

# POPULATION CONNECTION

Volume 52, Issue 4  
December 2020

**WEST COAST WILDFIRES WORSE  
DUE TO POPULATION GROWTH**





## President's Note

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**M**y iPhone died on Election Day. It was disorienting. I'd grown accustomed—even addicted—to endless micro doses of what passes for reality in these hyperkinetic times. Instead, as final figures trickled in, I followed developments on a device descended from Philo Farnsworth's image dissector (my television).

If there is one thing all Americans can agree on about this election, it's that the outcome wasn't entirely what anyone hoped for. The dismal Trump era will thankfully end. Yet congressional results were mixed.

We were extremely heartened by the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. They are committed to taking decisive action to repeal the Global Gag Rule and to reinvigorate an array of vital programs. There is no time to lose when we're literally seeing the world set aflame due to our heedless ways. We were, however, dismayed to see the defeat of several stalwart House supporters of programs that help achieve population stabilization. While some great Senate candidates fell short of victory on Election Day, control of that body is still up for grabs.

As I ineffectually poked at my phone, it almost seemed to be sending me a message of sorts. Maybe the lesson is that, even in fraught moments when we're grasping for good news, we need to keep our eyes on the far horizon. We need to be less obsessed with the latest tweet or breaking news. Since the era of rapid population growth began around 1800, it's taken more than two full centuries for us to reach current overpopulation levels. Like it or not, it's going to take time and much sustained effort to restore balance.

Of course, the events of the day matter greatly. And this election in particular was critical. But we must keep thinking about the next generation, the next century, even the next millennium, which is no easy task in this instantaneous era.

By meeting the population challenge, we can set the table for a much brighter future. Over the past 50 years, we've gone from about four nations at or below replacement rate in terms of family size to nearly 100 nations in that category. That's still fewer than half the nations on earth, but it provides a roadmap for a better future if we're willing to persevere.

One of the best ways to achieve a better, safer, less-crowded future is by ensuring today's young people understand the challenges posed by rapid population growth. We're the only nationwide provider of K-12 Population Education. If we don't do it, no one will. We adapted rapidly to training thousands of educators remotely under the current COVID regime, since there is no time to lose.

Recently, I've been scheduling conversations with quite a few of our longest-serving members. They're deeply concerned about the need for a lasting legacy, as they understand the importance of population stabilization. We're grateful that they see the need for sustained action to curb overpopulation.

If you'd like to have one of those "old fashioned" conversations with me, just send me an email. I'm glad to report I'm now the proud owner of a fully-functioning refurbished iPhone.

*John Seager*  
[john@popconnect.org](mailto:john@popconnect.org)

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john@popconnect.org

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Marian Starkey, MSc

marian@popconnect.org

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## Population Connection

2120 L Street, NW, Suite 500

Washington, DC 20037

(202) 332-2200 • (800) 767-1956

info@popconnect.org

populationconnection.org

populationeducation.org

popconnect.org/magazine-archives

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*By Marian Starkey*

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*By Matt Simon*

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*By Isabella Isaacs-Thomas*



**Cover Image:** The Bobcat Fire burns through Angeles National Forest on September 11, 2020, north of Monrovia, California. California wildfires have already incinerated a record 2.3 million acres this year and are expected to continue until December. The Bobcat Fire has grown to more than 26,000 acres. (Photo by David McNew/Getty Images)

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## Editor's Note

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**N**ever have I been gladder to see a year end—2020 has been a doozy, to put it mildly. A global pandemic, racial unrest more heightened than we've seen in decades, and a West Coast set ablaze, in part, by pyrotechnics at a gender reveal celebration. This year has been tragic, infuriating, and embarrassing.

I'd love to be able to say, "Despite all that, we survived," but, sadly, many of us did not. The hostility toward science that the outgoing presidential administration has proudly displayed has played a part in prematurely ending the lives of more than 230,000 Americans, many of whom—with better leadership—wouldn't have been exposed to COVID-19 in the first place.

Starting fresh in January with a president who is committed to ending the Global Gag Rule, rejoining the Paris Climate Accord, and tackling the coronavirus pandemic gives me hope that we can get our country and its priorities back on track before too many more lives are lost.

This issue of our magazine looks at the devastating wildfires that have ripped across the American West since late July. We can't directly blame Donald Trump and his political goons for the devastation wrought by the wildfires in California, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington these past four months, but this administration has undercut progress at every turn. It's going to take considerable political will to reduce our emissions and slow climate change, to prevent development in dangerous wildland-urban interface (WUI) regions, and to slow our population growth so that such development isn't even a consideration.

As you'll read in the two feature articles in this issue, population growth in fire-prone states is responsible for sprawling

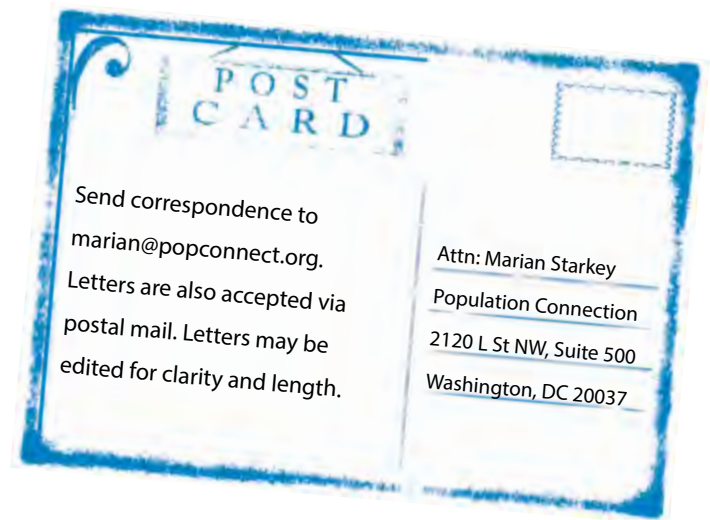
development into areas that should never have been inhabited by people. Our buildings create kindling for wildfires, making even those that start through no fault of our own—each year, tens of thousands of fires are started by lightening strikes—worse. And once people live in WUI regions, forest management and wildfire containment become much more difficult, leading to burns that rage out of control for months, displacing and killing people, pets, livestock, and wildlife.

State-level population growth happens through births, internal/domestic migration, and immigration. Some people think we should increase all three, environmental consequences be damned. Matthew Yglesias, author of *One Billion Americans*, is one such person. He believes that we need *more* population growth in order to remain the world's number one superpower. Fearing that China is going to overtake us because its population of 1.4 billion is more than four times the size of ours, he wants the U.S. to aim for a billion people living in skyscrapers across the Rust Belt. I reviewed his very silly book on page 14.

As this dreadful year winds down, I'd like to propose a toast to better times ahead. To a return to respect for science, established facts, and expert opinions. To an end to harmful policies like the Global and Domestic Gag Rules that contribute to unintended pregnancy and the population growth and poor health outcomes that result. To a commitment to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions in order to keep the planet's rising average temperature below the level that scientists say is the threshold for permanent devastation. And to a sense of care and concern for our fellow humans and the other species that share this planet. Cheers to a new year and a new America.

**Marian Starkey**  
marian@popconnect.org

## Letters to the Editor



Last year, I traveled with a group of fellow physicians to the Philippines to perform anesthesia for a marathon of surgeries in a region just north of Manila. On numerous occasions while I was preparing to induce anesthesia, our patient would stop me, pull me close to her face, and quietly ask if I could have the surgeon tie her tubes during whatever unrelated operation was about to be performed. In the shadow of the most densely populated city in the world, a city within which tens of thousands of abandoned “street kids” live, the capacity of a woman to choose not to have additional children has become so politicized that her best hope is to whisper it into the ear of a foreign physician.

When I returned home and found Population Connection, I was elated to find a well-run organization that was already dedicated to addressing what is not only a foundational cause of much human suffering but an existential threat to our global civilization. In the first *Population Connection* magazine I received, however, I was surprised to find such a large amount of attention paid to the topic of abortion. While I am pro-choice and participate in abortions myself, it struck me as an odd strategy to focus on a method of reproductive health that is contentious, reactive instead of preventative, and relatively resource inefficient compared to other options.

As is accurately noted in many other Population Connection articles, the most efficient and effective solutions to overpopulation remain the least contentious: educate and empower women and make contraception readily available. Population Connection should concentrate on these banal solutions.

The costs of overpopulation are not political, abstract, or academic. They are as real as a street orphan, as impending as rising waters, and as heartbreaking as a whispered request for

reproductive agency that has to be declined because of local politics. Population Connection seems to be the best domestic organization doing the brave and necessary work of turning the tide on these problems. But if we are to prioritize real results, we must be thoughtful with our strategy, heedful of ways in which we may unintentionally spawn opposition, and humble in our efforts to court any allies so long as they are willing to collaborate on this one particular and most pressing of issues.

Joseph Schoenfeldt, MD

I have just read the “Letters to the Editor” section in your September magazine referring to the June issue. It was heartening to see that others appreciated your June issue as much as I did, though I did not write you about it at the time. It is also heartening to realize that there are others out there who feel similarly to me about the problems our planet is facing at this time, and the connection to human overpopulation and wildlife exploitation.

