

# POPULATION CONNECTION

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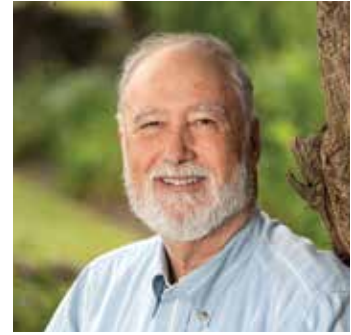
**AGING IN  
ADVANCED  
ECONOMIES  
IS A POLICY  
CHALLENGE, NOT  
AN IMPENDING  
DEMOGRAPHIC  
DISASTER**



# President's Note

John Seager

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One of my long-ago EPA coworkers displayed this message for all to see: “Your failure to plan ahead does not constitute my crisis.” None of us can afford to ignore today’s ecological emergencies resulting from humanity’s profound failure to plan ahead as our population continues to soar. Our disregard for nature has triggered what amounts to an environmental pandemic that’s as real as Covid, yet vastly more lethal for humans and other species.

Back East, we wore masks this summer when going outside as our skies were darkened by smoke from vast Canadian forest fires tied to climate change. Scientists at the University of Maine’s Climate Change Institute recently reported day after day after day when temperatures exceeded the hottest ever recorded by humans on Earth. Left unnoted was the fact that human population was also hitting new highs—as it does every single day.

Noting that “warmer temperatures lead to more air conditioning; more air conditioning leads to warmer temperatures,” *The Guardian* reports that we may see 3.5 billion more room air conditioners by 2050 globally. According to a 2017 report by the FAO, “Demand for food and other agricultural products is projected to increase by 50 percent between 2012 and 2050. Demand will undergo structural changes, owing to factors such as population growth, urbanization, and per capita increases in income.”


Soaring temperatures, food shortages, and unbreathable air are all linked to rapid population growth. Why do these relationships continue to be brushed off? The problem isn’t lack of evidence. Yet, as we don our masks, crank up the AC, and tote bottles of water, most

ignore population connections. If asked, they point to overconsumption—important, to be sure—then quickly change the subject.

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which coincided with the rapid acceleration of human population growth, we’ve kept the pedal to the metal with utter disregard for the Laws of Nature as they relate to our ever-increasing numbers.

As the California State Public Health Department pointed out in “Pollution Box Score, Top of the Ninth Inning,” a warning the agency published in 1969, “Man, perennially weak at defense and strategy but a threat at the plate, has been hitting nature hard. It must be remembered, however, that nature bats last.” Nature, broadly defined, will adapt despite the grievous damage we inflict—though countless species and the wild places they call home will not survive our craven ways.

For our own sake and on behalf of Earth as we know it, we must stop the stupid. One obvious step: Smash the social, cultural, educational, and economic barriers that prevent people from choosing smaller families. Make no mistake: Those barriers abound right here in the U.S. And we should also recognize that, despite some challenges, there are advantages to a society with more older people. As one such person, I’m tired of blanket criticisms.

Smaller families won’t cure every ailment we’re inflicting on our living planet. But, unless you’re willing to bet the future on the fantastical blather of know-it-all tech bros like Elon Musk (whom I wouldn’t trust to look after a philodendron), voluntary programs to stop overpopulation here, there, and everywhere are imperative. 

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## Feature

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### Aging Populations and Great Power Politics: The Problem Is for the Elites, Not the Masses

By Dean Baker



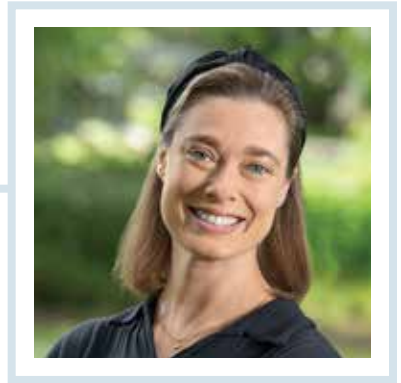
**Cover image:** People hiking on Spencer Island, located within the Snohomish River Estuary, near Everett, Washington, on May 28, 2023. (Photo by Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images)

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# Editor's Note

Marian Starkey  
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Raise your hand (or, even better, write a letter to the editor) if you're sick of reading news articles about the economic devastation that the aging populations of high-income countries will inevitably bring in the coming years and decades. Many journalists, economists, politicians, and businesspeople are hung up on the idea that there's nothing to be done to protect economies from stagnation as the proportion of elderly people grows in relation to the proportion of working-age people. This reveals a woeful lack of flexibility or creativity on their part.

Invite a guest speaker to your college class, club, or community group! Hannah Evans, Senior Analyst, is available for virtual presentations all year long. She may also be able to schedule in-person presentations, by request and depending on location. Hannah gives thought-provoking presentations focused on causes and impacts of population dynamics, as well as rights-based solutions to global population challenges. Email Hannah at [hannah@popconnect.org](mailto:hannah@popconnect.org) to set up a talk!

Is it *easier* to grow GDP when the working-age population is supporting fewer people of dependent ages? Yes, as long as those working-age people are skilled, educated, and employed. Is it *impossible* to grow GDP with a rising dependency ratio? No. (We'll save the discussion about whether raising GDP should still be countries' default priority for a future issue of this magazine.) As you'll read about in the feature article by economist Dean Baker that begins on page 14, productivity gains alone should ensure

economic solvency in the U.S. as the large cohort of baby boomers moves through their elderly years. He provides examples of how increasing productivity should preserve the economies of other high-income countries as well.

Our communications team (Hannah Evans, Olivia Nater, and me) hosted a virtual event on World Population Day (July 11) to discuss aging and slower population growth in the U.S. You can view the recording on our website at [popconnect.org/world-population-day-2023/](https://popconnect.org/world-population-day-2023/), alongside a blog post and press release on the same subject. We also submitted several opinion pieces to nearly a dozen newspapers around the country, but none of them were printed, we presume because our levelheadedness about aging doesn't get the same amount of attention (clicks) that alarmist articles about economic implosion receive.

We'll keep writing letters and columns, and we encourage you to do the same. With enough pressure, newspapers will eventually have to acknowledge that aging is inevitable as countries develop and women gain agency over their childbearing, and that there are myriad ways for economies to adjust to these shifting demographics. At this point, it's not a matter of *whether* aging will occur, but of how we can most productively respond to this inexorable phenomenon. 

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**Correction:** The cover of the June issue inadvertently stated that the Congo Basin is the world's largest carbon sink. It should have said that it's the world's largest *tropical* carbon sink. The planet's oceans absorb more carbon than the Congo Basin.

# Letters to the Editor

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I am a longtime member of Population Connection, and you are in my trust. The June issue about the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) brought back memories. My husband and I joined the Peace Corps after we graduated from UC Berkeley in 1965 and were sent to a village in northeastern Brazil to work in health and community development. People there lived in mud houses in extreme poverty. Emaciated women birthed babies every year as there were no family planning opportunities. Half of the babies died at birth.

I learned of a family planning clinic in the nearest city, a five-hour bus ride away, along a bumpy dirt road. I visited the clinic and found a doctor who would come to my village, Pianco, but I had to create a clinic first. I found a space, in the tiny general medical clinic, for the gynecologist to use one day a month.

I rode my horse to villages that had no roads to educate women about the new clinic and the services it offered. Most women had never heard of family planning. Only two women showed up on opening day, due to fear and because their husbands wouldn't allow it. After the second month, word got out that the IUDs were safe, and the clinic soon became a success.

Gabriela Taylor

President Seager's note in the March issue was excellent. I appreciated him calling out misguided news items in *The New York Times* and on my hometown public radio station, Oregon Public Broadcasting, describing falling populations in China and Oregon as "a cause for concern." (That story in the Times and other news stories making the same point have elicited scores of critical comments by readers who identify population growth as a source of many problems.) I especially liked Seager's use of Pittsburgh as an example of a flourishing city and metro area that had fallen in population. More examples of this type, and also of successful nations with falling or stable populations, would be very helpful. As part of those articles it might also be helpful to point out the falsity of the idea that a population Ponzi scheme is the only way to fund social security programs. Many thanks for your work, which I first supported as a teenager in the 1960s.

