by Cary Vigneri, NFP Omaha Coordinator

Word of a secret meeting at Offutt Air Force Base to plan a new generation of nuclear weapons prompted a group of area activists to come together in the spring of 2003 to organize a response. From leaked documents, the group had learned that the Stockpile Stewardship Conference (the entity charged with maintaining the nation’s nuclear arsenal) was meeting at StratCom to discuss the development and production of low-yield “earth penetrating nuclear weapons” or “bunker busters” mini-nukes—weapons strictly forbidden under the terms of both the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Article Six of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The sheer effrontery of these Bush Administration war planners, nuclear industry contractors and Pentagon officials to ignore international law generated an ambitious plan for a three-day protest in Omaha named “SOS Speak Out at StratCom—No New Weapons of Mass Destruction.”

SOS 2003 was designed to inform American citizens and the world about StratCom, arguably the most powerful and important military installation in the world. Historically, the U.S. military’s command-and-control center for all nuclear capabilities, including land, air, sea and now even space-based weapons systems, StratCom has undergone a major evolution in mission with the launching of the “War on Terrorism.” In addition to its traditional role of nuclear deterrence, StratCom’s charge now includes “full-spectrum global strike” to meet “decisive national security objectives” as defined by the President and the Secretary of Defense. Today, this facility, located in our own backyard just ten minutes south of Omaha, is the nerve system for a global military empire of at least 725 foreign military bases in some 150 countries, plus the literally thousands of installations within our own borders.

The personnel at StratCom are assigned the task of creating programs that eat up society’s financial and creative resources in the production of increasingly efficient, mass killing devices. The truth of their insidious mission must be made public, so that citizens can hear, understand and resist the dangers that this poses to the earth’s very existence. As the purveyors of doom devise methods to visit the planet with new and more lethal killing schemes, we must continue in our efforts to expose their black arts.

Last year’s event, which garnered national and international media, included a political forum, educational workshops, a commemoration of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with guests from Hiroshima who survived the first atomic blasts 58 years ago; a rally with internationally known speakers; a concert; all of which culminated with a march to atomic blasts 58 years ago; a rally with internationally known speakers; a concert; all of which culminated with a march to.

This ambitious initiative will be reprised in 2004, although somewhat abbreviated. SOS 2004 will span two days, August 6 and 7, 2004. The events will include opportunities to join the Catholic Workers of Des Moines as they again faithfully sit vigil at Kinney Gate from August 6 through August 9. There will be a separate vigil on August 6 in Omaha in the evening at Gene Leahy Mall that will include a tribute to those whose lives were sacrificed in Japan 59 years ago. We will also commemorate other “hibakusha,” survivors of the atomic experiments, known collectively as Downwinders. On August 7, SOS 2004 will stage a peace gathering in Everett Park, which is in Bellevue and within easy walking distance to the base. There will be a morning rally at Kinney Gate at Offutt Air Force Base in solidarity with the world’s fervent hope for complete nuclear disarmament and an end to all war. Speakers for this event have yet to be confirmed and suggestions and ideas for this part of SOS 2004 are welcome.

The coordinating committee welcomes NFP members, citizens of Nebraska and Iowa, and concerned anti-nuclear and pro-peace activists all over the world to join in the preparations for Speak Out at StratCom 2004. There will be an emphasis this year on creating a visually colorful event, both informational and entertaining, that will be of great interest to the people in our local communities.

Committees for this SOS 2004 are currently forming and you can connect with the people involved by calling either NFP office in Lincoln or in Omaha. Those numbers are 402-475-4620 in Lincoln, and 402-453-0776 in Omaha. You can also contact Steve Thyberg in Omaha at 402-593-1810, who is helping to coordinate the planning for this year’s event. Join us, won’t you, and once again we raise our voice to say: No more War! No more Occupations! No more Weapons of Mass Destruction!
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Contact the NFP State Office for information on the UNL, UNO, UNK, Creighton University and Hastings & Doane College Chapters
Radioactive ‘Bull’s Eyes’ for Terrorists?

by Kevin Kamps, Nuclear Waste Specialist
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Washington, D.C. (kevin@nirs.org; www.nirs.org)

Critics of nuclear power have warned for decades that atomic reactors represent pre-deployed “dirty bombs” in our midst, a point driven home by the 9/11 attacks. The book, Nuclear Power Plants as Weapons for the Enemy, was written by Bennett Ramberg in the mid-1980s. A review entitled, “When Reactors Become Weapons,” in the NIRS newsletter “Groundswell” (December 1985) stated, “Ramberg... calls for alternative reactor siting—underground and/or in very remote locations [as well as] improvements in containment effectiveness...[He notes the merit of] an end to centralized energy facilities in general and nuclear power plants in particular... In the long run, this may be the only way to provide security, because the mere existence of nuclear power plants makes us all potential nuclear hostages.”

Nebraska’s reactors are neither buried nor remote. The Ft. Calhoun plant is a mere 17-mile drive from Omaha, and 36-mile drive from Bellevue, home of Offutt Air Force Base and StratCom (Strategic Command). Cooper Station in Brownville, just east of the town of Auburn, is a 75-mile drive from Omaha, and only 66 miles from StratCom. Of course, as the crow flies (or wind blows), the distances are even shorter. StratCom, being the nerve center of the U.S. invasion of Iraq (as reported in previous Nebraska Report articles) and other far-flung military activities (U.S. Space Command, nuclear weapons arsenal control center, etc.), is in and of itself a potential target for terrorist attack. StratCom’s proximity to these commercial nuclear reactors, though, makes for a particularly dangerous combination.

Indications abound that reactors are targets for potentially catastrophic terrorist attacks. Three Mile Island Alert, a nuclear power watchdog group in Pennsylvania, overviews the documented threats at www.tmia.com/security/airplane.html. In fact, al-Qaida originally planned to attack nuclear facilities. An al-Jazeera reporter quoted the 9/11 mastermind as saying, “About two and a half years before the holy raids on Washington and New York, the military committee held a meeting during which we decided to start planning for a martyrdom operation inside America. As we were discussing targets, we first thought of striking at a couple of nuclear facilities but decided against it for fear it would go out of control... You do not need to know more than that at this stage, and anyway it was eventually decided to leave out nuclear targets for now.” The reporter asked, dumbfounded, on 9/11. The (London) Sunday Times reported on October 20, 2001 that the fourth hijacked airplane that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania was in the general area of five commercial nuclear plants, and that the FBI had confirmed to British intelligence that a “credible source” had said that the terrorists might have been planning to hit one; in fact, the Three Mile Island nuclear plant sentence for the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, had also trained near Three Mile Island and threatened to attack “nuclear targets” as well.

