

Population growth: Is there an answer?

Bill sparks controversy



ZERO POPULATION GROWTH or zero population control?

That's the issue before Congress in the form of "The Global Resources, Environment and Population Act of 1981," a bill introduced last month by Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., that calls for analysis of the relationship between world population and world resources.

Conflict is only beginning — between Zero Population Growth adherents and the American Life Lobby — over Hatfield's bill. The act would establish an interagency council to recommend to the president national population policies promoting national and global population stabilization.

ZPG and the World Population Society commend Hatfield for preparing and introducing the bill into the Senate. They say the bill is a major step toward solving world overpopulation.

Not so, says Judy Brown, ALL executive director. "There are a multitude of reasons for opposing this bill," she says. But the bill has received support from a variety of senators and organizations, says Dick Granger, Hatfield's legislative assistant on energy and natural resources.

"It doesn't cost the country any money, and it doesn't add to the workforce. It will get the president to study the problems that we've got and it won't cost a cent."

GRANGER SAYS ONCE the public is informed about the global population situation, the bill will receive even more support.

"It's one of those issues that take a while to get off the ground. People need to realize that the world population is growing exponentially, and resources are not."

National security is threatened by the increase in population within the United States, Granger says.

"Events like the assassination of (Egyptian) Pres. (Anwar) Sadat can have immediate effect on our energy supply. It's simple to understand that the more people that you have, the more energy you use," says Granger.

"We haven't received one letter of opposition to the bill," he says. "We're

taking it one step at a time. There's usually some opposition to any bill, but we think this one has got a lot going for it."

The ALL doesn't agree. The group — the only one now opposing the bill — says Congress should stay away from the messy side effects of population control.

"Our job is to make sure all of the members of Congress realize that there is some opposition to this piece of legislation. Our side will be heard in this issue," Brown says.

"Ultimately, issues like abortion will be involved," says Brown. "Other things, like sterilizing Spanish women without their consent and using (contraceptive) drugs that have been banned in the U.S. could be involved also."

"We believe the U.S. should be concerned with helping the underdeveloped nations through the production of food, not through wiping out their populations," she says.

ROBERT SASSONE, AN attorney on the ALL board of directors, checks the population figures used by ZPG and similar groups. Much of the data concerning population and resources used by Congress is wrong, and some of it may have been fabricated, Sassone says.

"They are utilizing the same statistical errors that the ZPG people have been using for years," says Sassone. He claims that some departments within the government have been allocated extra funds by increasing the numbers on their population data.

"It enables the rich to get richer, if it's used properly. And baby, it's used properly," he says.

Supporters of the bill say overpopulation is a direct cause of a large number of people starving. Sassone says overpopulation has nothing to do with starvation.

"They're not starving because of a lack of food production," says Sassone. People in Third World countries are starving because of mismanagement of food resources, he says.

"It's so easy to stop starvation. For 1 percent of the U.S. budget we could stop the world's starvation, if it were properly used," he says.

Sassone says the opposition to Hatfield's bill may be slight, but it will probably be enough to stop the bill from passing through Congress.

"I don't think we'll have to do much. My first inclination is to just ignore it, because it will probably go away," he says.

Carol Baker disagrees. The executive director of Zero Population Growth says the bill will be passed through Congress without much opposition.

"It's really a historic occasion," says Baker. "We couldn't be more pleased with Hatfield's bill. It's going to do more than just help sustain a higher quality of life," she says. "If the U.S. sets up a national population policy, it will help to give us stature and credibility worldwide."

Baker says the council set up by the bill would not have the authority to impose any kind of restrictions on Third World nations.

"WE ARE NOT at the point of talking about mechanisms to control population yet," says Baker. "This bill is simply to analyze growth and resources within the nation and the rest of the world."

Imposing taxes on large families may be necessary in the future to discourage further growth, she adds.

"This country needs to neutralize its incentives for having children," says Baker. "There may come a time when we will be forced to use economic disincentives to discourage growth. We are not too far from the day when we will have to make the same decision that China did."

China withdraws health, food, space and work benefits from couples who have more than one child.

