Record Low U.S. Birthrate Intrigues Demographers, Alarms Economists
Is population a taboo topic? Sometimes, it does seem that way. It’s occurred to me that people don’t talk about overpopulation because they think they can’t talk about overpopulation. Not so.

I’ve rarely gotten a negative reaction at the hundreds of population presentations I’ve done — including those at 84 colleges and universities ranging from MIT to Purdue to UCLA. We successfully train more than 12,000 eager K-12 educators in Population Education annually. About 50,000 teachers teach some 3 million students each year about the impacts of human population growth on people and the planet through our programs. We do so all across America, including in the reddest of states.

Guess what? Most Americans agree with us when it comes to the impacts of population growth. A 2015 Pew/AAAS survey found that 59 percent of our fellow citizens believe that a growing world population will be a major problem. That’s more than the proportion who believe climate change is mostly due to human behavior. Yet human-driven climate change seems like a topic for open discussion. Why not human population?

In these times, it’s more important than ever to respect science. The role played by rapid population growth when it comes to climate change, species extinction, oceanic disruption, and so much more is well-documented. One might even call it an “inconvenient truth.”

It shouldn’t be a question of whether to talk about population growth, but how we talk about it can make all the difference. Reproductive autonomy needs to be front and center because that is non-negotiable. It’s an inalienable right for people everywhere — and it’s the key to meeting population challenges. Powerful forces oppose us, but they’ll never cause us to dial back. For half a century now, we’ve kept our population stabilization mission front and center.

The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan supposedly said, “Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts.” Rapid human population growth is a crucial fact of life on our crowded planet.

2018 marks our fiftieth anniversary! Fifty years of advocating for reasonable, voluntary solutions to achieve zero population growth. We owe it all to the 250,000 cumulative donors who have enabled us to educate millions of young Americans and to be strong, effective advocates for population stabilization. Thank you!
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Editor’s Note

I spent the decade of my life between 25 and 35 reading everything I could get my hands on about whether to have kids — from childfree manifestos to essays by parents who couldn’t imagine their lives without having had children. I even briefly joined the social club No Kidding! to mingle with others who had either chosen not to have children or had chosen to live their fullest lives without having the children they wanted (although, I only met one couple for whom children were wanted and not had, in a year or so of attending events).

My thoughts on parenthood have always been a bit of a mystery to those around me because I love children. I started babysitting when I was ten years old, and kept at it until I was in my late twenties. I was a full time nanny through a professional agency for two years in DC, and fifteen years later, I’m still close with that family. I play auntie to friends’ children and there’s not much I love more than snuggling newborns. But despite all that — or perhaps because of it (since I know just how much work childcare can be) — I have leaned toward not having my own children since I was a teenager.

I’ve heard all the platitudes over the years: You’ll change your mind. You’re still so young. Your biological clock will catch up with you. And all the challenges: Who will take care of you when you’re old? Your life won’t be meaningful without children! You’ll regret your decision and then it will be too late!

One thing that has helped to legitimize my preference is that my husband and I have been a couple since 1999, so I’ve never had to suffer through the refrain, “You just haven’t met the right person.” He is happily childfree as well.

According to recent data, we’re not alone. Fertility rates for teens and young adults have been dropping for years, but they had been rising for women in their thirties and forties. That’s what happens when women put off having children in order to finish their educations, establish careers, and find partners they want to “scramble their DNA with,” to quote sex and relationship advice columnist and podcaster Dan Savage.

But, in 2017, that pattern didn’t hold. Fertility rates dropped, not just for women in their teens and twenties, but also for women in their thirties. They ticked up slightly for women in their forties, but the number of births in that age group is so few that it barely makes a dent in the national total.

In fact, in 2017, the total fertility rate was the lowest it had been, at 1.76 births per woman, since 1978. And the number of births in 2017 was the lowest it had been since 1987.

This issue explores the latest U.S. fertility data and the real people behind it. There are stories of women who want children at some point, but aren’t prepared to have them now because of career and financial obstacles. There’s an interview with Leilani Münter, a race car driver and environmental activist who decided not to have children while in college. And there’s an interview with a professor of childfree studies who is childfree herself.

Whether we’re biological or adoptive parents, childfree by choice, or childless by circumstance, respecting each other’s reproductive decisions must be the basis of our efforts to stabilize population.

Marian Starkey
marian@popconnect.org
Letters to the Editor

I thoroughly enjoyed the “50 Years of Family Planning for Our Future” article by Stacie Murphy in the June 2018 issue. It was very comprehensive and informative. I was surprised to read about President Eisenhower and President Truman working together as honorary chairmen of Planned Parenthood in 1964. Those were the days when politicians worked for a common cause for the good of the people and the country, disregarding their party affiliation.

It was very interesting to notice the politics of our country — how the Global Gag Rule comes in and out with a stroke of a pen by every president of different point of view. It is like a football game they play without realizing its impact on half the humanity of the world.

The timeline design by Mali Welch was excellent and depicted very clearly all the milestones from 1968 to 2018. It has inspired me to join the President’s Circle.

Thank you very much. Keep up the good work.

Vimal Goyle

I love being a member of Population Connection and getting the magazine. As a data driven organization, accuracy is of course very important. Therefore, I was disappointed in looking at the graphs (Key Data Trends Since our Founding) in the June issue, where it is immediately obvious that the “Carbon Emissions per Capita” graph does not follow from the “Total Carbon Emissions” and “Total Population” graphs which appear to be correct.

If total carbon emissions in 2012 were about 10,000 million metric tons, and the 2012 world population was about 7 billion people, then the per capita emissions would have been about 1.4 metric tons per person. Your graph shows about 7,300, which is a factor of 5,000 too high. The trend is also wrong, showing the emissions per capita going down, when based on the other two graphs it should be going up.

Eric Korevaar

I have to admit something embarrassing: I am at a loss as to what happened here. I was working with so much data when I was putting this feature together that I must have pasted the wrong data into the wrong spreadsheet to give to the designer. The trend line didn’t stick out to me as an obvious inaccuracy because per capita emissions have actually remained relatively stable over the past half-century (because most population growth has occurred in the countries with the lowest emissions).

The data that I meant to use, and thought I had used, is from the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center. The chart should have looked like this:

– Marian
Letters to the Editor, Continued

I enjoy reading your magazine and appreciate the broad range of articles. Looking at the timeline in the most recent issue, however, I was disappointed to not see more people of color represented. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, saw family planning and birth control as not only justifiable, but as an integral part of the Civil Rights movement. He spoke and wrote on many occasions about his support for family planning. I wish that one of those quotations had been included in the timeline.

Barbara Francisco

One correction, however: On the inside front cover John states that LARCs are 200 times more effective than birth control pills. I think this is an exaggeration: Peipert and others state that the ratio is about 20 to 1. Birth control pills are still a very effective method of contraception, and it would be good not to underrate their effectiveness. It is interesting to note that women in Europe, using the same pills, have fewer failures than women in the U.S. Apparently, we just aren't as compulsive at taking “the pill” regularly.

Richard Grossman

I recently finished reading the March issue of Population Connection. Thank you so much for your measured response to Jean Crocco’s supercilious, pompous letter.

The men featured in the December 2017 issue should be given medals, for they are truly heroes. They love their wives and children, and are taking a principled stand in their villages to help their wives, their families, and themselves. As well, they are enduring the snickers and snide comments of many of their fellow villagers.

The June 2018 issue of TIME has a six-page feature on the search for birth control for men, and the young man featured is posed exactly as the men in your issue.

I am proud to support your organization, and impressed by the work that you do.

Sue Boulais

I was disappointed not to see my name listed in your June issue of long-time donors. I was with you in the early ZPG days and have been a monthly donor for many years.