Robert Liberty

I have been a supporter of your organization for many years. As a retired forester who has done some work in the Congo Basin, I read with interest the article in the June issue about deforestation in that region. It is indeed population increase and displacement that are driving deforestation. The picture you show of a woman carrying about 30 kg of charcoal and a man carrying about 10 kg of branch wood illustrates the plight of the people. However, if the forest areas that were cut down for charcoal production were left alone, without converting the land permanently to agriculture, the stumps would sucker and grow again into forests. Nature abhors a vacuum.

Keith Openshaw

Thanks so much for reprinting Naomi Oreskes' article from *Scientific American* in your June issue. I loved Oreskes' critical comments on the world reaching 8 billion people as a sharp contrast to what so many of the mainstream media offered as commentary on the world reaching that milestone. It is unfortunate that most of the media and so many public officials see only the short-term economic benefits of continued population growth and not the long-term cost to the world and the environment of trying to feed, house, clothe, and otherwise meet the needs of a continually growing number of people.

Michael E. Kraft

# Meet Our New Board Chair!

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**Bryce Hach** was born in Iowa and grew up in Colorado. After graduating from Colorado College in 1998, Bryce became a public high school science teacher and football coach in the Mississippi Delta with Teach for America. Afterward, Bryce completed the Coro Fellows Program in public policy leadership in St. Louis and then an MS in public policy management from Carnegie Mellon University.

In 2004, Bryce moved back to Colorado and became the Executive Director of a private foundation that supports current and future high school chemistry teachers nationwide. Later, Bryce took on the role of Executive Director of a multi-sector collaborative effort to reduce homelessness in Fort Collins.

In 2013, Bryce and his family made an intentional move to Falmouth, Maine. Bryce worked in director roles for nonprofits in social service and environmental conservation while serving on several boards and teaching graduate courses in nonprofit and public management at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School. In 2018, Bryce and his wife, Sarah, started a business called Maine Food for Thought, an educational food tour focused on locally and sustainably sourced food, which had a great run until Covid-19 forced the business to close.

At that point, Bryce returned to teaching, his first profession. He teaches biology, AP environmental science, and systems thinking at North Yarmouth Academy in Yarmouth, Maine. Bryce is also a Science Ambassador Fellow with the Centers for Diseases Control (CDC), a certified Maine Master Naturalist, and a new member of the Falmouth, Maine, Town Council.

Bryce, Sarah, and their daughter, Ivy, enjoy the outdoors, sports, movies, travel, food, and engaging in conversations around just about any topic.

Bryce joined the Population Connection Board of Directors in 2018, serving as the Secretary and then the Vice Chair before being elected to Chair in June of this year. On the opposite page, he shares his hopes for our planet and its future.

# Board Chair's Note

Bryce Hach

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The human population has doubled in my lifetime, and during that same period, over two-thirds of the planet's wildlife has been lost. When I was born, climate change was not on our collective radar. When I was born, there weren't massive gyres of plastic swirling in three of the world's five oceans. When I was born, there wasn't coral bleaching. When I was born, the Amazon Rainforest was much larger than it is now. But, again, when I was born, the size of the human population was half what it is today.

However, what if? What if our planet was ecologically secure? What if the natural world could thrive alongside our own species? What if we could go to bed at night knowing Earth was going to be all right? For us, for our children, for children born long after we are gone.

Let's imagine this hypothetical future world. We are smaller in number now. Cities still hum along with energy, innovation, creativity, culture, museums, libraries, and sports, but they don't sprawl out as far as they once did. They are a little quieter now, and a little darker at night.


On a clear night, stars present themselves above the city lights. Traffic congestion is lighter now too, and the smog has dissipated. Old infrastructure that is no longer needed has been converted into parks, woods, affordable housing, small urban family farms, and other creative uses.

Sea levels have dropped as glacial ice in the polar regions has come back. Fish populations are healthy again, and solutions for removing plastic from the oceans are being implemented.

Neighborhoods are more intimate and walkable now, and neighbors are more neighborly. As we travel outward from city centers, past industrial, commercial, mixed-use, and residential neighborhoods, we come upon farms, where livestock and crops are nurtured in ecological connection with one another. Major monoculture industrial scale farms and giant feedlots have given way to smaller, more diverse farms that preserve topsoil, pollute less, and treat livestock humanely.

With your generous support, Population Connection is working toward a future for people and the planet that is safe, healthy, and sustainable for all. Thank you for your steadfast dedication to population stabilization—it's an honor to work alongside you for positive, lasting change.

—Bryce

Past the farms, we reach the edge of development. Unbroken forests and grasslands provide ample habitat for wildlife to safely range. Rivers flood in the spring and recede in the summer in the absence of dikes and levees. Nature is no longer confined to publicly funded parks, walled reserves, and zoos; it has reclaimed most of the planet and supports millions upon millions of thriving species, including our own. 

# Aging in the U.S.

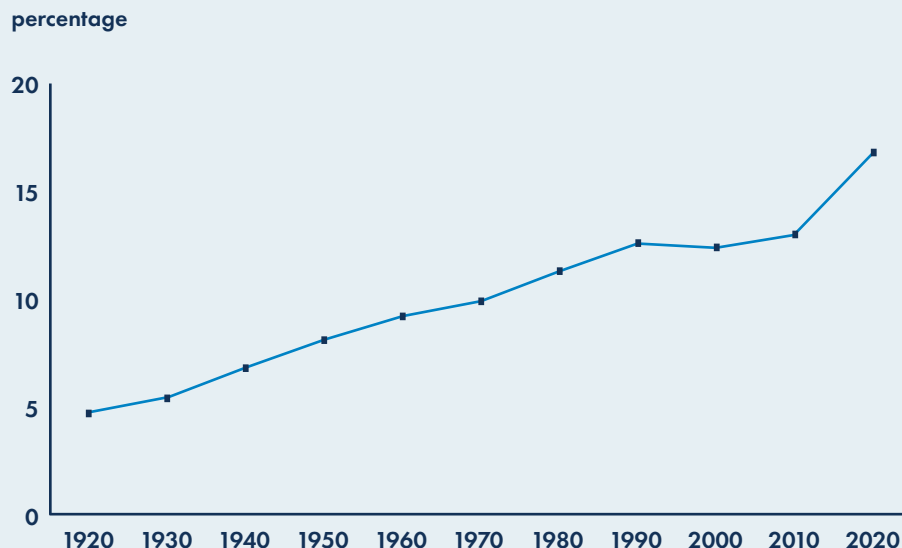
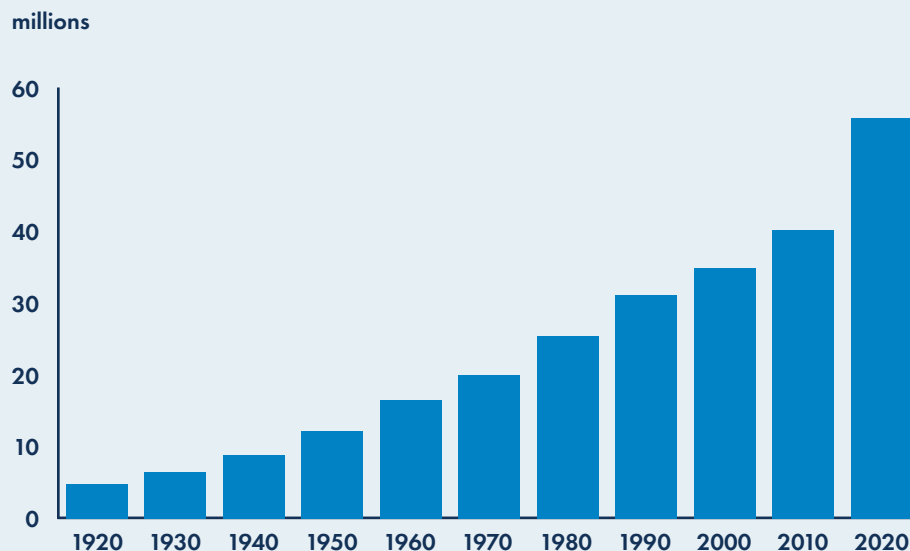
The population age **65 and over** increased by **50.9 million**, from 4.9 million (or 4.7% of the total U.S. population) in 1920 to 55.8 million (16.8%) in 2020.