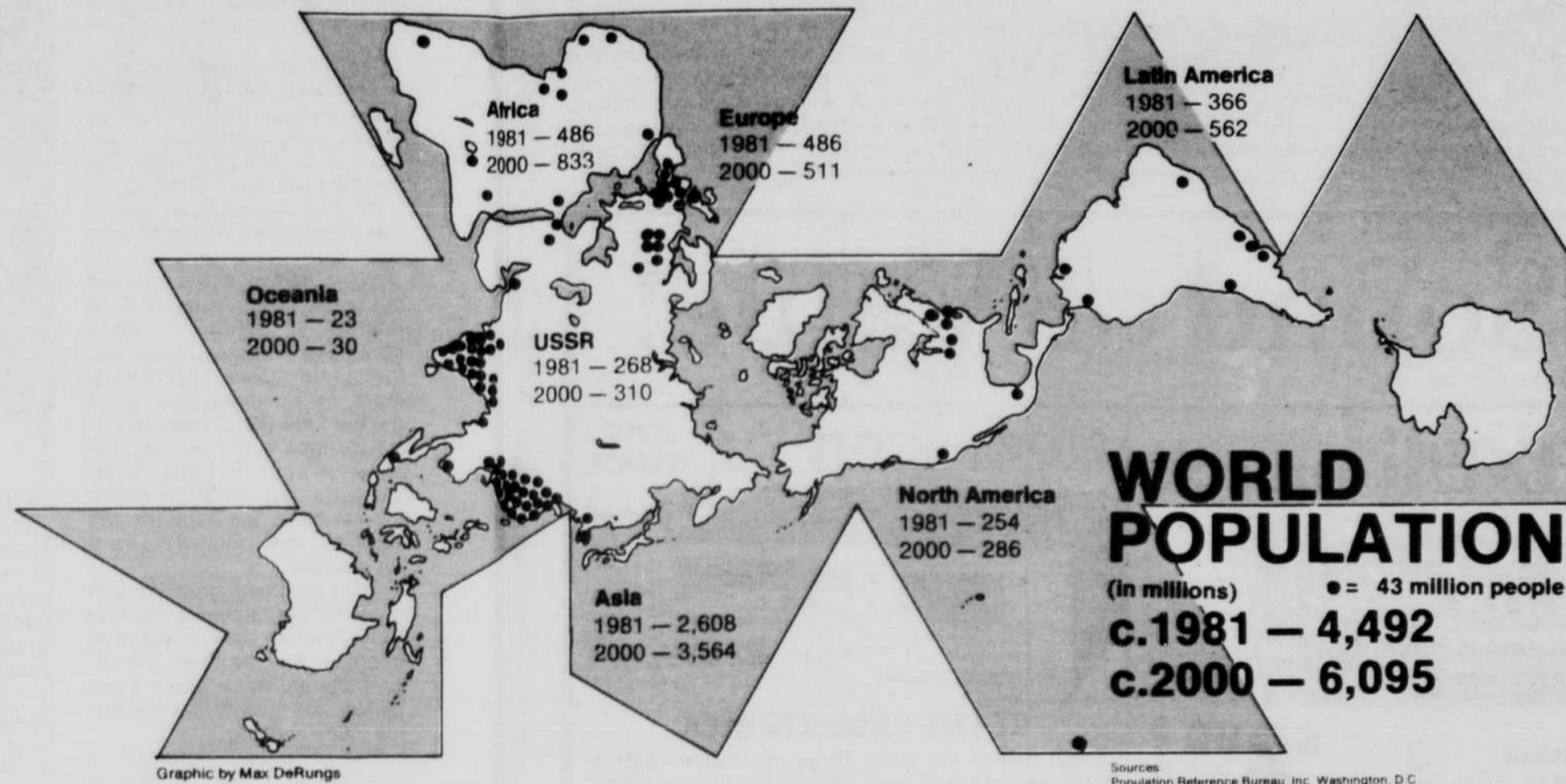
Frank Oram, the executive director of the World Population Society, says Hatfield's bill will help American businesses.

"American businessmen consider it a high risk to invest in other countries that have high populations, because these countries tend to have unstable governments," says Oram.

"THIS IS PROBABLY the most important piece of legislation put through Congress in a very long time," he says. "It deals with the future, with the objective being to plan our own society. Sen. Hatfield has shown incredible foresight."

"The United States has no policy concerning population. We have never come to realize in this country the impact of global overpopulation," he says.

Story by Chris Courtner



Sociologist worries about population bill



Although this country needs a population policy, the bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., could create problems, says a University sociology professor.