On October 17, 2001, F-16s were scrambled to protect Three Mile Island after an e-mail threat from purported al-Qaida operatives in Spain stated that it would be hit with an explosive-laden plane later that evening. The threat said someone working at the plant would disable the cooling system at the same time. The airspace around Harrisburg was shutdown for nearly four hours. The threat was later determined to be “not credible” and airspace was reopened. The public was not made aware of these events until later (except for the roar of jet fighter engines). Local officials were also left in the dark and were angered by the lack of communication. (“On high alert, nuclear plants face unknown vulnerability,” Philadelphia Inquirer, October 19, 2001).

In January 2002, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) warned U.S. atomic utilities that al-Qaida might be seeking to crash an airplane into a reactor. It was the 20th security warning by the NRC in just four months. (“U.S. Warns Nuclear Plants of Terrorist Threat,” Washington Post, February 1, 2002).

Although the White House has backed away from George W. Bush’s dramatic statement in his January 2002 State of the Union speech that U.S. forces had found diagrams of nuclear power plants seized amongst al-Qaida materials in Afghanistan, an NRC Commissioner has said, “I believe that based on the evidence available there is a general credible threat by al-Qaida toward American nuclear power plants,” and U.S. intelligence warned that members of al-Qaida might be downloading information on U.S. nuclear reactors from the Internet. (“White House Backs Away From Bush ’02 Nuclear-Terror Warning,” Wall Street Journal, February 10, 2004)

A July 2002 National Resource Council report titled, “Making The Nation Safer,” states that the potential is high for 9/11 type attacks on highly radioactive waste stored at nuclear power plants in the next five years. “Such attacks could potentially have severe conclusion on page 6
Review of *Prophets Without Honor: A Requiem for Moral Patriotism*


Reviewed by John Krejci

“At approximately 10:30 a.m. April 9, 2004, Rev. Carl Kabat, OMI, entered missile silo N-8 nine miles west of New Raymer, Colorado, by means of ladders. He destroyed nothing in the process. He was wearing his trademark "clown’s outfit," to prove he is still a ‘fool for God.’ He was taken into custody by Weld County law enforcement at approximately 11:45 a.m....

Kabat has spent nearly 16 years of his life in jail for various protests at nuclear WMD sites which he calls ‘evil.’ Since Kabat’s latest release from jail in 2002, he has been ministering to the Catholic Worker Community of St. Louis.”

This recent prophetic act was not described in this book, but it does typify what the book is about. Carl Kabat is but one of the Catholic priests and others who, through acts of protest, civil disobedience and consequent prison sentences, have given witness that the threat to use nuclear weapons is evil, and that this threat, in turn, is used to support U.S. policies which enrich us at the expense of developing countries, that are themselves controlled by economic—and when necessary—military might.

If you want to learn more about the history of radical peacemaking, you should read *Prophets Without Honor*. Nebraskans for Peace Omaha Coordinator, Cary Vigneri, said of the book:

“I found it inspiring. It brought me back to feelings I experienced as a young and idealistic person, who was convinced that enough light shed on the truth would right the world’s wrongs... I recommend reading and keeping this book if one is serious about finding solutions to the huge moral and spiritual imbalances that block the path of human progress. It is so rich in detail and in the basics of liberation theology it is most useful.”

For Nebraskans and Midwesterners, many of the names of the protesters are familiar: Frank Cordaro, Daryl Rupiper, his aunt Sr. Joyce Horbach, Marylyn Felion and Bill Sulzman (brother of NFP Vice President Jeanette Sulzman). It features national figures Dan and Phil Berrigan, Liz McAlister, Fr. Roy Bourgeois and Iowan Mike Palecek himself. Vietnam, the Iranian hostage crisis, Iran-Contra, the School of the Americas and the massacre of priests, nuns and peasants by the school’s graduates are also described and analyzed in the context of an immoral U.S. foreign policy, guided by capitalist greed and enforced by violence, deceit and war. If the book has shortcomings, it would be its failure to document the many rich quotations from participants and written references. And for those of us who are long-time peace activists, it does not give insight into what will cause U.S. foreign policy to change. The subtitle of the book “Requiem for Moral Patriotism” echoes some lack of hope. The publicity-seeking behavior and moral defiance carried out by the courageous men and women have not been enough to stop the violence. Little has changed. We are still seeking an effective means to sensitize the American conscience, especially the young.

In the “Afterword: Is there a way out?,” the authors make the case that the prophets in fact warned our government that 9/11 would eventually come if U.S. foreign policy did not change. In addition to the warnings from the prophets themselves, they quote the words of an Afghan mullah and Taliban leader: “You should know that whatever incidents and sorrow you suffer... are a result of the erroneous policies of your government.”

The book concludes with the statement, “If [the Prophets Without Honor’s] vision had been honored instead of jailed, the World Trade Center Towers would still be standing.” All of which makes one wonder when will we ever learn?

This fall Mike Palecek’s newest book will be released by New Leaf Books of Chicago. “The Last Liberal Outlaw” tells the story of a small town [Iowa] newspaper editor fighting the proposed construction of a corporate federal prison near town. Palecek lives in northwest Iowa with his wife Ruth and two kids. Mike is a former federal prisoner for peace, newspaper reporter, and was the Iowa Democratic Party’s nominee for the U.S. House in the Fifth District, 2000 election. For more information visit www.iowapeace.com
by Becca Kaiser
NFP Outreach Coordinator

The last time Howard Zinn came to Lincoln, Nebraska, was as a member of the U.S. Air Force just prior to World War II. When Zinn spoke to a crowd of 300 Nebraska Wesleyan University students and Lincoln community members March 22, he drew on the lessons he’s learned about war in a talk entitled, “The Uses of History.”

Given the current war with Iraq, Zinn’s words could not have been more poignant and direct. In a brief overview of past U.S. military endeavors, Zinn noted that history has shown time and time again the uncertainty of war’s outcome. “War is certain horrible means for uncertain ends,” he said. We emphasize the “but” in the sentence “War is hell, BUT…” War, he stated though, is horrible, extreme and always hell precisely because we can never predict how the sentence will end.

So what are the lessons of war for the United States? Even World War II, which had admirable and noble goals, was hell. Zinn remembers returning from serving in WWII and gathering his memorabilia in a folder and almost subconsciously scrawling the words “Never Again” on the outside. “War solves nothing fundamental,” he says. It’s like crack—a quick fix, a high—but six months later, you look back on the world and see that nothing is really different. The same problems have resurfaced. The “War to End All Wars,” World War I, left 50 million dead, and did not rid the world of fascism; just as the “War on Terrorism” will fail in its mission as well.

Zinn compared the analogy of war being like wine, some years good, others bad, with perhaps the more accurate truth from a student’s paper: “War is like cyanide; once drop and you’re dead.”