This represents a **growth rate of about 1,000%**, almost five times that of the total population (about 200%).

In 2020, about **1 in 6 people in the United States were age 65 and over**. In 1920, this proportion was less than 1 in 20.

The **rapid growth was largely driven by aging baby boomers** (born between 1946 and 1964) who began turning 65 in 2011.

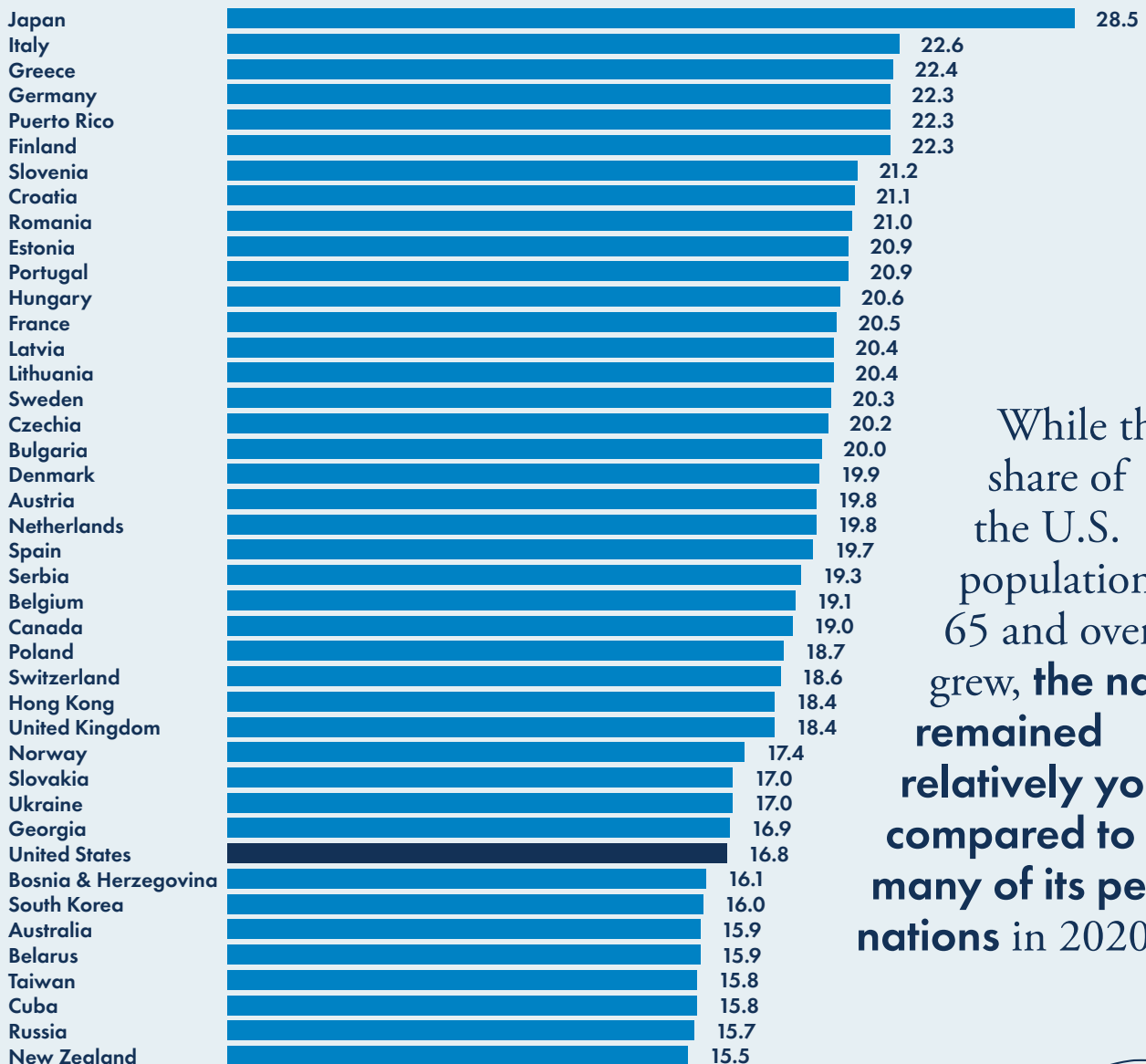
## U.S. population 65 and over by size and percentage of total population: 1920–2020





# and in Peer Nations

## Countries or areas with largest percentage age 65 and over: 2020



While the share of the U.S. population age 65 and over grew, the nation remained relatively young compared to many of its peer nations in 2020.

Source: Zoe Caplan, "U.S. Older Population Grew From 2010 to 2020 at Fastest Rate Since 1880 to 1890," United States Census Bureau, May 25, 2023, [census.gov/library/stories/2023/05/2020-census-united-states-older-population-grew.html](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/05/2020-census-united-states-older-population-grew.html) (retrieved July 14, 2023)





# IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

## Major Atlantic Ocean current could collapse within next decades, study suggests

Using statistical models and ocean temperature data, a new study published in *Nature Communications* found that an important ocean current could reach a major tipping point sooner than previously estimated, causing it to shut down sometime between 2025 and 2095.

The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) plays a key role in climate regulation, moving warm water from the tropics into the North Atlantic Ocean, and moving cold water south. Scientists have known that the AMOC is slowing (which is happening due to an influx of freshwater from ice melt) ever since detailed measurements began in 2004.

A complete collapse of the AMOC would have disastrous consequences, causing extreme temperature drops in Europe, faster warming in the tropics, and rapid sea level rise on the northeast coast of North America, among other impacts.

While scientists agree the AMOC is increasingly weakening under climate change, there is still wide disagreement about when a disastrous tipping point might be reached.

## Deforestation increased in 2022

Despite world leaders' pledge to end and reverse deforestation by 2030, 4.1 million hectares (approximately 10.1 million acres) of primary rainforest were destroyed in 2022, 10 percent more than in 2021, according to data published in June by the World Resources Institute.

The majority of primary (old-growth, mature) forest loss occurred in Brazil (43.1 percent), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (12.5 percent), Bolivia (9.4 percent), and Indonesia (5.6 percent). Brazil's primary forest loss accelerated under President Jair Bolsonaro's administration (January 2019 to December 2022), which stripped away environmental protections and weakened Indigenous land rights, making it easier for damaging industrial activities to expand.

## Climate breakdown and population growth

Governments are still largely ignoring the urgent need to increase funding for international family planning programs—a need exacerbated by the escalating climate crisis. A report by the Population Institute, published in July, adds to previous scientific warnings that the most hard-hit

areas also have the fastest growing populations.

The report compares population, gender, and reproductive health indicators for the 80 most vulnerable countries in the world, as measured by their exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive abilities. It found that in these countries, population is growing on average at twice the global average rate, while in a dozen of the most vulnerable countries, populations are growing at more than three times the global average rate.

Niger, for example, is ranked most climate-vulnerable while also having the highest fertility rate in the world, at 6.7 live births per woman. Niger is expected to warm faster than other areas, which will deal a huge blow to agricultural productivity. Already, 2.5 million Nigeriens are acutely food insecure, and nearly half of children under five are chronically malnourished.

