

# Newsletter, November 2004

**This and the other back issues of newsletters are archived here so that interested parties can learn about the kinds of activities in which World Population Balance is involved and learn about the importance of our growing population problem. To receive timely information in our free newsletter, please subscribe to our newsletter.**

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## Vote . . . twice!

From the President  
By David Paxson

Republicans and Democrats probably agree on only one thing: this is the most important election in decades! We encourage you to vote . . . twice!

First, go to the polls on November 2.

Second, make appointments with your elected officials and educate them about the greatest crisis of our time: population growth.

Help them understand that (1) rapidly increasing human numbers (2) on a finite planet (3) with limited and declining vital resources is not sustainable. Cite resources from the long list that are declining: petroleum, fresh water, rainforest, ocean fish harvests, and topsoil among many others. Go armed with recent articles or books documenting these problems. Just two are the recent National Geographic cover features about "The End of Cheap Oil" and "Global Warming: Bulletins from a Warmer World".

Emphasize that we humans have a clear choice. We can choose to ignore these ominous trends and passively watch as increasing population and decreasing resources lead to more poverty, misery, suffering and death.

Or we can choose to stop over-harvesting of resources by reducing our consumption and humanely reducing birth rates. We at World Population Balance continue to vote for this choice. We have yet to meet a person who believes that increasing misery, starvation and death is a humane choice.

If you would like one of us to join your meeting with elected officials, please call us. We would be pleased to

participate in this vitally important educational opportunity.

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## Thank You

By David Paxson

\$ Thank you! \$

Our thanks to each of you who responded so generously to board chair Alan Anderson's recent appeal for financial support. Your contributions have totaled over \$16,000, crucial for our vital education programs. Frank Babka is again on track to talk to about 10,000 high school students! We also reach thousands of others at religious, civic, service, environmental and other groups. We reach tens of thousands through our radio, TV and newspaper interviews, as well.



If you have not renewed, please do it soon.

If you cannot afford to renew at this time and want to continue receiving WORLD POPULATION BALANCE, please send whatever amount you can or call our office (612-869-1640).

Thank you for your ongoing financial votes for population education!

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## China Facing Environmental 'Crisis'

A senior Chinese official recently announced that China's environmental problems have reached crisis levels. Pan Yue, deputy head of the State Environmental Protection Administration, recently told the BBC that China's industrial development was unsustainable because its resources could not cope. Environmental problems like pollution, acid rain and contaminated rivers have only now become a key policy issue. At the same time, China's 1.3 billion population continues to expand by about 11 million per year, net gain!

Pan Yue said that China could no longer afford to follow the West's resources-hungry model of development, and it should encourage its citizens to avoid adopting the developed world's consumer habits. He said previous attempts to create a cleaner environment had not been carried out properly and there would now be a raft of new laws and regulations aimed at promoting sustainable development.

"Now the question is how we adjust the model of development. This is a key issue that is being discussed at the highest levels of government. We've been talking about sustainable development for 12 years, but it's not been carried out properly. Now we've learned the lesson. We need new laws and regulations. Otherwise we're just talking slogans. It's important to make Chinese people not blatantly imitate Western consumer habits so as not to repeat the mistakes by the industrial development of the west over the past 300 years," Pan said.

This is not to say that Beijing is to abandon its economic ambitions. The pace of industrial development over the past 20 years has been unprecedented. However, China's rapidly growing cities are now among the world's most polluted. Pan acknowledged there would be political and social problems if China's economic growth rate were not sustained. But he said more emphasis should be placed on renewable energy, replacing its coal-fired power stations with greener technology, and penalizing factories that cause pollution.

-From the BBC, 23 September, 2004

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## The Party's Over - A Must Read

June's National Geographic cover story, "The End of Cheap Oil", presents a sobering view of our global petroleum industry and the challenges ahead. Even more compelling is *The Party's Over* by journalist Richard Heinberg, who teaches at the New College of California. He considers depletion in the context of the ecological realities of the human condition and an ecological interpretation of history. And he frighteningly but persuasively surveys depletion's consequences. The introduction by internationally known petroleum geologist, C. J. Campbell, heartily endorses *The Party's Over*.

This review is excerpted from a lengthy version by freelance writer, John Attarian.

Heinberg's core message is that industrial civilization depends on inherently finite energy resources that are "about to become scarce." Competition for them "will trigger dramatic economic and geopolitical events," and industrialism may be unsustainable. He predicts that we will soon enter "a new era in which each year, less net energy will be available to humankind, regardless of our efforts or choices." Our "only significant choice" will be how to reduce energy use and shift to renewable energy, which will have "profound ethical and political implications".

Free market economists see energy as just another commodity, governed by market forces which are infallibly guided by prices. Environmentalists believe that switching to renewable energy sources will solve the environmental problems caused by fossil fuels. Seeing oil depletion as real and recognizing peak and decline as imminent, retired petroleum geologists disdain the economists' view. These geologists also are skeptical about renewables. After much research, Heinberg concluded that the geologists are right and offer "a long-range view based on physical reality."

Still more momentous were the contemporaneous commercial application of electricity and switch from coal to petroleum. Electricity is a very convenient energy carrier, and through its use energy consumption soared. Fossil fuels allowed replacement of draft animals by machinery, enabling farmers to shift land from raising animal feed to raising human food, and to operate larger farms. They also supplied nitrogen fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, greatly boosting crop yields. Oil made possible the automobile industry, which unsettled and dispersed families, gutted public transport and the railroads, and drove energy use still higher. Heinberg argues persuasively that America's cheap, abundant energy underwrote her rise to affluence and world domination.

