EDITORIAL
Doing Government to the People

Gallup News Service poll results released in May, 1996, suggest that Americans favor certain changes in national policy but often find that their government is unresponsive. On some issues, the public consensus attains the level of 6-to-1. Nevertheless, initiatives to enact desired changes either fail in Congress, remain bogged down, or (in 1995–96) were vetoed by President William Clinton (Benedetto, 1996).

A healthy natural environment is among the quality of life indicators which most Americans appear to value. Yet key government policies are undermining this highly prized national endowment, a heritage which makes an essential contribution, indeed, to U.S. prosperity and perhaps to life itself. Encouragement of population growth is one government policy which is supremely antagonistic to preservation of environmental quality. Words by Nathan Keyfitz put the population/environment relationship into perspective:

If all else is equal, action damaging the environment is directly proportional to the number of people. That at least seems the most appropriate initial hypothesis. . . . The burden of proof is on anyone who argues against the proportionality hypothesis in either way (1993, p. 547).

In this light, the 3 million annual U.S. population growth assumes the greatest seriousness. Increasing competition for space and resources creates the conditions for conflict, so that mitigation of environmental harm will become increasingly contentious, costly, technologically challenging (Kinsley & Lovins, 1995) and even (in certain realms as, for example, protection of aquifers) unattainable.

Nevertheless, the federal government's pro-growth population policy persists. It is manifested in financial inducements to have the extra child (aimed at virtually every income level of the society), a tenuous posture
toward family planning services available to medically indigent women, continuing high levels of legal immigration, and ineffectual enforcement of laws barring illegal immigration.

Pro-life policy and cash subsidies to families with dependent children (AFDC) have an arguable, if minor, effect on population size, but that issue rarely enters into the acrimonious disputes which surround them. These debates, while very important, are not our subject. In another realm entirely is immigration policy. Immigration has an undeniably major effect on U.S. population growth, and the electorate is remarkably united in opposing the present large flow.

A February 18, 1996 Roper poll shows that 70% of all respondents support limiting immigration to 300,000 or less per year. This preference unites 73% of blacks, 72% of whites, 52% of Hispanics, 73% of political liberals, 72% of conservatives, and 71% of moderates (Mittelstadt, 1996).

These results track increasing dislike of current immigration policy under which a minimum of 1.3 million immigrants net (including family reunification and skilled immigrants, refugees, asylees, asylum claimants who vanish into the population, visa overstayers, and illegal border crossers) enter annually to remain as settlers. A Times/Mirror Center Poll in November 1994 (published by USA Today) found 82% of Americans saying that the U.S. should restrict immigration, up from 76% in 1992. Similar trends are found in CBS/New York Times, CBS, Time/CCN and other national polls, without exception (Carrying Capacity, 1995).

The American people have reached this consensus despite being relatively uninformed on key, supporting facts. What would opinion be if the popular media linked population growth to its real and pervasive environmental consequences, or reported data which show that immigration, including children born to post-1970 immigrants, presently accounts for 60% of U.S. population growth? Or if it reported mainstream demographic studies, where projecting present annual immigration and its inflation of the U.S. fertility rate leads to a population size of half a billion to 800 million people by 2080 A.D., with immigration accounting for virtually all of the increase? (Ahlburg & Vaupel, 1990; Heim & Austin, 1996). (For baseline comparisons, the United States fought World War II with 135 million people, and today's population is in the vicinity of 270 million.)

Despite ample data and the clearly expressed will of the people, legislation to reduce legal immigration is exactly the type of initiative that Congress was unable to enact in 1996. Bills introduced by Lamar Smith (R-TX) in the House of Representatives and Alan Simpson (R-WY) in the Senate included provisions for modest reductions in legal immigration—about