The language of our culture is key to making the case for war and for keeping citizens fooled, Zinn argues. We use language to create the myth that we’re all “in this together.” Examples include phrases such as “the national interest,” “national defense,” or “national security.” Zinn asks, “Who’s interest is the ‘national’s’? Certainly not mine, and not the GI that is serving in Iraq.” Language is used to create the “us versus them” mentality, convincing most that the “War on Terrorism” is for all of our sakes—but who said that the government is “America”? The idea that being against a U.S. government decision or action is paramount to being against “America” is unfounded.

A historical example of this misuse of language is found on the Nixon tapes. When Nixon asked one of his advisors, “How are we going to explain this?” the quick reply was, “National security.” Zinn adamantly argues that the U.S. government is not America, but rather that everyday active citizens are America’s core. If the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to alter or abolish the government, then certainly we have the right to openly criticize it. In the U.S., Zinn exclaims, you question your government; this is not a totalitarian government.

The “us versus them” mentality, he stated, is pushed in all rhetoric and language to make the case for war. Zinn recalls the frequency of parallels being made with the dictator Hitler. “We invoke Hitler because people still have a good feeling about World War II,” he says. With the current war with Iraq, we compare Sadaam to Hitler, making it easier to sell the immediate need to rid the world of these types of tyrants. However, the military actions the U.S. takes on the people of Iraq aren’t on the tyrant, but on the people themselves. Zinn questions the ability of precision bombing and smart bombs to accurately define “military targets.” Again, the history of U.S. foreign policy is ripe with examples of “military targets” turning out to be highly populated by civilians.

With all his critiques of United States history, Zinn also comes down hard on the citizens for our lack of being informed and our failure to hold the government responsible. He offers examples of Bush and other administration officials misrepresenting the U.S. role in their accounts of our history—painting pictures of helpfulness and relief, rather than the terror we often caused. But the truly sad part of this, he said, is that the Administration knows that the American people don’t know the facts of their own history, so any misrepresentation simply doesn’t matter. The story about “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq provided a bitter case in point. The short memories of U.S. foreign policy ventures are fertile soil for the government to mislead the populace because we won’t remember later on. He argues passionately, “If you know your history, you won’t believe the rhetoric of war.” To punctuate this point, he asks who is the more eminent threat to world security—Iraq, with its missing weapons of mass destruction? Or the United States who we know has a stockpile of over 10,000 nuclear weapons?

When trying to answer the difficult question of what to do now with the war with Iraq, Zinn has a simple answer. “How do you support the troops?” he asks. “You get them out of there!” From this point on he argues that we have a certain mess if we remain in Iraq, but we have probability or possibility of a mess if we leave. Zinn continues by asking rhetorical questions: “What’s keeping the U.S. there now? Are we simply too proud to leave? Do we think we’ll look cowardly? Are we trying to salvage a macho image?”

Zinn says the U.S. could minimize the mess if we get other countries involved in the situation, other countries that were opposed to the war from the beginning. The United State can not fix this mess because we are tainted from our involvement up to this point.

He offers this definition of fanaticism to illustrate his point: “When you find that you’re going in the wrong direction and you run faster.” He sharply criticizes Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry’s recommendation of adding more troops to Iraq, asking him to remember what he learned in Vietnam: the more people we added, the more bodies came home. The Hippocratic Oath taken by doctors says that if you don’t know the solution or remedy of a problem, the first thing to remember is to do no harm. “In Iraq,” Zinn says, “we have to stop doing harm.

Zinn is counting on the American people to stop the dangerous direction our government is headed in. He speaks of a government that is not #1 as a military super-power and #1 in nuclear weapons, but rather a country that helps the world. A country that is #1 in foreign aid and relief, that helps provide medical care and higher education to citizens of the world. “Our wars are not about making us more secure,” Zinn says. We need to do something intelligent about terrorism; we need to ask the question why millions of people across the world hate us. But more than anything, we need to advocate for citizen involvement and real political change. Again, the history of the United States paints a clear picture of when real, systemic change takes place—the slave revolts, the Civil Rights movement, the women’s rights movement, etc. “When millions of people do small parts,” he said in a phrase of the famous Margaret Mead quotation, “things change.”
Nebraska’s Nuclear Reactors

Radioactive ‘Bull’s Eyes’ for Terrorists?

Indications abound that reactors are targets for potentially catastrophic terrorist attacks. In fact, al-Qaida originally planned to attack nuclear facilities.

Around the beginning of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March, 2003, U.S. intelligence agencies warned that the largest nuclear power plant in the U.S.—the three-reactor Palo Verde complex 50 miles west of Phoenix, Arizona—might be targeted for attack. National Guard troops were deployed and a Black Hawk helicopter patrolled overhead, in addition to enhanced on-site fortifications. (“The Nuclear Industry’s Dirty Bombs,” Mother Jones, March 24, 2003)

The Homeland Security Department warned al-Qaida might crash foreign cargo jets, which undergo less security than passenger planes, into a U.S. nuclear facility (“U.S. Warns of al-Qaida Cargo Plane Plot,” Associated Press, Nov. 8, 2003). North Carolina Waste Reduction Network warned that any one of 70 small private planes identified by the U.S. General Accounting Office as stolen over the previous five-year period could be loaded with high-explosives and directed as a “poor man’s cruise missile” against a nuclear reactor (NC WARN News Release, Nov. 13, 2003, www.ncwarn.org).

Shortly after Sept. 11, both the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the U.S. NRC admitted that reactors were not designed to withstand a kamikaze jumbo jetliner crash. (NRC News Release No. 01-112, 9/21/01, “World’s nuclear facilities vulnerable, warns UN agency,” New Scientist, November 1, 2001) IAEA’s director general, Mohamed El Baradei, stated, “There is no sanctuary any more, no safety zone.” Terrorist attacks need not breach the relatively robust (but not invulnerable) concrete and steel reactor containment dome to cause catastrophic radiation releases. Explosions or fires that destroy the control room or cut off electricity for safety systems could lead to a meltdown.

High-level radioactive wastes stored on-site are particularly vulnerable, for storage pools are often located outside reactor containment. Boiling water reactors such as the one at the Cooper Station plant are especially vulnerable, as the storage pools are elevated several stories in the air and are located on the outside wall of the facility. Loss of cooling water in storage pools could lead to melting or even combustion of the highly radioactive fuel. The nuclear fuel rods are encased in zirconium (an ingredient in cluster bombs and old-fashioned flash bulbs), which can combust on contact with air. The ensuing fire would be very difficult to extinguish and could deliver fatal doses of radioactivity for a couple hundred miles, such as occurred with the 1986 Chernobyl reactor explosion and fire, which spread radioactive contamination around the world, although most fell within a couple hundred miles or so (“Nuke Waste May Be Inviting Target,” Associated Press, Aug. 19, 2003). However, Chernobyl’s fallout continues, nearly 20 years later, to contaminate the Dnieper River, used by tens of millions downstream. An accident or terrorist attack at either of Nebraska’s reactors could similarly contaminate the Missouri River, impacting tens of millions living downstream from the reactors.

