What’s NFP’s Stance on the Mess in Iraq Now?
(The same as it’s always been.)

U.S. OUT. U.N. IN.

As we’ve said for five years now, going back to the summer of 2002 when the Bush/Cheney White House first began its drumbeat to invade, this war was absolutely unnecessary.

We charged from the beginning that the intelligence justifying a preemptive attack on Iraq was being manufactured and fixed. We cited the conclusions of U.N. weapons inspectors such as Scott Ritter and Hans Blix that there were no WMDs in Iraq. We warned that this aggressive venture was more about a ‘resource grab’ for Iraq’s oil than it was about removing a military threat. And even when 70 percent of the American public rallied to the administration’s side, we unwaveringly opposed the “shock and awe” bombing campaign, the ensuing ground invasion and the ongoing occupation that has now entered its fourth year.

continued on page 3
Nebraska Report

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Nebraskans for Peace

Nebraskans for Peace is a statewide grassroots advocacy organization working nonviolently for peace with justice through community-building, education and political action.

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U.S. Stumbles in War on Terror

“‘I vowed that if you harbor a terrorist you’re equally as guilty as the terrorist. That’s a doctrine. In order for this country to be credible, when the President says something, he must mean it.’ President George W. Bush, April 10, 2007, American Legion Post 177, Fairfax, Virginia.

In its “War on Terror,” Washington apparently continues its ‘do as I say, not as I do’ approach. People are denied entry to the U.S. for paying ransom to terrorists in order to free loved ones. But bomb a Cuban airliner over Venezuela, killing all 73 people aboard? Not an act of terrorism, says our government. The distinction seems to hinge on whose side you’re on.

When former CIA operative Luis Posada Carilles was convicted of being the mastermind behind the 1976 bombing of a Cubana Airliner, killing all 73 aboard, he was convicted and imprisoned in Venezuela. He escaped after eight years in 1985, thanks to a bribe from Jorge Mas Canosa, the now-deceased head of the Cuban American National Foundation. Cuban native Posada Carilles is vehemently opposed to Fidel Castro and obsessed with doing all he can to end Castro’s regime. He has been tied to the importation of large quantities of cocaine into the U.S. in support of the Contras in Nicaragua in the ‘80s, and to a series of bombings in Cuba just recently—including one in Cuban hotel that killed an Italian. Even the CIA now distances itself from him.

In May of 2005, Posada was arrested and imprisoned in the U.S. on charges of immigration fraud for lying about how he entered the country. But early in 2007, he was released to the custody of his wife in their commodious home in Miami. He was under house arrest while authorities tried to determine if and to where he could be deported. Even though both Cuba and Venezuela demand that the U.S. try him for bombing or return him to Venezuela to stand trial, the U.S. will not send him to either country for fear that he might be tortured there. Other countries have refused to accept him.

In mid-May, 2007, a federal judge threw out the immigration fraud case against Posada, although an earlier deportation order still stands. So he walks freely through the streets of Miami, an accused terrorist. Meanwhile, members of Congress are circulating a request to hold hearings to determine why we are harboring and protecting him.

The hypocrisy of this action by the U.S. signals the rest of the world that our fight against terrorism operates under a double standard with regards to Cuba. Our credibility continues to be seriously compromised.

Colombia Update

Colombia’s President Alvaro Uribe visited Washington in early May, appealing to U.S. lawmakers for increased military aid and support for a Free Trade Agreement, which has been signed by both Bush and Uribe. Uribe is under scrutiny in Colombia as more of his party’s legislators face charges of complicity with the paramilitary group AUC, which is on the U.S. State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Bush considers Uribe a friend of the U.S., which is yet another example of our double standard regarding terrorism. The passage of this FTA would likely have negative consequences for Colombia, as the flooding of the market will put many small farmers out of business and lead them to turn to more lucrative drug production. Furthermore, Colombia is notorious for being a dangerous place to organize labor unions. Many union leaders have been the victims of extra-legal executions by paramilitary death squads.

In late May, the foreign operations appropriations subcommittee in the House of Representatives will consider Bush and Uribe’s proposal for “Plan Colombia 2.” “Plan Colombia” was initially intended to support the rule of law in Colombia, improve the human rights record of the Colombian military and reduce coca production. But after seven years and more than $5.4 billion of U.S. taxpayer dollars spent, the effect has been just the opposite.

Check out NFP’s snazzy new website @ www.nebraskansforpeace.org
U.S. OUT. U.N. IN.

The White House’s arguments about “staying the course” are nonsense. There is no “course.” Iraq is broken and, riven now by civil war, impossible to reassemble. We should have retired—with apologies to all—the moment it was proved there were no weapons of mass destruction. Instead, the justifications for the occupation changed: It was about “bringing democracy to the Midwest.” It was about taking the fight against al-Qaeda on their own turf. It was about removing a war criminal guilty of crimes against humanity. Today, the “democratization” project is in shambles. Al-Qaeda is guaranteed the Iraqi people’s hostility by enforcing a brutal (and yet incompetent) sanctions regime that resulted in the deaths of 500,000 children from malnutrition and disease. We added insult to injury by looking the other way as revenues from the “Oil for Food” program were looted by all hands, and by seeking, after the toppling of Saddam, to install an international peacekeeping force.

