

New OCA initiative has same message

At a news conference following the announcement of a new anti-gay rights initiative, Oregon Citizens Alliance Director Lon Mabon explained why opponents won't defeat the measure in the fall of 1994.

"If a person opposes this initiative, it can only be on the grounds that they believe homosexuality should be granted minority status and that homosexuality should be taught to our students and children as a good and normal behavior," Mabon said.

In other words, the OCA cut out the most mean-spirited section of the original Measure 9. Homosexuality is no longer abnormal and perverse — it's just pushy.

The new initiative is titled the "Minority Status and Child Protection Act." It would prohibit the government from granting "minority status" to gays and lesbians, denying public schools the opportunity to equate homosexuality with "race, color, religion, gender, age or national origin." It would also ban children's books that address homosexuality from public libraries.

It's been said before and apparently needs to be said again. What Mabon fails to recognize is that there is a difference between

granting a group minority status and granting a group equal rights. Minorities ostensibly receive special protection under the law, protection that every person does not have. Programs like affirmative action are designed to give more opportunities to people of color in the work force — they correct past injustices against minorities.

Gays and lesbians, however, do not receive special protection, nor do they want it. They are not asking for housing over heterosexuals. They don't want people to give them jobs because they are gay. They simply don't want to be denied rights based solely on their sexual orientation. They want a landlord to make a decision based on references or credit history.

In a perfect Oregon, residents would see right through Mabon's manipulative rhetoric to the real focus of his measure: a hatred of the gay lifestyle. Unfortunately, 43 percent of Oregonians were fooled last fall, and at least that many will likely be duped again.

Perhaps the real crime of the new initiative, however, is that it will once again detract from more important issues in the state — the budget, school funding and child abuse, among others. Both citizens and the Legislature should be concentrating on solving serious problems, not arguing over homosexuality.

However, the OCA has complicated things again. It feels it must once again divide the state into two angry factions, both of which rely on emotional arguments over rational reasoning. That is a real shame.

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COMMENTARY

Population control is key to future

By Eben Fodor

It just keeps growing and growing and growing ...

No, not the national debt. Population.

Most people steer clear of this macabre subject. But that's just not the proper response. As the global population of humans reaches 5.5 billion, we are in uncharted waters.

We've never had this many people on the earth before. In fact, our population grew more in the past 40 years than ever before. This is the phenomenon of exponential growth.

Was Thomas Malthus right when he predicted in the early 1800s we would breed ourselves to the point of social and environmental collapse? We seem to be doing a fine job so far.

Growing at exponential rates, world population is twice what it was in the mid-1950s. At the current rate of increase, 1.8 percent per year, we will double again in about 40 years. We are now growing 180 times faster than the historical average for all of human civilization.

Some people say we don't have a population problem in the United States because we are growing at less than 1 percent per year. To understand just how dramatic our current growth is, take the following example:

If we were to go back to 10,000 B.C. when humans were just beginning to develop agriculture, and start with only two people, we can see the effect of exponential growth. If this original couple were to increase their population at a steady rate of just 1 percent per year up to the present time, there would be so many people today that it would form a solid ball of human flesh with a size greater than our solar system. We would be expanding faster than the speed of light. (Yep, check it out, physics students.)

We really don't know what the human carrying capacity of the earth is. A logical population limit is the number of people who can be fed if all arable land is used for intensive agriculture. Population experts put this population at about 10 billion — a number that we may reach in just 36 years.

But we are already facing

shortages of food and land for agriculture. In most underdeveloped countries, every scrap of decent land is heavily utilized.

Adding chemicals — fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides — may increase the world's food supply temporarily. But these chemicals rely on high inputs of expensive fossil fuels, which are in limited supply.

And the indications are that such methods can't be sustained over long periods of time without causing permanent damage to soil productivity.

How about genetically engineered plants that could produce more food per acre? This is certainly a hopeful area. In fact, it's the only area that offers much hope at all.

Genetically engineered plants, if successful, will still rely on photosynthesis to make food. They will require sunlight, space to grow (land), essential nutrients and, of course, water. The last three requirements are already in short supply. Thus, although we may extend our food supply somewhat, there is no panacea here.

We are at the point where our demand for resources is crowding other species off of the planet. The best estimate is that 87,000 species of plants and animals went extinct last year. The rate of extinction has increased far beyond natural levels as human population has grown.

Overpopulation is the mother of all environmental issues. Ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, toxic and radioactive wastes, soil erosion, and air and water pollution are all directly related to human population. Our environmental crisis is actually a population crisis.

Some people argue that there may be an overpopulation problem in Africa, China or India, but that a solution can be found in better distribution of wealth and political reforms. They suggest that other countries just need to improve their economies, and that with democracy and greater social equity, everyone can enjoy our level of prosperity.

The trouble with this argument is that it ignores basic laws of physics. First of all, Americans consume roughly 100 times more resources per capita than do third-world residents. We

also generate 100 times as much pollution and environmental damage.

Imagining 1.3 billion Chinese consuming resources in the American style — with large homes, lots of appliances and gas-guzzling cars. We would have already exhausted the world's oil supplies, not to mention the resulting environmental consequences.

The real issue with population is not whether we will be able to care for all of the new arrivals. Rather, it is that we are not able to care for those who already exist. According to the World Health Organization, 35,000 children die every day because of hunger and poverty-related disease. Millions own little more than the clothes on their backs and lack any hope for a decent life. Shouldn't we address this problem before we add to it?

In the United States, where we are supposed to have the highest standard of living in the world, 19 percent of our children are raised in poverty. And per-capita income is declining. Today's young adults will earn less than their parents did. Overpopulation means a declining quality of life for everyone.

Our only real choice is to stabilize our population as quickly as possible. If we don't do it ourselves, through humane methods, it will be done for us in less desirable ways — wars, famine, disease.

Population control doesn't have to be coercive, but it will be if we don't get our act together. Right now we can work to make family planning available to everyone worldwide. Birth control, abortion and voluntary sterilization must be available at low or no cost. We must remove tax incentives for large families and replace them with incentives for small families with two or less children.

Some problems actually do resolve themselves. This isn't one of them. We must move from a policy of denial to one in which population control is a top priority, at home and abroad.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 1000 EUGENE, OREGON 97402

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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