In 1995, Cooper had 175 tons of high-level radioactive waste stored on-site, and Ft. Calhoun had 222 tons. By 2011, Cooper will have 452 tons, and Ft. Calhoun 379 tons. If NRC allows the reactors to operate beyond their original 40-year licenses, Cooper could generate more than 762 tons of high-level waste, and Ft. Calhoun more than 534 tons. (U.S. Department of Energy, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Yucca Mountain Repository, February 2002, Tables A-7 and A-8).

Incredibly, the NRC has ruled that reactor operation and waste storage licensing decisions need not address terrorist attacks as they are “remote and speculative events.” But grassroots citizen groups are challenging that in agency hearings, court rooms, and the streets (as in Mothers for Peace v. NRC, “Nation watching Diablo lawsuit: Local activists want more say in nuclear plant safety, take case to federal court,” San Luis Obispo Tribune, April 18, 2004). To find out more or sign your group up with the movement demanding that security be upgraded at Nebraska’s reactors, contact NIRS Reactor Watchdog Project director Paul Gunter at 202-328-0002 ext. 18 or pgunter@nirs.org.

The Cooper Station ‘Boiling Water’ Reactor

Most of the discussion regarding the security of nuclear plants has focused on the reactor containment structures. But the adjacent “spent fuel pools” actually contain more highly radioactive fuel than the reactor cores and are much more vulnerable, as they are located outside the more structurally sound containment building. Boiling water reactors like the Cooper Station plant at Brownville (pictured above) are particularly at risk, as the storage pools are elevated several stories in the air and are located on the outside wall of the facility. Loss of cooling water in storage pools could lead to melting or even combustion of the highly radioactive fuel. The nuclear fuel rods are encased in zirconium which can combat on contact with air. The ensuing fire would be very difficult to extinguish and could deliver fatal doses of radioactivity for a couple hundred miles, such as occurred with the 1986 Chernobyl reactor explosion and fire.
In a victory of sorts, the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission voted this spring to revoke the license of one of the four off-sale liquor dealers in Whiteclay. Arrowhead Inn owner Donald Schwarting, whose outlet was generally regarded as the most notorious in Whiteclay, lost his license after being convicted of a felony offense—though not, it turns out, for anything relating to the illegal alcohol sales in Whiteclay. Schwarting was convicted of selling used cars without a license, and felons—whatever the crime—are statutorily prohibited from holding a liquor license. The commission, to its credit, did show some leadership by subsequently voting to deny an application by Schwarting’s son, Jason, to take over his father’s license.

Even this ‘victory’ though is likely to be short-lived. Jason Schwarting has already filed suit in Lancaster County District Court to appeal the commission’s decision, and he may well win. Regardless how Schwarting’s lawsuit turns out, however, there’s nothing to prevent anyone else (so long as they don’t have a felony conviction on their record) from immediately submitting a new application for a license in Whiteclay. And as long as the Legislature refuses to amend state law and ban the sale of alcohol near dry Indian Reservations, the commission will probably give it to them.

It’s now been five years since the murdered bodies of Wilson Black Elk, Jr. and Ronald Hard Heart were found in Whiteclay. It’s been five years since the State of Nebraska arrested ten Indian men for crossing the police line into Whiteclay from Pine Ridge during the protests that summer. And after five years, (save for the short-lived victory described above) nothing has changed. No legislation has been passed. No permanent law enforcement has been provided. And even the prospects for a “cross-deputization agreement” between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the State of Nebraska are now dead in the water.

In an April announcement that appeared to take the Johanns Administration completely by surprise, tribal officials announced that law enforcement from the second-poorest county in America was not going to do for free what the Nebraska State Patrol calculated would cost $250,000 a year and could not afford. (Two hundred fifty thousand dollars, ironically, matches the sum the State of Nebraska annually collects in sales and liquor taxes from the sale of alcohol in Whiteclay). Unless Nebraska is prepared to underwrite the cost of tribal law enforcement in Whiteclay, Oglala Sioux tribal officials stated, the deal’s off. No money. No deal.

With nothing happening inside the halls of state government, where else can we go then but back to the streets? So, on Saturday July 3, we’ll be back in Whiteclay to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the arrests of the ten men, the still-unsolved murders of the two men that spawned the protests leading to the arrests, and the five-year-long failure of the State of Nebraska to resolve this problem in any meaningful way.

As NFP State Board member Byron Peterson documented in his testimony at the April 22 Liquor Control Commission meeting (which is reprinted here), the situation in Whiteclay is as bad as ever. In just an hour and a half the afternoon of April 1, Peterson was able to snap photos of three separate instances of illegal drinking on the premises at the Jumping Eagle, one of the three remaining off-sale establishments in Whiteclay. Just four citations for this offense, over a four-year period, are grounds for automatic license cancellation. But as Peterson noted in his remarks to the commission, he saw no law enforcement in Whiteclay during the entire time he was there.

Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Byron Peterson. I’m a retired Social Worker and a member of the State Board of Nebraskans for Peace.

This afternoon, you will be considering an application from Jason Schwarting to take over the recently revoked license held by his father for the Arrowhead Inn in Whiteclay.

Nebraskans for Peace urges you to reject this application. As an employee at his father’s off-sale outlet, Jason Schwarting has already brazenly demonstrated his disregard for Nebraska liquor law by selling alcohol on credit. While the sale of alcohol to an intoxicated person who didn’t appear drunk, or to a minor who appeared to be of legal age could be an honest mistake, a ‘good faith’ error in judgment, selling alcohol on credit is flat-out illegal. There’s no guesswork involved. And you are knowingly and deliberately violating the law.

Denying this license request should be automatic. But there is larger issue here that we would like you to consider. For a number of years now, in response to court rulings that have eroded your discretionary powers, the Liquor Control Commission has basically adopted the practice of granting liquor licenses to any and all, unless the applicant is a convicted felon. (Or the applicant, like Jason Schwarting, has already demonstrated blatant disregard.)

One of the three incidences of illegal drinking on the premises of an off-sale liquor establishment captured by Byron Peterson at the Jumping Eagle on the afternoon of April 1 in the space of an hour and a half. Peterson saw no law enforcement in Whiteclay during the entire time that he was there.

Even if the Commission denies Jason Schwarting’s request, however, there is nothing to prevent you from granting a replacement license for the Arrowhead Inn to someone else with a clean record...

And this unincorporated village of 14 people, just 200 feet from the dry Pine Ridge Reservation, that has no legal place for its Indian clientele to legally drink what is sold there—and no local law enforcement to ensure that state law is enforced—will once again have FOUR off-sale liquor licenses.