The Democratic majority in Congress now says, “We must get out of Iraq by the fall of 2008. We must establish benchmarks forcing the Iraqi government to democratically share power, redistribute the oil wealth and thereby contain the sectarian violence. But Iraq’s Shiite government is not interested in democratizing the government. It’s bent on avenging the wrongs done to Shiite majority by the Sunni minority. And there is no way the U.S. itself can promote democracy in Iraq. We have no credentials, let alone legal standing. Our own government cares nothing for democracy at home—witness the stolen elections in Florida and Ohio that gave it two terms in office. Witness the abuses of the Patriot Act and the “warrantless wiretap” program. Witness Guantanamo and Abu Ghrab and the administration’s defense of the use of torture.

But we’d already lost any credibility we might have had with the Iraqis even before George Bush became president. We forfeited that during all those years we coddled Saddam Hussein as a favored ally—before we turned against him that is, and defeated his country in the first Gulf War. And then, we included our controlling the insurgency without seriously negotiating with its leaders and the governments of the surrounding states. Militarily, however, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was right when he said the war is “lost.” It’s past time we got out.

The specter that advocates of the war raise is that of endless retaliatory bloodshed. There will be some of that, given the heat of the battle. There was some in Vietnam and some in the former Yugoslavia. But the bloodshed is already occurring. According to the British medical journal, *Lancet*, more than 600,000 Iraqis have died since the war began. Reuters reports that nearly 4 million Iraqis have been made refugees since the American invasion.

What can we do to mitigate the likelihood of bloodshed?

1. We should—humbly and penitentially—petition the United Nations to furnish security forces to patrol the violent areas and offer the U.N. personnel the tools to prevent Sunni-Shiite massacres... and we should foot the bill for the cost.

You break it, you pay for it.
The Hagel Policy Toward Iran

Speaking at the University of Nebraska at Kearney this past February, Senator Chuck Hagel forcefully argued against going to war with Iran. The senator’s comments matched many of the findings Joe Volk of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (who spoke to Nebraska audiences this past March) came away with after his visit to Iran, namely that: we have common interests with Iran; we should pursue diplomacy; we must seek a regional approach in talking with Iran; Iran does have some democratic institutions; the Iranian government was helpful in resisting terrorism in Afghanistan and may be helpful in the future; President Ahmadinejad does not make foreign policy for Iran—the Ayatollah Khamenei does; the population of Iran is very young and may well opt for political change on its own; and, we should reach out to Iran through ‘people-to-people’-style contacts.

All of these points are important and points to which NFP can subscribe, as we seek to stave off movement by the Bush/Cheney Administration for a possible attack on Iran.

We tend to be cautious, though, about what the senator means when he talks of holding Iran accountable for its actions. Such efforts should not be done without our encouraging the Iranians to hold us responsible for our actions toward it—including the CIA overthrow of the democratically elected Mossadegh government in 1953, U.S. complicity in the Shah’s torture regime, and supplying arms to both sides during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

To defuse this potentially explosive situation, we would argue that the United Nations needs to step in to mediate the differences between our two nations; the U.S. in turn needs to pledge to quit feeding arms to our Arab allies and to Israel—if Iran will stop feeding arms to Shiite operatives in Iraq and to Hezbollah; and for its part, Iran needs to permit complete access to weapons inspections teams to confirm that its uranium enrichment program is not intended to produce nuclear weapons. Both countries should pledge not to work through intermediaries, for which neither nation can be held responsible. All told, Sen. Hagel’s speech constitutes, in our view, the beginning of a journey toward sanity on Iran, and he deserves our thanks for articulating such a level-headed and prudent perspective.

U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel

Key points from Sen. Hagel’s speech at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (excerpted by Paul Olson)

1. The United States must approach the Middle East with a clear understanding of the complexities of the region. Our strategic policies must be regional in scope… integrating Iran, Iraq, Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, violent Islamic extremism, access to energy supplies and political reform into a comprehensive policy equation. This should be developed through consultation, cooperation and coordination with our regional allies Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Israel. This will require a new regional diplomatic and economic framework to work within… a new Middle East frame of reference.

2. Iran will be a key center of gravity [in the next century’s Middle East]. The United States cannot change that reality. America’s strategic 21st century regional policy for the Middle East must acknowledge the role of Iran today and over the next 25 years.

To acknowledge that reality in no way confuses Iran’s dangerous, destabilizing and threatening behavior in the region. Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism and provides material support to Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist groups. Iran publicly threatens Israel and is developing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. Iran has not helped stabilize the current chaos in Iraq and is responsible for weapons and explosives being used against U.S. and Iraqi military forces in Iraq.