In particular, one of the letters refers to the John Vidal article. I, too, read that article with great appreciation for its honesty, conciseness, and synthesis of ideas and conclusions. I even referred to it on my Facebook page, sparking a fair bit of consensus (for a change). I hope the article has been widely disseminated beyond just your magazine. The more people who can be reached and informed and even changed by the concepts Vidal puts forth, the better.

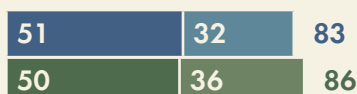
Thank you again for the work you continue to do. You tackle some of the most important issues of our time in a careful, caring, and constructive way. Kudos!

Marcia Kellam

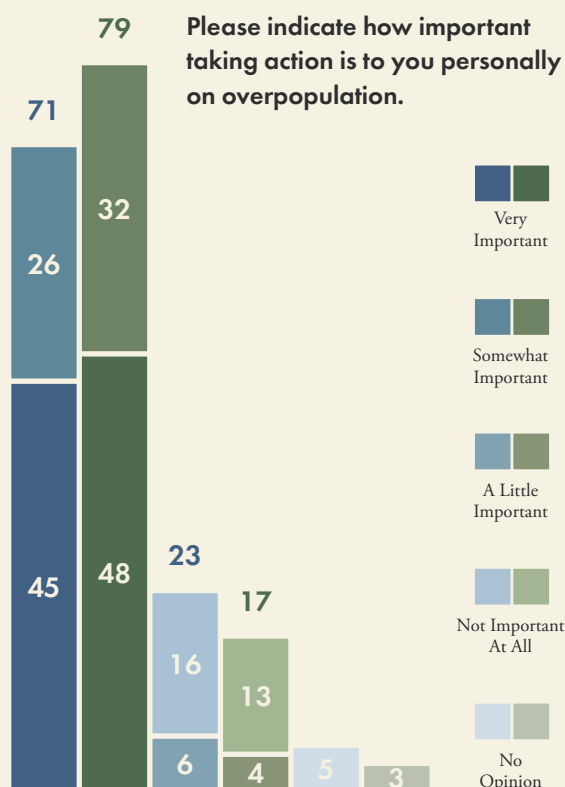
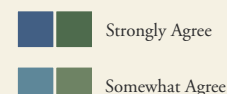
# Young Activists *and* Environmental Activists

## Summary of Key Findings—Value Statements

**Overpopulation threatens** the quality of life for people everywhere.

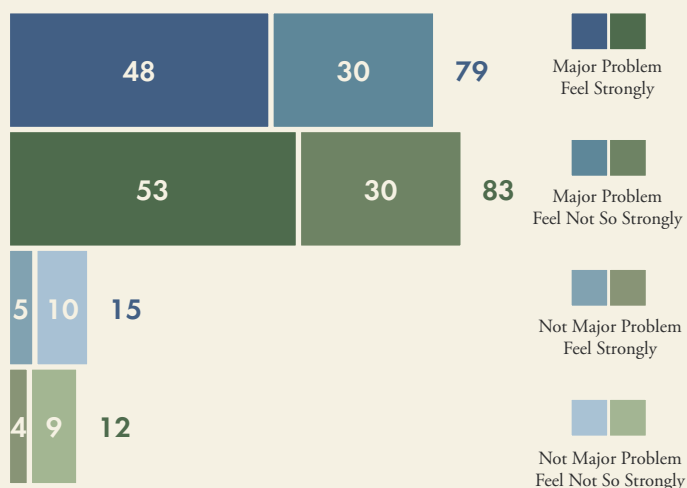


**We need progressive action** to stabilize world population at a level that can be sustained by Earth's resources.



Which of the following statements about rapid global population growth is closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right?

- The growing world population will be a major problem because of the food and resource strains such growth would bring.
- The growing world population will not be a major problem because we will find ways to stretch resources.



### Methodology – Young Activists

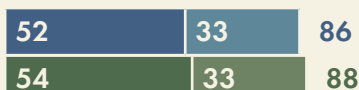
- Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey that was conducted online between August 25 and September 4, 2020. The survey reached a total of 500 younger activists (ages 18–35) nationwide.
- The sample was drawn from an online panel of listed adults and screened to be ages 18–35, likely 2020 voters, not Republican or conservative, not planning to vote for Donald Trump, who feel favorable toward Planned Parenthood and the Sierra Club, think climate change and environmental issues are “very important,” believe it is “very important” to take action on access to reproductive health care worldwide and climate change or another environmental issue, and report they have done four or more political actions in the last year. To ensure the data reflects attributes of the actual population, the sample was weighted by education.

# → Want Population Stabilization

**Rapid population growth** poses problems for people and our living planet.



**It is important to educate** K-12 American students about the impacts of rapid population growth.



We commissioned the highly regarded firm **Lake Research Partners** to conduct two national surveys this past summer. We sought to determine how **18–35-year-old progressive activists** and **environmental activists of all ages** view the population issue.

The results were quite encouraging and may help dispel the myth that people these days don't care about population growth. With today's endless torrent of news and information (and misinformation), it's good to know that **engaged citizens want to take action on behalf of population stabilization.**

We'll be using what we learned to make our programs even more focused and effective. If you'd like to review the full report, just email me at [john@popconnect.org](mailto:john@popconnect.org).

—John Seager, President and CEO

Note: Slight discrepancies in some totals are due to rounding.



## Methodology – Environmental Activists

- Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey that was conducted online between August 25 and September 4, 2020. The survey reached a total of 500 environmental activists nationwide.
- The sample was drawn from an online panel of listed adults and screened to be likely 2020 voters, not Republican or conservative, not planning to vote for Donald Trump, who feel favorable toward Planned Parenthood and the Sierra Club, think climate change and environmental issues are “very important,” report they have done four or more political actions related to the environment and climate change in the last year, and self-identify as environmentalists. To ensure the data reflects attributes of the actual population, the sample was weighted by gender, region, age, race, and education.



# IN THE NEWS

By Marian Starkey, Vice President for Communications

## Researchers at the University of Washington Publish New Population Projections

*The Lancet* published new population projections by researchers at the University of Washington in July, and they are quite a departure from the United Nations projections. According to these new projections, the global population will peak in 2064 at 9.73 billion and decline to 8.79 billion in 2100. The researchers project a world total fertility rate (TFR) in 2100 of 1.66 births per woman, down from 2.5 births today.

By contrast, the UN medium projection calculates a still-growing world population in 2100 of 10.88 billion. The UN projects that world TFR in 2100 will be 1.9 births per woman.

The difference in the University of Washington projections comes from the methodology used. While the UN Population Division looks at current age-specific fertility rates, the University of Washington researchers looked at completed cohort fertility at age 50, and modeled projections into the future using educational attainment and contraceptive demand satisfied as the two factors that influence completed fertility.

The University of Washington researchers calculated a second projection, wherein the world achieves the Sustainable Development Goals targets for education and contraceptive demand

satisfied. Doing so, according to the team, would result in a global population of 6.29 billion in 2100.

Projections are models based on assumptions—therefore, we can't say that one set of projections is "right" and another is "wrong." As long as research methods are clearly laid out, we should embrace the thought exercise that comes with alternative projection scenarios, even if we think there's little chance of said projections bearing out in reality.

## United States Census Ends Early

The Trump administration ended the decennial U.S. Census more than two weeks early, after the Supreme Court ruled that it could. Justice Sonia Sotomayor was the only member of the bench to dissent.

The original deadline for collecting Census data was in August, but COVID-19 delays prompted an extension to October 31. A confusing legal battle ensued, with the deadline being temporarily moved to September 30 and then back to October 31, before data collection was ultimately shut down on October 13.

Although 99 percent of U.S. residents were counted before data collection wrapped up, that final 1 percent primarily represents harder-to-count populations that are concentrated in Democratic-majority areas, including immigrants, people of color, and lower-income residents living in multi-family homes. This

undercount could deprive people living in these areas of funding and congressional representation. Compounding that possibility is the Trump administration's attempt to exclude undocumented immigrants from this Census, despite the Constitution specifying that everyone living on U.S. soil be counted. The Supreme Court is expected to hear that case as early as December.

## ICE Doctor Accused of Performing Unnecessary Hysterectomies

Detainees at the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia, claim that they were subjected to coerced and non-consensual hysterectomies after a nurse at the facility, Dawn Wooten, filed a whistle-blower report in September. The doctor who performed the procedures, Dr. Mahendra Amin, is the detention center's primary gynecologist.

Dr. Amin would have been paid thousands of dollars for each surgery he performed with funds from the Department of Homeland Security. In 2013, he settled in a civil case after being accused of over-billing Medicare and Medicaid for unnecessary surgeries performed on terminal patients.