Lindley Sloan

Thanks for your message, Richard. John rounded up in his comments about the effectiveness of LARC methods vis a vis pills. According to the CDC, the implant has a failure rate of 0.05 percent and the pill has a failure rate of 9 percent (typical use) — that makes the implant 180 times more effective than the pill. Of course, with perfect use, the pill rises to 99 percent effectiveness, but as evidenced by your comments about European women having fewer failures, user error is a real problem, at least here in the United States.

– Marian

I am working my way through your June 2018 issue of Population Connection and have a comment on the timeline, “50 Years of Family Planning for Our Future.” You mention the enactment of China’s one-child policy in 1980. However, I cannot find where you mention that China eased those restrictions in 2015. I think the fact that the policy no longer exists deemed a mention in your timeline.

Kathy Hoeschen Massey

It is great to have a history of family planning and ZPG/Population Connection over the past half-century — well done!

– Shauna Scherer, Vice President for Marketing and Development
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First Comprehensive Global Biomass Study Stuns Science Community

A research team from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel and the California Institute of Technology published a study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) in June that calculated the breakdown of the approximately 550 gigatons of carbon (GtC) of biomass among Earth’s broad kingdoms of life. The breakdown is reported as follows:

- Plants: 450 GtC
- Bacteria: 70 GtC
- Fungi: 12 GtC
- Archaea: 7 GtC
- Protists: 4 GtC
- Animals: 2 GtC
  - Livestock: 0.1 GtC
  - Humans: 0.06 GtC
  - Wild Mammals: 0.007 GtC
- Viruses: 0.2 GtC

The study’s authors comment on the impact humans have had on the planet’s biomass:

Human activity contributed to the Quaternary Megafauna Extinction between ≈50,000 and ≈3,000 y ago, which claimed around half of the large (>40 kg) land mammal species… Intense whaling and exploitation of other marine mammals have resulted in an approximately fivefold decrease in marine mammal global biomass… While the total biomass of wild mammals (both marine and terrestrial) decreased by a factor of ≈6, the total mass of mammals increased approximately fourfold… due to the vast increase of the biomass of humanity and its associated livestock. Human activity has also impacted global vertebrate stocks, with a decrease of ≈0.1 GtC in total fish biomass, an amount similar to the remaining total biomass in fisheries and to the gain in the total mammalian biomass due to livestock husbandry. The impact of human civilization on global biomass has not been limited to mammals but has also profoundly reshaped the total quantity of carbon sequestered by plants. A worldwide census of the total number of trees, as well as a comparison of actual and potential plant biomass, has suggested that the total plant biomass (and, by proxy, the total biomass on Earth) has declined approximately twofold relative to its value before the start of human civilization.

In other words, although humans make up only 0.01 percent of the total global biomass, we have contributed to an 83-percent decline in wild mammal biomass since pre-human times and a 50-percent decline in plant matter.

The editor of the study, Paul Falkowski, of Rutgers, told *The Guardian*, “There are two major takeaways from this paper. First, humans are extremely efficient in exploiting natural resources. Humans have culled, and in some cases eradicated, wild mammals for food or pleasure in virtually all continents. Second, the biomass of terrestrial plants overwhelmingly dominates on a global scale — and most of that biomass is in the form of wood.”

Ron Milo, head of the study, told *The Guardian*, “It is definitely striking, our disproportionate place on Earth.”

Title X Funding Changes Underway

The Trump administration released new funding regulations for Title X family planning grant recipients in May. They amount to a domestic gag rule.

Page 119 of the proposed rule states, “A Title X project may not perform, promote, refer for, or support, abortion as a method of family planning, nor take any other affirmative action to assist a patient to secure such an abortion.”

Any clinic that provides the above services will no longer be eligible for Title X grants — grants that are used for family planning only, and that allow low-income patients to receive services at reduced cost.

The new regulations also prioritize funding to clinics that engage in abstinence-only education and promote natural family planning (the rhythm method). U.S. District Court Judge Trevor McFadden ruled in July against three Planned Parenthood affiliates and the National Family Planning and
Reproductive Health Association when he decided that HHS is not violating federal law by changing funding priorities without a public comment period.

**California Crisis Pregnancy Centers Win Supreme Court Case**

The Supreme Court ruled, 5-4, in favor of California’s crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) in June, in *NIFLA v. Becerra*.

The case revolved around a 2015 law (the Reproductive FACT Act) requiring that CPCs post notices in their waiting rooms explaining that comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion, are available at subsidized costs from publicly funded clinics. Notices were also required to inform patients when centers were not licensed medical facilities and did not employ licensed medical staff.

The Court decided that forcing anti-abortion CPCs to direct women to services they oppose on religious grounds was in violation of their free speech, and that notifying women — who believed themselves to be patients of real health clinics — that they were not in a place that could provide licensed healthcare was too burdensome.

This was the first Supreme Court case related to abortion since Trump-nominated Justice Neil Gorsuch was confirmed. Gorsuch, predictably, joined the majority in supporting the CPCs.

**Missouri Ends Medicaid Reimbursements To Planned Parenthood**

Missouri ended Medicaid reimbursements to Planned Parenthood for healthcare services rendered, as of July 1. The change is due to the state’s 2018 budget, which cut funding for providers of abortion.

About 7,000 Medicaid patients rely on the 11 Planned Parenthood clinics in the state.

The budget bill passed on May 9 and clinics received letters notifying them of the changes on June 8, even though Gov. Mike Parson (who took office on June 1) didn’t sign the budget until later in the month. The new fiscal year began in July, and was the start of the enforcement of the new policy.

**Iowa Abortion Restrictions Facing Court Challenges**

Iowa’s ban on abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected (as early as six weeks) was set to go into effect on July 1. Thanks to a temporary injunction issued by Polk County District Court Judge Michael Huppert, the ban is on hold.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the bill (SF 359) into law in May; Planned Parenthood and the ACLU of Iowa quickly filed suit to challenge its constitutionality.

Iowa’s Supreme Court struck down a 72-hour waiting period in late June, in a 5-2 ruling. Planned Parenthood of Iowa and the ACLU of Iowa filed the suit after the law was approved last year. The justices wrote, “Autonomy and dominion over one’s body go to the very heart of what it means to be free. At stake in this case is the right to shape, for oneself, without unwarranted governmental intrusion, one’s own identity, destiny, and place in the world. Nothing could be more fundamental to the notion of liberty.”

**Ireland Votes to End Decades-Long Abortion Ban**

Irish citizens — including expatriates living all over the world who traveled home — voted in May to reverse the country’s abortion ban. The “yes” vote won by more than 66 percent; voter turnout was about 64 percent.

The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, voted into law in 1983, gave fetuses equal rights to women and consequently banned abortion in the country, without exception. Women who violated the law were subject to up to 14 years in jail.

After 35 years of traveling abroad for abortion care, ordering pills online, and carrying unwanted pregnancies to term, women will now be able to obtain abortions up to 12 weeks into pregnancy for any reason.
United States Births at 30-Year Low in 2017

The provisional total fertility rate (TFR) for the United States in 2017 was 1.76 births per woman — the lowest TFR since 1978. The TFR has been at or below replacement — the level at which a given generation can exactly replace itself (2.1 births per woman) — since 1972. The dramatic drop in fertility in the early 1970s occurred at the same time that birth control became legal for all people, regardless of marital status. The U.S. Supreme Court case Eisenstadt v. Baird, decided in 1972, “simply extended the logic of Griswold v. Connecticut2 to all heterosexual intercourse, regardless of the marital status of the individuals involved.”