Iran must be held accountable for its actions. These actions by Iran are one part of a complicated picture of a country with a 3,000-year history, governed by a complex and opaque political structure, burdened by a stagnating economy and located in a geo-strategically unstable region.

3. As Tom Friedman described in a New York Times column earlier this year, Iran is a country that “regularly holds sort-of-free elections” where “women vote, hold office, are the majority of its university students, and are fully integrated in the work force” and whose residents “were among the very few in the Muslim world to hold spontaneous pro-U.S. demonstrations” on September 11, 2001. Friedman is correct in his observation that, “the hostility between Iran and the United States since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 is not organic. By dint of culture, history and geography, we actually have a lot of interests in common with Iran’s people.”

4. Iran has cooperated with the United States on Afghanistan to help the Afghans establish a new government after the Taliban was ousted. Iran continues to invest heavily in the reconstruction of western Afghanistan.

5. Iran is not monolithic. Iran is governed by competing centers of power. The President and the parliament—known as the Majles—are elected. But it is the Supreme Council, led by the Supreme Leader (currently Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) who serves as the Commander in Chief and has formal authority over Iran’s armed forces. Iran will be a key center of gravity in the next century’s Middle East. The United States cannot change that reality.

and foreign policy. Ayatollah Khamenei has the power to dismiss Iran’s President. A separate elected body—the Assembly of Experts—selects… and has the power to dismiss… the Supreme Leader. Yet another body—the Council of Guardians—screens presidential and parliamentary candidates, and reviews laws passed by the Majles. A third body—the Expediency Council—arbitrates disputes between the Council of Guardians and the Majles. Finally, the principal government and clerical officials from all of these entities have a seat on the Supreme National Security Council.

Power and influence in Iran evolve and shift… and are difficult to understand. Supreme Leader Khamenei did not support President Ahmadinejad’s presidential bid. In December 2006, Ahmadinejad’s supporters suffered major defeats in elections for municipal councils and the Assembly of Experts. Last month, an Iranian newspaper owned by Ayatollah Khamenei admonished Ahmadinejad to remove himself from the nuclear issue.

6. Two-thirds of Iran’s population is under the age of 30. Iran is undergoing a generational shift that will shape Iran’s outlook… and its opinions of the United States… for decades to come. Iran’s young people use the internet in large numbers, wear American jeans, listen to American music and are positive about America and the West. We do not want to lose this pro-American generation by turning them away from us. They are the hope of Iran. They bristle conclusion on page 8
On April 24, at an outdoor news conference on Capitol Hill, Ohio Representative and Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich announced that he had just filed articles of impeachment against Vice President Dick Cheney. Although President George Bush is equally deserving of impeachment, Kucinich said he was seeking to impeach Cheney first to prevent the risk of him ever becoming commander in chief. Kucinich’s action fulfills a long-cherished desire of Nebraskans for Peace, which has publicly called for the vice president and Nebraska native’s impeachment ever since his visit to his hometown of Lincoln in June 2004. While it is far from clear whether the Democratic majority in Congress will actually take action on House Resolution 333, Kucinich has already succeeded in restoring some much-needed perspective to the whole matter of impeachment. The last president to be impeached—Bill Clinton—was subjected to this extreme legal proceeding simply for lying about a consensual sexual relationship with a White House intern. As Rep. Kucinich’s April 24 media statement (which is printed below) carefully details, however, the criminal basis for Dick Cheney’s impeachment is of a different caliber altogether.

Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich

Thank you very much for being here.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that, among these, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; and, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it.

These words from the Declaration of Independence are instructive at this moment. Because not only whenever any form of government, but whenever any government official becomes destructive of the founding purposes, that official or those officials must be held accountable.

Because I believe the vice president’s conduct of office has been destructive to the founding purposes of our nation, today, I have introduced House Resolution 333, Articles of Impeachment Relating to Vice President Richard B. Cheney. I do so in defense of the rights of the American people to have a government that is honest and peaceful.

It became obvious to me that this vice president, who was a driving force for taking the United States into a war against Iraq under false pretenses, is once again rattling the sabers of war against Iran with the same intent to drive America into another war, again based on false pretenses.

Let me cite from the articles of impeachment that were introduced this afternoon, Article I, that Richard Cheney had purposefully manipulated the intelligence process to deceive the citizens and the Congress of the United States by fabricating a threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify the use of the United States armed forces against the nation of Iraq in a manner damaging to our national security.

That despite all evidence to the contrary, the vice president actively and systematically sought to deceive the citizens and the Congress of the United States about an alleged threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

That preceding the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the vice president was fully informed that no legitimate evidence existed of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The vice president pressured the intelligence community to change their findings to enable the deception of the citizens and the Congress of the United States.

