that non-coercive financial incentives will be necessary in order to reach that goal.

If almost all women had no more than two children, our fertility rate would drop to around 1.5 because many women remain childless by choice, or choose to have not more than one child. **We promote the ideal of the two-child maximum family as the social norm, because that is the key to lowering our fertility.**

Incentives to Lower Fertility

NPG proposes these incentives to motivate parents to have no more than two children:

- Eliminate the present federal income tax deduction for dependent children born after a specified date.
- Give a federal income tax credit **only** to those parents who have not more than two children. Those with three or more would lose the credit entirely.
- Give an annual cash grant to low-income parents who pay little or no income tax, and who have no more than two children. Those with three or more children would lose the cash grant entirely.

Two Vastly Different Paths Lie Before Us

With the reductions in immigration and fertility we advocate, our nation could start **now** on the path toward a sustainable and prosperous population of around 150 million. Without such a program, we are almost certain to continue our mindless, headlong rush down our current path. That path is leading us straight toward catastrophic population levels that can only destroy our environment, and produce universal poverty in a crowded, polluted nation.

Immigration: The Driving Force behind Our U.S. Population Growth

We at Negative Population Growth, Inc. (NPG) believe that our country is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long-range carrying capacity of its resources and environment. We believe, therefore, that U.S. population growth should be halted as soon as possible – and eventually reversed.

But unless our present massive immigration is drastically reduced, we will never be able to stabilize our population at a sustainable level.

Between 2000 and 2010, U.S. population grew by over 27.3 million people. Immigration, both legal and illegal, accounted for a large portion of that huge increase in numbers. Today, projections show that immigration will soon become the primary driver of U.S. population growth.

If we allow present rates of mass immigration to continue, our U.S. population – now 321 million – is

projected to reach 400 million by 2050, with no end to growth in sight! Such growth would be catastrophic for our environment, for our standard of living, and for the quality of our lives.

We now allow more than one million legal immigrants to come here annually. Their numbers are swelled by an estimated 500,000 illegal immigrants who come here each year and remain permanently – adding their numbers to the estimated 11 to 12 million illegal aliens who are already living here permanently in violation of our laws.

We urgently need to halt **illegal** immigration, and reduce annual **legal** immigration to not more than 200,000 a year, including all relatives and refugees. Then, immigration would no longer contribute significantly to our population growth.

Advocates of Massive Immigration Are Wrong!

There are powerful forces that fight not only to keep immigration at the present high level, but to increase it. Among them are employers who want low-wage labor, ethnic groups whose leaders seek greater political power, and some humanitarians who believe in virtually open borders.

They also include pro-growth advocates who believe that an ever-growing labor force, fueled by immigration, is necessary to achieve their goal of an ever-increasing GNP. That goal, in the real world of environmental and resource limits, is a recipe for disaster.

How Can We Best Help Others?

Beyond any question, the United States should maintain the humane policies toward immigrants and refugees that have characterized its past. But we need to express our compassion in an intelligent way. Our priority should be to improve living conditions in the developing countries, rather than to allow vast numbers of their citizens to settle here.

World population is growing by some 80 million a year, and almost all of that growth occurs in the developing countries. We cannot possibly allow more than a tiny fraction of those millions to come here. What can we do to help all those who have no choice but to remain at home?

One thing is crystal clear. The problems of the underdeveloped countries are beyond solution by emigration.

To pretend otherwise is simply self-delusion. **Nothing can permanently improve living conditions in these countries unless they first halt their population growth, the root cause of their poverty and environmental degradation.**

Those who assert that eradicating poverty is a prerequisite for halting population growth have the process just backwards. Only after halting their population growth can developing countries even begin to bring their standard of living up to an adequate level. We should do everything in our power to help those nations that are prepared to make a determined effort to halt, and eventually to reverse, their population growth.

We Need a Sensible U.S. Immigration Policy

We cannot continue to allow our national immigration policy to be dictated by special-interest groups who pursue their own agendas without regard for the broad national interest. **Our immigration policy should be an integral part of a national population policy aimed at halting, and then reversing, our population growth so that U.S. population can eventually be stabilized at a lower, truly sustainable level.**

As Americans, our first obligation to ourselves – and to our children and grandchildren – is to restore and preserve the land we have inherited. In shaping our immigration policy, our top priority must be our own national interest, and the welfare of present and future generations of Americans.