Many patients who received hysterectomies from Dr. Amin said they had no gynecological problems leading up to the surgeries and that the doctor's notes about massive cysts and heavy bleeding were fabricated. Many patients also said there wasn't a translator in the room, so



they weren't able to communicate effectively with Dr. Amin during their exams. Ms. Wooten, the whistle-blower, said she was unable to explain to patients why they'd had their reproductive organs removed because she didn't understand the reasons either.

Dr. Amin is no longer seeing patients at Irwin County Detention Center, and an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general is ongoing.

## WWF Living Planet Report Shows Alarming Wildlife Decline

Every two years, the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) publishes its *Living Planet Index*. The 2020 iteration, published in September, shows a 68-percent drop in the abundance of 20,811 monitored populations of 4,392 vertebrate species (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish) between 1970 and 2016.

The decline hasn't been even across the globe—Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced a 94-percent decline in measured populations of vertebrates, while Europe and Central Asia had a decline of 24 percent and North American had a decline of 33 percent.

According to the report, we are threatening wildlife populations by “overusing the Earth's biocapacity by at least 56 percent.”

## Mexican Supreme Court Rules Against Abortion Liberalization

The Mexican Supreme Court ruled 4–1 in July against decriminalizing abortion in the state of Veracruz. An injunction issued by a judge in Veracruz last year removed three articles from the state's penal code, resulting in decriminalization of abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, decriminalization for terminations for health reasons, and the elimination of time limits on abortions of pregnancies resulting from rape. The Supreme Court ruled not to uphold the injunction.

Mexican abortion rights advocates had hoped that the case would go the other way and open up the possibility of nationwide decriminalization (abortion is already legal in Mexico City and Oaxaca, but nowhere else in the country).

## Poland Abortion Unrest

In October, the 12-judge Polish Constitutional Court banned nearly all abortions, sparking massive protests across Poland. As a result of the uprising, the right-wing government delayed publishing the Court's ruling, pausing it from going into effect.

Poland already had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, but abortions due to fetal abnormalities were permitted—under the new ban, such abortions would no longer be legal.

## U.S. Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Mail Order Abortion Medication

In a 6–2 decision in October, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that patients may continue receiving medication abortion pills through the mail during the pandemic. In an effort to reduce the necessity of risky in-person health visits, the FDA relaxed requirements for many medications, including opioids, that previously required patients to pick up the prescriptions in person. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) challenged that abortion pills should be among the medications permitted for mail order. Maryland District Judge Theodore D. Chuang ruled in favor of ACOG, and the Supreme Court ruled against the Trump administration's emergency appeal to block Judge Chuang's order.

In September, 20 Republican senators sent a letter to FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn thanking him for his efforts in the case described above and asking that the FDA “classify the abortion pill as an ‘imminent hazard to the public health’ that poses a ‘significant threat of danger.’” The authors of the letter also wrote, “Pregnancy is not a life-threatening illness.” It may not be an illness, but it is life-threatening all too often—worldwide, around 300,000 women die each year of pregnancy-related causes. In 2018, 658 women died of pregnancy-related causes in the U.S. alone.

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honors those who have included Population Connection in their estate plans, or who have established a Charitable Gift Annuity. We are grateful to ZPG Society members for their generosity and far-sightedness. **Thank you!**



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## What Will Your Legacy Be?

If you aren't yet a member of the ZPG Society, have you considered becoming one? The simplest way for you to ensure that your dedication to Population Connection's mission continues well into the future is through a gift—a bequest—in your will. You can create a bequest by adding just one sentence to your will. And that sentence can make the difference of a lifetime!

### *Sample Bequest Language:*

After fulfilling all other provisions,  
I give, devise, and bequeath \_\_\_\_%  
of the remainder of my estate  
[or \$\_\_\_\_ if a specific amount]  
to Population Connection  
(Tax ID #94-1703155), a charitable  
corporation currently located at  
2120 L Street NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20037.

*For more information contact:*

**Shauna Scherer or Jennifer Lynaugh**

legacy@popconnect.org or (877) 319-9880

# WEBINARS and WORKSHOPS

This past year threw unprecedented challenges into all of our activities

here at Population Connection, including **Membership Relations**. Our usual outreach events—tabling at farmers markets, hosting film screenings, attending community festivals and marches, and sending staff speakers around the country—haven’t been possible. So, we’ve pivoted to providing educational, interactive events for our entire Population Connection community—all available virtually!

## POPULATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE COURSE

In August, Communications Manager **Hannah Evans** hosted a four-part course that explored how population, health, and the environment intersect—over 200 attendees joined one or more sessions! At the end of the course, nearly 50 members who attended at least three of these sessions received certificates establishing them as “**Population Ambassadors**”—volunteers specially recognized for going above and beyond in furthering their knowledge about population issues. If you’d like to view the recorded series, you can find it on our website: [popconnect.org/population-and-climate-change-course/](https://popconnect.org/population-and-climate-change-course/).



**POPULATION & CLIMATE CHANGE COURSE**

 Instructor: Hannah Evans, Communications Manager

[popconnect.org/population-and-climate-change-course/](https://popconnect.org/population-and-climate-change-course/)

August 6	August 13
 Population & Climate Change	 Climate Justice
August 20	August 27
 Human Activities & Pandemics	 Solutions Through Reproductive Health

## FALL SPEAKER SERIES



Mark Hathaway, MD

We continued hosting experts in the fields of population, health, and reproductive rights by kicking off our Fall Speaker Series in September. **Mark Hathaway, MD, of Jhpiego** (originally known as the Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics)—and a member of our Board of Directors—gave an interactive and highly informative presentation titled “Contraceptive Mechanism of Action: In the Womb Where It Happens.” He outlined how different contraceptive methods work and the steps a health care provider takes when counseling patients on available options.



Pape Gaye

In October, we were honored to host **Pape Gaye, President Emeritus of IntraHealth International**. A native of Senegal, Pape gave a presentation titled “Family Planning in Francophone West Africa: Progress and Challenges.” He explained how governments, civil society, and the donor community have boosted access to and usage of modern family planning methods throughout French-speaking West Africa.

Following the November election, our sister organization, **Population Connection Action Fund**, sponsored a panel discussion with several members of our Advocacy staff, titled “What Happens Next: A Discussion About Reproductive Rights Advocacy After the 2020 Election.”



Carol Bliese

Finally, **Carol Bliese, our Senior Director of Teacher Programs for Population Education**, wrapped up this series in December with a presentation titled “Education for Earth’s Sake: How PopEd Supports Teachers and Inspires Future Generations.” Carol’s talk offered an inside look at PopEd’s teacher training workshops and demonstrated some of our favorite classroom activities. To view any of these recorded sessions, please visit our website: [popconnect.org/fall-speaker-series/](https://popconnect.org/fall-speaker-series/).

We’ll continue to host virtual events like these into 2021. Keep an eye on our website for more information: [popconnect.org/getinvolved](https://popconnect.org/getinvolved). If you have questions, suggestions for virtual events, or would like more information on how you can deepen your involvement with Population Connection, please reach out to us at [engage@popconnect.org](mailto:engage@popconnect.org).

# No, the U.S. Is Not “Extremely Undercrowded”

## Tripling the American Population to Compete With China Is Not Thinking Bigger, It’s Thinking Dumber.

**Book review by Marian Starkey, Vice President for Communications**

What a simpler world this would be if old school economics were our only concern—if we didn’t need to worry about natural resource availability or the earth’s capacity to absorb our various forms of waste. Reading Matthew Yglesias’ new book *One Billion Americans: The Case for Thinking Bigger* might lead you to believe that we live in such a world.

We don’t.

The premise of the book is that in order to hold onto the title of world’s biggest superpower (USA! USA! USA!), we need to compete in population size with China. And since China has over a billion people, we need a billion people too. The author sees no problem with tripling the American population—since, according to him, we’re currently “extremely undercrowded” and “many American cities and increasingly their suburbs are clearly underpopulated”—as long as all of that people power keeps us in the top spot of global economic powers.

The author’s ideas for accommodating another 670 million people include tearing down existing homes (including historic ones) and building high-rises where they’re currently not zoned, widening roads and investing in German-style city rail systems to cut down on the inevitable traffic jams more people would create, and training workers whose jobs could be automated to become childcare providers for the millions of additional babies people would have if only there was better paid parental leave and affordable after-school care.

The author admits that he has only one child and lives in a historic townhouse in DC. He assures the reader that different people have different preferences. Of course they do, but it’s hard not to think he’s suggesting a different way of life for other people but not for himself. (“We can and should stay number one forever, but it’s going to mean knocking down some old buildings ...” Just not the one he lives in, one presumes.)

Investing in better commuter rail service in order to get cars off the road is a great idea. Many of Yglesias’ policy ideas are of this variety—items



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288 Pages | 6 x 9  
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we should prioritize in order to improve quality of life and reduce per capita pressure on the environment. Where he loses me is in pushing for these policies in order to cram hundreds of millions more people into our cities, suburbs, and wildlands.