That in this the vice president subverted the national security interests of the United States by setting the stage for the loss of more than 3,300 United States service members and the loss of 650,000 Iraqi citizens since the United States invasion; the loss of approximately $500 billion in war costs, which has increased our federal debt; the loss of military readiness within the United States armed services, through an overextension and lack of training and lack of equipment; and the loss of United States credibility in the world affairs and decades of likely blowback created by the invasion of Iraq.

That with respect to Article II, that Richard Cheney manipulated the intelligence process to deceive the citizens and the Congress of the United States about an alleged relationship between Iraq and al-Qaida in order to justify the use of United States armed forces against the nation of Iraq in a manner damaging to our national security.

And that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the vice president actively and systematically sought to deceive the citizens and Congress of the United States about an alleged relationship between Iraq and al-Qaida.

That preceding to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the vice president was fully informed that no credible evidence existed of a working relationship between Iraq and al-Qaida, a fact articulated in several official documents.

With respect to Article III, that in his conduct while vice president of the United States, Richard Cheney openly threatened aggression against the Republic of Iran, absented any real threat to the United States, and has done so with the United States’s proven capability to carry out such threats, thus undermining the national security interests of the United States.

That despite no evidence that Iran has the intention or the capability of attacking the United States, and despite the turmoil created by the United States’s invasion of Iraq, the vice president has openly threatened aggression against Iran.

Furthermore, I point out in the articles that Article VI of the United States Constitution states, and I quote, “This Constitution and the laws of the United States shall be made in pursuance thereof and all treaties made or which shall be made under the authority of the United States shall be the supreme law of the land. Any provision of an international treaty ratified by the United States becomes the law of the United States.”

The United States is signatory to the
Gold Star Mother Cindy Sheehan Speaks at Peace & Justice Expo

by Elaine Wells
NFP Omaha Chapter

Liberal patriots living in Omaha often feel isolated and hopeless. But on Sunday, April 15, everyone at the third “Peace & Justice Expo” in the University of Nebraska-Omaha Student Center seemed right at home and part of the family. Even the “Young Republicans,” who had planned to crash the party, were welcomed in and offered a booth, where they chatted with other Expo participants and had a friendly exchange of viewpoints.

Thanks to Omaha activist Vicki Pratt and the Booth Committee, a record-setting 76 organizations were crammed into the dining room. All day people squeezed past each other in the narrow aisles to learn about the organizations and their work for peace and justice. Groups ranged from the ACLU to WakeUpWalMart, from Baha’i Faith and Omaha Catholic Worker to Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The Expo program listed all pre-registered organizations and their contact information. Several Expo attendees said they felt the exhilaration of hope for a better world!

Slicing the “American Pie”

In the ballroom, local musician (and NFP member) Michael Murphy created a peaceful atmosphere with his music, as the eager audience filled almost all 800 seats. Then Dana Bainbridge and student actors cleverly demonstrated how the “American Pie” is currently divided: 52 percent of our taxes go to the military for past and present wars, and the remaining 48 percent is cut into tiny pieces for agriculture, community development, education, environment, foreign affairs, general government, health, housing, human services, science, transportation, world hunger and all other needs. Their message: “We want the pie sliced differently!”

I know you are against the war and you know it’s wrong.
What I want to know is what you want to do about it...
Don’t be offended... But everyone here can do more.
I’m not asking you to do anything I have not done.

—Cindy Sheehan, April 15, 2007

One way to divert money from death and destruction to human needs is the Peace Tax Fund Act, which will allow taxpayers to designate their taxes for non-military purposes. It has 46 sponsors in congress, and Senator Hagel’s deputy has said Hagel would consider introducing the bill in the Senate if he got enough support from constituents. Expo audience members signed postcards asking him to do so.

Mandy Lozier, president of the Student Social Work Organization, one of UNO’s sponsoring organizations, shared a reading on “the way of love.” Margaret Gilmore, co-chair of the Peace & Justice Expo planning committee, invited everyone to attend workshops and visit booths. Then “the proud papa” of the first two Peace & Justice Expos, Steve Thyberg, introduced our keynote speaker, “the peace mom,” Cindy Sheehan.

“Sacrifice Till It Hurts”

When she first challenged George Bush to explain “for what noble purpose” her son Casey had died in Iraq, he refused to respond to her. “If he had come out and talked with me,” she told the Expo audience, “I would have gone home.” But not only did he not come out and answer her question, she stated, he has since said, “The troops are not coming home as long as I am president.”

“So,” the Gold Star mother directly challenged the audience, “I know you are against the war and you know it’s wrong. What I want to know is what you want to do about it.”

“Where’s the moral outrage? The media doesn’t show dozens of body bags coming home, nor hundreds of Iraqis dying. Our VA system is in shambles. Soldiers’ families use food stamps. Soldiers suffer in 135-degree heat and some have only two bottles of water a day. Don’t be offended. I’m not asking you to do anything I have not done,” she declared. “I have been smeared, slandered and threatened, and I ache every day for Casey. Suck it up and pull out more, until it hurts.”

