

Statement of Stewart L. Udall
to the Commission Population Growth
and the American Future

April 14, 1971

*My interest - think between resource + people
- Views altered drastically*

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your deliberations on a population policy for the United States.

Devising such a policy, in my view, is one of the two or three most urgent tasks we face as a people -- and I urge you to face it squarely. This is no time for evasion or half-hearted measures. As the very backbone of any policy you recommend, I urge this Commission to call for stationary population size in this country as soon as it can be achieved within the context of our democratic traditions.

The case for a stationary population has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt. Your own interim report offers compelling testimony to this end and only stops short at drawing the necessary conclusions. Among other findings, your report states that small differences in family size lead to enormous differences in population, that further population growth will drain off resources which are badly needed to raise the quality of our lives, that such growth in the past has aggravated many of our nation's problems and made their solution more onerous, and that further delays in tackling population growth will make our ultimate fight against this problem far more difficult and costly because the momentum for further growth is so great.

These findings add up to one of the clearest, bluntest statements of

the need for a no-growth population policy ever to come from a government commission or agency. As an environmentalist, I also commend you for dismissing the shallow notion that our only population problem is one of distribution and for your identifying population growth as a culprit in the tragic degradation of our air, water, land and the livability of our cities.

What elements should an effective and humane population policy have?

First, it should be a policy for all Americans. I am impressed with the judgment of sociologist Philip M. Hauser on this point. Last June, at a Chicago Congress on population and environment in which I also participated, Dr. Hauser stated:

"The population problem is not to be found among the disadvantaged, the poor, the undereducated, or the proportionate minority groups, who have large families. Their contribution to total growth is relatively minor. The problem, if we are to diminish the fertility rate and growth rate of the United States, resides in the dominant white middle class . . ."

I do not fully agree with the all-or-nothing way Dr. Hauser has framed the issue, but at heart what he is saying is that just as the world's population dilemma lies not solely in India and other poor countries, so our own population problem is not the fault of any single group. We all bear responsibility for it and must wrestle with it together -- and we must develop a policy that is both equitable and democratic.

Similarly, I must point out that insofar as our government family planning programs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the

Office of Economic Opportunity are identified and intended as population programs -- and so long as they remain our only population programs -- they will suffer from the same grave flaw. They reach only the poor and therefore, despite their profound humanitarian merits, they constitute no population policy at all.

Dr. Hauser has expressed the issue well. "I am convinced of this," he told the Chicago Congress: "There will be no problem about decreasing the birth rate of the poor and the uneducated when they get the opportunity to participate fully in the American society and economy."

The case for directing a national population policy to all Americans is bedrocked by the fact that while the poor and near-poor contribute one-third of our annual births, the non-poor contribute two thirds. Furthermore, "unwanted" births among the well-to-do account for a larger share of the U.S. birth rate than "unwanted" births among low-income groups.

This leads to the second vital trait any U.S. population policy must have: it must deal both with wanted and unwanted births. As others have noted, the major problem is not the "unwanted" child but the "wanted" child. The severity of the point can be argued, perhaps, but the demographic evidence seems clear that the prevention of unwanted pregnancies would not today be sufficient to halt U.S. population growth. As for the future, relying on the prevention of undesired births to stop population growth would leave the nation's future in the unacceptable place we find it today -- in the custody of chance. Even if the entire adult population 30 years from now practices

effective birth control, it can still choose to have an average of three or more children per family. Assuming it will average only two is nothing more than wishful thinking and clearly cannot serve as the foundation for policy.

The need to deal with the problem of too many wanted children requires a third trait in our population policy: It must seek to redirect the momentum of our society through education. [In other words, there is no purely scientific way out of the woods. The perfectly reliable pill is only half an answer. The perfectly reliable pill-user is the other half -- and to produce her (or him) in this country we must face up to the fact that the population education our children receive today is virtually useless. Worse than that, by inference and precept, it teaches them that growth is eminently desirable. This flaw ranks near the top of the list of sins in the mis-education of our youth. Evidently it is being perpetuated by the Office of Education staff which is now carrying out the mandate of last year's Environmental Education Act and is, in the process, treating the subject of population as if it were an embarrassment. I suggest that the Commission look into this problem and do what it can to stiffen the spines of those responsible.

By population education, I do not mean population propaganda. But we should -- indeed, must -- present the causes and consequences of population growth as fit subjects for the classroom, the same as we now teach civics or science. And we must also present the options for personal

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action in this field. I have a great deal of faith that once children mull over these issues they will decide on their own what this Commission should also decide: that the U.S. population must cease growing if we are to have any chance to preserve the quality of life in this country.]