In hashing out all the intricate details of how we could make cities denser, encourage “Americans and ... those who would like to become Americans” to settle in Rust Belt cities whose populations have declined (one of his ideas: add more frequent flights to major cities, but don’t worry—in this fantasy, planes are electric!), and restructure our tax code and public services to enable people to have the number of children they say they ideally would like to have\*, Yglesias almost completely ignores the environmental repercussions of tripling the American population (in fact, he repeatedly warns against “ecopessimism” and says, “There is plenty of room out there for big houses and big lawns”). The environment is almost an afterthought—with the only real discussion relegated to the final chapter of the book, and even then, he nonsensically tries to refute environmental limitations one by one, painting a picture of an eco-conscious utopia where American individuals, corporations, and politicians take benevolent care of our environment despite the widespread lack of will to do so in real life. He urges us to avoid “going overboard in describing our environmental problems,” when considering how many children to have. Yglesias even says that the U.S. “not only has lots of land that *could* accommodate more people, it has lots of land that would clearly *benefit* from more inhabitants.” The very idea of there being any wild land anywhere that would benefit from human habitation is absurd.

If the entire book is a fantasy thought experiment, that’s his right. But if *One Billion Americans* is a real policy prescription, we should ignore it as naïve, harebrained and even dangerous should people in power take a liking to Yglesias’ ideas.

Matthew Yglesias co-founded Vox.com and is currently a senior correspondent focused on politics and economic policy. He has written two other books: *The Rent Is Too Damn High: What To Do About It, And Why It Matters More Than You Think* and *Heads in the Sand: How the Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats*.

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\* The U.S. has a higher fertility rate than almost any European country, many of whom have implemented the very infrastructure improvements the author recommends. Women may report that their ideal fertility is 2.7 children, on average, but there’s a big difference between abstractly imagining three children as ideal and actually trying to conceive a third child once raising two is already a lived reality. And many women simply wait too long to start their childbearing to have the number of kids they say they want. Helping people in their twenties to be more financially secure would likely help a bit with this, but money isn’t the only reason people are waiting until later to have kids. Starting a career, finding the right partner, and having life experiences that are more difficult once children come along also play a part. Does he have policy prescriptions for those things as well?



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Yglesias even says that the U.S. “not only has lots of land that *could* accommodate more people, it has lots of land that would clearly *benefit* from more inhabitants.” The very idea of there being any wild land anywhere that would benefit from human habitation is absurd.

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# Climate Grief Is Burning Across the American West

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**Climate change is making wildfires bigger, fiercer, and deadlier, fueling a new kind of despair on the West Coast—and beyond.**

**By Matt Simon | Originally published by WIRED on September 14, 2020**

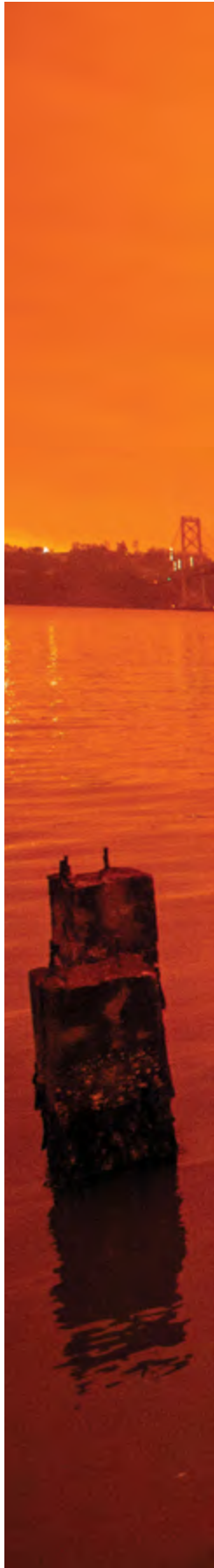
Grief has settled over the western U.S., along with the thick haze of smoke pouring from dozens of massive wildfires up and down California, Oregon, Colorado, and Washington. It's grief over the thousands of structures and at least 33 lives lost so far; grief over another villain conspiring with COVID-19 to lock people indoors; grief that the orange-hued dystopia of *Blade Runner* is now a reality in smoky San Francisco; grief over losing any sense of normalcy, or indeed a clear future.

Enveloping all of those emotions—packaging them into an overwhelming feeling of doom—is climate grief, as psychologists call it, the dread that humans have thoroughly corrupted the planet, and that the planet is now exacting its revenge. Wildfires were around before human-made climate change, but by pulling a variety of strings, it's made them bigger, fiercer, and ultimately deadlier, creating what fire historian Steve Pyne has dubbed the Pyrocene, an Age of Flames. By burning fossil fuels, we've primed the landscape to burn explosively, and by pushing human communities deeper and deeper into what was once wilderness, we've provided plenty of opportunities for ignition—and plenty of opportunities for grief as these forces catastrophically combine.

"So much is out of our control," says Adrienne Heinz, a research psychologist at the Stanford University School of Medicine, who studies the effects of disasters like wildfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. "We lose our sense of personal agency over how we will live—the decisions are made for us."

"It shifts from grief over what's happening with our climate—can we feel safe in our own communities?—to despair, the differentiator being that you don't feel like tomorrow is going to be any better than today," Heinz adds. "That's where it gets really dark."

For the people of Northern California, an exhausting parade of massive wildfires have marched across the landscape over the past





**Left:** Smoky skies from the northern California wildfires cast a reddish color in San Francisco on Wednesday, September 9, 2020.

(Photo by Ray Chavez/  
MediaNews Group/The  
Mercury News via Getty  
Images)



several autumns, with many people having to evacuate several years in a row. Last October, the Kincade Fire burned 120 square miles. The November before, the Camp Fire destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 86 people. And in October 2017, the Tubbs Fire obliterated 5,600 structures and killed 22.

“The catchphrase—kind of with a bitterness around here—is, ‘This is the new normal,’” says Barbara Young, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Healdsburg, north of San Francisco, who had to evacuate last month. “And so, with that, I think it’s implied that this isn’t going away—our climate is changing. These aren’t flukes, this is the trend. And I think everyone is very clear that this is not a one-off. This is every year now.”

Year after year of such stress is taking a toll on Americans in the West, Young says. Even if someone isn’t forced to evacuate, the mere whiff of wildfire smoke can be an emotional trigger for survivors of previous blazes. “It’s a tremendous amount of fatigue,” she says. “Mental fatigue, physical fatigue, emotional fatigue. And that’s long-term.”

California’s wildfires are also chewing through iconic destinations, like Big Basin State Park, bringing a sort of anthropomorphized grief as people mourn for a place they’ve bonded with. “Places just have a lot of emotional significance for us,” says psychologist Susan Clayton of the College of Wooster, coauthor of an extensive report on climate change and mental health. “And when they’re gone, in some cases people have even talked about it being like losing a family member—for example, a favorite tree that you’ve known for a long time is destroyed.”

To be sure, wildfires are a perfectly natural and indeed beneficial component of the Western landscape, periodically clearing out an environment and resetting it for new plant growth, which feeds herbivores, which ultimately feed carnivores. But these recent fires in the American West are far from perfectly normal. Sparked by a



freak thunderstorm system and fueled by record heat and brutal winds, California’s fires over the past month have grown into conflagrations of astounding size and intensity. About halfway between the Bay Area and the Oregon border, the August Complex—a “complex” is a grouping of blazes—has ballooned into California’s biggest wildfire on record, at 877,000 acres, or 1,370 square miles. That nearly doubles the previous record set just two years ago by the Mendocino Complex, which burned 459,000 acres. Two other complexes currently burning, the SCU Lightning Complex and LNU Lightning Complex, are now the state’s third- and fourth-biggest fires ever, respectively. Across the state, over 3.2 million acres have burned.

“The hots are getting hotter, the dries are getting drier,” said California governor Gavin Newsom in his Democratic National Convention speech on August 20, recorded a mile from one of hundreds of wildfires burning in the state. “Climate change is real. If you are in denial about climate change, come to California.”





**Above:** Marcia Ritz looks through the rubble of her home in Lake Berryessa, California, on August 27, 2020. The Hennesey Fire, part of the LNU Lightning Complex Fire, tore through the area on August 18. Ritz and her husband, Jerry Rehmke, rode out the fire with nine other people aboard a pontoon boat as flames surrounded Lake Berryessa.

(Jane Tyska/Digital First Media/East Bay Times via Getty Images)



**Left:** Gina Santos cries in her car after evacuating the LNU Lightning Complex Fire in Vacaville, California, on August 19, 2020. She moved into her “dream house” several months ago and was distraught that it might have burned down.

(Gabrielle Lurie/The San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images)

In Oregon, a plague of wildfires has blackened a million acres and forced tens of thousands to evacuate. Ten people are dead, and dozens more are missing. “We have never seen this amount of uncontained fire across the state,” Oregon governor Kate Brown said last week. In Washington, wildfires have burned 600,000 acres. Still more fires across Colorado have burned hundreds of thousands of acres—crews got a better handle on these last week when extreme heat suddenly gave way to snow.