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Such challenges drew several rounds of applause and a standing ovation at the end of her brief speech. Then she called for questions and insisted that the line form in boy/girl order, so that both sexes could be heard. She asked people of all ages and races to join the line, so that everyone could be represented.

A young person asked, “Seventeen-year-old high school students will register soon for military service. What can we do as high school students?” Cindy suggested counter-recruitment, and referred people to the American Friends Service Committee for information about conscientious objector status.

When asked, “Why are we so complacent?” Cindy replied, “Our media are owned by five corporations. Thomas Jefferson was most terrified by not having a free press. I majored in history at UCLA, and I think we’re all too comfortable. Sacrifice is now a dirty word, but in audiences all over the country...”
people are ready for the nonviolent Gandhi revolution.” Later someone asked, “What can we do about the media?” Cindy recommended, “Boycott Fox News, and Sean Hannity.”

To the question “Do you think Bush is evil?” she responded, “I view him as our brother who does evil things.” Then she quoted a Palestinian taxi driver who talked of all people loving each other. “There is no place for violence,” he concluded.

Another Omaha resident asked, “Here in Nebraska we have shameful, willful ignorance. How do we get through to people?” Answer: “We are the majority. Act like it! Apply bumper stickers, hold signs, wear T-shirts, speak out. The greatest threat to democracy is an uninvolved citizenry. We are the sovereigns. We must make our leaders do what we want.”

Then a student said, “There’s lots of anger toward the Military/Industrial Complex, but would Kurds be slaughtered by the millions if we left Iraq?” Answer: “Almost one million Iraqis have died during this occupation. They don’t want to be occupied. Even generals say this can’t be solved militarily. [The occupation] is a war crime. It violates the Geneva Convention and our own Constitution.”

Only one encounter marred Cindy’s rapport with this audience. She said to a young man, “If you support Bush and the war, why are you not in Iraq? Are you supporting our troops by leaving them there without food, water, protection, and without care when they come home? Seventy-two percent of them say they want to come home.”

There was no immediate response, but several people in the question line urged a Young Republican to move ahead to the microphone and answer her challenge. He did so reluctantly and politely tried to speak, but Cindy talked over him, and would not allow him to be heard, even though audience members called out to let him answer. After the Q & A, listeners debated Cindy’s approach—some saying that it was undemocratic and “Bushesque,” others saying that it was Cindy’s way of dealing with her own painful loss.

The rest of the afternoon was stuffed with music by the Dana College group “Aequitas” and Amy Keller, dramas on the struggles of native people and immigrants, and twelve action-inspiring workshops organized by Dana College Social Work professor Jo Peterson. It’s impossible to give credit to every individual who made Expo 2007 so awesome, but the peace and justice family left this reunion saying we feel connected, encouraged, informed… and we want a full day next year!
What’s HOT in Global Warming?
by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

Bruce E. Johansen is Frederick W. Kayser Professor of Communications at UNO and the author of the three-volume Global Warming in the Twenty-First Century (Praeger 2006).

Life After Oil: Scandinavia Leads the Way

Sweden has some of the highest liquor taxes in the world, which have spawned copious smuggling, mainly from Denmark. Until recently, contraband seized at Malmo, near Copenhagen, by Tullverket (Swedish Customs) was poured down the drain. Now, however, in today’s very green Sweden, a million bottles a year of illicit liquor is trucked to a new high-tech plant in Linköping (about 130 miles south of Stockholm) that manufactures biogas fuel for automobiles, as well as fertilizer.

The plant also accepts human and packing-plant waste—part of Sweden’s drive to become the world’s first oil-free society by the year 2050. Out of this noxious mix, all of which used to be regarded as garbage, comes bio-fuel to power buses, taxis, garbage trucks, private cars, as well as a “biogas train” that runs between Linköping and Västervik on the southeast coast.

Sweden and other Scandinavian countries have proved to be endlessly creative at finding ways to replace oil usage with what used to be waste. People in these countries are making resources of whatever they have in abundance: Iceland, geo-thermal resources; Sweden, wood; Denmark, wind—often using simple, practical, and elegant applications available now, at modest cost. Iceland plans by 2050 to power all of its passenger cars and boats with hydrogen made from electricity drawn from local, renewable resources.

Denmark has become a world leader in improving wind-turbine technology to the point where it generates electricity that is competitive in cost with oil, coal, and nuclear power, meanwhile building infrastructure that provides several thousand jobs and most families a share in the national wind-energy grid.

In Iceland, 85 percent of the country’s 290,000 people use geothermal energy to heat their homes. Iceland’s government, working with Shell and Daimler-Chrysler, in 2003 began to convert Reykjavík’s city buses from internal combustion to fuel-cell engines, using hydroelectricity to electrolyze water and produce hydrogen. The next stage is to convert the country’s automobiles, then its fishing fleet. These conversions are part of a systemic plan to divorce Iceland’s economy from fossil fuels.