1 Total fertility rate equals the sum of birthrates for five-year age groups multiplied by five. Divided by 1,000 the TFR gives the rate per woman.
2 The 1965 Supreme Court decision Griswold v. Connecticut made contraception legal for married couples only.

Principal Source of Payment for Delivery, by Maternal Age (2016)*

* Data on this measure is not yet available for 2017.
The provisional number of births for the United States in 2017 was 3,853,472 — the lowest number in 30 years.

The general fertility rate in 2017 was 60.2 births per 1,000 women ages 15–44, a record low for the United States. Birthrates declined for all age groups of women under 40, but rose slightly for women in their early forties.

The provisional birthrate for teenagers in 2017 was 18.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15–19, a record low for this age group. The rate has declined by 55 percent since 2007 (41.5), the most recent period of continued decline, and 70 percent since 1991, the most recent peak. The number of births to women ages 15–19 was 194,284 in 2017, down 56 percent from 2007 (444,899).

Sources:

1 Births per 1,000 women in each five-year age group
2 Indian Health Service (IHS), TRICARE, other government program (federal, state, or local), or charity
Earth Day Moves Members to Engage with Their Communities

By Heaven Edwards and Maeve Doolittle, Former and Current Senior Membership Relations Coordinator, respectively

Dedicated. Passionate. Knowledgeable. These are the words that best describe the 250+ Population Connection members across the United States who have been talking to their communities about the importance of family planning as a tool for development, empowerment, and population stabilization.

We’ve heard from our members for years that they wanted more support in reaching out to their communities with information about population challenges and solutions. With that in mind, Population Connection doubled down on supporting member activism by creating the Membership Engagement department in 2017. We started by working with committed leaders in local communities who were ready to broaden their impact — leaders such as Rebecca Lester in Portland, Oregon.

Last summer, Rebecca set up a table at her local farmers market. Other Population Connection members in the area couldn’t make it to this first outreach event, but that didn’t stop her. A month later, she again set up a table at the farmers market — this time, two local members joined her. Now, just one year later, this Portland-area group reaches out to the community on a monthly basis, raising awareness and gathering petitions on policies that matter for population stabilization, such as repealing the Global Gag Rule and investing more foreign assistance in international family planning.

Of course, when we started our membership engagement program, many members were already raising awareness in various ways in their communities. Many have written letters to the editors of their local papers. Some have distributed photocopied infographics from our magazine — one member, Paul Rodgers, even included one of our infographics in his annual holiday card!

Dirk and Bonnie Walters from San Luis Obispo, California, were among the ranks of members who were operating autonomously — in their case, since 1985! For the past 33 years, Dirk and Bonnie have set up an informational booth at the San Luis Obispo Night Market on the second and last Thursday of every month. After reconnecting with Dirk and Bonnie, we sent them updated materials for distribution and invited local members to join them. Bonnie says this gave their table a “major facelift”!

In 2017, we were floored by 80+ requests from members nationwide who wanted to table for Earth Day. And in 2018, Earth Day participation ballooned to 115 members volunteering in 53 cities across 27 states. Together, we reached an estimated 7,000+ Earth Day participants, based on the number of petitions we gathered and materials we distributed at each table.

These one-on-one conversations are a critical component of grassroots movements. When César Chávez was once asked how to organize, he responded, “Well, first you talk to one person, then you talk to another person, then you talk to another.” Population Connection members have mastered this skill, spreading the message nationwide that global population stabilization will protect our environment and improve the quality of life for people everywhere.

Whether you’re ready to start a grassroots initiative in your community, or you want to refresh your knowledge of population data and dynamics, visit our newly updated web page at popconnect.org/getinvolved for videos and printable fact sheets that can help you spread the word about population stabilization. Get in touch with us by emailing engage@popconnect.org. We’ll work with you to develop a game plan to get you involved in your community!
Clockwise, from top left:
Charles tabling at the municipal building in Rochester, Michigan | Kevin and Laura tabling in Union Square, New York City | Population Connection members tabling at the Tucson Children's Museum | Larry tabling at the David Brower Center in Berkeley, California
U.S. Fertility Rate Fell to a Record Low, for a Second Straight Year

By Sabrina Tavernise | Originally published by The New York Times

The fertility rate in the United States fell to a record low for a second straight year, federal officials reported in May, extending a deep decline that began in 2008 with the Great Recession.

The fertility rate fell to 60.2 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age, down 3 percent from 2016, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. It was the largest single-year decline since 2010, when families were still feeling the effects of a weak economy.

Fertility rates are essential measures of a society’s demographic balance. If they are too high, that can strain resources like housing and education. If they are too low, a country can face challenges replacing its work force and supporting its older adults, like in Russia and Japan. In the United States, declines in rates have not led to drops in the population, in part because they have been largely offset by immigration.

The country has been living through one of the longest declines in fertility in decades and demographers are trying to figure out what is driving it. Rates tend to drop during difficult economic times as people put off having babies, and then rise once the economy rebounds. But the rate has not recovered since the Great Recession. A brief uptick in 2014 did not last. The number of births has also declined, and last year was its lowest level since 1987.

“Every year I look at data and expect it will be the year that birthrates start to tick up, and every year we hit another all-time low,” says Kenneth M. Johnson, a demographer at the University of New Hampshire. “It’s one of the big demographic mysteries of recent times.”

He says it seems to be inconsistent with the growing number of women of childbearing age: In 2017, women had nearly 500,000 fewer babies than in 2007, despite the fact that there were an estimated 7 percent more women in their prime childbearing years of 20 to 39.

Social forces are also at work. Women are postponing marriage, becoming more educated, and are more likely to be the primary breadwinners for their households.

“It’s hard to tell whether this is a dip that we periodically see in fertility or this is a long-term trend due to major social changes,” says Donna Strobino, a demographer at the Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

She notes that the numbers of births to 10- to 14-year-old girls, now only a few thousand, are down from over 6,000, 10 years ago. The reverse has happened with births to women in their late forties, which were more than 9,000 last year. Nearly one in five births are now to women 35 or older, she says.

It could be that the new generation of millennial women is delaying having children even longer than the women who came before them, as prime child-bearing years are also critical years for advancing in a career. A recent study shows that the marital pay gap that springs up after a first child is born typically does not close if the birth happens between age 25 and 35.

Shannon Hettinger, a 32-year-old from Washington, D.C., says she definitely wants children. She grew up in a large family in a small town in Pennsylvania and almost all her high school friends are married with children. But she moved to Washington, and spent her twenties deciding on a career. Now that she has one she loves — she works in residential real estate sales — she is not going to stop until she gets established. That means not having children for a while.
“I just want to build my book of business and see where I can go from here,” she says. “My whole focus is career growth. That’s my No. 1 priority.”

“Once I achieve a certain level of success,” she adds, “then I’ll start thinking about a family.”

Ivy Gray-Klein, 26, who lives in Philadelphia and works at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, says she is open to having children but cannot imagine doing so until she is 30 or 35. She wants to feel settled in her own life first. Now she has three roommates, is paying down her student loans, and is working to build a little bit of savings.

“I’m just really trying to get myself to a place that is solid,” she says by phone. “Having a child right now would be so destabilizing. Children just seem like such an enormous financial undertaking.”

The country has had declines before. The longest period of continuous decline on record was from 1958 to 1968, according to Brady E. Hamilton, a statistician and demographer with the National Center for Health Statistics. The United States has been tracking the number of births and birthrates since about 1910.

The most recent decline has been deepest for minorities. The fertility rate among Hispanic women dropped more than 27 percent between 2007 and 2016, the most recent year of data by race. The rate for whites has dropped about 4 percent, for blacks about 11 percent, and for Asians about 5 percent.