The authors call for incorporating funding for women's and girls' empowerment, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, into climate adaptation plans.

## Summer months bring climate chaos

Scientists at the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the EU's

Copernicus Climate Change Service declared July 2023 to be the hottest month on record before it even ended. During the first and third weeks, temperatures temporarily exceeded the 1.5°C limit set by the Paris Agreement.

Commenting on the data, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that “the era of global warming has ended,” and “the era of global boiling has arrived.”

Deadly heatwaves in North America and Europe, record-breaking wildfires in Canada and Greece, extreme flooding in India, and unprecedented ocean temperature increase off the coast of Florida are just some of the disastrous ways in which the climate crisis manifested itself these past few months.

## **FDA approves first over-the-counter birth control pill**

On July 13, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Opill, a progestin-only birth control pill, for over-the-counter use—the first oral contraceptive approved for use in the U.S. without a prescription.

Opill is expected to be on shelves as of early 2024, and reproductive health advocates hope it will help more people access contraception by removing the need for a prior doctor visit. According to the Guttmacher Institute, almost half of U.S. pregnancies are unintended.

## **Poll reveals record high support for U.S. abortion rights**

Gallup poll results released in June show 69 percent of respondents think abortion should be legal in the first three months of pregnancy. This is higher than the previous record of 67 percent recorded in May 2022 after the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* draft decision was leaked.

While the majority of respondents still oppose abortion later in pregnancy, 37 percent said it should be legal in the second trimester and 22 percent said it should be legal in the last three months of pregnancy—the highest rates Gallup has recorded since 1996.


Overall, 34 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal under any circumstances and 51 percent say abortion should be legal under certain circumstances. Thirteen percent of respondents think it should be illegal in all circumstances—a significant reduction from 21 percent in 2019. Current policies do not reflect these views, with 14 states so far having banned abortion in most cases at any point in pregnancy.

## **Serious disease risk from U.S. livestock populations**

A report by experts at Harvard Law School and New York University published in July warns of a high risk of zoonotic disease spillover from animal to human populations in the

United States. The U.S. has one of the largest livestock and poultry counts in the world, at approximately 10 billion, and is also the biggest importer of wildlife, bringing more than 220 million live wild animals across its borders each year.

The authors point out the hypocrisy of western calls to shut down China’s wet markets, while the U.S. engages in many of the same risky practices. For example, there are at least 130 live bird markets in the northeastern United States alone, with roughly 25 million birds passing through them every year. The report notes that there have already been several outbreaks of bird flu at these markets in 2023, and there is evidence that swine flu has spilled over into humans at live animal markets in Minneapolis.

The authors warn that the use and production of animals in the U.S. “remains a cultural blind spot” and that public health is chronically underfunded. 

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources: [popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-september-2023/](https://popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-september-2023/)

# ZPG SOCIETY MEMBER

## Martha “Marti” Scheel

The ZPG Society is our recognition group for members who have made a gift in their will or trust, established a Charitable Gift Annuity, or designated Population Connection as a beneficiary of their retirement fund or other financial account. Development Manager Sarah Ikemoto spoke with ZPG Society member Martha “Marti” Scheel about her commitment to zero population growth. We are grateful to Marti and all our generous legacy donors!



Marti Scheel has been aware of the population movement since the first Earth Day in 1970, when Population Connection was known by its founding name of Zero Population Growth (ZPG). She has been a member since 1990, and we have been honored to include Marti in our ZPG Society.

Marti considers herself to be a pro-choice feminist. She grew up as the eldest child in a large Midwestern family. Describing her experience caretaking for her younger siblings, “I was a parent when I should’ve been a kid, and I had no desire to be a parent.” She continues, “I didn’t want to get pregnant and had my tubes tied when I was 30... I thought it was important to have control over my own fertility.”

Marti was so inspired by the pro-choice movement that she volunteered with Planned Parenthood to give others similar opportunities to make decisions about their own fertility. This early volunteerism showed Marti that there are more ways to give than direct financial commitments.


Marti worked hard, earning her library science degree from The Catholic University of America, and was employed in technical services at federal and university libraries in the Metro Washington, DC, area. Yet, it was through her volunteerism that she was able to pursue her passions: helping church groups in disaster response such as post-Katrina cleanup in New Orleans, building houses both domestically and internationally for Habitat for Humanity, cycling in bike-a-thon fundraisers, and knitting hats to be distributed to school children in Maryland.

Now retired and living in New Orleans, Marti continues to live her philosophy that “there are other people we can help, and we need to work at a larger scale and work together.”

Marti loves to travel and volunteer and has been on more than 10 volunteer service trips since retiring. As a single person, she appreciates these trips as a rewarding way to meet and work with like-minded individuals and to become more connected to a

**“There are other people we can help, and we need to work at a larger scale and work together.”**

different culture than tourists normally do—and together to improve the lives of people she otherwise would not have met.

Marti looks forward to reading about all of Population Connection’s programs in our magazine. Her passion for education makes her an ardent supporter of Population Education, and she’s also inspired by Population Connection’s advocacy work, as she’s “worried about the future of young people’s rights to abortion in this country.” Marti says, “I really thought that we were moving forward on this, but now I see people who are anti-abortion, anti-gay rights, anti-progressive, not only in the United States but in other countries as well. We’ve got a lot work to do. I’m here, I’m still kickin’, still votin’, and still throwing some money at elections.” 



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Marti’s commitment to service inspires us here at Population Connection. We are grateful for her investment in our work over the long-term by including a gift to Population Connection in her will. We’re proud to work together to foster the world of opportunity Marti envisions. If you’re interested in learning how you can include Population Connection in your estate plans, please contact us at [legacy@popconnect.org](mailto:legacy@popconnect.org). You may also go online to create your will for free, at [freewill.com/populationconnection](https://freewill.com/populationconnection).

# SUMMER PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Interviews by Stephanie Wolfe, Membership Relations Coordinator

**We are thrilled to announce the winners of our second annual Summer Photo Contest! Participants from across the country contributed images showcasing the natural landscapes, diverse cultures, and wildlife that fuel their passion for working toward a sustainable future. Congratulations to our winners, and thanks to all who participated. You continue to inspire us!**

1

## First Place

### **Karl Leck, Chadds Ford, PA**

Population Connection member since 2004



In December 2019, I set off on a return trip to Antarctica after 25 years to see the differences made by climate change. Along the way, I spent time in the interesting landscapes of Patagonia to photograph puma in the wild. Late in the afternoon, I was in a location with a long view of the rock towers of Torres del Paine National Park in Chile. In front of me was a green shrub contrasting the gray mountains and blue sky. When a colorful bird settled in its branches, this landscape scene had a subject, albeit small. It was a wonderful moment of peaceful beauty.

### **Why population stabilization matters to Karl**

I have had the opportunity to travel to many places and observe the lives of my fellow humans. I have seen how natural resources can be abused, how water and arable land are critical elements to a peaceful society, how health care promotes a thriving community, and how respect and cooperation yield the most positive results. After 7+ decades, I have no children. It was a long, complex decision, and I am comfortable with it. I believe everyone should be able to make life choices for themselves. I support advocating for women to have the resources to do so. I agree with the philosophy ‘my body, my choice.’ I have participated in women’s rights demonstrations from New York to Washington and proudly support Population Connection. I know I cannot change the whole world, but I can do my part to moderate population, preserve natural resources, and support others who do the same. I am passionate about it!

**Find all of the incredible photo contest entries our members and supporters submitted on our website at [popconnect.org/virtual-events/summer-photo-contest/2023-contest/](https://popconnect.org/virtual-events/summer-photo-contest/2023-contest/).**

**2**

## Second Place



### **John Dwyer, Englewood, CO**

Population Connection member since 2017

This photo was taken in May 2020 at Belmar Park in Lakewood, Colorado, which has a small lake in a park surrounded by a busy urban area. This lake has an island with a few small trees, snags really, that provide nesting areas. The two species that I've seen nesting there are great blue herons and double-crested cormorants, although snowy egrets, black-crowned night herons, Canada geese, barn swallows, spotted sandpipers, and others are often present. I was lucky to be there when there were two active heron nests, one with four nestlings and another with three. The timing was good since the nestlings

were large enough to be easily visible. Nestlings stay in the nest for 49–81 days before they fledge. Great blue herons are magnificent creatures and one of my favorite birds. I love to watch them standing patiently, yet totally alert, waiting to catch a fish.

