

CENSUS 2010: De-bunking the Headlines

By Kathleene Parker

The United States recently updated its census. But—considering corporate media’s and the government’s seemingly deliberate efforts to distort the results, and considering that our booming population continues as the unacknowledged elephant in the room—I wonder why we even bothered.

When the first census was done in 1790, our population was roughly 4 million. But when the outcome of the 2010 census was announced, the astounding new population total was barely mentioned or, when it was, its context was ignored, so that no one understood the significance of the 307 million Americans, likely more, we have become. (Some estimate the number at closer to 320 million.)

Nor were we helped to understand one of the best-kept secrets of our time: That only three nations—China, India and the United States, in that order—have populations over 300 million. (Indonesia at 230 million is a distant fourth.)

Meanwhile, the United States is the world’s fourth fastest growing nation! In other words, we’re not only a high-carbon, high-impact economy, we’re a global population super-giant. And, the drought-plagued American Southwest is the fastest growing region of this, the world’s fourth fastest growing nation!

with populations over one billion—also becoming big-time consumers and highly industrialized that dubious distinction falters, but we’re still a major global population player. We—and the world—deserve for us to have a candid national discussion of “where we are growing” and whether that is what we Americans want for our children’s futures.

(Some scientific estimates indicate that one American has the environmental impact of 10 to 30 citizens from a developing nation, depending upon what developing nation and the specific American lifestyle—say a trophy house versus a humble suburban cottage. Sadly, in the United States, even those with a “green” lifestyle have a huge carbon and general environmental footprint compared with that in many non-industrial cultures.)

United States growth is linked to both immigration at the highest rate, by large margins, in our history and, despite media depictions to the contrary, a rising birthrate. (In contrast, most other developed nations have below-replacement-level birth rates.)

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When will the American people be allowed full disclosure about our exploding population or the implications to the planet?



After the census, there were the much-ballyhooed and correct—but appallingly misleading—headlines that 2000 to 2010 brought “some of the slowest growth in decades.” In fact, recent growth slowed only slightly while we continue a decades-long population explosion.

Our numbers explode to the extent that we could easily be a China-like one billion Americans this century, a fact it seems, studiously ignored—even deliberately hidden—by Big Media. Of note, since 1950 our growth rate has exactly matched India’s a century earlier, a pattern that shows every indication of continuing—with an almost identical demographic outcome!

But since media reports imply the opposite, we are, in the word of Colorado population activist Dr. Al Bartlett, “innumerate”—which is to numbers what “illiterate” is to words. It seems that even the truth—and perhaps the planet—are to be sacrificed in the name of continuing our population growth! (More on those economic forces in a future column.)

When will the American people be allowed full disclosure about our exploding population or the implications to the planet? After all, Bangladesh’s overpopulation is a huge problem for Bangladesh, but—except for it being a breeding ground for terrorist extremism—it is of little consequence to the world. But U.S. overpopulation, with its huge and growing carbon and environmental footprint, is a global problem!

Sierra Club director Carl Pope—back when the Sierra Club still considered population a component of carrying capacity—in the early 1990s called the United States “the world’s most overpopulated nation.” With China and India—each

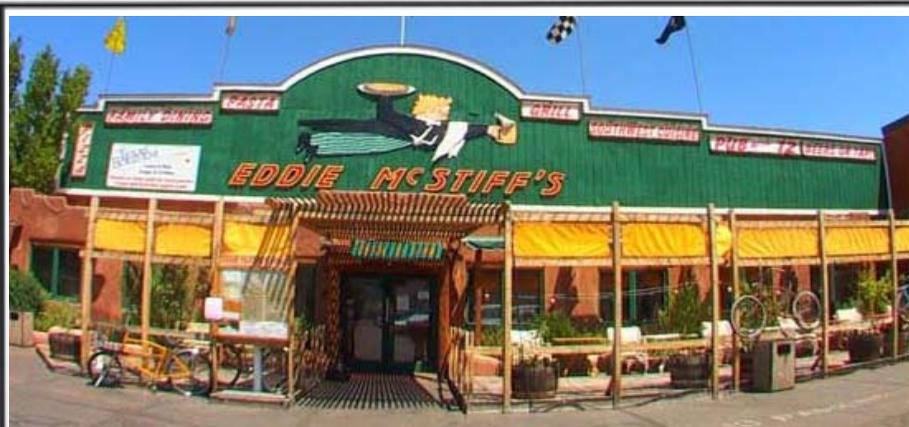
The media are fond of saying, “We are a nation of immigrants.” True, but we are also a nation that—with two exceptions—tightly controlled immigration. (Founders Jefferson, Franklin and Washington opposed immigration or raised deep concerns, for reasons apropos to their times, and forged policies of tight immigration.)