The biggest falls have been among younger women, but last year the birthrate even declined for women in their thirties, an unusual development, demographers say. The rate had been rising for that group, as more women delayed childbearing.

“I was surprised to see that reversal,” says Gretchen M. Livingston, a demographer at the Pew Research Center. She cautions into reading too much into one year.

A bright spot was the rate of births to teenagers, which has dropped 55 percent since 2007 — nearly 8 percent a year — a decline Dr. Hamilton calls “phenomenal.” The teenage birthrate is down 70 percent since its peak in 1991, he says.

Shannon Hettinger, 32, of Washington, D.C., says she definitely wants children, but for now is focused on her career. “Once I achieve a certain level of success,” she says, “then I’ll start thinking about a family.” Photo: Erin Schaff | *The New York Times*
THE CHILDFREE LIFE: Why So Many American Women Are Deciding Not to Have Kids

By Petula Dvorak | Originally published by The Washington Post

Oh, come on, millennial women. Just look at us. Frantic and apologizing, overwhelmed between staff meetings and gymnastics, shamed for bottle-feeding, booted for breast-feeding, passed over for promotions, denied on the daycare list — isn’t this what you’ve always dreamed of?

No thanks, they’re saying, to today’s lovely vision of motherhood. And in huge numbers.

The American birthrate is sinking: 3.8 million babies were born last year — the lowest number in three decades and down 2 percent from 2016, according to a new report by the National Center for Health Statistics.

It’s a decline that is alarming demographers and social scientists — many of them men who chart womb activity like the consumer price index or manufactured-goods sales. If this keeps up, they fret, we may become like Japan, where adult diapers outsell baby diapers.

Babymaking dropped in the 2008 recession and kept sliding. That makes sense to the charts-and-graphs people. But by 2016, the economy was roaring, business was booming, and experts kept wondering when, exactly, women were going to crank the baby factories back up.

“Every year I say when the economy is getting better then we’ll start having more children,” William Frey, a demographer and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told The Washington Post last year, “and I’m still expecting that to happen.”

But it’s not. And there are plenty of reasons. Some have to do with moms like me who work outside the home. We’re not making it look easy, because it’s not. As I’ve pointed out before, the United States and Papua New Guinea are the only nations in the world that don’t guarantee paid leave or paid benefits for new parents, according to a report from the International Labor Organization.

Ever been to a baby shower at the Pentagon? Don’t snicker. There are baby showers at the Pentagon. Some of its top-ranking women are parents. But one of the most popular baby shower gifts at DoD, or any other federal office pregnancy fête, is personal days. Coworkers donate them to help extend parental leave so a frazzled new mom doesn’t have to go back to work six weeks after giving birth.

Not the gauzy vision of motherhood on Pinterest, is it?

Then there are the personal finance considerations. More than $900 billion of the nation’s $1.4 trillion in student loan debt belongs to women, who make up more of the nation’s university students and are more likely to take out loans, according to a study by the American Association of University Women.

And because of the persistent gender wage gap — women still make about 80 cents for every dollar a man makes in 2018 — those loans are harder to pay back. Maybe women just can’t afford to be mothers.

What about a Trump effect? I talked to one therapist in left-coast California who specializes in helping women decide whether they want to become mothers. She says a potential client canceled her spot in a class right after the election. “She left a message saying, ‘When Trump was elected, I didn’t need your class to decide,’” says Ann Davidman, whose niche as a “Motherhood Clarity Mentor” puts her in touch with hundreds of women struggling with motherhood. She heard lots of versions of that.

But none of these factors make sense when you look at a place such as Sweden or Denmark, where women are empowered, and
Here’s the answer: choices. For the first time in human history, women truly have them. A lot of women don’t feel pressured to have kids they don’t want.

they have generous maternity leave and progressive men named Björn who wear BabyBjörns. Their birthrates are declining, too.

Here’s the answer: choices. For the first time in human history, women truly have them. A lot of women don’t feel pressured to have kids they don’t want. “I think there is far more permission to choose a childfree life than there ever has been,” Davidman says. “There’s so much out there to help childfree women feel good about themselves, to not feel shamed.”

It’s not childless. It’s #ChildFree.

“The childfree movement is very much linked to women having more choices,” says Amy Blackstone, a sociology professor at the University of Maine who staged a decidedly nontraditional shower (It’s a … Blog!) when she launched her journal of her childfree life with her husband.¹

For generations, women who weren’t feeling the parenting pull usually gave in and gave up, thanks to social, spousal, or parental pressure. And that was the recipe for misery, the fuel for all those furtive, chardonnay-fueled “I Regret Having Children” posts and pages. Women today are showing us it doesn’t have to be like that.

Can we make this world better for kids? Yes. Can we make workplaces better for families? Yes. Should we keep striving for equal and healthy partnerships? Of course.

But can we please stop — in research schematics and at the Thanksgiving table — wondering about women’s wombs? They made a choice, thank you.

¹ See our interview with Professor Blackstone on page 22 of this issue.

Photo: Scott Griessel | Dreamstime.com
Leilani Münter: Childfree by Choice, and Racing to Share the Benefits with Her Fans

Interviewed by Marian Starkey, Senior Director of Publications

Leilani Münter waves to fans before the start of the ARCA auto race at Daytona International Speedway, February 10, 2018, in Daytona Beach, Florida

Photo: Terry Renna | AP Photo
Leilani Münter makes environmental activism look very cool. The 44-year-old was named one of the top ten female race car drivers in the world by *Sports Illustrated* in 2007, and her likeness to Catherine Zeta-Jones offered her the opportunity to pose as a photo double in two movies, which funded her early racing career. But before all that, she earned a degree in biology with a specialization in ecology, behavior, and evolution, and had plans to work with dolphins and other marine animals. Despite her packed schedule, she makes time to sit on three environmental non-profit boards, and she is a patron of Population Matters, an organization in the UK that boasts such high profile patrons as Jane Goodall and Sir David Attenborough.

When Leilani was a student at the University of California – San Diego, her biochemistry professor showed the class Population Connection’s “dot” video, *World Population*. She recalls the shock and devastation she felt at learning how rapidly the population was growing (and this was before the world even reached 6 billion people). She decided then and there that she would never have biological children. Leilani has been married for nine years to Craig Davidson, and didn’t allow their relationship to get serious before he understood how serious she was about not having kids.

Leilani’s interest in biology was only natural, with a neurologist for a father and a hypertension nurse for a mother. And growing up surrounded by the natural beauty of Minnesota, she has always been concerned about the impact humans are having on the planet and its wildlife.

She tries to live in ways that reflect that concern. Leilani has been vegan since 2011 (and was vegetarian before that), she has solar panels that power her house and charge her Tesla, she has a 550-gallon rainwater collection system for her vegetable garden, and she adopts an acre of rainforest through the Rainforest Trust for every race she runs. She even serves up free vegan burgers at the racetrack for willing fans to sample — sponsored by her Vegan Strong campaign, which aims to show the public how delicious vegan food can be.

As someone who has known for a very long time that she didn’t want to have biological children, Leilani has endured all of the usual comments: *You’ll change your mind, You’re only saying that now, and You’ll grow out of it.* She laments, “There’s always a lot of dismissal of my decision.”

Sometimes, though, there’s understanding and agreement in surprising places, which motivates her to keep talking about her childfree choice. She told me about a flight she took recently during which she sat next to a man who had five biological children. After explaining to him the reasons that she doesn’t have children, he readily admitted, “Yeah, I get it. You won’t have any argument from me.”