By 2003, 18 percent of Denmark’s electricity was being derived from wind; Germany’s northernmost state of Schleswig-Holstein was using wind for 28 percent of its electricity (Brown, 2003: 201). In Amsterdam, up to 40 percent of travel in the city was via bicycle. At many traffic lights, bikes go first. Spain is testing a new solar technology called “Concentrating Solar Power” that uses mirrors to focus sunlight with a much greater efficiency than photovoltaic cells. This technology is being tested in Seville, and may open the way for large-scale solar power plants.

The Swedish oil end-game is a full-court press, involving, among other things, home-grown bio-fuels, solar, wind, wave, heat pumps, research into new sources and technological improvements sponsored by the government, teleconferencing, work at home (via Internet), public transport, hybrid vehicles, bio-diesel cars.

It’s Al Gore’s kind of place. In Stockholm to promote his film “An Inconvenient Truth” during late 2006, Gore hailed Sweden’s efforts to reduce its use of oil to zero. I think it’s a remarkable achievement,” Gore said. The Swedish government funded a program to distribute “An Inconvenient Truth” to all Swedish secondary schools.

Sweden and the rest of the European Union are working to decouple transportation from gasoline consumption. Automobile engines larger than two liters are severely taxed in the E.U., a measure that would be political suicide in the United States. Stockholm will introduce a fleet of Swedish-made electric hybrid buses in its public transport system on a trial basis in 2008. These buses, which use both a combustion engine and electric motors for propulsion, are an interim step to the development of entirely “clean” vehicles. The vehicles’ diesel engines use ethanol.

Sweden’s government includes a Ministry of Sustainable Development (Brazil and Quebec have similar bodies), which includes a Commission on Oil Independence, with members from government, academia, industry (including Sweden’s automakers), labor and the public. The commission’s task, in its own words, “is to propose different measures to under the heavy yoke of the Ayatollahs’ strident limitations of personal freedom.
7. The United States and Iran do not know one another. This unfamiliarity, distrust, and lack of engagement risks producing disastrous consequences. When countries do not engage, the risk of misperception based on faulty judgments spawns uninformed and dangerous decisions…

The United States must be cautious and wise not to follow the same destructive path on Iran as we did on Iraq. We blundered into Iraq because of flawed intelligence, flawed assumptions, flawed judgments, and questionable intentions. The U.S. must be cautious and wise not to follow the same destructive path on Iran as we did on Iraq.

The U.S. must find a new regional diplomatic strategy to deal with Iran that integrates our regional allies, military power and economic leverage… As the 2006 Baker-Hamilton report on Iraq concluded, “The United States should engage directly with Iraq and Syria in order to try to obtain their commitment to constructive policies toward Iraq and other regional issues.”

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9. Our refusal to recognize Iran’s influence does not decrease its influence, but rather increases it. Engagement creates dialogue and opportunities to identify common interests, demonstrate America’s strengths, as well as make clear disagreements. Diplomacy is an essential tool in world affairs, using it where possible to ratchet down the pressure of conflict and increase the leverage of strength… Last month, Dr. Abbas Milani, the co-Director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institute, testified before the House Foreign Relations Committee, saying:

“The U.S. should offer to negotiate with Iran on all the outstanding issues. Comprehensive negotiations are not a ‘grand bargain.’ Instead such negotiations can offer [Iran’s leaders] powerful inducements, such as a lifting of the economic embargo and even establishing diplomatic ties. But contrary to the ‘grand bargain’ suggestion, central to such negotiations must be the issue of the human rights of the Iranian people. Contrary to the masses of nearly all other Muslim nations, and contrary to the declining popularity of the U.S. in the world, Iranian people are favorably disposed towards the United States. An offer of serious, frank discussions with the regime on all of these issues will, regardless of whether the regime accepts or rejects the offer, be a win-win situation for the United States, for the Iranian democrats and for the existing U.N. coalition against the regime’s adventurism.”

10. The United States must be resolved and clear-headed in its dealings with Iran… We must be clear that our objections are to the actions of the Iranian government… not the Iranian people. Our decisions to deploy a second carrier battle group and other military assets into the Persian Gulf, as well as the decision to target Iranian military assistance flowing into Iraq, should be coupled with a clear and credible commitment to diplomatically engage Iran. America must have a strategic and comprehensive Middle East framework of resolution, using all the levers of influence available to the U.S. and its allies.

11. [We must] find new and imaginative ways to reach out to the Iranian people. Part of that initiative could be offering to re-open a consulate in Tehran… not formal diplomatic relations… but a Consulate… to help encourage and facilitate people-to-people exchange. All nations of Europe and most of our allies in the Middle East and Asia have diplomatic relations with Iran.

The failure of Iran to comply with the U.N. Security Council deadline to halt its uranium enrichment activities should be an opportunity for the United States to reaffirm and expand the international consensus to address Iran’s nuclear program. The will of the international community gives credibility to its demands of Iran.