This is wrong. This is poor public policy. And I know you don’t like it any better than we do.

It’s a recipe for lawlessness. In fact, I have here today three photos, which I took the first of this month in Whiteclay, clearly showing alcohol being consumed on the legal premises of the Jumping Eagle—an unequivocal violation of an off-sale dealer’s license. Had there been law enforce-
by Mark Vasina, Treasurer
Stop Big Business Subsidies—Repeal LB 775

Versions of this article were originally presented as speeches to the Lincoln Rotary Club #14 March 9 and the Lincoln League of Women Voters March 19, 2004.

Imagine you and your spouse are raising a family. You are making house payments, getting by while putting aside something each month into your children’s college fund.

Although both you and your spouse hold jobs, you share a single automobile, a 2001 Ford Taurus. You get by with one car because you both work close to home and the demands of your jobs have not created as-yet-insurmountable problems with transportation for your family.

But your spouse has decided to advance his career and feels constrained by the car-sharing arrangement. Jobs located further from home and requiring working hours outside a predictable routine seem out of bounds.

You talk it over and agree that your spouse’s career options are improved if your family has more transportation flexibility. You decide to purchase a second family vehicle.

The next day a new Hummer pulls into your driveway. You stare in disbelief as you learn that you and your spouse are this Hummer’s new owners.

Although both you and your spouse are this Hummer’s new owners.

You protest about the Hummer’s lousy mileage and the budget-challenging size of the monthly car payments. “We can’t afford this!” you say. “You have to take it back!”

Your spouse responds with indignation. “Look here,” he says. “We agreed we need two cars now. And we agreed I should buy another one. We need this car so that I can get a better job.”

You tell him that of course you agreed to a second car. “But,” you insist, “we can’t afford this car!” He shouts back, “You don’t want me to have the car I need to advance my career? I need this car! We need this car!”

“Okay,” you say again, lowering your voice. “We need a second car. But not this car. We can’t afford it. We will have to trim back our lifestyle to pay for it, and stop setting aside money for our children’s higher education. The sensible thing to do is to take it back and purchase a car we can afford.”

Your spouse continues to argue that you need the Hummer so that he can advance his career and increase your family income. If he takes back the Hummer, you will be sharing one car again, and he will never get a better job. He even threatens to leave you and the children if you don’t let him keep the Hummer and help pay for it.

You are unable to make any headway with your point of view that a second car is a good idea—but not this one.

What would you do in this situation? You might give in if you felt sufficiently intimidated. You might consider divorce if you concluded that your well-being or that of your children were at serious risk.

Most of you would likely find yourselves somewhere in between—unwilling to ignore either the importance of your relationship with your spouse or the problems posed by his stubborn behavior. Recognizing the need for a second car, you would search for a way to replace the Hummer with an affordable vehicle and get your family’s finances back on track.

The argument advanced by your spouse (“Keep the Hummer or face the undesirable consequences of owning only one car”) is known as the fallacy of false dichotomy, or the missing middle.

The false dichotomy is a characterization of a practical, moral or political problem in such a way that the solution is illogically and unnecessarily confined to only two choices—one of which is unquestionably undesirable (“one car is not enough”). The person presenting the false dichotomy argument attempts to restrict the choices so that the only alternative presented (“buy the Hummer”) must be chosen.

In a policy debate, the false dichotomy is sometimes employed to frame the solution in terms that obscure a careful analysis of the issue. Those who advance the fallacy hope the confusion it causes will result in the policy choice they advocate.

LB 775—the Employment and Investment Growth Act, passed in 1987 by a picky Nebraska legislature when ConAgra threatened to move its Omaha headquarters out of state—is the Hummer in this story.

LB 775 supporters—the owners and senior management of businesses receiving LB 775 tax breaks, and their paid lobbyists—are promoting the fallacy of false dichotomy in their interpretation of the role of LB 775 in Nebraska’s economic development.

“Nebraskans must either continue to fund LB 775 with tax dollars,” the argument goes, “or statewide economic disaster will ensue as businesses chase public subsidies in other states. No other options exist.”

This position is nonsense, of course, for other options clearly do exist. LB 775 can be modified or scaled back. It can be replaced with another business tax incentive program—or a number of them. Funding for LB 775 can be redirected to other types of development programs.

The real policy issue involving LB 775 is how to create and fund an effective and affordable economic development program. If LB 775 truly is unnecessarily expensive, yielding statewide economic benefits of questionable value, why not replace it?

This is the goal of the coalition of organizations seeking to place an initiative on the November ballot to stop the awarding of new LB 775 contracts.

These organizations have been clear from the outset that they support the public funding of development programs—including business tax incentive programs—which can be reasonably expected to create quality jobs and promote economic growth in a fiscally responsible manner. Last December the initiative committee published a detailed plan for reforming—not repealing—LB 775, and distributed it to state senators.

The ballot initiative approach was chosen in the face of the legislature’s steadfast refusal to repair LB 775. Over sixteen years, the legislature has turned down thirteen attempts to require program evaluation, ten proposals to increase disclosure of key information, and dozens of other proposals to limit LB 775’s cost or scope.

Nebraska’s single ballot question rule precludes ballot language of sufficient complexity to give LB 775 an appropriate makeover. Initiative coalition members believe that a successful repeal initiative will force the legislature to devise a superior program to replace it at the next legislative session.

Any publicly funded program must justify its cost. As business owners do not accept the notion that they should pay any wage—no matter how high—to fill the jobs created by their enterprises, taxpayers should not be forced to fund public programs at literally any cost—no matter how high—to provide for job creation. The cost of buying jobs with public funds must be affordable, and should not exceed the public benefits.

LB 775 fails that simple test.

Evidence of any significant positive contribution by LB 775 to Nebraska’s economy is lacking. In 1997, Creighton University economist Ernie Goss told the Omaha
argued for at least a decade that the race needed for the next generation of jobs.

On the other hand, reliable evidence indicates that LB 775 has resulted in expensive tax burden and spending shifts within the state.

LB 775 tax breaks currently divert $77 million on average from our state treasury each year, after accounting for new tax revenue generated by LB 775 projects. This was reported in a 2001 study by the Legislative Fiscal Office, the budget research agency of the Nebraska legislature.

Additional sales tax and property tax revenues are lost to many municipalities and school districts due to LB 775.

To pay for LB 775, elected officials raise taxes on other taxpayers—working people, farmers and small business owners. With our state budget in crisis, they also cut spending on other public programs, including essential funding for K-12 and higher education.

A comparative study was prepared for Sen. Chris Beutler by Nebraska’s Legislative Research Division and presented to the Revenue Committee last session. The study shows a significant disproportion between LB 775 as a percentage of state personal income (a measure of a state’s total tax base) and similar business incentive programs in other states.

