



# LIFE MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford  
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## Too Many of Whom? By Richard M. Doerflinger

Legislative efforts to prevent harmful climate change by reducing carbon emissions have encountered serious obstacles. Major environmental legislation was never approved by the Congress that just ended; many expect the new Congress to be less interested in the issue. So people devoted to protecting the environment are exploring new ways to shape and communicate their message. But at least one “new” proposal is not new at all, and is a really bad idea to boot.

The idea appeared on November 15 in the online environmentalist magazine *Grist*. Editor Lisa Hymas’ fresh new idea for protecting the environment is “Fight for Free Birth Control.” Or as she puts it: “For the moment, forget about carbon caps and start thinking about cervical caps – and the Pill, IUDs, and Depo-Provera.” It’s a “no-brainer,” she says, that this will produce fewer unintended pregnancies, hence fewer births (and abortions), hence “fewer greenhouse gases.” She endorses Planned Parenthood’s campaign to have the federal government mandate contraceptive coverage in all health plans.

“No-brainer” is not a bad label for a proposal that ignores so many facts. Set aside the obvious fact that forcing everyone, including religious employers with moral objections, to pay for birth control coverage is not in any sense “free.” The idea that simply expanding access to contraceptives would greatly reduce unintended pregnancies, abortions and births was disproved by experience years ago. That’s why groups like Planned Parenthood have grasped at “back-up” solutions to contraceptive failure (so-called “emergency contraception” as well as abortion), and become comfortable with various forms of coercion to get smaller families.

Sure enough, at recent U.N.-sponsored talks on climate change in Mexico, the People’s Republic of China said it should get credit from environmentalists for its brutal one-

child-per-family policy (even though the country’s carbon emissions have increased in recent years). Television mogul Ted Turner now urges that China’s approach become a global paradigm for saving the planet. And Population Action International last year praised U.S. environmental groups for signing onto a “Green Budget” urging a massive increase in population control funding – no doubt hoping such groups will do the same this year.

This makes no sense even as politics. The new Congress may be skeptical about climate change – but it will be openly hostile to pro-abortion population control groups. Hitching onto these groups’ bandwagon is a sure road to irrelevancy. On a larger scale, the task of developed nations is to help poorer nations industrialize without repeating our own environmental mistakes – and efforts to win these nations’ trust will only be undermined by the message, “by the way, there are too many of you.” These nations’ leaders are not so gullible as to take such messages at face value, when delivered by Humvee-driving, private-jet-owning billionaires from nations whose per capita carbon emissions are twenty times higher than their own.

“On this earth there is room for everyone,” Pope Benedict told us in his *encyclical Caritas in Veritate*. “At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it.” In this season we may also recall that in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Present had harsh words for those who fret about the “surplus population” of other people. Too many Westerners still see people in other nations as problems, not as valued partners in making our world a safe and healthy place for generations yet unborn.

*Mr. Doerflinger is Associate Director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. For more on the U.S. bishops’ pro-life activities see [www.usccb.org/prolife](http://www.usccb.org/prolife).*

For additional commentary on life issues, check out “Life Lines” on the first Friday of each month in *The Observer*.

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