She has observed that people who are already parents often feel as though they don’t have a voice in this conversation because they’ve already made their decision to bring more people into the world. She encourages them to participate in this movement all the same, because ultimately it will be those people’s children who will benefit from any measures we take today to protect the environment. She says, regarding the children of people who decide to become parents:

They’re going to have a more pleasant world to live in if there are fewer people on the planet and more resources to go around. This issue is one that everyone should care about and everyone should be talking about, and it feels like one of the least talked about issues of all. Population is the thing that tends to be glossed over or swept under the rug, because people think it’s an uncomfortable conversation. Do we have to wait until we hit 9 billion or 10 billion people? I’ve been on the planet since 1974 when the population hit 4 billion; it’s almost doubled in my lifetime! That’s the thing about this issue that’s frustrating is that it’s such an easy thing to understand; it’s not complicated in any way. It’s a simple, really simple, math equation.

Leilani was generous enough with her time to spend over an hour on the phone with me in July. She couldn’t have been kinder or more knowledgeable about the causes that receive her support. Excerpts from our conversation are transcribed below.

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**Do you think your activism on this issue has affected the way your fans think about population, the environment, and their own reproductive decisions?**

I was at a screening in 2015 for *Racing Extinction*, which is a documentary film that I worked on with the Oceanic Preservation Society. *Racing Extinction* is specifically about the sixth mass extinction of species. We were doing a screening of it in Vail, Colorado, for about 700 people, and somebody from the audience asked if there was something that wasn’t addressed in the film that we wish had been addressed. I said, “Yes, population.”

You can always gauge the feel of a room, and I would say about two-thirds of the audience were clapping and nodding their...
heads, and maybe a third of the audience had the defensive body language of crossing their arms and checking out of the conversation. I remember at that moment feeling encouraged that more people in the room were responding in a positive manner to having that subject brought up.

I think people get it. Everything that we’re doing as humans is just being multiplied by billions. More and more people, or at least the logical people of the world that have some common sense, can admit that this is not sustainable, this is not viable, we can’t just keep increasing exponentially on this planet and expect that everything’s going to turn out okay when we’re already losing so many species and so much biodiversity as it is, with 7.6 billion of us. What’s going to happen when we’re at 8 billion, 9 billion, 10 billion? Everything that’s going on is just going to get worse because it’s being multiplied.

When I signed up to be a patron of Population Matters, I got a lot of requests from media outlets that wanted to talk about it. That was really encouraging to me in that I feel like people are not as scared to talk about it as they once were. Hearing the conversation on a radio show or seeing it in the newspaper is all it takes. The more it’s talked about the more accepted it will be to start talking about it and the less taboo of a subject it will be.

I’ve found that one of the first questions strangers ask on an airplane when they’re starting a conversation with me is, ‘Do you have kids?’ It’s usually the first or second question. You know, ‘What do you do?’ ‘Do you have kids?’ ‘Are you traveling for business or pleasure?’ I always answer the question with, ‘My husband and I are childfree by choice.’ And saying ‘by choice’ has oftentimes opened up the door for a deeper discussion. It lets them know that it wasn’t like I wanted to be a parent and I couldn’t have kids — it lets them know that this was a conscious decision that we made.

What do you say to people who believe that science and technology will save us from resource limits and our own environmental destruction?

Science and technology can’t give us a second planet to live on at this point. Maybe in the future humans will be interplanetary and we’ll terraform Mars and we’ll have a second civilization there. But at the moment, all we’ve got is Earth and there’s only so much room, there’s only so much of the wild places left.

Humans are 0.01 percent of the life on Earth and we’ve already killed off 83 percent of the wild mammals... Yes, I think technology will help us have less of an impact — the more electric cars we have, the more renewable energy we use, and the more people that go vegan — all of that is going to help us as humans live in a more sustainable way, and if we can live in a more sustainable way with the planet then we can have more people because those people aren’t harming the environment as much as they had been in the past. But I don’t think you can then just dismiss the population issue and say, ‘Oh, technology will save us.’ What if it doesn’t save us? You’re placing a pretty big bet there, not only on tech, but also on the human nature to hold on and resist change.

It’s hard to get a person to switch from a gas car to an electric car, or to get a meat-eater to eat vegan food — this is what I spend my life trying to do, trying to get people to make more conscious choices. Change is happening and it’s encouraging, but we can’t ignore the population issue and say, ‘Oh this isn’t an issue.’ I have a lot of faith in technology, but not that much, and not that much in human beings’ willingness to change.

People resist change. They like to stick to their old ways. People are creatures of habit, so changing behavior and changing people’s minds about these choices that they’re making is really difficult. I just spent all this past weekend trying to get meat-eaters to eat a vegan burger at the racetrack. It’s not an easy thing to do and it’s just not happening fast enough. It can’t counteract the growth of the billion people every 12 years. It’s just not mathematically feasible.

You live in the Bible Belt and you’re surrounded by racing fans — not the easiest audiences for your outreach. Are you met with a lot of resistance?

I think those are the people that need to be talked to the most. One of the things that annoys me is that people tend to go around and talk to people that already agree with them. If you really want to change things and have a positive impact on the world, you have to be a little bit braver than talking only to people who already agree with you. You have to go out and seek out the places where people really need to have this discussion — it’s a more difficult conversation to have, but it’s by far the most important because you’re going to have the biggest impact.

I always feel like I’m making the most difference when I’m at the racetrack and I’m talking to people that haven’t learned about these issues — they haven’t seen Racing Extinction, they didn’t know we were losing species at that rate — that’s where you can really make a difference.
Craig Davidson and Leilani Münter attend the Racing Extinction afterparty at the Sundance Film Festival on January 24, 2015, in Park City, Utah. Photo: Jerod Harris | Getty Images for Oceanic Preservation Society
Leilani Münter attends the Los Angeles premiere of Racing Extinction at The London West Hollywood on September 17, 2015, in West Hollywood, California. Photo: Rachel Murray | Getty Images for Abramorama
I encourage everybody who’s reading this story to get outside of your comfort zone and go out and talk to people who don’t agree with you. Otherwise, you’re not changing anything. You’re just hanging out with your like-minded friends and talking about how you’re going to save the world. In order to create that change, you have to start that discussion with people that don’t agree.

Population discussions can raise people’s suspicions about government interference and unsavory agendas regarding reproductive health and rights of citizens.

People need to realize our own evolution on the planet is dependent on us reacting to this issue and reducing how quickly we’re reproducing. That is ultimately how we will survive or we will destroy ourselves. Yes, millions of years of evolution were telling us to pass on our genes, have kids, and grow the population—but now that’s what’s going to hurt our species.

If we truly are an intelligent species, we will adapt to the new circumstances and not just go along with those evolutionary instincts and urges to procreate. If our species wants to survive on this planet and keep this planet beautiful, we need to slow down and stop increasing our population.

Charles Darwin wrote about adaptability to change, not necessarily strength or intelligence, being the most important factor in species survival. We need to adapt the way that we’re living on the planet in order to survive, and one of those things is adapting how many people we’re adding to the planet every day.

Truly, if we are the intelligent species that we claim to be, that will be one of the main things that we’ll have to address. I’m not talking about any sort of government one-child policy or anything like that—if we’re an intelligent species, we should be able to make that decision willingly, on our own.

If I want to have kids I’ll adopt one of the 153 million orphan children already on the planet who need a home. I don’t need to have my own little mini-me version of myself to be a parent. There are plenty of children out there already who need homes, so why would I not do that instead?

I really feel that one of the best things that you can do if you want to preserve the world for the future is to look at the numbers and draw with common sense that because we are destroying the world around us by living in such an unsustainable way, a natural reaction to wanting to reduce that impact is to add fewer people. It’s just such a simple thing to understand, it boggles my mind when people try to argue against it. I don’t understand what they’re thinking is going to happen that’s going to make it okay for us to keep adding a billion people to the planet every 12 years. It’s just so unrealistic.