Nebraska pays many times more on this basis than any other state, including its neighbors.

Sen. Beutler stated, “The data indicates that we should seriously rethink our business incentive program to make it more targeted and less burdensome on the taxpayer. … We cannot continue to under fund higher education in order to over fund tax incentive programs. Business is better off in the long term with a solid research university and less lavish tax incentives.”

Recapturing only three years of tax revenue losses due to LB 775 would have paid for all cuts to education in the state budget since 2001.

The organizations that have joined together in the initiative repeal campaign believe we must put our state spending priorities in order. It is a mistake to sacrifice public education for tax incentives, because state and local tax incentives alone do not create jobs in the American economy.

Businesses may allocate jobs among states and communities in part due to tax incentives, but no new U.S. jobs are created as a result.

Education, on the other hand, is the key to job creation. As Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Omaha business leaders in February, education is essential to provide Americans with the skills needed for the next generation of jobs.

Federal Reserve Bank economists have argued for at least a decade that the race among states to influence business site decisions with tax incentives is harmful to the participating states—which divert tax revenues from essential public services to subsidize local private sector expansion.

And it is harmful to the U.S. economy as a whole—as states and municipalities nationwide suffer tax incentive-induced revenue losses while unsubsidized businesses are forced to compete with higher expenses.

The fairy tale of the Union Pacific tax breaks-for-jobs swap perfectly illustrates the fiction of “new jobs” coupled with real economic damage.

In January, U.P. management announced they were shifting 1,038 jobs from St. Louis to the railroad’s new Omaha headquarters, built with the assistance of tax breaks. LB 775 supporters hailed the announcement as a victory for Nebraska and proof of the effectiveness of Nebraska’s tax incentive programs.

But what is really going on here? For every job transferred to Omaha, an equivalent job is lost in St. Louis. For every dollar spent in the Omaha metro area by the transferred U.P. workers, the St. Louis economy takes a hit by an equivalent amount. No new railroad jobs are created. No new jobs are created in the Great Plains. No new jobs are created in the United States.

In exchange for shifting the jobs to Omaha, U.P. will receive an estimated $75 million in tax breaks from the people of Nebraska, not counting additional local incentives paid by Omaha taxpayers. The Legislature and local taxpayers must make to pay for LB 775 can be escalating wildly.

Sadly, we the people have allowed the well-funded pro-LB 775 lobby to define the terms of the public debate over the success and failure of LB 775. LB 775 supporters have deployed the fallacy of false dichotomy (“LB 775 or economic death”) and have been allowed to get away without providing any sound statistics whatsoever to back up their assertions that LB 775 is effective and affordable.

In March the Department of Revenue issued its latest report on LB 775, for the year ended December 31, 2003. The report shows that LB 775 gave businesses more than $130 million in tax breaks last year, but those businesses added only 262 new jobs.

Ignoring the question of whether most of those jobs would have been added anyway, this amounts to taxpayers doling out nearly half a million dollars last year for each new LB 775 job. The cost of LB 775 appears to be escalating wildly.

This isn’t exactly what is going on here. The reality is both better and worse.

If we average the cumulative amount of LB 775 tax breaks earned since the program’s inception over the total number of true new LB 775 jobs (as estimated by the Department of Revenue), the average taxpayer cost per job is $115,000, up from $108,000 a year earlier.

The cost of LB 775 is indeed increasing, although at a slower pace than indicated by the 2003 numbers alone. That’s the good news.

For the bad news we need only look at the reasons why the average taxpayer cost per true new LB 775 job is going up. There are two.

First, LB 775 tax breaks given out last year are subsidies for jobs added not only during 2003, but in previous years also. LB 775 jobs earn tax credits for their employers for up to six years after LB 775 projects qualify for tax breaks. LB 775 beneficiaries can also cash in earned tax credits which have been carried over unused from previous years.

Unused tax credits already earned total $838 million at year-end 2003. Add estimated tax breaks still to be earned by existing LB 775 projects, and Nebraska taxpayers’ future obligations to current LB 775 beneficiaries is $1.5 billion. If we add the $1.5 billion in tax breaks already paid out since 1987, the total bill for LB 775—if no new projects are added—is over $3 billion.

The second reason for the increase in the average taxpayer cost per job is the program’s ineffectiveness, particularly in the face of the recent economic downturn.

As Nebraska participated in the economic expansion of the 1990s, LB 775 projects had the appearance, at least, of creating jobs. Now that Nebraska’s job growth has faltered, LB 775 is clearly failing to produce the intended results.

This, of course, suggests that the economic boom of the 1990s—not LB 775—was the real impetus for the 240,000 jobs added to the Nebraska economy since 1987. Other statistical evidence indicates that this is so.

The chart shows the number of new conclusions on page 11

### Measuring Business Tax Incentive Credits Used in Relation with the “Whole Tax Base” (Personal Income)

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Stephen Moore, Analyst, LRD, Nebraska Legislature
THE PEACE & JUSTICE EXPO

by Steve Thyberg, EXPO Coordinator

There is so much peace and justice work happening in the greater Omaha area by so many good people! Our dream for the Omaha Peace & Justice EXPO was to bring together all of these wonderful efforts and organizations, celebrate them and show them off. We wanted to give people a real opportunity to see what is right here in the Omaha area and to learn how they can get involved. It would be a time to bring people together, feel connected, feel the enthusiasm and empower each other to create a more peaceful and just world. And a time to just feel at home in the midst of this awesome community!

What came together was an unprecedented gathering of local organizations dedicated to peace and justice locally and globally. On May 2, 2004 from 1:00-6:00 p.m. at the UNO Milo Bail Student Center, that is exactly what happened and more. Sixty eight organizations active in peace and justice in the Omaha area shared their goals and showcased the projects of their organizations. EXPO attendees got acquainted with these groups and made connections as well as seeing up for volunteer opportunities. They were able to engage in lively talks formally, through workshops, and informally, while visiting the booths, as well as listening to wonderful speakers share the ways nonviolence has been and can be a force for change in the community.

This first Omaha Peace & Justice EXPO featured the work of area organizations from the Prairie Peace Park and Amnesty International to the United Nations Association and the Social Ministry Commission of the Archdiocese. Political parties and churches with peace and justice committees also participated. There were 33 informative workshops to learn about everything from the situation in the Middle East, “Faithful Citizenship”, “Grassroots & Policy Advocacy” to “Nonviolence Training” and “Instant Runoff Voting.”

There are many who do this work from a religious conviction, so we started the day with an Interfaith Prayer Service. The River City Mixed Chorus shared several songs, including We Shall Overcome. This was followed by prayers from a Native American Church prayer leader and a representative of the Baha’i Faith, and humorous and moving messages from a United Methodist minister and a Catholic priest. Together we joined in one of the Dances of Universal Peace, Mir, and we sang My Sweet Lord.