#### **Why population stabilization matters to John**

I'm a long-time supporter of Population Connection, from back when it was called Zero Population Growth. I consider its mission to be vitally important to a sustainable planet. Our current economic system of continuous growth with a limited resource base is not sustainable. Global warming, increased pollution, exhaustion of water supplies and other limited resources, species extinctions, the refugee crisis, and other issues are the result of excessive population pressure. In my opinion, your work is of primary importance in addressing these issues. I'm immensely grateful to you and everyone in your organization for the work you're doing.

**3**

## Third Place



### **Catherine Knoop, Laurelville, OH**

Population Connection member since 1987

We hiked up through Flathead National Forest in Montana, just south of Glacier National Park, a place we'd always wanted to go—my husband is a naturalist, and I was a science teacher. This photograph captures Stanton Lake at the trail's end.

#### **Why population stabilization matters to Cathy**

It's a real concern for the planet and what I see happening. I think one of the main issues is looking at the population and our consumption. That's why I value Population Education so much and love being a teacher trainer, because you have fantastic materials. I've

been using them for years and recommend them to others so we can educate the future!

# Aging Populations and Great Power Politics: The Problem Is for the Elites, Not the Masses

By Dean Baker, Senior Economist, Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)

We recently got new data showing that China's population shrunk last year. It is now projected to see its population continue to decline through the rest of this century.

This is being portrayed as a disaster for China. A similar "disaster" has already hit Japan, South Korea, Italy, and many other wealthy countries. People in these countries are having

fewer kids than they did in prior decades. Unless they make up for their low birth rates with high rates of immigration, they will see declining populations, which we



A medical worker conducts an examination for a senior resident at a nursing home in Anxiang County of Changde City, central China's Hunan Province, June 21, 2023. The city of Changde has scaled up efforts to develop an elderly care service system composed mainly of community services, in-home care, and institutional care. (Photo by Chen Sihan/Xinhua via Getty Images)



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are supposed to believe is a terrible disaster. In fact, although declining populations may be a problem for political leaders who want to be more important in international politics, they are not bad news for the people of a country.

Before directly addressing the looming disaster story, let me just say that many of the policies that countries have adopted to promote population growth are good in their own right, whether or not they lead to those countries' objective of more rapid population growth. Parents of young children should be able to get time off from work to be with their kids. They should also have access to affordable child care. And we should have something equivalent to the expanded child tax credit to ensure that even low-income families can provide basic necessities for their kids.

These policies are important because having kids should be a manageable task for parents rather than an impossible burden. If people choose to have kids, they should be able to do so without it wrecking their lives.

We should also want every kid to have a decent chance in life. This means, at the minimum, ensuring

that they have decent nutrition and housing and access to medical care. This can be done at a relatively low cost to society and should not really be an arguable point.

But getting beyond these issues, the question is whether societies will really suffer if they see a secular decline in population over many decades. While it is fashionable among intellectual types to assert that falling populations are a disaster, the logic for this argument is lacking.

The essence of the disaster story is that we will have fewer workers to support a growing population of retirees. The implication is that either retirees will have to get by with less money or workers will face an impossible tax burden.

There are two basic flaws in this argument:

- The impact of normal productivity growth swamps the impact of demographic changes, and
- It's not clear that supply constraints (i.e., too few workers, too many retirees) are even the main problem facing aging societies. The widely accepted story of "secular stagnation" is that aging societies suffer from too little demand, the complete opposite problem of too few workers.

Taking these in turn, it should be clear to anyone familiar with economic data that even modest

**While it is fashionable among intellectual types to assert that falling populations are a disaster, the logic for this argument is lacking.**



An elderly woman waves a flag while watching the annual Fourth of July parade in Geneva, Florida, on July 4, 2022. (Photo by Paul Hennessy/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)

rates of productivity growth have far more impact on living standards than changing demographics. The years 2010 to 2025 are the peak years of the retirement of the baby boom cohort in the United States. The Social Security Trustees project that the aged dependency ratio

(the number of people over age 65 divided by the number of people between the ages of 20 and 64) will increase from 0.218 in 2010 to 0.325 in 2025.

This is a story of a rapidly aging society since we had a long period of very high birth rates following the

end of World War II, followed by decades of much lower birth rates. As a result, the United States is seeing a more rapid aging of its population than most countries with declining birth rates are likely to experience. Yet, this still should be a relatively manageable problem.

Suppose that productivity growth averages 1.0 percent annually over this 15-year period, which is a slower pace than we have ever seen over any 15-year period in the United States. If wage growth moves in step with productivity (that's a big if, but has nothing directly to do with demographics), before-tax real wages would be 16 percent higher at the end of this period.

Suppose that people over age 65 consume 70 percent as much per person as the working-age population, and that we tax workers to ensure the older population gets their 70 percent. In this case, both workers and retirees can see an 8.9 percent increase in income over this 15-year period. And this doesn't even account for the fact that we are seeing a decline in the youth dependency ratio and also that an increasing share of the over-65 population is likely to be working as older people have better health and a larger share of jobs are not physically demanding. It's hard to see a crisis here.

And this is the story for the period of the peak rate of retirement of the baby boom cohort. In a story where we continue to see low birth rates and a declining population, the ratio of retirees to workers will continue to grow, but not as rapidly as in the peak years of the baby boomers' retirement.

Furthermore, we can plausibly see more rapid rates of productivity growth. If productivity growth were to average 2.0 percent over a 15-year period, roughly the post-World War II average, the before-tax real wage would rise by almost 35 percent. This would allow for a gain in after-tax income for both workers and retirees of more than 20 percent, even with the rapid increase in the ratio of retirees to workers associated with the retirement of the baby boomers.

And many countries, notably China, have seen far more rapid increases in productivity. China has been averaging productivity growth of

more than 4.0 percent annually in recent decades as people have moved from very low-productivity work in agriculture to much higher-productivity jobs in manufacturing. It is approaching the end of this shift, as more than 62 percent of the population is now urban, but it still may see productivity growth that far exceeds the 2.0 percent that the U.S. has averaged over the last 75 years.

Also, there are benefits from a smaller population that GDP does not pick up. Parks, beaches, museums, and other recreational areas will be less crowded. There will be less congestion and pollution. There will also be less strain on



Workers make home air conditioners at a "new energy" workshop in Anqing City, Anhui Province, China, July 21, 2023. (Photo by Costfoto/NurPhoto via Getty Images)



Children at a child care center in Des Moines, Iowa, on February 9, 2022. Since Covid-19 arrived in early 2020, about one-third of child care centers have closed and some 111,000 workers have departed the sector. Photo by Kathryn Gamble/Bloomberg via Getty Images

infrastructure. None of these factors are picked up in the GDP accounts or measures of productivity.

In short, there is no reason to believe that a country will see stagnant or declining living standards simply because it has a rising ratio of retirees to workers. If, for some reason, it stops seeing gains in productivity, then living standards could stagnate or decline, but the issue here is the weak productivity growth, not the aging of the population.

It would be very dishonest to imply that a country in such circumstances is suffering due to the aging of the population, a problem that cannot

be easily remedied. By contrast, factors that impede productivity growth may be difficult to address politically but are likely much more easily solved than finding a way to substantially increase birth rates. (Increasing immigration is easier.)