People often conclude that childfree people are selfish. What would you say to those who feel that way?

We are doing the selfless thing. We are going to make the world a better place for all the people who have had kids. Their kids are going to have a better world because we’re choosing not to have children. We have nothing selfishly to gain from creating a better world because we don’t have kids or grandkids. Our kids are not going to benefit from it because they’re not going to be here!

And not having children allows us the free time to volunteer and otherwise support causes we care about.

All parents, I think, are short on sleep and short on time and short on energy—they don’t have time to dedicate themselves to causes. If they do, that’s amazing, but they’re a huge exception to the rule. I think, in general, parents are just trying to get by, to make it on very little sleep, working and balancing being a parent. When would they have time to be an activist or educate other kids?

There are so many more kids I can educate by having the extra time to go and fight for these issues. I can go to a high school and do a screening of Racing Extinction and reach hundreds of kids, thousands of kids, through screenings and through talking about these issues. I can positively impact children that are already here. I’m reaching many more kids than I would if I had kids, because if I had children I wouldn’t have the time.

I certainly don’t need to bring another child into the world to have a positive influence on future generations. I don’t feel like I’m missing out on anything. I feel totally satisfied with my life and like I’m having a much bigger impact than I would if I had my own kid.

Learn more about Leilani’s lifestyle and career at leilani.green and veganstrong.com. Find out where to watch Racing Extinction at racingextinction.com/film.
Amy Blackstone, PhD, is decidedly not having children. She and her husband, Lance, are so committed to the childfree life that they started a blog, *We’re {Not} Having a Baby! Childfree Adventures in a Child-Centric World*, in 2013. Dr. Blackstone is a professor of sociology at the University of Maine, where she researches childlessness and the childfree choice, childfree families, workplace harassment, and civic engagement. I interviewed Prof. Blackstone over email while she enjoyed a childfree summer teaching in Italy.

**Why did you and your husband, Lance, choose not to have children?**

It was really a process for us. We both grew up assuming we’d have children one day. As a teenager, I babysat regularly and loved the work. I was a nanny in college and grad school. And Lance and I were married young, at 22 and 23. So, all signs pointed toward parenthood for us. As we aged, though, we both realized that neither of us really felt drawn toward parenthood. Throughout our thirties we checked in with each other about it at regular intervals, but neither of us ever changed our mind.

At first it was about not feeling the pull. Later, we began to understand better what we’d be giving up by having kids: our autonomy, time to nurture our connection with each other, possible sacrifices in our careers, spontaneity and the ability to travel, etc. These are some of the reasons we don’t have kids.

As we’ve aged, other reasons have become important. We enjoy being able to make an impact in our community through volunteer work and donations, we understand better the environmental impact of each new child in the world (and particularly in the U.S.), and we appreciate even more the care and attention that is needed to sustain a lasting and fulfilling marriage. In short, there’s not a singular reason, but, for us, there are a variety of benefits to remaining childfree, and the extent to which each is critical for us varies and has varied over time.

**Why are people with children so fascinated by people who choose not to have children? And why are childfree people perceived to be unhappy and selfish?**

Sociologist of gender Judith Lorber once observed, “Talking about gender for most people is the equivalent of fish talking about water.” Much the same can be said of talking about the choice to parent. Parenthood is so much a part of our everyday lives, from how we arrange our families to what we see on TV and in magazines to what we learn in church and hear from our politicians, that we often take for granted that everyone will do it.

We’re told that parenthood is an important part of becoming an adult and that it is one of the most fulfilling things

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1. See *The New York Times* article “I’m in My 40s, Childfree, and Happy. Why Won’t Anyone Believe Me?” and the deviance and stigma section of Dr. Blackstone’s 2012 article “Choosing to be Childfree.”
adults can do. So to opt out of that strikes people as strange. Why would anyone opt out of their destiny, out of the most fulfilling thing they can do?

The thing is, it’s not our destiny any more than any other choice we make as adults. Though we are biologically “wired” to want to have sex, we’re not wired to want to become parents — the “instinct” we sometimes hear about that drives women to nurture their children kicks in after they’ve had kids. Because the idea that parenthood is the most — or one of the most — fulfilling things we can do is so pervasive, people assume that those of us who aren’t parents must be unhappy. And because our cultural lore tells us that rearing a child is one of the most selfless things a person can do, we assume that people who choose not to do so must be selfish. I explore these ideas, and a few other myths about the childfree, in my forthcoming book.²

Have you experienced any disadvantages of not having children (other than being asked intrusive questions)?

I, like many of the childfree women and men I’ve interviewed, have experienced social exclusion from friendship groups and some challenges around work/life balance that differ from those faced by my peers who are parents. I also spent many years having to tell medical professionals over and over again that I didn’t want children.

Every annual exam in my thirties came with the suggestion that I start taking prenatal vitamins so that my body would be ready whenever I decided to have kids. I was told this annually despite the fact that I also annually shared that I wasn’t planning to become a mother. It may seem small but to be disbelieved and dismissed on a regular basis by the people who are supposed to be your allies and advocates is exhausting.

Many of the women I’ve interviewed or met through our blog and social media pages have shared similar, and often much worse, stories about not being believed or taken seriously and even being denied medical treatment they sought (such as birth control and sterilization) as a result.

In addition, to me, the ideas that “real” families are limited to those that include children and that “real” women are only those who bear children are hurtful.

We enjoy being able to make an impact in our community through volunteer work and donations, we understand better the environmental impact of each new child in the world (and particularly in the U.S.), and we appreciate even more the care and attention that is needed to sustain a lasting and fulfilling marriage.

What have been the advantages?

Though sometimes finding work/life balance can be tricky for childfree people — many of whom have shared with me stories about being given the least desirable shifts at work or handed heavier workloads because it is assumed that they have nothing important to go home to after regular work

² Childfree: Why More People Than Ever Are Opting Out of Parenthood...and How They’ll Be Just Fine
hours — I’ve also experienced and have been told about occasional advantages at work as a result of being childfree.

Many employers assume that non-parents are more committed to their jobs than parents, an assumption that doesn’t always bear out in research on the topic but that benefits non-parents nevertheless. Women in particular are penalized with lower salaries when they become parents, which could be perceived as an advantage for childfree women. But these are not advantages we should celebrate. All workers need and deserve a balance between their work and their lives outside of work. I think parents and non-parents would be well served to come together to advocate for work/life balance policies that apply equally to all, whatever an employee’s situation at home.

Other advantages include having more autonomy over how we spend our time and with whom we spend it, and, for some childfree but certainly not all, having more disposable income. These often come up as advantages of a childfree life, but I think we should be careful about assuming that childfree people are all off gallivanting around without a care in the world and without a concern for their finances. Many childfree people, like parents, struggle to make ends meet. And though we may not be putting our time toward rearing our own children, many of us fill our time with commitments to making a difference in our communities that both provide meaning for us and come with their own sets of obligations.

How did you get interested in the sociology of this topic?
I became interested in the sociological study of the childfree about ten years ago, when in my mid-thirties I began to realize that I did not want to become a mother. I understood that my own lack of “maternal instinct” differed from what many of my peers described feeling at the time, but I didn’t

Amy and Lance have been going to Roatan, Honduras, for about a month every year for the last ten years. This photo is from their 2017 trip.
understand why they were feeling the pull toward motherhood and I was not.

As I often do when I have a question about choices humans make, I turned to the sociological literature on the childfree choice, in hopes of finding some clarity and insight into my own experience. While there is a strong history of good research on the topic, it had been examined far less than I anticipated. I was at a point in my career when I was able to take on a new research project, so I decided to study the topic myself, with the goal of contributing to the growing body of literature on the childfree choice.