Climate change is but one of several co-conspirators in the West’s fiery reckoning. Part of the problem is that the region has long embraced a policy of squelching fires quickly, so underbrush builds up as fuel year after year. Part of that problem is that fire crews have ever more people to protect, as the West’s population expands and we build farther into forests. More people also means more opportunities for accidentally sparking fires. Plus, bigger populations make it harder for fire crews to do controlled burns—small, manageable blazes set in the spring when

the landscape is hydrated, so there’s less fuel load to burn in the dryness of summer and fall. But to burn safely, crews have to ensure there aren’t people downwind, especially with the continued spread of COVID-19, a disease that attacks the lungs.

The patterns of how fires burn in a given area, known as wildfire regimes, are changing as human populations expand and the climate grows hotter and drier. “The populations within these wildfire regimes are increasing so rapidly that forest management becomes almost impossible,” says climate scientist Zachary Zobel, who studies wildfires at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. “Controlled burns get very challenging when there are population centers around where you’re trying to cleanse the forest, because one misstep and it burns down the entire neighborhood. I mean, that’s a little bit bleak—that’s the truth.” Plus, things have been so generally hot and dry that crews have less of a window during the spring to even think about doing burns.

Overarching all of these problems is climate change. Swaths of the western U.S. literally being on fire may seem like an obvious symptom of a world figuratively being on fire, but there are some surprising dynamics at play. Yes, the West has been extremely dry in recent years, which desiccates mountains of vegetation into mountains of tinder. And yes, on a hotter planet, the atmosphere sucks what little moisture is left out of those plants more greedily. The West has gotten so dry and hot, in fact, that areas usually too wet to burn, like northwest Oregon, are right now consumed by flames. But the collision of climate change and the West's wildfires is also a matter of timing, and oddly enough, it's about the abundance of water during a certain time of year.

**“The populations within these wildfire regimes are increasing so rapidly that forest management becomes almost impossible,” says climate scientist Zachary Zobel, who studies wildfires at the Woodwell Climate Research Center.**

Having so many intense fires arrive in the summer is odd, actually. California's biggest blazes tend to break out in the autumn, when seasonal winds tear in from the northeast. In decades past, these winds weren't so dangerous, because

by the time they arrived, California at least had experienced a little rain, which greened up the vegetation. But climate change is pushing those rains later and later in the year, giving the parched landscape more time to combust. And it isn't done pushing yet. “Just the raw length of the wildfire season, what we're expecting over the next couple decades is for that to very much be extending later into the year,” says Zobel. And because of climate change, the landscape is drier for longer and wildfires burn more intensely.

But here's a great irony of climate change: Parts of California are getting very heavy rains during the winter, because the warmer air on a warmer planet holds more moisture. Come spring, the hydrated landscape explodes with new vegetation, which then shrivels during ever hotter summers. In other words, the wet winters are leaving the landscape with fuel to burn in the autumn when speedy seasonal winds arrive. Instead of burning naturally and less intensely every so often, parts of the western U.S. are now in a regular cycle of blooming, getting obliterated by massive wildfires, and blooming once more.

“If we were just dry all the time, at some point, we would run out of things to burn, essentially,” says Zobel. “The inverse of that is actually probably worse.”

What makes the resulting grief so painful for the people who live in the West are the dueling certainties and uncertainties of wildfires: Residents know how climate change has exacerbated these fires, and know that the Western landscape will grow more dangerous from now on, but they don't know where the next Camp Fire or Tubbs Fire will break out, or when whole towns and dozens of lives may be lost in a matter of hours. We can characterize this hellish new reality, but we can't predict the firestorms. The certainty of climate grief interfaces with the uncertainty of climate anxieties.

“I think that's one of the things that characterizes this response to climate change,” says Clayton of the College of Wooster. “For those





“We see pictures of farm workers who are working in really horrible air quality that’s bad for their health,” says Elizabeth Sawin, co-director of Climate Interactive, a nonprofit that focuses on the intersection of climate change and inequity. Indoors, too, the poor are at greater risk: To keep its equipment from sparking fires when winds kick up, the California utility PG&E has been preemptively cutting power to hundreds of thousands of people. And while power cuts affect everybody in a region, the wealthy are more likely to have resources like solar panels, or to be able to recover from losses. “We could go down the list of people who are likely to lose their power, and with it all the food in their freezer, when replacing the food in their freezer is an economic hardship,” says Sawin.

The rich can also afford to stay one step ahead of climate change, moving away from rising seas and fire-prone landscapes. “We’re starting to hear around the country and around the world, the term climate gentrification,” says Sawin, “which is the idea that the places that are safest will soon become unaffordable except to the elite. So whether that’s high ground in a place that’s prone to flooding or fire-safe areas in the West, I think it’s the same underlying dynamic.” This is particularly acute in California, as low-income residents flee expensive coastal cities and settle in less expensive towns near the mountains. They’ve been displaced not by disaster, but toward disaster.

Thus inequities, wildfires, and climate change collide. Each massive problem on its own is difficult for the human mind to parse, much less all three together. “I am doing a lot of work with people on really increasing psychological self-care, spiritual self-care, physical self-care, and to help that fatigue,” says Young, the therapist in Healdsburg. “And I do think that is connected with climate grief. Finally, maybe we are forced to see how interconnected everything is.”

of us who are absolutely sure that it’s happening, that it’s going to be bad, you still don’t know exactly what impacts might be felt in a particular area and when they’ll happen. And I think with wildfire, that’s just especially true. It can be so random. Such small things can have an impact on where it starts and how much it spreads.”

As with climate-fueled disasters in general, the West’s wildfire crisis is hitting the least fortunate the hardest. Researchers from several California universities reported last month on how they used smartphone location data to show that poor Americans have had to travel more than the working-from-home wealthy during the pandemic, likely to get to their essential jobs, putting them more at risk of contracting COVID-19. Similarly, while many of the rich are able to huddle safely at home behind double-paned windows with air purifiers humming, essential workers labor outdoors in the West’s choking wildfire smoke, braving a virus that attacks the lungs.

**Above:** Austin Giannuzzi embraces family members at the burned remains of their home during the LNU Lightning Complex fire in Vacaville, California, on August 23, 2020.

(Photo by Josh Edelson/ AFP via Getty Images)





# California's Catastrophic Wildfires in Three Charts

Article by Isabella Isaacs-Thomas | Charts by Megan McGrew

Originally published by PBS on September 14, 2020

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The devastating wildfires tearing across California, Oregon, Washington, and several other Western states are an increasingly familiar scene, as blazes have become larger and more destructive over the past several decades.

Seven of the top 10 most destructive fires in California's history have occurred since 2015, and this year's fires have already burned an unprecedented 3.1 million acres in that state so far, driven in part by lightning storms and an extreme heat wave.

The autumn winds that typically fuel the bulk of destruction during California's wildfire season have already begun to blow, contributing to dangerous conditions like low humidity and dry vegetation that have helped fuel fires including the yet-uncontained August Complex, now the largest fire in California history.

Meanwhile, about 10 percent of Oregon's population were placed under some level of evacuation notice last week, and although

wildfires burned more slowly in that state over the weekend, smoke created unhealthy to hazardous air quality that is forcing residents across that state and the broader Pacific Northwest to stay inside. At least 35 deaths have been confirmed across California, Washington, and Oregon, and officials have said the toll is expected to grow.

Annual wildfires occur naturally in multiple states, but highly populated California has a lot to lose when fires burn widely and out of control. A 2019 report from the company CoreLogic found that California's metropolitan areas "dominate" a list of the top 15 regions most at risk for wildfire damage, due to its "high density of homes located in wildfire-susceptible areas."

Given the ongoing destruction, oppressive air, and ominous skies turned orange by the smoke, many are once again drawing a connection between the changing climate, extreme weather events, and wildfire season. As the planet continues to warm, experts predict

that droughts and heat waves—both factors that paved the way for this year's catastrophic fires—will only intensify with time.

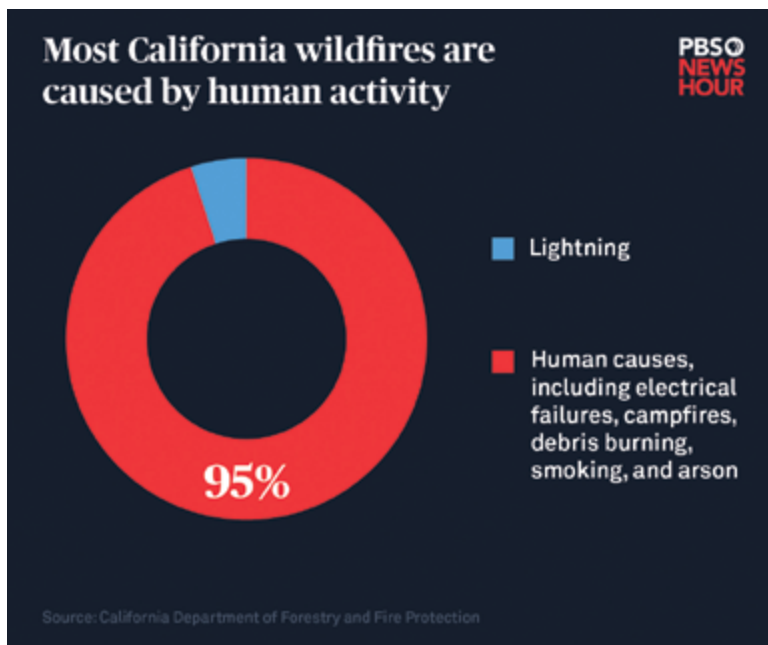
The effects of climate change are already being felt, but that's not to say that a future marked by regular, widespread devastation of communities and ecosystems, in addition to loss of life, is completely unavoidable.

