

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Overpopulation breeds terrorism and disease

Have we ever discussed the fact that overpopulation breeds terrorism? That countries in this world suffering from devastating plagues of AIDS are denied birth control and family planning equipment and information? In the midst of this ignorance on the part of many Americans, our administration finally admits they are withholding \$34 million earmarked for United Nations family planning programs overseas, an initiative aimed at controlling population and preventing the spread of AIDS.

This backward policy, or total lack of population control policy in our country is generated by the ravings of the fascist segment of our citizens, who are not so concerned with the lives of unborn babies as they are obsessed with the fear that women might make their own decisions and control their own destinies. (I exclude my Catholic friends, whose religious beliefs preclude birth control and abortion.) Furthermore, this right-wing group has repeatedly shown a lack of regard for human life in other areas of social concern. This latest move by the administration is a perfect example.

Maybe we should look at the population statistics of the most unstable countries, from whom we have to fear terrorist acts. According to Population Press, the newsletter of the Population Coalition, a grassroots nationwide educational organization started within the League of Women Voters, 47 percent of the population of the West Bank/Gaza, is under the age of 15. Now that sounds like a real nightmare, and it is. Forty-three percent of Saudi Arabia's population is under the age of 15. Afghanistan's under 15 population is 43 percent and Iraq's is 42 percent. The adults are dying and leaving children by the millions.

Supporters of the Bush administration's dark ages philosophy say they don't like China's abortion policy and forced sterilizations. China's abortion policies are the least of that country's transgressions. Forced sterilization might be a bit severe, but nothing less than what right-wingers here have been known to advocate for welfare mothers and people of color.

Let's look at the non-population policy of our country. We're supposed to be world leaders and developed to the max. Our growth rate is by far the highest among developed countries, about half due to immigration. Our birth rate was the highest in 2000 since 1971 and of U.S. births today, 26 percent rank as unplanned and 50 percent of those are unwanted, putting us in a league of our own among developed countries. In the 1990s the U.S. population grew by 13 percent. This means that should our population growth continue, and we are already fourth largest in the world, it will soar to well over twice its present 285 million by the time today's child becomes a grandparent.

Population Press asks, "Is this prospect what our future grandchildren — or even today's Americans — would want?" According to a Roper public opinion survey, 72 percent of Americans worry that overpopulation will become a "serious problem" and 59 percent think the U.S. population is too big already. In addition, the magazine says, most Americans say they would like the present immigration flood cut by nine-tenths. One in five would like it ended entirely.

So does the Bush policy reflect the concerns of Americans? Hardly. Does the administration and its right-wing followers have a respect for the devastation of lives in other countries of the world? Apparently not.

In a world where AIDS is ravaging whole societies and destroying cultural norms, suggesting the use of condoms for disease prevention and population control should be considered only rational, not attacked by some front organization called the "Family Research Council."

Consider the population stabilization success story from Finland. First, they focused heavily on universal education, available equally to boys and girls. The Lutheran Church made literacy its primary goal.

Finland has a comprehensive family planning program which provides not only reproductive health but also public support for families in the form of child day care, child health care and home help services. There is sex education in the school curriculum for 14–16 year olds. The Finnish media and Lutheran Church provide practical, informative material on family planning and sex education.

Results?

- Very low number of teenage pregnancies and abortions.
- The number of abortions halved in the last 20 years.
- Low incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS
- So few unwanted pregnancies that there are not enough babies for adoption needs.
- Young people do not start sexual activity younger than before nor is sexual promiscuity on the increase.

In short, the Finnish government believes that its programs can insure that every child born is wanted and as healthy as possible, and that educated people can independently choose the ideal size of their family.

That is a logical and responsible goal. As a nation with the most resources in the world, not only does our government not even approach this kind of common sense, they deny resources to our own people and spread their stupidity across the globe.

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