Halt Immigration While Reform Is Debated

By Jeffrey Hart

I'd like to call attention to a remarkable article published by former Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm. The column was printed in April in the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver and recently reprinted in the local New Hampshire press. It has the potential impact of the theses nailed to the church door by Martin Luther in 1517.

Lamm is a clear and courageous thinker who is not afraid to speak his mind, and he tells the sharp-edged truth on the issue of immigration to the United States.

The immigration issue is hitting hard even in New Hampshire, which is far from the Rio Grande and from the Caribbean.

But before we get to Lamm and to immigration, I want to say a word about sharp-edged issues.

As the election year of 1996 approaches, an enormous number of the issues that are "up" have sharp edges. They are not very available to consensus and compromises.

That is because those issues go the heart of the nature of these United States, and both or all sides of the issues have moral and theoretical dimensions.

It is certainly true of the vexed "affirmative action" issue. It is true about fiscal policy, and the deficit, and the duties of this generation to the next. It is true about welfare — about whether it is an "entitlement," and about whether illegitimacy should be subsidized.

Next year there will be a powerful urge to postpone the ultimate confrontation and choice. Sen. Bob Dole's experience and temperament lead him to seek compromise, but he is being pushed toward confrontations he hates by dynamics of the Republican Party, as witness his recent speech demanding English as our official national language.

President Clinton would like to fudge things, as in his recent speech arguing that "the problem is wages, not welfare or immigrants."

The vague idea of Colin Powell is also a fudge, of course. Powell is Mr. Soft Edge in a sharp-edged time.

Richard Lamm puts the basic questions bluntly. Do we need more people in the United States? Are we under-populated?

"The average American woman has 2.1 children in her lifetime — a number that would stabilize the U.S. population by the year 2040 at approximately 305 million Americans," the former Democratic governor writes. "Whether we grow to 400 million or 500 million Americans depends almost entirely on immigration."

He asks, Do we need more labor to run our economy? Does America really need more unskilled labor? Does it need more skilled labor?

> *"The issue before us is not illegal immigration. That should be terminated in any case. The issue is legal immigration."*

Lamm reminds us that 25 years ago the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future concluded: "We have looked for, and have not found, any continuing economic argument for continued population growth. The health of our country does not depend on it, nor does the vitality of business nor the welfare of the average person."

Lamm considers in his short article the issue of decent space. Are things even now too crowded? Anyone who has driven, or tried to drive, along the Los Angeles freeway can talk about that. Anyone who has tackled the Long Island Expressway — "the world's longest parking lot" — can chime in. If you want to use the New Jersey Turnpike, try driving around 3 a.m.

The population drain upon our natural resources is prodigious. The water table in Florida and in parts of California is dangerously low. The New York City water system is collapsing underground, and renewal is unaffordable. The beaches in California, New York and elsewhere are increasingly crowded or private.

Lamm does not touch upon the 1965 law that reformed immigration to America, unintentionally opening the gates to a huge influx from the Third World.

One result has been an exodus of English-speakers and traditional Americans from the large cities and the consequent rapid growth of small cities, of fewer than 1 million people. Is it acceptable that traditional Americans should feel like strangers in their own land?

Sometimes it is said that we are a "nation of immigrants." That is not true.

The original settlers were "colonists," makers of a nation. There was a huge surge of immigration in the latter half of the 19th century. And that was about it, until the 1965 law brought in the Third World.

The Statue of Liberty had nothing to do with immigration. It was given to us by republican France to symbolize "liberty enlightening the world."

Years later, Emma Lazarus' famous lines were added: "Give me your tired, your poor..." Lazarus' sentiments are not found in the Constitution, and they are not in the Declaration of Independence.

When Lazarus wrote them, the United States had vast open spaces and a tiny population. There was work for strong backs, and for nation-building.
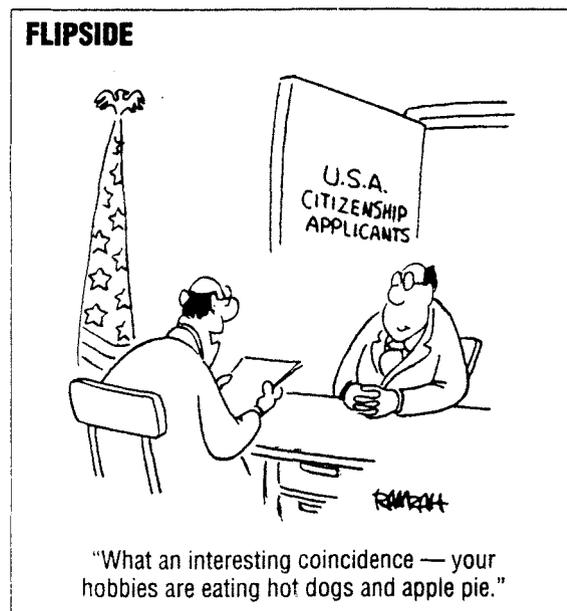
That is not the case today, not by a long shot.