Can you make any qualitative generalizations about the childfree?

Though the childfree are a diverse bunch (much as parents are), there are a few things my own and others’ research tells us about who the childfree are and how and why they’ve made that choice.

First, it is very much a choice — it isn’t that we’ve simply fallen into this life circumstance. Childfree people are non-parents who have made the explicit and intentional choice not to have children; they are different from what I would call childless-by-circumstance individuals who want to be parents but aren’t for any number of reasons. And for many childfree, their choice was not one made in a single instant. Instead, it’s a choice they give thought to over time — sometimes, but not always, in consultation with loved ones — and that they take seriously and often make with an awareness that they are both gaining something from their choice and that they may be missing out on other things as a result.

The childfree are not any more — or less — selfish than parents. Parents and the childfree both volunteer in their communities, care for their families, and think about others’ wellbeing and the future.

What is your current project on childfree women/men/couples?

I’m so glad you asked! I’m wrapping up a book that is set to come out in 2019, published by Dutton. In the book I consider the growing popularity of the choice not to have children, from its history to the present day, and how the movement benefits parents and the childfree alike. My primary focus is on women and couples, but the work includes men’s experiences and an afterword from my husband, Lance, from his perspective as a childfree man.

What do you see as the future of childfree studies?

I hope that researchers will continue to expand the lens to include the diversity of childfree people’s experiences. To date, much of the research (including my own) has been primarily focused on the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Researchers such as sociologists Kimya Dennis and Cara Bergstrom-Lynch, and many others, are expanding this work to include childfree women and men of the African diaspora and LGBTQ childfree people. This work is necessary and important and will provide an even better understanding of who makes this choice, why, and what their lives are like.
The months leading up to an election are normally quiet ones on Capitol Hill, but if there’s anything we’ve learned with Donald Trump in the White House, it’s that norms mean nothing.

A Gag Rule of Our Very Own

On May 22, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a proposed change to the rules governing funding for Title X, the nation’s only dedicated family planning program for low income people. Under the proposed rule, no entity receiving Title X grants could “perform, promote, refer for, or support, abortion as a method of family planning, nor take any other affirmative action to assist a patient to secure such an abortion.”

Providers would also no longer be required to offer all FDA-approved forms of contraception. And they would no longer be required to discuss all pregnancy options with patients. If a clinic decided to only offer “natural family planning” and discuss only adoption and parenting with pregnant patients, that clinic would be eligible for Title X funding. But comprehensive providers — like Planned Parenthood — would not.

Because the rule is an administrative change, rather than a law passed by Congress, there is a lengthy process that has to play out before it can take effect. But without significant pushback, by this time next year, Title X as we currently know it may cease to exist, leaving millions of Americans without access to appropriate, affordable birth control.

2019 Appropriations Process Gets Underway

On June 20, the House Appropriations Committee met to consider the Fiscal Year 2019 State Department and Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. The underlying bill was, as it has been for the past several years, a horror-show of funding cuts and policy restrictions for family planning programs. It codified the Global Gag Rule, barred funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and capped our bilateral family planning funding at $461 million — a $146.5 million cut from current levels.

Four committee members offered amendments designed to undercut these attacks and highlight the importance of reproductive health and family planning programs in our foreign policy:

• Ranking Member Nita Lowey (D-NY) offered an amendment to strike the Global Gag Rule and anti-UNFPA language from the bill and replace it with language from the Global HER Act (H.R. 671), which would remove the Global Gag Rule and prevent a future administration from reinstating it;
• Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced an amendment to strike the Global Gag Rule and anti-UNFPA language and replace it with an earmarked UNFPA contribution of $32.5 million;
• Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) offered an amendment to strike the Global Gag Rule and anti-UNFPA language and replace it with a floor of $575 million — the enacted level for the current fiscal year; and
• Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA) proposed an amendment to require that the annual State Department Human Rights Report include information on “the status of reproductive rights (as defined in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and reiterated in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action)” for all countries covered by the report. The amendment was a response to the decision by the Trump State Department to specifically censor such information from this year’s report.

All four amendments failed on party-line votes, with every Democrat present voting in favor and every Republican present voting against.
The Senate Appropriations Committee didn’t wait to get in on the action, meeting to consider its version of the bill the very next day. Again, as has been the case for several cycles, the outcome in the Senate was much different than in the House.

As she has for the past five years, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) sponsored a single amendment to reverse all the harmful family planning provisions in the base bill. The amendment calls for “not less than” $595 million for bilateral family planning programs — $20 million above the current level; strikes the legislative imposition of the Global Gag Rule from the bill and, like Rep. Lowey’s amendment in the House, replaces it with the language of the Global HER Act (S.210); and inserts a $37.5 million U.S. contribution to UNFPA.

On the day of the vote, Rep. Shaheen was at home in New Hampshire recovering from a routine medical procedure. In her stead, the amendment was offered by Sen. Dick Durban (D-IL). Notably, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), who has been a reliable supporter of the Shaheen Amendment over the years, chose this year to make a public statement in favor of the measure, telling her colleagues:

“This is a little bit of déjà vu all over again. I think we do this every year — and we do have the discussion about abortion — but I think it is repeated every year that this amendment makes zero changes to long-standing statutes and restrictions on U.S. funding for abortion. What this amendment really is about, is about supporting women and girls around the world, which we all ought to be able to come together on.

The Shaheen Amendment ultimately passed, 16-15, with Sens. Murkowski and Collins (R-ME) voting in favor, along with all committee Democrats except Sen. Joe Manchin (WV).

The stark differences in the House and Senate versions of the bill set up a confrontation down the road, but leave international family planning programs in a good position to emerge with a status quo outcome — very much a victory in the current setting.

Kennedy Retirement Leaves Roe Hanging by a Thread

On June 27, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement. Considered the swing vote on a whole host of issues since the 2006 retirement of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, Kennedy’s decision to step down gives Donald Trump the opportunity to appoint another justice — and swing the Court to the right for a generation. Trump wasted no time in declaring his intention to choose the next justice from a previously-published list of 25 judges approved by the very conservative Federalist Society.

On July 9, he did exactly that, announcing DC Circuit Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh as his nominee. A former clerk for Justice Kennedy, Kavanaugh has a long track record of hostility toward workers’ rights, gun control efforts, consumer protections, environmental regulations, the Affordable Care Act, and of course, reproductive rights. While on the DC Circuit Court, Kavanaugh authored the dissent in a 6-3 ruling that a pregnant immigrant teenager in federal custody had to be allowed to obtain an abortion. And in 2017, he gave a speech in which he praised former Chief Justice William Rehnquist’s dissent in Roe v. Wade.

Numerous progressive advocacy groups have announced their opposition to the nomination, and a concerted effort is underway to persuade red-state Democrats and pro-choice Republicans Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski to vote against confirming what could well be the fifth vote to overturn Roe. Hearings are expected in September. A vote was not yet scheduled as of our press deadline, but is expected in the early fall.
While attacks on reproductive health and rights by the Trump administration and its cronies multiply, the #Fight4HER campaign is standing up and fighting back stronger than ever. Over the course of the summer, activists and volunteers have been organizing in communities around the country to garner support for the Global HER (Health, Empowerment, and Rights) Act, which would permanently repeal the deadly Global Gag Rule. Check out some of our highlights from the summer, and learn what you can do to defend global reproductive rights!