12. Today, some of America’s own actions are undermining the very interests that we must protect and advance in the Middle East. A recent poll conducted by Zogby International in the countries of Arab allies… Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates… found that only 12 percent expressed favorable attitudes toward the United States. As Washington Post writer David Ignatius observed when covering a conference in Doha, Qatar, this past winter, “It isn’t a tiny handful of people in the Arab world who oppose what America is doing. It’s nearly everyone.”
When It Comes to the Electric Chair…

There's No Place Like Nebraska

by Richard S. Hargesheimer & J. Wm. Moreland

A version of this article originally appeared in the May 21, 2007 Lincoln Journal Star. Richard S. Hargesheimer and J. Wm. Moreland volunteer for Amnesty International, a worldwide human rights movement that, among other issues, opposes torture and executions in all their forms.

Nebraska holds a place of infamy, not only throughout the United States, but also throughout the entire World.

According to a recent report by Amnesty International, Nebraska is the only jurisdiction on Planet Earth to use electrocution as the sole manner of execution of the death penalty. No other State in this nation, nor any other nation on this earth is so notorious in this respect. Belgium, for example, retains its electric chair merely as a tourist attraction commemorating a bygone and barbarous era in Belgian history.

The predominant method of state-sanctioned killing in the United States is lethal injection. Approximately eight states, who abandoned the electric chair for its obvious cruelty, have retained the electric chair only as an alternative, should the application of lethal injection be declared unconstitutional for a variety of reasons.

Nebraska’s use of the electric chair is, therefore, obviously unusual; but, it is also, as our sister states have said, cruel, amounting to unconscionable torture. Indeed, according to recent reports, the death chamber procedures recently adopted by the Nebraska Department of Corrections—on the advice of a widely discredited physician—promised to severely burn, but not necessarily kill, the condemned prisoner. As a precaution, the physician has sanguinely (and sanguinarily) advised the Department to maintain a fire extinguisher readily at hand.

The Department would do well to heed the good doctor’s advice. The history of the application of electrocution in the death chamber shows that the prisoner’s bursting into flame has not been uncommon.

Jesse Joseph Tafero, for one, a prisoner electrocuted in Florida in 1990, required three jolts of electricity to kill him, during which six-inch flames shot from the top of his head. Frank J. Coppola, electrocuted in Florida in 1982, required two 55-second jolts, which caused his leg and head to catch fire so intensely that smoke was reported to have filled the death chamber. John Evans, Alabama 1983, caught on fire, and it required 14 minutes and three jolts to burn him to death. Similar examples abound.

Nor has it been uncommon that condemned prisoners have simply been cooked to death.

Allen Lee Davis, for example, electrocuted in Florida in 1999, was reported by witnesses to be still alive when, “the blood from his mouth had poured onto the collar of his white shirt, and the blood on his chest had spread to about the size of a dinner plate, even oozing through the buckle holes on the leather chest strap holding him to the chair.” Florida Supreme Court Justice Leander Shaw noted, “the color photos of Davis depict a man who—for all appearance—was brutally tortured to death by the citizens of Florida.” Citing two other recent botched executions, Justice Shaw called them “barbaric spectacles… acts more befitting a violent murder than a civilized state.”

As another example, Alpha Otis Stephens, electrocuted by Georgia in 1984, received an initial two-minute shock. His body was too hot to touch for several minutes. When physicians were finally able to examine him, he was found to be alive, and a second administration of electricity was required. As a result, cooking Stephens to death required more than ten minutes to accomplish. A Georgia prison official observed, by way of explanation, that “Stephens was just not a conductor” of electricity. Again, similar examples abound.

Commenting on the potential cruelty of Nebraska’s newly adopted electric chair procedures, Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning, himself a death penalty advocate, said, “There is no way to make it pretty.” “It is an ugly thing,” he declared. Nevertheless, Bruning continues to support this ugly thing.

Despite the Attorney General’s lack of compassion in this matter, to be sickened by botched electrocutions is not, fundamentally, at all about concern for the condemned prisoner, nor the absence of empathy for the murder victim. Rather, it is about who we are as a society.

Are we Nebraskans so mean-spirited, so punishment-oriented that we get a feel-good glow from torturing someone to death? If that be the case, what does it say about us? Fortunately, only certain Nebraska politicians appear to be so bloodthirsty. According to a 2007 poll, a majority of Nebraskans (always way ahead of most of their elected officials) prefer an alternative, not only to the electric chair, but to the death penalty itself—and support, instead, life in prison without possibility of parole.

Nebraska stands uniquely notorious in the world today. The electric chair and fire extinguisher now symbolize Nebraska.

But, we do not have to stand for this. Nebraskans can choose elected representatives who will retain the electric chair and fire extinguisher as our state symbols—or they can elect officials who will turn those symbols into relics of a more hideous past. By their vote, the people of Nebraska can choose to become the first state in recent years—the first State in this millennium—to abolish capital punishment altogether, and thereby demonstrate, to the nation, to the world and to our posterity, that we have become a more humane, rational and enlightened people than once we were.

