

Outing the 800 Pound Immigration Reform Gorilla

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Before we can discuss how the poor fellow might change our future, we must first get him out of the closet and into the living room for close inspection. In manacles, of course.

As when his brother was in the closet in 2006, inspection has been hindered by baggage piled against the closet door – tons of anecdotes, hard luck stories, numbers without context, and self-serving demands from multitudinous interest groups. Who can blame many in Congress and the general public for imagining that it may be only a capuchin monkey in the closet.

We can't have a sane immigration policy until we have a sane population policy. The single most important question for any immigration reform bill is how it will affect U.S. population size over the medium and long term. That will drive everything else. Many, perhaps most, environmental scientists and natural resource economists regard even the present U.S. population of 316 million as one that is not sustainable economically and environmentally over the long term.

But discussions of population policy are taboo in Congress and other establishment venues. The political parties and their controllers fear any disturbance to our existing *de facto* population policy of "growth forever." The reason the growthists censor is, of course, that they want *no* reasoned population policy. To their minds, one favoring stabilization would be "un-American", if not an outright Communist plot.

Now let's open that closet door a bit. The whole gorilla can be visualized with numbers in the U.S. Census Bureau's (USCB) 2012 population projections and the Congressional Budget Office's (CBO) June 2013 report on the probable demographic impact of S.744 were something close to that bill to become law.

The USCB makes four population projections out to the year 2060, based on four different immigration scenarios. As usual, three of these (termed the low, middle, and high series) assume net immigration rates that increase continuously into the future though to different degrees. The fourth (termed the constant series) assumes annual net immigration remains constant over time at 725 thousand, about what it is now.

In the context of true immigration reform, where changes in all deficient laws and policies should be under consideration, the logical starting point for discussion would be the constant series projection. This gives a U.S. population in 2060 of 392.7 million. *That would be an increase equal to the total current population of the western third of the U.S.* And we would still be growing in 2060 by 1.2 million per year.

So the first question a responsible Congress should ask is, "Do the American people want our population to expand to 393 million, given all the negative economic, environmental, and social consequences of doing so?"

If the people do not want this, true immigration reform must start off by figuring how to adjust laws and policies so that net immigration levels are *lower* than 725 thousand per year. Options that would logically be on the table would include rates of 400 and 550 thousand *total* (not net) immigrants per year. Those were the recommendations of the 1972 Rockefeller and 1995 Jordan commissions, respectively.

The USCB usually recommends its "middle series" projection as the basis for comparisons, and governmental agencies at all levels demand that projection be the one used for planning purposes. The middle series (like the low and high series as well) is based on laws and policies

many of which everyone agrees need changing.

The establishment nevertheless pushes this “growth forever” middle series projection as de facto policy. The general public meekly follows, mainly because the media never tell them what is really going on. Indeed, the media mostly engage in piling more baggage in front of the closet door.

The 2012 middle series projects a U.S. population in 2060 of 420.3 million that would still grow then by 2.1 million per year.

Now consider the COB report. This contains some ‘spin’, is secretive about key assumptions, and gives a vague population projection but only to the year 2033. Its information is sufficient, however, to estimate that S.744 would lead to a conservative revised 2060 middle series projection of about 441.5 million people, with that population still growing at 2.7 million per year.

In sum, S.744 is an excellent start on immigration

reform if the intent is to increase U.S. population size by 40 percent by 2060 and probably more than 100 percent by 2100.

If apprised of all the negative consequences of moving in that direction, however, the American people surely would demand that Congress start from scratch, deliberate with greater intelligence, and put the U.S. on the road to population stabilization. All censors and baggage-pilers out of the way, please.

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