It is also important to recognize that increasing birth rates actually makes the situation worse in the near term, as it increases the number of children that each worker must support. In the United States, the combined young and old dependency ratio hit a peak, due to the baby boom, in the early 1960s that is likely to never be surpassed. It will take more than 25

years before an increase in the birth rate can begin to lower the overall dependency ratio.

### Is too few workers even a problem?

While increases in productivity should ensure that a rise in the ratio of retirees to workers doesn't lead to a drop in living standards, there is an even more basic question about the impact of an aging population. After decades in which policy debates focused on being able to meet the demand created by a growing cohort of retirees, it turns out that the major economic problem in this context may be too little demand, or secular stagnation.

What we have seen first and foremost in Japan, but also in other wealthy countries with a growing share of retirees in their populations, is that insufficient demand is a major problem. This is the direct opposite of the story where the economy is unable to meet the demand created by retirees, resulting in high interest rates and high inflation.

In fact, prior to the pandemic, most wealthy countries had near-zero interest rates in their overnight money markets, and even longer-term government bonds carried unusually low interest rates. The interest rate on Japan's 10-year Treasury bonds was generally negative in the years since the Great Recession.

Rather than being troubled by inflation rates that were too high, central banks were actually struggling to raise inflation rates to their targets. And, even as many governments ran large deficits to help support their economy, the debt service was not imposing a major burden.

Japan again is the poster child. In spite of having a debt of 260 percent

of its GDP, until recently, investors were paying the government to hold its debt, as its bonds carried a negative nominal interest rate. The country's current interest burden is roughly 0.3 percent of GDP. That compares to 1.7 percent in the United States at present and more than 3.0 percent in the 1990s.

In short, the evidence from the

decade prior to the pandemic is that the concern that a rising ratio of retirees to workers would place an impossible burden on the economy was entirely misplaced. The biggest problem posed by an aging population is that investment falls, as businesses no longer need to expand their capital stock to accommodate a growing workforce.



An elderly woman walks down an alley in a traditional restaurant district in Tokyo on International Day of Older Persons (October 1) in 2022. Japanese society is rapidly aging—Japan has the longest life expectancy in the world and a very low fertility rate. (Photo by David Mareuil/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

The quickest way to offset weak demand is to have the government spend more money. Ideally, this spending should be in areas that provide both current and lasting benefits, like child care and education, but any spending can generate demand in the economy. But in any case, lack of demand appears to be the major problem associated with an aging society and falling population. This does not look like a major crisis.

## Declining populations as a problem for politicians, policy types, and pundits

If the prospect of an aging society and declining population does not pose a major problem for most of the people living in a country, the story is different for politicians looking for power. The typical person in Denmark or the Netherlands does not have a worse standard of living than the typical person in the United States, and by many measures, they are doing better.

However, there is a reason that most people in the world know about President Biden, whereas few people outside of Denmark or the Netherlands would know the names of their prime ministers. The difference is that the United States has 330 million people, compared to 6 million in Denmark and 18 million in the Netherlands. The

policies pursued by a rich country with 330 million people make a big difference in the world. The policies pursued by rich countries with 6 million or 18 million matter far less.

If politicians are seeking power, it is much better to be running a big country than a small one. For this reason, the prospect of a shrinking population looks like bad news to many of them. And this sort of concern goes far beyond just the small number of people who might actually be running a country or a top policy adviser.

There is a much larger group of academics, commentators, or generic pundits whose views matter much less when they are directed to the government of Denmark or the Netherlands than when they are

presenting their wisdom to guide the policies of the United States. If that seems hard to fathom, imagine Thomas Friedman directing his bold pronouncements to the Prime Minister of Denmark rather than the President of the United States. It just wouldn't pack the same punch.

While these commentators may be a tiny share of the population, they are a very large share of the people whose views about things like a shrinking population get attention in major media outlets. In short, the people whose status depends on addressing their remarks to a major power are the ones telling us that we should be very worried about our country becoming a lesser power, no surprises here.

There is one last point to be made

Dean Baker co-founded the Center for Economic Policy and Research (CEPR) in 1999. His areas of research include housing and macroeconomics, intellectual property, Social Security, Medicare, and European labor markets. He is the author of several books, including *Rigged: How Globalization and the Rules of the Modern Economy Were Structured to Make the Rich Richer*, and his analyses have appeared in many major publications, including *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times* (UK), and the *New York Daily News*. His blog, "Beat the Press," provides commentary on economic reporting.

Dean previously worked as a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute and as an assistant professor at Bucknell University. He has also worked as a consultant for the World Bank, the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress, and the OECD's Trade Union Advisory Council. He received his BA from Swarthmore College and his PhD in Economics from the University of Michigan.



Aerial view of the U.S. Pentagon building in Arlington, Virginia. (Photo by Ivan Cholakov/Dreamstime.com)

about how the quest for great power status may diverge from the interests of most of the population. The traditional way to secure great power status is through military power.

This can be expensive. At the peak of the Reagan era military buildup, we were spending 6.0 percent of GDP on the military. We are currently spending a bit more than 3.0 percent. The difference of 3.0 percentage points of GDP is more than twice the projected increase in spending on Social Security as a share of GDP between 2000 and 2030, the years of the retirement of the baby boom generation.


There is a further issue that the Soviet Union's economy, at its

peak, was around 60 percent of the size of the U.S. economy. By contrast, China's economy is already about 20 percent larger than the U.S. economy and is projected to continue to grow more rapidly for the foreseeable future. This means that a full-fledged arms race with China is likely to be far more expensive than the Cold War with the Soviet Union. That would likely impose a serious burden on the U.S. economy.

### **Conclusion: Shrinking populations are not a problem**

As a practical matter, there is little reason for the overwhelming majority of the country to be

concerned about a declining population. The impact of aging on living standards is limited and much smaller than other burdens the country has borne in the past, such as paying for the care and education of the baby boom generation when they were children. Furthermore, the gains from higher productivity should swamp the impact of a rising ratio of retirees to workers.

By contrast, the prospect of a declining population and diminished national power in world politics is bad news for the people who write in major news outlets about things like a declining population. This is the most obvious explanation for why we hear so much about this non-problem. 

## House Introduces Harmful Funding Bills

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

### House Republicans use funding bills to gut family planning

On July 12, the House Appropriations Committee approved the Fiscal Year 2024 State Department and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) funding bill on a pure party line vote of 32–27 with all Democrats on the committee voting in opposition.

The bill, if passed into law unchanged—which is extremely unlikely—calls for cutting funding for international family planning programs by \$150 million or nearly 25 percent. It also bars any aid to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the world's largest multilateral provider of reproductive health care and family planning services, and reinstates the disgraceful Global Gag Rule.

Such a bill threatens to severely undermine access to contraceptives around the world. The most recent estimates suggest that there are at least 218 million women in the developing world who want to prevent or delay pregnancy but have an unmet need for contraceptives. The Covid-19 pandemic likely increased unmet need.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), the ranking Democrat on the SFOPs Subcommittee, offered an amendment to restore funding to these crucial programs, to ensure funding for UNFPA, and to eliminate the provision reinstating the Global Gag Rule. A number of Democrats spoke out about the enormous returns in terms of improved health, reduced poverty, increased economic opportunities, and a more stable planet that investment in family planning brings. Every Republican on the committee voted against the Lee amendment, and it was defeated.

In contrast, the Senate version of the SFOPs funding bill calls for an increase of just over \$25 million for global health, for a total of \$635.1 million, with \$35.1 million dedicated for UNFPA. That funding increase is the result of an amendment offered by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) during the Senate Appropriations Committee meeting. The amendment was approved on a near party line vote with all Democrats except Joe Manchin (D-WV) being joined by Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). The Committee also refused to reinstate the Global Gag Rule.

On July 13, House Republican leaders released a draft of the 2024 funding bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. This bill completely eliminates the Title X domestic family planning program and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI).