"The bill is very comprehensive. It's awesome in scope," says Lawrence Carter, University sociology professor. "What bothers me is something it might be masking."

"The Global Resources, Environment and Population Act of 1981" could have implications beyond the establishment of a population council, he says.

Carter says the bill doesn't cover many of the problems faced in overpopulated areas.

"This bill is focusing on the population, environment, and resources," Carter says. "It

seems to me the major problems are made socially, economically, and politically.

"What really seems to be the problem is the distribution of food," Carter says. "Maldistribution of food resources within the government is responsible for food shortages."

"One-quarter of the world's populations consumes one-third of all food resources. Evidence seems to show the developed countries are still going to be the greatest consumers at the turn of the century," Carter says.

Studies show that people in the third-world countries are moving into more developed areas, Carter says.

"A migration of this kind can be socially and culturally disabling both for those migrating and for the country that receives them."

Story by Chris Courtner

Population controls threaten human rights



Coercive sterilization, the distribution of dangerous contraceptives and other population controls attack women's rights, says a University doctoral student in sociology.

"I don't believe in any mass control of women's reproductive rights. I do believe in women having access to cheap, safe birth control, and I believe that's very different from population control," says Sharon Claeysens, who studies and lectures on population control.

Puerto Rico, where sterilization is pushed as the ideal form of birth control, is an example of a territory that practices population control.

"People who live there think it's strange that an island which loses so much of its population in migration to the United States would have been targeted for population control, and it has the longest running program in the world," Claeysens says.

More than one third — 37 percent — of Puerto Rican women between 14 and 44 years old have been sterilized since the program's inception, she says. Sterilization is the only form of birth control that is free because doctors are reimbursed for sterilization

operations, primarily through United States health and welfare funds.

In addition, birth control pills and IUDs were tested in Puerto Rico. "Some women there died as a result of those experiments," she says.

The United States also practices coercive population control, Claeysens says. Some black women in the South have been told they would lose their welfare or be refused medical treatment if they refused sterilization after their second child, she says.

Native Americans, Claeysens says, also have been subjected to similar treatment. At least 25 percent of American Indian women have been sterilized, and in some tribes 80 percent of the tribe's women have been sterilized, dooming that tribe to extinction.

"It upsets me because it's against reproductive rights. It upsets me because it's genocidal."

Claeysens says certain subgroups are targeted for population control — poor people and colored people — and as long as there are no federal guidelines against it, it will continue at the local level.

"It's very important to distinguish between population control and reproductive rights. When contraceptives in only certain forms are introduced on a large scale to a targeted group, that is population

control, that is social Darwinism, that is social engineering."

Outside of the United States, many birth control products banned here are still being used for population control, Claeysens says.

For example, the Agency for International Development was challenged about deaths resulting from their distribution of Dalkon Shields, an IUD. The manufacturer, A.H. Robins Co., sold unsterilized Dalkon Shields to AID at a 48-percent discount. The sterilized version of this birth control device was determined to be dangerous and was banned in the United States. Use of the Dalkon Shields abroad resulted in a number of pelvic infections and subsequent deaths, Claeysens says.

"The whole zero population growth movement is not too far removed from Malthusian ideology," Claeysens says. Thomas Malthus, a British writer living at the end of the 18th century, thought the poor brought their misery upon themselves by overproducing and therefore increasing competition for scarce jobs.

"One might say we should provide more jobs for poor people. Instead, Malthusians say poor people should not reproduce as much as other people. Thereby we target Third World countries, which are the poor

countries of the world, as the people who should not be reproducing themselves."

Although the Third World has a larger proportion of the world's population, it consumes about 10 percent of the world's resources, Claeysens says. The United States holds a much smaller population but consumes proportionately much more of the world's resources.

"We need to concentrate more on the redistribution of resources and if we are concerned about the environment, as the ZPG people say they are, then we should be concerned more about what the industrial countries are doing to the environment because they have much more potential to destroy the environment than overpopulation."

The recipients of population control — Third World women, minority and poor women in the United States — are anything but helped, Claeysens says. They lose their "reproductive freedom" in countries where sterilization is pushed and where other forms of birth control are dangerous.

"I am a champion of reproductive rights. I do not believe that women's rights to control their bodies are sanctioned under population control."

Story by Ron Hunt



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