

Energy Model – Population and Energy

Our vast and growing consumption of energy is tied to both population and technology. So here are some things to think about.

Professor Al Bartlett frames our population policy choices like this:

These <u>good</u> things <u>increase</u> populations	These <u>bad</u> things <u>decrease</u> populations
Procreation Motherhood Large families	Abstinence Contraception Abortion Small Families
Immigration	Stop Immigration
Medicine Public Health Sanitation	Disease
Peace Law & Order	War Murder / Violence
Scientific Agriculture	Famine
Accident Prevention (55 mph speed limit)	Accidents
Clean Air	Pollution (Smoking)
Ignorance of the problem	
< Education >	

Some of these factors we can make choices about, some factors are imposed on us by nature. Overpopulation is impossible, not because we can fit an infinite number of people on Earth, but because the earth's resources are finite. When people's needs exceed the available resources, war, starvation, and disease result. If we do not choose how to limit our population growth now, the choice will be made for us, and in ways we won't like.

“Where on Earth is the population problem the worst?”

It is my [Al Bartlett's] opinion that the world's worst population problem is right here in the United States. This is because of our high per capita resource consumption. It has been estimated that a person added to the population of the United States will have 30 or more times the impact on world resources as will a person added to the population of an underdeveloped nation. Indeed, resource consumption in North America is roughly the same as resource consumption in the entire rest of the world.

Where should we apply our efforts to have the most beneficial effect in helping to solve the population problem?

The answer is, right here in the U.S.

For many people, the population problem is a problem of "those people," in distant undeveloped countries. In early 1997, many people successfully lobbied Congress to restore family planning assistance in the U.S. foreign aid programs. This was a great victory, but it treats "those people" as though they were the big problem . . . It is so easy to blame the problem on others and to identify what other people should do to solve the problem, while we ignore our own responsibilities and avoid doing anything to reduce the population problem in the U.S. We need to work to stop population growth in the U.S."¹

The issues of energy use, finite resources and stopping population growth are provocative. What do you think? If you are interested, share your ideas with me and back them up with some research. I will be happy to provide you with some bonus credit for your efforts.

To use a Dutch expression:

"A development policy without a population program is like mopping the floor with the water turned on." (—P. Bukman).

¹ Wild Earth Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall 1997, Pgs. 88-90