

We must cap world population now

by Larry S. Rodick

The population of the world is exploding at an ever-increasing rate. It has become the primary threat to the very future of mankind.

In about 1830, the world reached the one billion mark in human population. By 1930, we had added our second billion; we will reach the 6 billion mark by about 1997. Demographers predict the world's population will double inevitably—even assuming the most conservative growth estimates. According to most scientists, the globe cannot sustain our present quality of life if its population exceeds 10 billion people.

Our water and air are no longer pure, and we have begun to run out of places to put our solid wastes. We are losing arable land and rain forests at a staggering speed, and thousands of animal species disappear each year. The mass of humanity crowding into our urban centers has made them unfit places to live.

At some point the world will choke on its own population, unless we act immediately to bring unbridled population growth under control.

Current efforts to control population growth are much too limited and faltering. It is time to confront the problem directly and decisively. The world must act to set a cap on its population.

As the world's leading power, the United States should take the lead. This country, with a current population of 250 million, should set an absolute cap on its future population of 300 million. The world, through the United Nations, should cap its population at 10 billion. Each country of the world, led by the industrialized countries, should set caps on their own populations.

Several arguments have been raised against a population cap. One, which I will call the fatalist approach, maintains the world will self-destruct from one force or another before population reaches the danger point, so why bother to control it. This doomsday argument, sometimes espoused by religious fanatics, has been around for a long time. Had we followed such

advice in the past, we probably would not be here today. What a different world it would be, for example, if we had allowed smallpox, polio, and other killer diseases to go unchecked.

Another theory, held by some economists, maintains that economic growth automatically brings down population growth. This has occurred in some industrial nations. The problem is there is no certainty that large areas of the world will realize this kind of economic growth. Even if they do, it will take many decades, even centuries for the population growth rate to level off. We simply do not have that kind of time.

A third argument against setting population limits, advanced by reasonable people such as those in my own field, is that to set limits will give dictators license to destroy elements of society for ulterior reasons. While history shows a propensity for such brutal and inhumane treatment of minority groups, I think there are three reasons why this argument is not sufficient to dismiss the idea of setting a cap on populations.

First, I believe the United Nations is beginning to show the muscle necessary to prohibit coercive birth control programs, and should be given the task of enforcing a voluntary family planning policy in every country. Second, the risk of exceeding the earth's carrying capacity far exceeds the risk posed by adopting reasonable limits; that is, we face the choice of partial extinction or total extinction. Third, there is evidence that unrestricted population growth is, in itself, one of the factors that allow dictators to assume power. Poor, illiterate masses are easy prey for those seeking power.

The United States should act first to cap its own growth. Throughout history, societal changes have occurred first in the developed countries, followed by the lesser developed nations, take the lead, the less developed countries will move soon enough to control their own rapid growth.

It is time to cap the population of the United States, for our own reasons. Our overall population density is not large, compared to many nations, but our people are not moving to rural areas, and for good reason. Much of

our rural area is not habitable because of harsh weather conditions, unsuitable soil, topography, lack of jobs, inadequate health care facilities, etc. The trend, in fact, continues to be toward our greater urban area. Yet our cities are decaying, unable to meet the needs of their ever increasing populations. Urban blight is reaching the suburbs.

We must stabilize our own population if we are to maintain our present quality of life.

As always, the future is uncertain. But one thing is certain. If the world does not act its population will continue to grow at an increasing rate. It is possible we can find ways to live with such growth, but all indications are the scientific advances necessary to keep up with it are unlikely. In all probability we would face more war and increasing famine as people try to cope with diminishing resources.

If, on the other hand, the nations of the world do set a cap on total population and it develops that the earth could have sustained a higher level, we will only have lost some resources expended in the effort. If we are correct the effort will do nothing less than save our planet.

Setting these population caps will take tremendous political courage on the part of the leaders of the world. It can happen only if there is a groundswell of support from people around the world who see the dangers of no action. We know there are programs that work to bring down population growth. Witness the substantial cuts in the fertility rates of several developing countries over the last 25 years. We must find the courage to apply these programs worldwide, to set a population stabilization goal and marshal the resources to achieve it.

It will be a huge undertaking, comparable to our successful effort to reach the moon. It is imperative that we begin now.

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Letters to the Editor



Wrong vote could leave UNLV budget short

Dear Editor,

It has been mildly discouraging to walk around the campus and see the lack of interest in our current presidential campaign, as well as our local campaign.

I did not until recently see any of the traditional campaign buttons that are as much a part of our political culture as the voting booth. There are so many issues that interest us as students yet I see so little activism from us.

Occasionally, I see a small stand urging us to support (or fight) abortions or another protesting the Nevada Test Site but aside from these isolated incidents there seems to be little interest.

It is understandable that many of our students work and have families and for that reason can not afford the time. However, we also have many students that do have the time and find it for fraternity and sorority activities. I would respectfully urge those students to consider an interest in political expression. The current presidential race will drastically effect our lives—depending on one's political

loyalties. That is certainly worth the trouble.

Having written that, I can also suggest as issue close to home if the reader is disinclined to take part in a presidential race in which he or she feels they have no real choice between the three candidates. I am referring to the almost constant threat of tuition increases.

As much as I like and respect Governor Bob Miller, his pen seems to find our university budget as the first place to trim the state budget. I believe I found a way to fight back. I would like to suggest electing Dina Titus.

Since having her as my instructor in political science class, I was impressed with her strength of character. Although some might find it objectionable that Titus is of the Democratic Party persuasion. However, I will guess that she has a vested interest in preserving our university budget the way it currently is—both as an educator and as a representative in Senate District 7.

It strikes me as odd that we as students can pull together for athletic events and to express our outrage at the Rodney King beating—and yet something that could severely limit our ability to complete our education gets so little protest. I do not insult our student body or faculty as being apathetic. Undoubtedly there is an interest in the subject of tuition increases, perhaps a strong interest, yet it

is undirected. Today, we have a chance to send a message to Governor Miller to leave out budget alone. I believe Titus is just the person with enough strength to push it off.

I ask you to try and find the time to go to your local polls and cast your vote for Titus. It shouldn't take that long. If you are not registered to vote there are several places in and around the campus that should have information on how to register—Student Government, the political science office or even the Democratic Headquarters office just across Maryland Parkway.

I think it will give you a great sense of satisfaction to know you used your own democratic process to at least try to effect a change you feel is for the better. I respectfully ask all to consider my suggestion.

John Hanechak
Student

Band on field for you

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to the editorial published in the Oct. 22 issue of *The Rebel Yell* which was written in a way to suggest that the band ruined the Homecoming festivities. As a proud member of the UNLV Star of Nevada

Marching Band, I have to disagree with the accusations you made.

During Homecoming we didn't play a single note until all of the festivities were completed; not during the announcement of the King and Queen winners as suggested in the editorial. The band was on the field and ready to play after all other festivities were completed, but this was done only in an effort to save time.

The editorial said, "Although the band is an important part of Homecoming, it should not overshadow the event." Well, you're right. The band is an integral part of Homecoming, but we did not overshadow the event. In fact, our time was cut by the athletic department. Perhaps if the athletic department had lengthened halftime to more than 15 minutes like they do at any other school, you could have enjoyed the festivities.

This band puts a lot of time in for practice, usually 12 hours a week, to only play seven minutes. We appreciate the fans we do have, but please don't blame the "chaotic" Homecoming on us. We are out there for you.

I suggest checking your facts before you point fingers and then you can point them in the right direction.

Geoff Neuman
music education major