Ninety-five percent of wildfires in California are caused by human activity. Although we can't control the yearly winds that fuel those fires in the fall, or the droughts that regularly choke the region, we can address the daily human decisions that have a direct impact on how and why wildfires break out in the first place.

Here are three charts to help you understand those fires, and what experts say we need to keep in mind if we want to reduce the risk of future disaster.

For a sense of how wildfire season is worsening in California, Lynne Tolmachoff, who serves





as chief of the CalStats program at the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), points to how long that season lasts now, compared to previous years.

When Tolmachoff started at CalFire two decades ago, seasonal firefighters were expected to work about five months out of the year, from around mid-July to early October. Now, she said, some firefighters are working as many as nine months out of the year, as the season has begun to start earlier and end later than it has in the past.

“Now we’re seeing it starting in May and going occasionally into November, and even a couple years ago, we had to go into December,” Tolmachoff said. “Sometimes, Southern California, depending on what happens with their weather patterns, may never even go out of fire season. They may have to stay staffed,

because they’re seeing wildfires year-round.”

This year’s fires, which have already broken state records in terms of total acres burned, were largely caused by the more than 14,000 lightning strikes that hit California during the month of August in combination with severely dry conditions. Although lightning accounts for just 5 percent of wildfires in California, Tolmachoff said the fires it sparks tend to burn more acreage than those caused by humans.

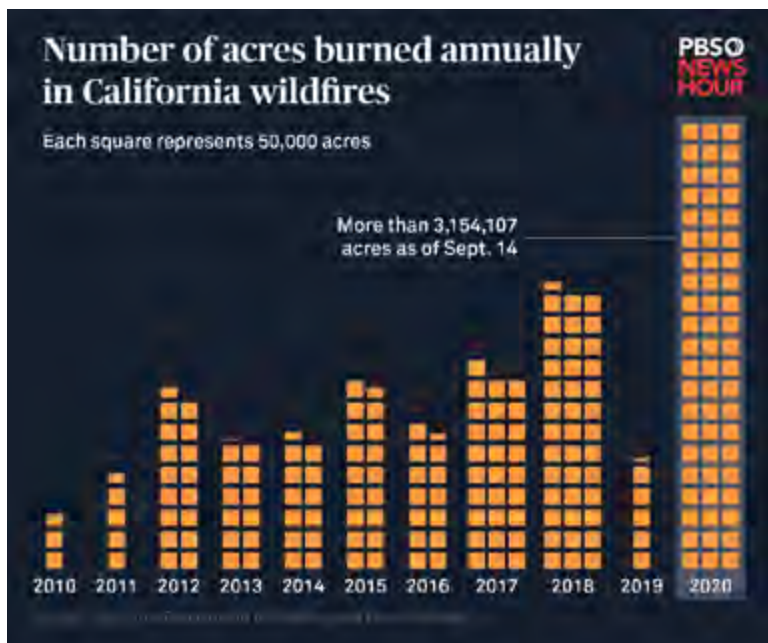
That’s due in part to where lightning tends to strike—usually, in mountainous regions with high elevations where, if a fire does start, it can be harder to contain due to the inaccessible nature of the terrain. “Dry thunderstorms” occur when storms cause thunder and lightning, but most or all of their precipitation never actually reaches the ground, allowing flames to smolder.

A similar phenomenon occurred back in 2008 when a severe thunderstorm system in Northern and Central California caused more than 6,000 lightning strikes that met “record dry conditions” and sparked more than 2,000 fires, according to CalFire. At the time, that season was considered to be one of the most severe on record.

What has made 2020 unusual, Tolmachoff noted, is the fact that the lightning struck not just the mountains, but also flatland areas and parts of the state that are more populated. Two complexes, or groups of fires, caused completely or in part by lightning strikes in the Bay Area this year have already been named two of the 10 most destructive fires in California history.

Although lightning fires cause immense damage, they account for just a fraction of the annual wildfire devastation in California during most years. The rest is caused by human activity and infrastructure like arson, power lines, and, recently, the use of a pyrotechnic device at a gender reveal party, which sparked the yet-uncontained El Dorado fire that began in early September.

This year’s heat wave—in addition to years of intense drought—has made California’s dried out vegetation particularly effective fuel. Annual fall winds may continue to exacerbate this already disastrous fire season—a possibility Tolmachoff is particularly concerned about. When humidity is low, even when temperatures cool down, those wind gusts can both



**The landscape varies widely across California, and different parts of the state have different terrain and conditions that can sustain wildfires. But one thing that remains constant is the fact that humans are responsible for the vast majority of the blazes that occur every year. Keeley argues that the role of human activity should be emphasized when it comes to addressing root causes of massive wildfires, and points to both the practice of fire suppression and California's increasing population as primary factors.**

fan fires and spread them into different areas, historically bringing the “largest, most devastating fires.”

“Until we get some significant rain, we will remain in fire season. Even if the temperatures cool, we’ll still see fire,” Tolmachoff said. “So that’s probably our biggest concern, is the fact that we’ve already burned over [3 million] acres and yet we still have probably two good months at least of fire season to go.”

The infamous 2018 Camp Fire, which killed 85 people, was caused by “electrical transmission lines owned and operated” by the utility company Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and exacerbated by the usual fire-friendly forces of dry vegetation, low humidity, and strong winds. That year’s fire season held the title of the most destructive on record until this year unseated it, and it’s still considered the most deadly.

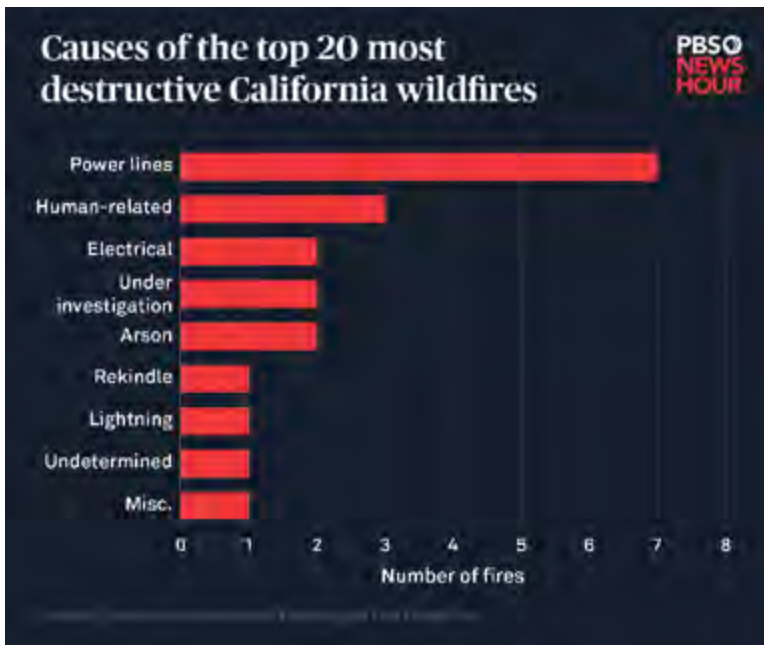
Jon Keeley, a research scientist with the United States Geological Survey, noted that the major, multi-year drought that hit California between 2011 and 2019 killed off an immense amount of vegetation in the state. He said that more than a million trees in the Sierra Nevada died over the course of that drought, providing ideal fuel for the fires that are devastating that region now.

Keeley acknowledges that climate change “almost certainly” exacerbates fire-friendly conditions in California, but says that’s only part of the story.

The landscape varies widely across California, and different parts of the state have different terrain and conditions that can sustain wildfires. But one thing that remains constant is the fact that humans are responsible for the vast majority of the blazes that occur every year. Keeley argues that the role of

human activity should be emphasized when it comes to addressing root causes of massive wildfires, and points to both the practice of fire suppression and California’s increasing population as primary factors.

“The bottom line is this is a multifactor problem. It’s not just climate change, it’s not just the drought, it’s not just dieback. It’s management activities that have suppressed fires for over a century—a lot of things going on,” Keeley said. “The way I see the current situation in California, this is the perfect storm. Everything is coming together at once.”



**Keeley emphasized that California’s population has grown by 6 million since the year 2000.**

**“That 6 million increase in population means more people pushed out into areas of urban sprawl, of dangerous fuels, increased ignition sources, increased potential for people getting killed, an increase in the electric grid,” Keeley said. “So if there’s anything that can explain the increase in fires in the last 20 years, my feeling is it’s population growth.”**

While this summer’s fires were fueled by lightning storms in addition to human activity, Keeley noted that the fires fueled by yearly autumn winds are “always” started by people, whether by accident or on purpose. He said that power line failures have been responsible for the majority of large-scale fall fires in the state over the past two decades.