The Main Stage featured community leaders such as Tim Butz of ACLU Nebraska speaking about USA Patriot Act, Musa al-Hindi of Al-Awda and Nebraskans for Justice in Palestine described how the war on Iraq has prompted much action, and Frank Cordaro, Des Moines Catholic Worker Community, shared about the direct action efforts at Offutt AFB. The promise of the proposed Department of Peace was outlined by Steve Thyberg and NFP’s own Tim Rinne shared the challenges of LB 775—Nebraska’s Corporate Welfare? These engaging and enlightening speakers were joined by the perspective, wit and passion of Omaha SLAM poets and musicians Michael Murphy & Nils Anders Erickson. For a directory of participating organizations and a complete list of workshops and speakers, just e-mail Steve Thyberg at incompassion@yahoo.com

The EXPO was a real expression of community supported from many directions. Five UNO organizations sponsored the EXPO, welcoming the event to their campus, and provided the five ecores for our Main Stage. The brand new website progressivomega.com put all of our info on their website to get the information online. Six of our participating organizations shared copying costs for the entire program, which included listings of speakers, workshops and the directory of the 68 participating organizations. What a gift! Creighton’s Spirit of Peace Community created our banner, which we stretched across Dodge Street that last week before Expo day. All of the participating organizations helped get the word out by distributing Expo flyers, emails, putting us on there websites and in articles in their groups’ newsletters. McFosters and The Grainery both put up event table tents. We had a lot of volunteers involved, some starting as early as December. So many volunteers calling organizations, distributing flyers, holding banners and doing all those things that make an event flow smoothly. Thanks a ton volunteers!

To feel that we are in this together and to feel the support of community at the end of the day people came together in a Community Ceremony. Each organization was asked to contribute to the series of thoughts that were shared—words of gratitude for the coming together and for the progress that we have made in peace and justice; words of grieving for the pain and for the losses that humanity has brought upon itself; and words of hope for the future that each person was asked to write on colored strips of paper. These strips were then linked together into a beautiful chain, just as we link our hopes together into an effort that will change the world.

Finally we shared pledges of what each of us would do to make a more peaceful and just world. All this was celebrated in song as we raised our voices in We Shall Overcome, Imagine, Give Peace a Chance and We Are Family. Participants described the ceremony as moving and fitting conclusion to an important afternoon.

Where do we go from here? As you all know, there is a lot of work to do, but this isn’t a problem. What we are involved in is the recreating of our culture. The selfish and the frightened are only in the drivers seat until the people stand up and become the leaders. When enough of us wake up and realize what we need to do, it will be a brand new day! Let’s all come together and nurture participatory democracy through community dialogue and networking. Build on the connections made at the 2004 EXPO and join us next year for an even more amazing celebration of community and education.

See you next spring!

EXPO Participating Organizations 2004:
ACLU Nebraska
Act to Stop War Coalition
Advocates For Justice, Inc.
Al-Awda - the Palestine Right to Return Coalition
American Association of University Women
Amnesty International - Creighton University
Amnesty International – UNO
Anti-Defamation League
Central Nebraska Peace Workers
Chicano Awareness Center
Citizens for Equal Protection
City Sprouts
The Phil Berrigan Catholic Worker House - Frank Cordaro
Concord Center
Creighton Center for Service and Justice
Creighton Prep High School – Awareness Workshop & Operation Others
Dana College Social Work Department
Dignity Cooperative
Earth Day Omaha
Family Federation for World Peace and Unification
Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance – UNO
Food Not Bombs
Free the Innocent Inc
Gather the Women
The GROVE – UNO (Religion/Diversity Club)
Humanity International for Peace & Prosperity, Inc.
Immigrant Rights Network of Iowa and Nebraska
Interfaith Immigration Services of Nebraska
Larrick for Congress
Latina Resource Center
Libertarian Party of Nebraska
Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition (MOTAC)
National Canadian for Community and Justice
National Association of Social Workers - NE Chapter
Nebraskan Coalition for Peace
Nebraska Criminal Justice Review
Nebraska Green Party
Nebraska International-language Association
Nebraskans for Justice in Palestine
Nebraska Young Democrats
Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty
Nebraskans For Peace
Nebraskans For Peace - UNO
New Covenant Justice and Peace Center
Northside Family Christian Center - Menonite
Omaha Bahai Faith
Omaha Friends Meeting – Quakers
Omaha Family & Friends of Inmates
Peacemakers Potluck and Vigil
Peaces of Omaha
Prairie Breakers
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Prairie Peace Park
P.U.L.S.E. Inc.
Rainbow Outreach GLBT Resource Center
R.E.A.S.O.N. Rationalists, Empiricists, And Skeptics Of Nebraska
Second Unitarian Church
SGI-USA Omaha (Buddhism)
SDAwatch - Creighton
Social Ministry Com. of the Archdiocese of Omaha
Socialist Workers’ Party
State of Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission
Theatre of the Oppressed – UNO
United Methodist for Mission & Justice, Inc.
United Nations Association of the USA – Lincoln Ch.
UNO School of Social Work
William Brennan Institute For Labor Studies – UNO
proliferation of alcohol sales in Whiteclay is not only calling into question the adequacy of law enforcement in the area but also raising concerns about the safety and well-being of the community. Given the history of alcohol-related issues in Whiteclay, it is crucial to address these problems comprehensively.

The Department of Revenue reports that the sale of alcohol within five miles of a dry Indian Reservation—has ever even made it out of committee. The Legislature has ignored your advice and, we have discovered, even failed to provide you a statutory definition of “adequate” law enforcement. Adequacy of law enforcement is one of the criteria for whether to grant a license. While you may not be able to legally define what “adequate” law enforcement is, the fact that you are on record in support of law enforcement “during all the hours that alcohol is sold” there dating back to January 2001. And each of the last two legislative sessions, you have publicly requested that the Legislature act on your requests.

The Legislature, I am sorry to report, however, has refused to act on your requests. In fact, not one legislative measure relating to Whiteclay—either to provide funding for law enforcement there or to prohibit the sale of alcohol within five miles of a dry Indian Reservation—has ever even made it out of committee.

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And to grant a replacement license in Whiteclay for the Arrowhead Inn, under these circumstances, is not only promoting lawlessness. It is flirting with tragedy. Nothing good can come of the sale of over 11,000 cans of beer a day to a Pine Ridge clientele that has no legal place to drink it in an unincorporated village with no local law enforcement. It was an utter fluke that Donald Schwarting got convicted of a felony and lost his license. With all the alcohol violations that daily go on in Whiteclay, who’d have ever guessed that selling used cars without a license would be what got him banned from the liquor business.