The previous immigration highs were “the Great Wave” between 1880 and 1920. Today there is what I call “the Great Tsunami of Immigration,” beginning about 1990 and continuing.

For perspective, in the 60 years between 1860 and 1920 only 25 million immigrants were admitted. In contrast, in just six years between 2000 and 2006, over 20 million arrived! During the frontier-era Great Wave—when urban sprawl, water shortages, crumbling infrastructure, a gripping recession with high unemployment or global environmental degradation were not problems—on average about 600,000 legal immigrants a year were admitted.

But even that was not without controversy, partly because powerful economic forces (the “robber barons”) wanted a flooded labor market to keep labor helpless against exploitation. Lost on many today is that the current immigration debate has happened before in our history. Just a century ago, we were having a heated discussion similar to our current one. (I say “similar” because, unlike today, liberals, civil-rights advocates and labor advocates then stood mostly on the side of restricting immigration and the discussion aligned along a labor-versus-business demarcation. More on that in a future column.)

But Congress eventually had no choice but to halt the Great Wave. Immigra-



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tion was slashed to under 250,000 a year beginning in 1920, an average that held through 1965—not coincidentally a time, despite the Great Depression, of huge labor advancement and the civil rights movement. (During the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt and others insisted that immigration be kept below 10,000 a year, despite the humanitarian crisis in Europe, a difficult but necessary stand given a nation teetering on the brink of disaster.)

In contrast, immigration during the today's Great Tsunami averages 700,000 legal immigrants. That is at five times historical averages and is the highest rate in our history with almost as many arriving in one year as all immigration between 1776 and 1826. An estimated half-million additional people arrive each year via illegal border crossings. That translate to 1.2 million added to our population each year just from immigration, with most arriving from less industrial, less high-impact cultures to become part of the most high-consumption, destructive economies in world history!

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The other growth source is births. The media hype a basically replacement-level birth rate of about 2.1 children per woman, albeit up from a low of 1.7 in the 1970s. Again, strictly speaking, true, but absolutely ignoring a staggering demographic force called momentum.

Put as simply as possible, it means that while each woman is having fewer children, more women than ever are of reproductive age and are having children, meaning a high annual birth rate! That's a trend common in all rapidly growing nations and it means that it can take decades, after achieving a replacement-level birth rate, for population to stabilize.

As a result—and absolutely lost on the media—more babies, 4,317,000, were born in 2007—than during the 1957 peak of the baby boom! Over 4 million babies continue to arrive each year. Subtract roughly 2.4 million deaths and the upshot is that births add just under 2 million to our population each year, while immigration adds 1.2 million.

Each year the nation adds another 3 million high-impact, high-carbon, high-consumption Americans with global and domestic implications of staggering—and undisguised—proportions.

(Parker, a journalist, publisher and longtime environmental and population activist is a native of the Four Corners area. She earlier served on the national Population Issues Committee of the Sierra Club and currently sits on the Board of Advisors of Population-Environment Balance. She often writes nationally about population and water issues. During her lifetime, she has seen cities, such as Las Vegas, Phoenix and Denver, grow from populations of tens of thousands to millions. She lives in the Albuquerque suburb of Rio Rancho.)



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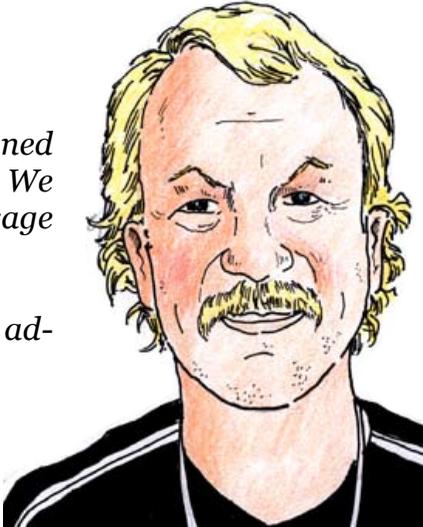
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