Inadequate maintenance is partly to blame, courts have found. According to *The New York Times*, PG&E’s electrical network—which serves approximately 16 million people in Central and Northern California—has been linked to multiple destructive fires, and regulators have determined that the company “violated state law or could have done more to make its equipment safer” in several cases.

Power grids have also expanded to accommodate growing communities in the state, creating more

opportunity for disaster. Keeley emphasized that California’s population has grown by 6 million since the year 2000.

“That 6 million increase in population means more people pushed out into areas of urban sprawl, of dangerous fuels, increased ignition sources, increased potential for people getting killed, an increase in the electric grid,” Keeley said. “So if there’s anything that can explain the increase in fires in the last 20 years, my feeling is it’s population growth.”

In addition to infrastructural issues like power grids, mitigating human error on an individual level is key to preventing future disaster. That’s why one of CalFire’s goals is to educate as many Californians as possible about how wildfires work, what causes them, and the fact that they can affect communities in any part of the state—urban, rural, or anything in between.

This year’s wildfires aren’t the only natural disasters or extreme weather events to devastate communities over the past several months, renewing attention on the global need to mitigate the growing climate crisis. But given the magnitude of that task, in the context of the California wildfires, Keeley argues that looking toward tangible, human solutions to human-caused problems can offer some degree of hope.

“It’s a positive view that we don’t just have to feel like we’re doomed to climate change,” Keeley said. “We can change our outcomes, in part due to how we deal with these situations.”





# Joe Biden Wins the White House, January Runoff for Senate Control

By Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations

**A**fter four years of fury and frustration at the Trump administration's attacks on reproductive rights and family planning, advocates have cause to be optimistic in the aftermath of the election. Former Vice President Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump to become the 46th President of the United States. Biden has pledged to repeal the Global Gag Rule. He is also expected to support robust funding for bilateral international family planning programs and restore the U.S. contribution to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which had been prohibited by the Trump administration.

Control of the U.S. Senate will hinge on a pair of January runoff elections in Georgia, where no candidate in either race met the 50-percent-plus-one-vote threshold required by state election rules. In the House of Representatives, it appeared that family planning supporters would maintain a majority, though at our press deadline there were more than a dozen seats that remained uncalled.

## New Global Gag Rule Expansion Proposed

Even as we look to the future, we cannot afford to forget that, for the time being,

the Trump administration remains in charge, and that its members plan to continue their fight against reproductive health and rights to the very end. On September 14, the administration published a new proposed rule that would further expand the Global Gag Rule. Until now, all versions of the Gag Rule have applied to grants and cooperative agreements. If enacted, the new rule would include contracts, potentially impacting an entirely new category of global health programs and organizations. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that nearly 40 percent of global health funding flows through contracts.

Because this expansion is being done through the regulatory process, rather than through legislation, it is subject to a "notice and comment" period, during which any interested party may submit a question, comment, or other concern about the proposed rule, to which the administration must respond before it can finalize the regulation. The public comment period closed on November 13, and the hope is that the Trump administration will not have time to respond to all submitted comments and begin implementing the rule before President-elect Biden takes office and withdraws it from consideration.

## Supreme Court Tips Further to the Right

On September 18, the clerk of the Supreme Court announced that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had died of complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer. The 87-year-old justice, who had previously survived multiple bouts of cancer, dictated in a final statement to one of her granddaughters that her "most fervent wish" was that she would not be replaced until after the inauguration of the next president.

Less than 24 hours later, with early and absentee voting already underway in multiple states, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) announced that Donald Trump's nominee—whoever it was—would receive not only a confirmation hearing, but also a vote on the Senate floor before November 3, defying the precedent he himself set in 2016 with his refusal to consider President Obama's Merrick Garland nomination during an election year. On September 26, Donald Trump nominated Judge Amy Coney Barrett, who he had previously appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in November 2017. Barrett, who once clerked for the late Justice Antonin Scalia, has an extensive



history of extremely conservative viewpoints. She has called for the repeal of *Roe vs. Wade*, ruled that the use of the n-word in the workplace did not constitute a hostile work environment, and criticized the 2012 Supreme Court ruling preserving the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

After four days of hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee, the committee voted 12–0 to send the nomination to the floor, with all 10 Democrats on the committee having boycotted the vote. On October 26, the Senate confirmed Barrett to the Supreme Court by a vote of 52–48. Every Republican senator except Susan Collins (R-ME) voted to confirm her, including Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski, who had earlier voted against the nomination on procedural grounds. The ideological balance of the Court is now 6–3, in favor of conservatives. By the time this issue reaches your mailbox, the Court will already have heard cases that could overturn both the ACA and Roe.

### **Trump Attacks Reproductive Rights at the UN**

In late September, the United Nations General Assembly held its first-ever virtual convening. World

leaders—including Donald Trump—sent pre-recorded speeches to mark the occasion. Trump used his time to praise himself for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (which he referred to as the “China virus”), and extol U.S. support for human rights, specifically mentioning “the unborn” on a list of vulnerable groups the U.S. seeks to protect. His administration also continued its long-running effort to use international organizations to undermine sexual and reproductive health and rights. Along with Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda, the U.S. co-sponsored the Geneva Consensus, a non-binding international anti-abortion declaration.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar participated in the virtual signing ceremony on October 22. At the ceremony, Pompeo reiterated the position that “there is no international right to abortion,” and said that the Geneva Consensus promotes women’s health, “defends the unborn, and reiterates the vital importance of the family.” There has apparently been significant behind-the-scenes lobbying to convince other countries to sign on, as well.

## **Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg**

March 15, 1933 – September 18, 2020

A giant has fallen. In the wake of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s passing, this nation is poorer. For all of her 87 years, Justice Ginsburg never shied away from the battles that needed to be fought—on the contrary, she went looking for them. In the parlance of the current day, she persisted.

Through advancing age and infirmity, through the death of the beloved husband who supported and encouraged her throughout her remarkable career, through multiple bouts of cancer, she persisted. And now we must as well.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was always worth admiring—for her unapologetic ambition (at a time when, even more so than now, women were punished for it), for her keen mind, and for her understanding that the law must be not only an instrument of power, but also of justice.

Her loss is all the more crushing because of where we find ourselves today: fighting against those who have ambition without ideals, cunning without wisdom, and a will to power utterly lacking in compassion.

She was a bulwark, and now she is gone. But the torch has not been extinguished; it has been passed—to all of us.

May her memory be a blessing. May her memory be a revolution. And may her memory inspire us all as we continue to fight for the rights and dignity of people everywhere.





# A New President, a New Congress, and a New Supreme Court Keep the #Fight4HER on Its Toes

*By Rebecca Harrington, Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach*

## Summer of HER Summits

Against the backdrop of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and a national reckoning on race, our virtual Summer of HER program chugged on successfully throughout the summer with our organizers and fellows recruiting and engaging volunteers remotely. The program culminated with an exciting day of summits—on both the east and west coasts—at the end of August.

The summits brought together our fellows, staff, and key champions in Congress to talk about fighting to ensure a future that includes reproductive health and rights for everyone, everywhere.

At the eastern summit, Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-OH-3) gave a rousing speech about fighting for reproductive rights and women's rights, and about the power within all of the young organizers brought together by #Fight4HER. She emphasized that “our vote is our voice, and it is our power, and it speaks to our values,” while encouraging activists to “think about the women whose shoulders we stand on, when we think of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment.”

In the western summit, Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA-7) talked about the evolution

of his commitment to reproductive rights for everyone, everywhere, built upon his experience as a doctor, a former public health professional, and a father of a daughter. He rightly noted that “you can’t empower women if you don’t empower them to control their own reproduction,” highlighting this as a “fundamental right.”

Reps. Beatty and Bera are both original co-sponsors of the Global HER Act and have been long champions of international family planning and reproductive health and rights for people around the world. Our #Fight4HER teams in Ohio and California have formed strong relationships with the offices of both representatives, who are enthusiastic and outspoken supporters of our campaign.

To further engage activists online, we hosted a very successful Twitter rally as part of the summit agenda, asking participants to share videos of themselves explaining why they are #Fight4HER voters. The rally featured Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), one of our longstanding champions, and Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH-1), another strong advocate of the #Fight4HER. Our staff, volunteers, and fellows also shared their thoughts, and these messages collectively had

954,806 impressions and 2,741 engagements on Twitter.

In her video, Sen. Shaheen shared her commitment to fighting for health, empowerment, and rights: “As the only woman on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I’ve led efforts to advance women’s rights across the globe. But the fight for women’s health care depends on all of us—all of us across New Hampshire and the country.”

As the fall months progressed, we continued to utilize the best tools at our disposal to continue educating and activating people about the #Fight4HER. Relational organizing—drawing from personal networks to recruit new people—proved to be a very successful tactic for engaging people virtually, at a time when everyone is leaning on their communities like never before.