Exactly when oil extraction will peak, Heinberg rightly argues, depends on whether we: (a) define oil narrowly, as conventional oil, or broadly, including nonconventional oil, (which would postpone the peak); (b) the state of the economy, which affects oil demand and therefore extraction; (c) war in the Middle East, which could disrupt both extraction and demand; (d) and new discoveries and recovery technologies. The world peak for all fossil-fuel liquids, he concludes, is "unlikely to occur before 2006, or later than 2015."

Cornucopians and greens argue that we will simply use non-petroleum energy sources. But Heinberg's well-informed survey of these sources is not encouraging.

To his great credit, Heinberg realizes that energy must be expended to obtain energy. Accordingly, he stresses the crucial concept of net energy, or energy return on energy invested (EROEI). Oil's EROEI has been declining for decades as we have tapped deeper deposits located in more remote areas with more difficult terrain. When it breaks even, i.e., when obtaining a barrel of oil requires expending a barrel's worth of energy, oil extraction "will become almost pointless." Though still useful for plastics, oil will no longer be an energy source. Likewise for substitutes "if we replace an energy resource that has, say, a six-to-one EROEI ratio with an alternative that has a three-to-one EROEI ratio, we will have to produce twice as much gross energy to obtain the same net quantity. Thus, when a society adopts lower-EROEI energy sources, the amount of energy available to do work in that society will inevitably decline."

High hopes rest on hydrogen, mostly as an input for fuel cells, which chemically generate electricity. However, Heinberg observes, almost all hydrogen commercially produced comes from natural gas, and hydrogen enthusiasts

assume natural gas will be available as a "transition fuel." Without a transitional hydrocarbon fuel, Heinberg points out, we can't attain a hydrogen economy: "there is not enough net energy available from renewable sources to 'bootstrap' the process while supporting a viable economy." And with North America's natural gas supply "disturbingly uncertain," we will soon face hard choices among uses for gas.

Oil and gas depletion will send prices of fossil fuels and hydrocarbon-based fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides soaring, Heinberg warns, possibly creating an "agricultural apocalypse." Bereft of cheap energy, agriculture will be able to feed far fewer people than it feeds now. Heinberg's "educated guess" for Earth's "post petroleum carrying capacity" is less than two billion - roughly its pre-industrialization level. Yet our population exceeds six billion. So population will probably have to fall by over four billion persons between now and when oil and gas run out. If voluntary birth control doesn't achieve this, he warns, "famines, plagues, and wars" will.

Moreover, Heinberg points out, turning onto a saner path will be hard. Both our economic system and our political system (which runs on "moneyed influence") reward destructive behavior. And most people prefer cornucopian optimism.

Timely, illuminating, and courageous, *The Party's Over* is an excellent bird's-eye view of what the world runs on, where we've been, where we're going, and what is likely to happen to us if we don't make radical changes soon. Heinberg is all the more persuasive because his tone is calm and reasonable throughout.

Given all this, the only sane and prudent course is to take Heinberg seriously and act accordingly. If he's wrong, we lose little. If he's right, and we ignore him, we court disaster.

The global peak of oil and gas is one of the great hinges of human destiny, and it will happen in our lifetime, overturning our way of life forever. Revelations of a shattering reality, Heinberg's work is among the most important books of our time. Buy, master, and ponder this book. Oil and gas depletion is a topic you can't afford to ignore. If you think education about oil and gas is expensive, try ignorance.

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## Newsletter Editor Needed

Help us write *WORLD POPULATION BALANCE*. In August our highly talented editor, Ben Stallings, embarked on a year-long bicycle adventure around the eastern U.S., and we need your help. Since David, Frank and others help write many articles, it takes relatively little time to put the newsletter into final form. If you have two to three hours every couple of months, we would love to have your help!

The pay is immeasurable! You have the satisfaction of knowing you are making a vital contribution to the world's number one challenge! For more information, call David at 612-869-1640.

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## Student Reactions

One of our speakers met recently with classes of unwed teens who either were pregnant or new mothers. Following are some of their reactions:

"This presentation taught me so much about our population and the future population. How my kids are gonna grow up and the limited supply on water and food. How fast we are adding people on earth when there's really no room on earth for them. 75 million people each year. 140 people per minute. 200,000 people a day!"

"I thought it was good. I just thought even if we limited everyone to one - two children. If we don't have enough

resources to provide to 6.3 billion people, how can we maintain it?"

"I think that it is sad that this is happening and so many people are poor. We should figure out a way to fix it."

"I do agree with what he's saying and he made me really think that this is a real big problem and it makes me think about [her son] and how things are going to be when he grows older."

## Current Population

**World:** 6,394,206,000 -- doubling time 60 years

**U.S.:** 294,521,000 -- doubling time 88 years

**Minnesota:** 5,127,770 -- doubling time 62 years

*Extrapolated from U.S. Census and Minnesota Planning data*

## Our Mission

World Population Balance is committed to educating the general public, policymakers, and the media about current population facts and trends, the consequences of population growth, and the benefits of stabilization.

We are a non-profit organization and present our message through public presentations and conferences, appointments with elected officials, written articles, our newsletter, web site, media interviews, and public service announcements.

### MEMBERSHIP AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS FORM

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