**Organizers and volunteers around the country have collected over 6,500 petitions this summer alone!**

*Clockwise, from left:* #Fight4HER fellows and volunteers petition at the Dane County farmers market in Madison, Wisconsin, and are joined by members of the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders | #Fight4HER fellows and volunteers petition at Denver Pridefest in Denver, Colorado | Activists deliver 1,500 petitions to the Columbus office of Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH)
#Fight4HER has conducted petition delivery events across the country, calling on senators to co-sponsor the Global HER Act.

#Fight4HER is raising awareness about the harmful impacts of the Global Gag Rule in the developing world, as well as the Trump administration’s attacks on reproductive rights here in the United States. Through this movement to build support for reproductive freedom for all people, #Fight4HER has created a community of young organizers who will keep fighting through November and beyond!

**Clockwise, from above:** Activists deliver over 1,100 petitions to Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) in Phoenix, calling on him to sign the Global HER Act before he leaves office in November | Activists deliver over 1,100 petitions to Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) in Raleigh | #Fight4HER activists deliver petitions to Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), co-sponsor of the Global HER Act, in Manchester, to thank her for her unwavering commitment to reproductive health and rights for all

*Interested in joining the #Fight4HER? Text FIGHT to 52886!*

*By providing your contact info, you are confirming your subscription to Population Connection Action Fund campaign alerts. Message and data rates may apply. Text “HELP” for assistance and “STOP” to opt-out.
With the start of the 2018-19 school year, PopEd is launching a new edition of its high school curriculum, *Earth Matters: Studies for Our Global Future*. The target audiences are teachers of Environmental Science, Biology, and World and Human Geography. Like earlier editions, this new fifth edition of *Earth Matters* aims to foster understanding of the complexities of population pressures, climate change, natural resource use, wildlife endangerment, distribution of wealth and food, urbanization, public health, gender equity, consumerism, economic progress, and how all of these issues are interrelated.

It’s been six years since the fourth edition was published (as a CD-ROM), and much has changed in the trends that shape our world and the technology that enables classroom learning since then. For the fifth edition, we started from scratch on all of the student readings to capture the most relevant trends, challenges, and progress on key environmental and social issues related to population dynamics. Our “teacher-favorite” activities from past editions were all updated and new lesson plans were created to address emerging topics. And, best of all, we’ve transitioned the curriculum to be entirely online, making it easy for our curriculum team to keep the content current.

The issues covered in *Earth Matters* are interdisciplinary, resulting in materials that are highly cross-curricular. The readings and activities enhance knowledge and skills in social science (geography, economics, government, and world/U.S. history), hard science (environmental and biology), math, and language arts. Of all of PopEd’s curriculum products, *Earth Matters* goes furthest in encouraging student inquiry and exploration of often-complex topics. It is especially relevant for two Advanced Placement (AP) courses — AP Environmental Science and AP Human Geography — which are designed to introduce students to college-level content and to hone skills in research, writing, and critical thinking.

The activities in *Earth Matters* are written to accommodate a variety of learning styles. The emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning engages students of different strengths and abilities and especially lends itself to an inclusive classroom. Activity formats include labs, role-playing simulations, mathematical modeling, debate, guided research, resource management games, data analysis, policy development, and more.

All of the activities are matched to curriculum standards for all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces, plus frameworks for AP courses and the Next Generation Science Standards.

**Earth Matters by the Numbers**

- 15 new background readings (one for each unit) that provide a readable overview of the primary issues in environmental science and human geography
- 20 new case studies that focus on timely topics (e.g. threats to pollinators and climate refugees) and inspiring projects that are making a difference (e.g. urban gardens and anti-poverty initiatives)
- 44 teaching activities that include updated classics as well as new lessons on global migration trends, megacities, life cycle analysis of everyday products, the Sustainable Development Goals, and much more
- 31 infographics for sharing with students
- Nearly 400 recommended resources for further research including the latest websites, apps, online videos, insightful articles, and books

*Earth Matters* is password-protected. Teachers have the option of accessing the entire curricula online or downloading individual units. Visit populationeducation.org/product/earth-matters-studies-for-our-global-future/
A Sampling of New Activities in *Earth Matters, Fifth Edition*

**Like Oil and Water:** Students use the engineering design process to create and test prototypes for cleaning up oil spills and rehabilitating marine birds.

**Migration Stories:** In small groups, students take on the role of real-world migrants in different regions of the globe and take turns in the “hot seat” to answer questions about their unique journey. In the process, they examine the range of motivating “push-pull” factors and the challenges migrants and their new host countries face.

**Secret Life of Tees:** Students use guided research to perform a five-stage life cycle analysis on a T-shirt and brainstorm ways to reduce the garment’s social and environmental impact.

**Tale of Three Megacities:** At databank stations, students analyze articles, graphs, and images about three megacities (Lagos, Tokyo, and São Paulo), and compare the social, political, economic, and environmental issues across the cities.

**Trash Trouble in Paradise:** Role playing a city council meeting, students weigh various real-world economic, social, and environmental factors when siting a landfill on the Hawaiian island of O’ahu.

**Carbon Crunch:** Students visually represent the per capita CO₂ emissions from 14 different countries and determine each country’s vulnerabilities to climate change (including sea level rise, extreme weather, and agricultural impacts.)
WHAT TO EXPECT
WHEN YOU WERE NOT EXPECTING THIS
1st EDITION
A guide to the hard-won reproductive rights that you assumed were beyond debate at this point, but, yikes, here we are!
President Donald Trump has made it clear he wants women who get abortions to be punished. This, in itself, is abhorrent. Worse, proposed federal rules aimed at making abortions harder to get would also punish millions of women who don’t want to get pregnant or who simply need preventative healthcare.

At their core, the proposed changes to Title X, the federal family planning program, are about making it harder for women to get abortions. But, the consequences also affect family planning and women’s healthcare in general. They are especially harmful for low-income women who may rely on federally funded programs rather than private medical care.

That’s why the rule changes, like similar ones proposed nearly 30 years ago, should be stopped.

Under the proposed changes, health providers that participate in the federally funded program could not talk with women about abortion.

Women, it should be remembered, have a constitutionally protected right to abortions. Requiring providers to withhold information violates that right. Worse, medical providers are being told to violate their oath to help their patients by withholding information that the patient needs.

These proposed rule changes are extreme and unnecessary, and they will harm women who simply want to remain healthy. They should not be implemented.

– July 14, 2018

It’s easy to think the Trump team is chaotic, impulsive, and undirected just like the president himself. But when it comes to abortion rights, the White House has an unswerving purpose: curb reproductive rights at every turn.

He’s tapping Title X federal regulations to create rules that will hamper, if not shut down, the work of Planned Parenthood and other healthcare groups. These clinics would be barred from bringing up the subject of abortion in dispensing advice to women patients. The procedures couldn’t be done on existing premises, meaning a separate facility would need to be built.

Trump once noted a truth he no longer accepts. During his run for the White House, he opposed public funds for Planned Parenthood, though he noted it gives medical care to millions of women who “are helped greatly.” In fact, only a small slice of the organization’s work involves abortion, and the money for those procedures comes from elsewhere, not Washington.

Healthcare such as cancer screenings and birth control advice are the mainstay work at such clinics, which are often the only such resource in scattered parts of the country. Antiabortion groups — and now the White House — want to demolish this essential service because a small part of it goes against their personal beliefs.

There are other parts to the pattern. Trump sits atop the federal judiciary through his appointment power, which he’s pledging to use to limit abortion rights. The White House is leaning on abstinence-only counseling to please conservatives. Overseas aid can’t be spent on abortion or related counseling.

Voters who value a woman’s right to choose should remember all of these strategies. Trump is playing to his friendly audience in pushing abortion restrictions, but a much larger group should take note and demand a change in direction come November.

– May 28, 2018
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