At the very most, access to America's bounty should be available to those who can make a different kind of contribution — the men and women who bring rare skills and high education.

The issue before us is not illegal immigration. That should be terminated in any case. The issue is legal immigration.

We need a moratorium on all immigration — four years, say — while we discuss and debate the issue.

[Editor's Note: Copies of former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm's paper entitled "Immigration — More Means Less for All" can be obtained by writing the editors of *The Social Contract*, 316 1/2 East Mitchell Street, #4, Petoskey, MI 49770 or calling 1-800-352-4843.]

FLIPSIDE

"What an interesting coincidence — your hobbies are eating hot dogs and apple pie."

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INS Pilot Project for Verification

By Tony Saavedra and Guillermo X. Garcia

Santa Ana [California] is the primary testing ground for a nationally watched computer project that allows employers to instantly verify immigration papers — a system that many say is crucial to keeping undocumented workers off U.S. payrolls.

About 200 Southern California businesses — more than half in Santa Ana — were recruited for the pilot project being unveiled today by Immigration and Naturalization Commissioner Doris Meissner.

The INS also is sending 18 new agents to investigate employers in Santa Ana and Industry — creating an intense double-punch strategy that if successful could spread nationally, officials said.

"If we can do it in cities like Santa Ana and Industry, we can (try) with the other districts," said Richard Rogers, director of the agency's seven-county Los Angeles district.

The combination will bring an unprecedented level of scrutiny to Santa Ana businesses. Typically, only 35 agents are assigned to check employers from San Luis Obispo to San Clemente.

Immigrant advocates questioned whether the INS' database can be trusted, and whether the effort is fair.

"My fear is it's going to be discriminatory because they are not going to do it for the white Canadians, just the brown Mexicans," said Tustin immigration lawyer Kathryn Terry.

They left in busloads, 203 workers carted away by immigration agents in 1993 because Vans Inc. in Orange couldn't distinguish between real and bogus green cards.

Now the company has help. With the tap of a computer keyboard, Vans can link into an Immigration and Naturalization Service database and verify the papers in seconds.

"We're not losing sleep anymore saying, 'Gee, I wonder if I made the wrong call on this document and if the INS audits us, how many are going to come back bad?'" said Craig Gosselin, vice president and general counsel for the 1,100-employee shoe manufacturer. "It takes the guesswork out of a very difficult process of reviewing scores of documents."

There are concerns, however. Civil-rights groups and minority leaders nationwide have long argued that the automated system would violate the privacy of job applicants and rely on a notoriously backlogged computer database.

System Frees Investigators

INS officials say the online service would help employers who want to comply with hiring laws, but are baffled by more than 29 documents that can be offered as proof of eligibility, such as passports and work permits. The system also would free INS investigators to concentrate on companies that knowingly hire illegal workers.

"This pilot is an attempt to keep unauthorized workers from taking jobs from Americans or from workers who have the legal right to be here and be employed," said Bob Bach, INS associated commissioner for policy and planning in Washington, D.C.

Immigration chief Doris Meissner is scheduled to unveil the pilot project today in a news conference at a Santa Ana bicycle factory. If successful, the program, which costs less than $750,000, would be expanded next year to 1,000 firms in other immigration-heavy states and could ultimately form the groundwork for a national system, officials said.

The project focuses mostly on Orange County and Industry, primarily because of their large populations of immigrant workers and past problems with illegal hiring, officials said. Many of the firms involved have been raided or audited by the INS. And many complained they had been duped by counterfeit documents.

The project is an outgrowth of a nine-company verification system tested two years ago, using a device made for checking credit cards. It uses INS-issued software to link by modem into a 50-million-document database stored at Lockheed Martin Corp. in Orlando, Fla.