But however it came about, it’s an opportunity to stop the abuses in Whiteclay once and for all. Nebraskans for Peace asks that you deny not only Jason Schwarting’s application, but the applications of anyone else who applies to sell alcohol in Whiteclay.

The Legislature has shirked its responsibility. Use this situation as opportunity to force the Legislature to both define “adequate” law enforcement and to ensure that Nebraska’s liquor laws are not routinely ignored and that a double-standard is not tolerated when the State of Nebraska deals with Indians. Let it come to lawsuit if that’s what needed to get the Legislature to act.

But whatever you do, don’t exacerbate the problem in Whiteclay by issuing yet another license there.

The evidence suggests that LB 775 tax breaks simply reward business-as-usual by the corporations with the largest investment projects in the state. This is why our estimates show that only 23 companies receive 50 percent of total LB 775 tax benefits. Last year, UNL economists Richard Perrin and F. Gregory Hayden examined job growth in Nebraska since 1987 and found little to distinguish Nebraska’s performance from that of its neighboring states. They concluded that LB 775 contributed little to Nebraska’s job growth experience.

Dr. Perrin wrote in the February 18, 2004 issue of Cornhusker Economics that LB 775 “is far too expensive per job, and far too significant in the state budget, to be a reasonable economic development tool.”

LB 775 in its current incarnation is simply too expensive and too ineffective.

Can we afford to replace LB 775? More and more Nebraskans are coming to realize that we can’t afford not to.

Whiteclay Five Years On

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Whiteclay Five Years On conclusion

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Can we afford to replace LB 775? More and more Nebraskans are coming to realize that we can’t afford not to.
I am not the first to say that the United States Constitution is in grave danger today, due to the tireless activity of Vice President Dick Cheney. Not since Nixon, whom Cheney served beginning in 1969, has an administration so arrogantly stiffed Congress—elected by the people to oversee the executive branch—nor cloaked itself in so much secrecy.

John Dean, who also served Nixon as White House counsel, traces the shaping of Cheney’s political agenda in an essay for the History News Network. Cheney saw firsthand what Nixon called his “epic battle” for executive power: impounding funds Congress passed for programs he didn’t like, expanding the war in Vietnam when Congress was in recess despite the pressure by the public and Congress to scale back or end that war, and defying Congressional demands for information.

After Watergate and Nixon’s resignation, Dean continues, Congress passed important legislation which prevents a president from refusing to spend money appropriated by Congress, which requires a president to secure Congressional approval before sending U.S. soldiers to war, and which limits a president’s executive privilege when it conflicts with Congress’s duty to know and oversee.

Cheney views these actions to protect the historic balance of federal powers as a pure and simple erosion of executive power. He has dedicated his professional life since then towards moving the structure of U.S. government from the system framed by the Founders to a business model where so-called efficiency is a priority and the CEO is boss, period. During his time in Congress, Cheney defended Reagan and his administration against the Iran-Contra Committee’s charges of “secrecy, deception and disdain for law.”

As Vice President, Dick Cheney has expressed a similar pattern of secrecy, deception and disdain for law.

Cheney has famously stonewalled Congress and the GAO for more than a year on demands for information regarding the development of the Bush Administration’s energy policy. Cheney is not really protecting identities here, since the policy itself reflects the industry bias of the group that put the plan together. Cheney clearly came into office ready to draw the line of executive privilege in the sand early. And often.

Cheney’s record of deception goes back to 1990, when he was Secretary of Defense under Bush senior. It is alleged that the Pentagon doctored even then evidence to justify an invasion of Iraq, specifically U.S. photos (classified to this day) of an Iraqi troop buildup on the shared border that seemed to pose an eminent threat to Saudi Arabia. Commercial Soviet satellite photos taken at the same time show empty desert.

In justification of the current Bush war in Iraq, Cheney claimed publicly that Saddam Hussein was trying to buy uranium in Niger, at least seven months after retired Ambassador Joseph Wilson reported to the CIA and the State Department that the deal was a fake and the information “unequivocally wrong.” After the war was in progress, Cheney claimed on “Meet the Press” in September 2003 that the administration had evidence of links between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein, such a whopper that Bush, Rumsfeld and Rice all were forced to publicly repudiate that claim.

After Cheney stated publicly that he had no financial interest in defense contractor Halliburton “of any kind and haven’t now for over three years,” public documents surfaced showing that Cheney continues to receive a six-figure “deferred salary” through 2006 and holds options on hundreds of thousands of shares of Halliburton stock.

Cheney continues to insist that his office is above any influence on procurement contracts, but in late May 2004, TIME Magazine obtained a damning internal Pentagon email from March 2003, dated less than two weeks before the Night of Shock and Awe, which says that “action” on a huge contract to “RIO” (that is, Restore Iraqi Oil) had been coordinated through Cheney’s office.

Cheney’s disdain for law may even have led his staff to out a CIA operative, Valerie Plame, wife of Joseph Wilson who discredited the Niger uranium story, after Wilson published an opinion piece in the Washington Post critical of the Bush Administration’s misrepresentation of facts. Plame’s cover was broken; her career is at an end. Revealing the identity of a U.S. intelligence agent is a federal crime.

The Articles of Impeachment in the U.S. Constitution provide for removing a President or Vice President (or other civil officer) who has acted or threatened to take action that seriously threatens the Constitution, the U.S. system of government or the rule of law, or who has committed other crimes so serious that the Presidency could be injured.

The Constitution itself names “Treason, Bribery [and] other high Crimes and Misdemeanors” as cause for the removal of a Vice President from office. Is outing a valuable CIA agent treason? Is it treason to promote false evidence to exaggerate the threat posed by a foreign power in order to lead your country into war? If you stand to make enormous amounts of money from the prosecution of such a war, is that bribery in fact or just in spirit?

I can’t say whether the Constitution came to us from God or simply reflects the best that humans can be. But please understand that what holds together this amazing, beautiful, cock-eyed, flawed, terrible-except-compared-to-every-other-system, richest and most powerful ever on Earth country is an idea. And the vessel that contains that idea is the Constitution.

Impeachment is the power to protect the Constitution and the people from despots, lawless or a law unto themselves. The top ten reasons to impeach Vice President Cheney? Trust me, we don’t know the half. Cheney is a real crook—not an embarrassed husband caught straying with a White House intern.

But it’s worse than that.

I agree with John Dean that Dick Cheney wants to permanently alter the balance of federal power. The Vice President is waging war on the Constitution. Think it can’t happen here? Leave Cheney unchecked, and we will see martial law in the U.S. within the decade. You read it here first.

The Vice President, far more than punks like bin Laden or Hussein, is a grave, credible threat, both immediately and down the road. For this reason, the House of Representatives should begin at once to impeach.

From the Bottom by Sally Herrin

The real political spectrum isn’t right to left... it’s top to bottom.