

## Hispanic immigration: A key to Kentucky's economic vitality

### The crisis of the developed world

*Opinion by State Demographer Ron Crouch*

**THERE ARE ONLY THREE DEVELOPED** countries now with population growth: Australia, Canada, and the United States. This is due to the fact that they are “Settler Nations” that allow immigration. If not for immigration, the United States – like Europe and Japan – would be experiencing significant population decline.

Ben Wattenberg, of American Enterprise Institute states, “If America doesn’t continue to take in immigrants, it won’t continue to grow in the long run. ... America needs to keep growing, and we can fruitfully use both high-skill and low-skill immigrants.”

From 1990 to 2000, the Hispanic population in Kentucky rose by 172.6 percent, according to the U.S. Census. The newly released 2006 American Community Survey, ACS, estimates the 2006 Hispanic population in Kentucky at 85,938, an increase of 43.3 percent since 2000. Many believe the undocumented Hispanic population is significantly larger – probably by two to four times – than the official count.

#### **An aging United States workforce**

America’s workforce population has shifted from young to old as the Baby Boomers have aged. In January 2006, the first Baby Boomer turned 60 and will be followed by others over the next 20 years. Does an aging United States population understand the importance of diversity and immigration for their future well-being?

Kentucky’s competitive future with a declining young adult population will be determined by its investment in a diverse population. The educational levels of our minority and immigrant population vary significantly. Kentucky must increase the educational level of those “at risk” for its own competitiveness. Quality schools serving the growing minority population and programs serving the Limited English Proficient students are critical to economic prosperity of our state.

#### **The value of a growing minority and immigrant population**

Minority and immigrant populations will enhance urban living and repopulate rural area. The benefits of diverse cultures can revitalize our state. We need to ensure all Hispanic children are enrolled in school. We need to develop programs that ensure foreign-born children raised in the United States will qualify for professional jobs when they complete their education. We need to provide documents, green cards, guest worker IDs and drivers’ licenses that help document our Hispanic population. Kentucky can address the future and grow, or live in the past and decline.

The Mexican population of young adults now accounts for its growth, and by 2025 it will be their middle-aged population – a prescription for economic growth, giving them less need to immigrate to the U.S.

#### **A new future of the world: The wake up call**

We all hear about the world’s exploding population but what we know is totally wrong. The U.S. Census Bureau projects the world’s population will grow from 6,073,229,544 in 2000 to 9,404,251,020 by 2050, an increase of 3,331,021,476 or 54.8 percent more people. However, only 10 percent of the growth will be under age 25, and 65 percent being ages 45 and over. The world is experiencing a longevity crisis, not a fertility crisis. The battle for a young workforce will be a worldwide reality and the United States is winning the battle for a young workforce as the only developed country with any real population growth, due to immigration. We need to develop immigration policies that increase legal immigration and bring undocumented immigrants out of the shadows. It is in the long-term interest of the United States to be open to the significant benefits of immigration and their growth potential for our economy.



**Ron Crouch will be a guest speaker at the upcoming Kentucky Chamber Economic Summit and Annual Meeting, July 16-17 in Louisville.**

Visit [www.kychamber.com](http://www.kychamber.com) for a full agenda.

Crouch is director of the Kentucky State Data Center located at the University of Louisville, which is the official clearing-house for Census data for the state of Kentucky. KSDC provides data on population, housing, education, employment and other social indicators.

Crouch has developed a national database analyzing trends by both Census regions and states. He also has developed Census profiles for all 50 states including population pyramids by race and Hispanic origin, a population chart showing population trends by age, by race, and by Hispanic origin, and tables indicating trends on demographic, social and economic variables.