## Fight for the Supreme Court

On September 18, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away from cancer, leaving behind a rich legacy of fighting for gender equity, pay equity, reproductive rights, and civil rights. The very next day, Donald Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett, a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, as her replacement.

Over the next month, a hard-fought battle to prevent Coney Barrett's confirmation before the inauguration of the next president was waged. We worked in coalition with a broad range of groups, including Planned Parenthood, People for the American Way, and Alliance for Justice, under the leadership of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

The central message of our fight—that it was wholly unconscionable for the Senate to ram through a Supreme Court nominee while neglecting to pass a substantial COVID relief package during an ongoing pandemic—resonated strongly with people around the country.

Over the course of this month-long effort, we urged our supporters to call their senators, sign our petition, and let it be known that they did not support this rushed process. In addition to supporting and amplifying the work of our partners with digital rallies and Twitter storms, we collected 1,846 petition signatures, and our supporters made 298 calls to Senate offices, urging their senators not to vote in favor of a confirmation until after Inauguration.



### Post-Election

With the election of Joe Biden as the 46th U.S. President, and the election or re-election of pro-family planning candidates to both houses of Congress, we look forward to engaging our activists in a push to make international family planning a priority. As the transition to the next administration moves forward, we'll be advocating for a quick repeal of the Global Gag Rule, an end to the longstanding Helms Amendment, and an increase in our international family planning investment, to \$1.6 billion, including \$111 million for UNFPA.

Our activists and volunteers are excited about the possibilities 2021 holds.

**Above:** Rep. Joyce Beatty, #Fight4HER staff, and fellows at the East Coast Summer of HER Summit



# PopEd Applies New Tools for Virtual Teacher Workshops

Periodically, our staff share snippets of their experiences traveling around the U.S. and Canada, facilitating PopEd workshops for current and future teachers. This fall, rather than meeting with educators in person, we've had to do it virtually through Zoom and other platforms. With our commitment to provide engaging experiences, even from afar, we've created a host of digital tools to adapt our popular teaching activities for our socially distanced reality. Here are some staff highlights of using those tools in over 150 teacher virtual workshops this fall.

## Carol Bliese

*Senior Director of Teacher Programs*

**Power of the Pyramids**, our lesson on age structure diagrams, is a classic used by many high school teachers. Luckily for us, one of our trainers, Dr. Merryn Cole of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, reached out with a solution for facilitating the lesson virtually. She created a template in Google Sheets, enabling students to “draw” population pyramids and also see their classmates’ work during discussion and debriefing. We’ve since been using this tool in webinars, and sharing online, to rave reviews. Another trainer, Anthony Zanin, found that his AP students in Texas “were more engaged using the Google Sheet than they were last year when I did the activity in person.”

## Lindsey Bailey

*Senior Teacher Training Manager*

**Panther Hunt** is one of our most popular lessons, and a powerful way to explore the concept of carrying capacity and food chains. Students pretend to be panthers, amassing prey—paper cups representing squirrels, rabbits, porcupines, beavers, and deer—in their classroom habitat. With the help of Google Slides, we created a digital hunting simulation that is just as captivating as the in-person version. Students “hunt” prey by dragging small circles from the digital habitat to their “den,” a labeled area on the screen. As the prey get snatched up, students realize there’s not enough for every panther to survive. You can feel the tension rising through the screen. Engagement is high, and the content discussions remain rich.

## Laura Short

*Education Program Associate*

Adapting our census modeling activities to a remote learning environment was particularly challenging. Both activities require students to collect demographic data from classmates, which they analyze in small groups. For **People Count** (grades K-5), we built a census-like enumerator’s form in Google Sheets that several students can work on at once. In real time, they enter household information (name, age, sex, etc.), and the form automatically populates a graph to visualize the data. **Everything Counts** (grades 6-8) also gives students practice with various math and science population estimation techniques employed by wildlife biologists. Using an interactive Google Slide worksheet, students recreate the experience of catching and releasing mice into the wild.

**“I have to say the webinar was absolutely amazing! I was originally concerned with the virtual approach to the training. However, the lessons and activities were very well structured for the online environment. It was impressive, and the students were amazed with the resources. This is such an impactful and meaningful professional development. Keep doing the amazing work. I’m a huge fan and will keep reaching out to you all as long as I am teaching!**

—Cristina Viera, University of South Florida

### **Abby Watkins**

*Education Program Associate*

A few of our fall workshops have been hybrids (remote/in-person), like the one Carol and I presented for Dr. Shirley Disseler and her grad students at High Point University. The professor had to conduct her live class in North Carolina, while also managing camera angles and passing a microphone around so her students could respond to our questions from DC. We had to pick activities that would be both lively and allow these future elementary teachers to stay socially distanced—all while running the activity remotely and through a proxy. One of the most successful activities was **Green Spaces**, where participants measure out individual squares of space (representing parcels of grassy, oxygen-producing land). Students have a much more intuitive understanding of five feet of distance than they ever had in the past.

### **Pete Bailey**

*Professional Development Associate*

In addition to live and recorded webinars, PopEd now offers one-hour, online courses to teachers-in-training through the Canvas Instructure platform (also used for PopEd’s online graduate course). I’ve created a number of these “mini-courses,” consisting of several lesson demonstration videos, followed by questions about the lessons’ content and pedagogy. The platform allows professors to monitor their students’ progress, view their responses, and submit a final grade. Feedback from the mini-courses has been overwhelmingly positive from professors, who are excited to offer PopEd sessions that students can do on their own time.

### **Rafael Woldeab**

*Education Program Associate*

One of my favorite virtual workshops this fall was for Suzanne Gulledge’s graduate students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Laura and I presented **For the Common Good**, which includes two simulation games, where students try to determine individual short-term consumption strategies that will maximize resources for the entire group. We used a digital platform that allowed students to engage with each other using a shared board game. After several rounds of trial and error, they arrived at a sustainable consumption strategy to ensure their shared renewable resource did not run out. In discussion, the group drew parallels between overconsumption in the game and the overuse of renewable resources in society.



## CARTOON



Dave Granlund, Courtesy of Cagle Cartoons

### THE DENVER POST

In a strikingly clear message to those who would erode abortion rights in this nation, nearly 59 percent of Colorado voters struck down a proposed ban on abortions after 22 weeks of gestation.

Women and doctors should be making these medical decisions, not politicians. ...

Women from across the nation come to Colorado seeking abortion care when their home state denies them the medical care they need. ...

Opponents of abortion should take this loss for what it is and refocus their efforts on supporting pregnant women, especially teens, promoting access to birth control and comprehensive sexual education, and boosting adoption programs and foster care services. There is so much need.

And U.S. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett should reconsider her position about abortion and *stare decisis*. *Roe v. Wade* is now a decades-old decision that laid the foundation for women's rights in a country that at the time was ruled by men. Women for generations have relied upon the guarantee that the government (local, state, or federal) will not and can not interfere with their personal medical choices. To rip that foundation out from under women now, would erode this nation's commitment to freedom and our faith in time-honored institutions like the Supreme Court. Yes, Justice Coney Barrett, *Roe v. Wade* is a super precedent that should remain in place. When states bring ill-conceived restrictions on abortion, our justices should follow the lead of Colorado voters and strike them down. ...

Colorado has spoken and our justices should listen.

– November 4, 2020

### Los Angeles Times

...Clearly, [Amy Coney] Barrett is personally opposed to abortion. While she was a law professor at Notre Dame University, she was a member of an anti-abortion faculty group and was one of hundreds of female professionals who signed an open letter to a meeting of Catholic bishops in 2015, expressing their belief in “the value of human life from conception to natural death.” In 2006 she was among a long list of signatories who declared in an anti-abortion ad in a South Bend, Ind., newspaper that they “oppose abortion on demand and defend the right to life from fertilization to natural death.” The more provocative second page of the ad, next to the signatures, said in part, “It’s time to put an end to the barbaric legacy of *Roe v. Wade*.” ...

Taking away a woman's right to decide for herself what she will do with a pregnancy before the fetus is viable would constitute a profound injustice and an upheaval in the lives of millions of women of child-bearing age. Nothing has changed medically since *Roe* that argues for taking away a woman's control over her own body while a fetus is not viable.

The alarming thing is that the landscape for abortion availability even with *Roe* is bleak. Women who live in any of the states with just one abortion clinic face a daunting task of getting to them. And it is always poor or low-income women who face the most difficult obstacles to getting an abortion.

If *Roe* goes away, there will be states where abortion will be legal and states where it will be outlawed. And in the states where it's outlawed, there will probably be more so-called self-managed abortions—either through illicitly obtained pills for a medication abortion or from some other self-induced method.

At this point, abortion is part of women's health care in the U.S., and it should stay that way. Seemingly every major medical organization supports access to safe and legal abortion. So should the Supreme Court.

– October 11, 2020



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To learn more, please contact Shauna Scherer or Jennifer Lynaugh at 877-319-9880, or email [legacy@popconnect.org](mailto:legacy@popconnect.org).