China Needs More Children – And So Do We

by Phyllis Schlafly

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It made front-page headlines around the world when China's Communist Party announced the end of its notorious "one child" policy. Imposed by Chinese dictator Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, the one-child limit has been ruthlessly enforced with forced abortion, infanticide, sterilization, and heavy fines on families that dared to have a second child.

As a result of that vast experiment in social engineering, China created an unnatural society with 150 million "only" children without siblings, cousins, uncles or aunts. Due to sex selection, some 50 million more males than females were born – 50 million men who can never marry or start their own families.

Don't assume that China is becoming a free society, or that its Communist rulers concede they were violating fundamental human rights. A new "two child" policy will continue to be enforced by the same apparatus requiring every family to apply for and receive permission to have a child, with severe penalties for noncompliance.

No, the policy was changed because China is literally running out of people to maintain its economic growth. After 35 years of a very low birth rate, China has created a demographic time bomb in which the aging population in need of care is growing much faster than the population of young working people who can support them.

Believe it or not, the working-age population of China, the world's most populous nation, has already been falling for several years. In the foreseeable future, a fourth to a third of China's huge population will be over 60 years old and in need of support by younger people, but there will only be 2 workers for each retiree.

Does any of this sound familiar? It's the same story in our own country, as Social Security and Medicare groan beneath the weight of too many retirees supported by too few working adults. The percentage of Americans who work peaked 15 years ago and has declined almost every month since then.

As Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), a powerful member of the House Budget Committee, explained on C-SPAN last week: "The baby boom generation didn't have nearly as

many kids as their parents did, and they are living a lot longer. And so they are drawing more money out than they (or their children) paid in."

Or, as Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) said in the CNBC presidential debate, "After the war we had all of these kids, the baby boomers. Now we're having smaller families. We used to have 16 workers for one retiree; now you have three."

During the post-World War II baby boom, when I had my six children, most Americans got married in their early twenties and the average family had 3 to 4 children. Now the average age of first marriage has risen to almost 30, and the average family has only 2 children.

A population that merely replaces itself (two parents having two children) doesn't generate enough savings to support those two parents into a ripe old age. A single working person doesn't pay enough into Social Security and Medicare to support his own retirement; the system has always depended on having several younger working adults making contributions to support each retired person.

Listening to Republican presidential candidates, we hear a lot of talk about "economic growth" as the way to save Social Security and Medicare without bankrupting the nation. The Chinese Communists, facing a similar problem of reduced economic growth in an aging population, have decided that what really needs to grow is the size of their families.

Jeb Bush has promised to double America's growth rate to 4 percent, partly by giving a special tax break to induce married women to enter (or remain in) the paid labor force. That's the wrong policy if you realize, as China's leaders do, that more young people are needed to sustain the economy of the future.

Most women who marry and have a family leave the labor force during some part of their lives, and we should be glad they do, even if their lifetime earnings suffer as a result. A policy that expects women to remain in the full-time labor force, pursuing a lifelong career of full-time work, may help to close the "pay gap" between men and women, but it will mean fewer children.

A feminist reporter for Bloomberg Business set out to find where women's participation in the labor force is lowest and the male-female pay gap is the largest. She

found that place in Utah, and specifically in the medium-sized cities of Provo and Ogden, which are about an hour's drive from Salt Lake City.

The reporter was shocked to find that in Utah, only 52.8% of mothers with young children are in the labor force, compared with 95.5% of fathers – "the biggest gap in the nation." A University of Utah demographer said, "By every major metric, we're about two generations behind the nation."

Family-friendly Utah, with the nation's highest birth rate, also boasts the highest economic growth rate. The best way to improve the economy is to strengthen the family.

Phyllis Schlafly is a lawyer, conservative political analyst and author of two new books published last year, "Who Killed the American Family" and the 50th anniversary edition of "A Choice Not An Echo." She can be contacted by email at phyllis@eagleforum.org. To find out more about Phyllis Schlafly and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.