The population question is so critical in this country that it cannot be adequately addressed by any existing government agency or combination of agencies. It requires, in my view, the creation of a permanent Population Council which will not only advise the President and review the population impacts of other federal programs -- as the Council on Environmental Quality now does for ecological impacts -- but also sponsor research and propose legislation. Four of the prime tasks of this Council would be to set a reasonable date for achieving a stationary population, propose the specific intermediate steps that must be taken, monitor the year-by-year results, and recommend changes in policy -- including incentives and disincentives built into our tax laws and other statutes that fix public policy for the nation -- if the timetables are not being met. Through hearings and advisory boards, it should seek the fullest participation by all sectors of the public -- a major achievement of Swedish population programs in the 1930s and 1940s.

Since your Interim Report reflects the Commission's sense of priorities and scope, and since it will undoubtedly bear a strong relation to your final report, I will briefly comment on its most important omissions.

First among these, of course, was its failure to endorse a policy of zero population growth or, for that matter, any policy at all. As I see it, your mandate is not simply to collate and interpret the relevant facts: it is to lead the nation. If you do not recommend a comprehensive national policy -- hopefully one of zero growth -- ^{I believe} ₁ you will have missed your main opportunity for leadership.

The Interim Report makes only one hasty reference to the world context in which U.S. population growth and policy is anchored. I consider this an egregious omission. The sharply rising levels of consumption of our society combined with our growing population will ineluctably put inordinate demands on the developing nations for resources and raw materials. In this light, U.S. population growth and consumption patterns will increasingly conflict with U.S. idealism about bringing the have-not nations up to our own standard of living. In the words of a scientist I greatly respect, the geologist M. King Hubbert:

"Before any area can reach the per capita energy and mineral consumption rate of the United States, it must first build up its industry to that level. Were the whole world to have done this . . . the presently estimated world supply of the ores of most industrial metals, producible by present technology, would have been exhausted well before such a level of industrialization could have been reached."

Without exaggerating the role of U.S. population growth vis a vis world resources, it is safe to say that our growth has serious, long term

implications for the developing nations.

The time has come for blunt talk on this issue. If the 6% of the world's people who live in this country continue to practice resource machismo and pretend that we can demand and consume one-third or more of the world's limited resources indefinitely we will ipso facto extinguish the expectations of the have-not nations to ever enjoy anything approaching our present standard of living. In a world on the fringes of famine we are already, literally, the comfortable and corpulent "big house on the hill" issuing daily orders to the multitudes below to produce for our benefit more and more of their irreplaceable resources. In the not to distant future such hubris will, I fear, turn respect to envy and then to a hatred that will drain away our reservoir of good will and endanger the political stability on which world order must rest. I urge this Commission to explore this subject in depth, and tell the American people the truth about these geopolitical realities before it is too late.

Render great service to world community!

Another unfortunate omission, in my view, was the Interim Report's failure to deal with the controversial abortion issue. The Commission will fail the country if it allows President Nixon's recent, lamentable statement on this question to ~~color~~ ^{cow or} color its deliberations.

Some of the states are wrestling with this issue right today. Others have already acted courageously to alter the hideous hypocrisy of a framework of law that allows abortions for the affluent, denies this option to ordinary citizens, and asserts legal compulsion in an area of life where personal and private decisionmaking should always prevail.

For my own part, I urge the Commission to endorse outright repeal of abortion laws in recognition of the overriding rights of women, the morale of families and the contributions of such a policy to reduced population growth. At the same time, the Commission should point out that abortion is the least desirable method of birth control and one which should remain a socially acceptable expedient only until such time as contraceptive technology, the availability of contraceptive services and knowledge of the appropriate techniques eliminate the tragedy of unwanted pregnancy. It saddens me that some politicians seek to make abortion a political football. In this connection, let me say that I have unbounded admiration for Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York and Governor John A. Burns of Hawaii -- men who have approached the abortion repeal issue with moderation and self-restraint. Governor Burns, for example, is a staunch Catholic who forthrightly stated that as a person he "could not in good conscience condone abortion." Yet, after the Hawaiian legislature became the first to vote outright repeal, (and although he was a candidate for reelection facing a bruising primary fight) Governor Burns refused to veto the bill and deferred to the judgment of the lawmakers that it was "a matter involving individual conscience." This is the kind of statesmanship this issue deserves.

To sum up, the nation's best interests would be served if, a year from now, the Commission draws from its own impressive evidence the conclusion that a population stabilization should be a paramount goal for our future. Such a public announcement would give the indispensable thrust which public

and private agencies need to mobilize their resources around the central question of how we can best achieve this goal. A forthright call for stabilization would also make clear to the President, the Congress, the press and the American people that the population issue cannot be left to blind fate but must be put in the forefront of our agenda for tomorrow.

~~Thank you.~~

CONCL.:

People way ahead of country
& Congress:

Drastic shifts of opinion

- ON abortions
- ON growth as goal
eg Hawaii
Ore
Colo

YOUNG ADULTS - vol. sterilization
~~YOUTH~~ will decide -
MOST hopeful!