Created in 1970 under President Richard Nixon, the Title X program has helped tens of millions of lower income Americans receive affordable family planning services. It has also provided cancer screenings and other essential reproductive health care to people who otherwise couldn't afford it. Its elimination threatens the care of the millions of Americans who rely on the network of nearly 3,000 Title X providers across the country.

As a target of the right-wing opposition to all family planning care, much like the international program, Title X has been woefully underfunded in recent years. Its funding has stagnated for a decade, and it has only been able to serve about half the people eligible. The impact of its elimination would be severe in every state.

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative was created during the



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Obama administration to provide young people with medically accurate, evidence-based information about preventing unintended pregnancies. It was a counter to earlier efforts to promote harmful and failed “abstinence-only” education. Since TPPI’s creation, teen pregnancy rates in the United States have plummeted, though they remain higher than those of other developed nations.

The Republican draft bill was not brought up before the Appropriations Committee before the House adjourned for its August recess.

The Senate Appropriations Committee did act on its version of the Labor/HHS/Education funding package before recess. And again, the contrast between the two chambers’ approaches is stark. Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA) brought forth a bill that protects funding for Title X and TPPI. Under the Senate bill, Title X will receive \$286.5 million, the same level since 2014, and TPPI will receive \$101 million.

While these two bills are the most relevant to efforts to expand access to domestic family planning services,


Republicans in the House have been adding riders to stymie reproductive health care across the government. They used the Agriculture bill to try to force the FDA to restrict access to mifepristone, one of two drugs used for medication abortions, and they used the Veterans’ Affairs bill to attack efforts to protect reproductive health care for women in the VA system.

Next steps are unclear. The government fiscal year ends on September 30, and if Congress fails to approve new funding bills, the specter of a government shutdown looms.

## **Defense Authorization bill becomes magnet for abortion fight in House**

The House took up the Defense Authorization bill on July 13. Usually a bill that draws strong debates about the role of the U.S. military in the world and the funding levels for the Pentagon versus other priorities, this year, under the Republican majority, it became a vehicle for a different kind of war: the right-wing culture war.

During debate, Rep. Ronny Jackson (R-TX), a former White House physician who was fired after sexually harassing subordinates and drinking and taking Ambien while on official business, offered an amendment to block the Defense Department from expending any resources to help women in any branch of the armed services travel for the purposes of receiving abortion care. Following the Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, President Biden issued a directive to the Pentagon to help defray costs for any woman who had to travel from a base in a state where abortion was made illegal. The Jackson amendment blocks that directive.

Several Democratic veterans in the House spoke out against the Jackson amendment. Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) ranted to reporters about what an outrage the amendment was and how stupid it was to make her and other Republicans vote on it. She then entered the House chamber and voted *yes*. The amendment was approved on a vote of 222–213, with two Republicans, Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and John Duarte (R-CA), joining Democrats in voting *no*. 

# FIELD + OUTREACH

## Networking at Netroots Nation

By Grace Long, Field Coordinator

Every year since 2006, over 3,000 activists from across the country have gathered at Netroots Nation, the largest annual conference for progressives. Attendees are able to learn new advocacy techniques and strategies, as well as listen to panels addressing pressing social, environmental, and political issues. Perhaps even more importantly, the event is a chance for activists to meet to discuss their work with their peers and forge new connections. Each of the three days buzzes with possibility and solidarity.


I had the honor of representing our sister organization, Population Connection Action Fund, at Netroots Nation 2023 in Chicago this past July. There was a hugely diverse list of trainings and panels this year, all of which were led by experts with years of experience in their fields. However, even though their subject matter varied, there was a core theme: Each of these events was designed to be universally applicable to all organizations, no matter their resources, goals, or area of expertise. The majority of the strategies they shared were based on small but significant changes. All of

the speakers acknowledged the heavy burdens of both full-time organizers and volunteers, and they focused on ways to lighten the workload while maximizing the impact of our advocacy efforts.

Another common thread was the need to infuse joy into our activism. I learned some amazing tips about how to support our volunteers, how to encourage and uplift the activists on our mailing list, and how to make sure we share the successes of our work as well as the setbacks. This is a challenging fight, but for every campaign, there are a hundred small victories. It's important that we celebrate them.

After the main schedule wrapped up every evening, I rushed to join one of the many independent networking events hosted around the venue. This was my favorite part of Netroots—I was so inspired by my conversations with other activists! It provided an education beyond the formal trainings, where we traded tips and ideas that wouldn't belong in a PowerPoint presentation. Every time I spoke to another organizer, we were able to find an intersection

between our missions, as well as ways we could help each other. It was enlightening to hear about the campaigns and organizations that were being built around me, all in support of a shared goal of achieving equity, health, and happiness for all. Everyone was so eager for everyone else to do well and jumped at the chance to learn more about issues outside of their professional scopes.

It can be difficult to remember the thousands of good people working on the issues that are often featured in depressing headlines. That's the real joy of an event like Netroots. I left not only with new strategies to try, but also with a wealth of knowledge about issues I personally support. Given the intersectional nature of the progressive movement, conferences like this are invaluable. One organization alone cannot do everything that is required for its own success—it takes allies, partners, and supporters working across the spectrum of the progressive movement to advance the cause. With the help of our members and supporters, we are moving forward together. 



Giselle Arroyo attends a session at Netroots Nation 2023 with her baby | Photo by Steve Stearns

Our sister organization, Population Connection Action Fund, is proud to have sponsored the Netroots Nation attendance of 10 activists of all different ages—organizing professionals eager to hone their skills at the invaluable workshops and networking opportunities available at this unique conference. These scholarships were prioritized for people from historically marginalized communities and for those with the greatest financial need.

**“My favorite part about Netroots was the support and adoration I received as a new mom attending with my three-month-old. So many folks I spoke with had kind things to say to me about how important young voices are. They are our future and will be the ones to help save and repair Mother Earth.”**

– Giselle Arroyo, sponsored attendee

# POPULATION EDUCATION

## 2023 Summer Leadership Institutes

By Pamela Wasserman, Senior Vice President for Education


### Preparing New PopEd Trainers to Facilitate Their Own Workshops

New Orleans and Seattle played host to back-to-back Population Education Leadership Institutes this summer. These weekend events brought together educators (K–12 teachers, university education faculty, and nonformal educators) who are interested in becoming local facilitators of workshops using PopEd curricula. A third event is planned for St. Louis in late September.

These Institutes help to reinvigorate our trainers program with new recruits who will take PopEd back to their school districts, university campuses, and professional associations. Much of our time together is spent working through some of our most popular hands-on activities. Participants also learn about PopEd’s successful workshop model and ways to identify training opportunities in their regions.

The first of this summer’s Institutes was held at the Loews New Orleans Hotel from July 14–15 for 15 trainers from throughout Louisiana and Mississippi (plus a few from points further afield). This was considered a “regional” event to boost our representation in the Gulf Coast area.

The following weekend, July 21–23, we were at Cedarbrook Lodge in Seattle for our annual national Institute. This included 25 new trainers from across the U.S. and Canada—sweeping from Burlington, Vermont, to Nanaimo, British Columbia.

Our team is now working with these new trainers on coordinating workshops they will facilitate during the 2023–2024 school year. 

“This was an amazing experience. I really feel like you invested in us this weekend. I am heavily motivated to pay it forward.”



Institute participants at the Loews New Orleans, July 15, 2023



Institute participants at Cedarbrook Lodge in Seattle, July 22, 2023

**“What a wonderful workshop!  
You outdid yourselves in  
the best possible balance of  
enrichment and nourishment  
of professional vision and  
personal meaning. Thank you!”**



Karen Marshall and others simulate population sampling at the Seattle Institute



Carol Bliese facilitates the migration activity “People on the Move” in New Orleans

**“You all have done a  
phenomenal job of planning  
and accomplishing this two-  
day professional development  
event. I feel so grateful for  
being part of this.”**

**“Easily the most engaging  
conference I’ve been to, and  
I left with an exact plan to  
enact!”**



Teresa Razo and Angie Wood investigate the population growth trends of different species for the activity “Pop Ecology Files” in Seattle

# VIRTUAL EVENTS

## Thank You for Joining Us Online!

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

If you haven't checked out the array of virtual events Population Connection hosts each month, you're missing out! This summer, hundreds of members and supporters have joined us for several exciting events:

Population Connection's communications staff marked World Population Day on July 11 with a presentation entitled **Low Birth Rates: Good for the Planet, Good for People.**


The team discussed why low fertility is here to stay, outlined the many environmental benefits of slower population growth, and identified potential accommodations to the economic challenges presented by population aging.