Making Believe About the U.S. Population Crisis

U.S. population, now over 321 million, is growing by about 2.4 million every year – and is projected to reach over half a billion by next century. Nevertheless...

We keep on **MAKING BELIEVE** that a national population of that size (or even its present size) would be sustainable for the long term.

We keep on **MAKING BELIEVE** that our already overstressed ecosystem could provide an adequate standard of living for such numbers.

We keep on **MAKING BELIEVE** that family planning alone – or conservation, or green technology, or all of these together – are capable of sustaining a U.S. population of such catastrophic levels.

But... **if** we keep on **MAKING BELIEVE**, and keep on **pretending** that these preposterous propositions are true, we are going to wind up where we are now headed: in a nation of over half a billion impoverished people. Such an America would be a place where none of us would care to live – a nation of almost universal poverty, with an ecosystem in ruins.

Negative Population Growth, Inc. (NPG) believes that the optimum size for U.S. population is around 150 million, and that a substantially larger population would simply not be sustainable indefinitely.

In our view, only if U.S. population **is** reduced to that size can we hope to create an economy that would be sustainable indefinitely, with an adequate standard of living for all, in a healthy environment. So many people profess to believe otherwise because they do not see how U.S. population could possibly be reduced to an optimum size.

The conventional wisdom sees no way that our nation's population can be halted short of half a billion, and accepts that growth as inevitable. Rather than face up to the grim reality that such massive growth would bring on an economic and ecological catastrophe, conventional thinkers prefer to **MAKE BELIEVE** that all will be well.

But the truth is that sustainable development for an America of over 500 million people is simply an **impossible dream**.

Toward An Optimum U.S. Population

Further population growth on the gigantic scale now projected is **not inevitable**. If we could only summon the will, we could **start now** on the path toward a sustainable U.S. population of around 150 million.

To reduce U.S. population size, we need a negative rate of population growth. For that, we need to maintain our below-replacement level of fertility, decreasing our current rate of 1.88 to around 1.5.

If almost no American family had more than two children, the nation's total fertility rate (average number of children per woman) would fall to the level of roughly 1.5, because many women choose voluntarily to have no children at all, or stop after only one child. We must supplement our current trend of below-replacement fertility levels with non-coercive incentives, thus encouraging the two-child maximum family.

Zero Net Migration Must Be Our Goal

Because our nation is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long range carrying capacity of our environment and resources, legal immigration, now over a million a year, must no longer be allowed to add to the size of our population.

Instead, legal immigration must be limited to the number of immigrants who live here permanently, but who, each year, return voluntarily to their countries of origin. Their number is estimated to be around 200,000 a year. In order to achieve the important goal of zero net migration, annual legal immigration must not be allowed to exceed that number.

Let's Stop Making Believe

If we could only turn from **MAKING BELIEVE** to realistic analysis as a basis for action, **the U.S. could achieve a negative rate of population growth that would set us on the path to an optimum population of around 150 million.**

The fate of our nation, and of all future generations of Americans, hangs on our success in achieving that goal.



Donald Mann received a degree in Liberal Arts from Wesleyan University, later pursuing graduate studies in philosophy at Columbia University and in economics at l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris. He also served as an officer in the Navy amphibious forces, and his business career led to long assignments in such countries as Lebanon, Morocco, Belgium, and France. An ardent environmentalist for many years, in 1971 Don became convinced that a new organization to address the problem of overpopulation was badly needed. Therefore, with a great deal of help from many sources and individuals, he founded NPG, Inc. in 1972.

NPG, Inc. is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization. Since 1972, our primary purpose has been to educate the American public and policy makers regarding the damaging effects of U.S. population growth on our environment, natural resources, and quality of life. We advocate national policies which work to slow, halt, and eventually reverse population growth — until we reach a much smaller, truly sustainable size. For more information on NPG, visit our website at **www.NPG.org**.



Negative Population Growth, Inc.
2861 Duke Street, Suite 36
Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: (703) 370-9510
Fax: (703) 370-9514
Email: **npg@npg.org**

Board of Directors

Donald Mann, *President*
Frances Dorner,
Secretary/Treasurer
Josephine Lobretto
Sharon Marks
Diane Saco

**SIGN UP TODAY AT WWW.NPG.ORG
TO RECEIVE NPG COMMENTARY ONLINE!**