We celebrated World Rainforest Day with our Global Partner **Women for Conservation.** We were joined by Isabella Cortes Lara, Vice President and Conservation Director, and Emily Knudson, Director of Outreach and Philanthropy, to learn more about the organization's work in Colombia. Together, they taught us about the country's magnificent biodiversity and offered insights into their on-the-ground initiatives. In addition, they shed light on how our partnership supports W4C's programs that help to deliver

accessible reproductive health care to rural communities residing in biodiversity hotspots. Their essential programs help young girls complete their education, pursue careers in conservation, and ultimately chase their dreams. We were inspired as the speakers delved into the organization's community-based programs in conservation training, sustainable livelihoods, and family planning—all aimed at empowering rural women to become guardians of nature and protectors of critical biodiversity for generations.

We marked International Youth Day with our Global Partner the **African Education Program** (AEP). AEP works to unlock the potential of Zambia's youth and adults by building and growing community-led organizations. The African Education Program is approaching its 20-year anniversary. Co-founder and Executive Director Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza shared the story of how this organization came into existence from its humble beginnings in a high school cafeteria. Since then, the African Education Program has partnered with community leaders in Kafue, Zambia, to build and grow its flagship learning and leadership center, named the Amos

Youth Center. Additionally, Lumuno Mweemba Chongo, Program Advisor and Amos Youth Center Co-founder, shared the latest on the holistic programs serving over 750 youth and women weekly. She also shared a closer look at one of the core programs, the Reproductive Health Access Initiative.

Our Page Turners book club read and discussed **Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity.** The book posits that overconsumption, rather than population growth, is driving environmental crises. Book club participants had a lively discussion dismantling this erroneous argument. 

It's never too late to see what's happening next! Find recordings of past events, including most of those mentioned above, and register to join us in the coming months at [popconnect.org/virtual-events](https://popconnect.org/virtual-events). We'd love to have you!

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# GLOBAL PARTNERS

## Awakening Horn for Inclusive Rural Development (AHIRD)

By Lee S. Polansky, Senior Director of Executive Initiatives and Special Projects

Awakening Horn for Inclusive Rural Development (AHIRD) was founded in 2020 by a group of five young Tanzanians who experienced hardship and injustice while growing up and decided to join hands to fight harmful social-cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions that violate the rights of women and young people.

We connected with AHIRD through Melvine Ouyo, who is the Executive Director of Hope for Kenya Slum Adolescents Initiative (HKSAI) and a Population Connection board member. Melvine met the organization's Director, William Johnson, and said she was "inspired by his commitment to, and AHIRD's focus on, women's empowerment despite the challenges the organization faced." AHIRD works with women, adolescents, and children to empower them to make healthy decisions and to help raise their living standards through education and vocational training. The organization also provides advocacy training and mentorship to men and boys to help them take the lead in challenging toxic masculinity and patriarchal norms in their rural communities. William says AHIRD emphasizes educating poor and rural women, girls, and boys on "sexual


and reproductive health and rights; gender-based violence; and girls' bodily autonomy ... to improve their lives and achieve their fullest potential in all aspects of life."

Thanks to member donations specifically earmarked for international support, Population Connection helps to fund AHIRD's program Her Right to Decide for Her Future, which works mainly with girls and boys of secondary school age who live in the Magu District of the Mwanza Region in Tanzania. This program educates participants about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with the hope that they make positive, thoughtful decisions about their health and their futures.

Ongoing AHIRD activities include supporting and mentoring 50 marginalized and vulnerable girls

in Tanzania's Sanjo Division; distributing bicycles to girls who lack transportation to get to school; and teaching secondary school age girls and boys about SRHR through capacity-building activities.

AHIRD has serious challenges—mainly underfunding and understaffing—but the organization continues to work to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable women, adolescents, and children living in rural areas in Tanzania. AHIRD strives to "ensure every rural young woman and adolescent girl can exercise her sexual and reproductive health and rights" and to "free vulnerable women, young girls, and children from living in systemic poverty by continuing to sponsor access to education; fight for gender equality; and advocate for rights and empowerment of women, girls, and boys."

It has been an honor to help AHIRD. Melvine was right to be impressed when she first met William and heard him say that seeing women and girls languish in poverty inspired him and his founding partners to start his work on SRHR. 





**“We believe partnering with Population Connection is one of the biggest steps in making our plans happen, and we are thankful for this opportunity.”**

–William Johnson



Photos, clockwise from top left: AHIRD girls' education sponsorship beneficiaries at Bujashi Secondary School; secondary school girls who received bikes from AHIRD to make their travel to and from school easier; William and two AHIRD staff members presenting the Her Right to Decide for Her Future program at Kiswaga Secondary School; women learning to sew at the Mwangaza training center. Photos by AHIRD.

Learn more at [popconnect.org/AHIRD](https://popconnect.org/AHIRD) and [facebook.com/ahirdtforthevoiceless](https://facebook.com/ahirdtforthevoiceless).

## EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

### Los Angeles Times

This year, instead of celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court ruling guaranteeing a constitutional right to abortion, advocates of reproductive rights are observing the grim one-year mark since the Court overturned that ruling—and mapping out strategies for restoring abortion access where it was lost and preserving it where it still exists.

Rarely does the Court take away established rights, but that's what the conservative majority of this Supreme Court did in its ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* on June 24, 2022, returning reproductive rights to the vagaries of state legislatures. ...

Despite the chaos and grim statistics, poll after poll has shown that a majority of Americans support at least some level of abortion access—and that support has only increased, according to a FiveThirtyEight analysis, as people have had to confront the reality of no Roe-era protections.

Indeed, voters seem increasingly serious about making their elected officials support abortion access. In liberal and conservative states, voters have demonstrated a striking determination to enshrine the right to abortion in their state's constitutions, including California and Vermont where abortion protections are already robust. But voters in purple Michigan also approved a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a right to abortion. And in Kansas, Democratic and Republican voters together decisively voted down an amendment that would have stated the Constitution did not protect abortion rights.

Going into the next year, the best way out of this nearly dystopian world is through the ballot box. ...

June 23, 2023

### StarTribune

It's been 63 years since the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first oral contraceptive. The passing decades have demonstrated birth control pills' safety and effectiveness. Currently, more than 100 countries allow women to buy them without a prescription.

Americans deserve the same ease of access. That's why a recent move by the FDA to make one type of oral contraceptive—a medication called Opill—available without a prescription merits praise, even if its availability is long overdue in the U.S. ...

Insurance plans that covered oral contraceptives prior to the FDA's decision will still cover prescription-only pills. That is one option for those who have a health plan but may struggle with Opill's price. But other solutions are necessary for those who want to use Opill but don't have coverage or find its cost daunting.

One potential congressional remedy is a bill that would require private health insurance plans to cover over-the-counter birth control without any out-of-pocket costs to the policyholder. The Affordability Is Access Act has yet to gain sufficient traction at the U.S. Capitol, but has some influential Democratic cosponsors, including Minnesota Democratic Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith. ...

Preventing as many unintended pregnancies as possible is a goal that should unite Americans. Making birth control more broadly available is foundational to that, which is why solutions should be explored expeditiously to prevent Opill's cost from becoming a new hurdle to those taking the responsible step of using reliable birth control.

July 20, 2023

# CARTOON



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