Impeaching Cheney, conclusion

U.N. Charter, a treaty among the nations of the world. Article II, Section 4 of the United Nations Charter states, and I quote, “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

The articles conclude by pointing out that the vice president’s deception upon the citizens and the Congress of the United States that enabled the failed United States invasion of Iraq forcibly altered the rules of diplomacy so that the vice president recent belligerent actions toward Iran are destabilizing and counterproductive to the national security of the United States of America.

These articles of impeachment are not brought forth lightly. I’ve carefully weighed the options available to members of Congress and found this path the path that is the most important to take.

The justifications used to lead our nation to war have unquestionably been disproved. Brave soldiers and innocent civilians have lost their lives in a war the United States should never have initiated. The weight of the lies used to lead us into war has grown heavier with each death. Now is the time for Congress to examine the actions that led us into this war, just as we must work to bring the troops home. This resolution is a very serious matter, and I will urge the Committee on Judiciary to investigate and carefully consider this resolution.

At this time, I’m happy to take any of your questions.

QUESTION: Why solely Mr. Cheney?

KUCINICH: Well, there’s a practical reason here. And the practical reason is — Mr. Cheney would then become president.

It’s significant and responsible to start in this way, because if the same charges would relate to the president as relate to the vice president, you would then have to go through the constitutional agony of impeaching two presidents consecutively.

QUESTION: What’s the difference between Mr. Cheney and Mr. Bush?

KUCINICH: Let me tell you the difference. The difference today is that this vice president is actively encouraging aggression against Iran. It is urgent that Congress take steps to check the abuse of power. And that’s what this impeachment resolution will do.
Drought and decreased rainfall is projected to also affect the central southern U.S. That could have significant impact on food production and sourcing of water for millions. The High Plains (or “Ogallala”) aquifer underlies much of the semi-arid west-central U.S. The aquifer provides water for 27 percent of the irrigated land in the country and supplies about 30 percent of the groundwater used for irrigation. In fact, three of the top grain-producing states—Texas, Kansas, and Nebraska—each get 70 to 90 percent of their irrigation water from the Ogallala aquifer. Human-induced stresses on this groundwater have resulted in water-table declines greater than 100 feet in some areas. This already difficult situation could be greatly exacerbated by a decrease in rainfall predicted for the region.

The positive recommendations of the report to the U.S. military are fairly banal: integrate climate change into military strategy, work to stabilize climate change, partner with others to stop climate change, adopt innovative technologies, look at the military effect of rising sea levels. The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse.

No talk of reducing military expenditures to increase expenditure on alternative energy research or reduced energy consumption or carbon sequestration. No talk of moving the U.S. to first among nations in the percentage of our national income that we give in no-strings-attached aid to other countries in jeopardy from global warming. No pain for the U.S. for its environmental sins. In looking at a military report, we have to be thankful for small favors.

For all that, the Center for Naval Analysis study reminds peace people that to care about peace is also to care about conservation. Denmark’s energy consumption has remained stable for 30 years through its charging high prices for energy, its use of insulation and conservation, recycling every possible source of energy, its massive development of wind, and its use of public power cooperatives to develop energy supplies. The average Dane uses less than half as much electricity as the average American and in a country where the standard of living is higher than ours on most indices (http://www.huppi.com/kangaroo/8Comparison.htm) and the life expectancy is higher. We can take little comfort in George Bush’s singing the “End Times” anthem while the planet burns. Too much is at stake.

As we struggle with obdurate greed and invincible ignorance, we ought to think of William Butler Yeats’ two Chinese figures carved in stone, contemplating World War II’s and all other tragic events. They possess a sense of tragic joy in facing our world’s pain: “Two Chinamen, behind them a third,/Are carved in Lapis Lazuli/On the mountain and the sky, the mountain and the sky/Two Chinamen, behind them a third.”

We will need moments of solace like that of the two stone Chinamen as we face the enormous ignominy of our time, but we will have to come down and work with the Danes.
The total tolls per day can go as high as $7.50. They are pass in and out of the district, depending on the time of day and its relation to rush hour. Tolls range from $1.28 to $2.56 to enter the downtown district on normal business days. Tolls were approved by just 52 percent of voters in a general election referendum on September 17, 2006. Stockholm initiated a test program charging drivers electronic tolls to have replaced part of the income-tax burden.

Carbon Tax, enacted in 1991, is one of the first examples of the idea's use on a national scale. Several other countries have adopted carbon taxes. In Finland, Norway and Holland also have such taxes. In most cases, the new energy taxes were available to libraries, aquatic facilities and hospitals that wanted to switch to more efficient renewable energy. The Swedish government buys environmentally friendly cars, and some cities offer their drivers free parking. Swedish paper and pulp industries use bark that was used to be wasted to produce energy for their manufacturing processes, as sawmills incinerate wood chips and sawdust to generate power.

Sweden's nine million people have long had one of the world's most impressive records on environmental protection. Sweden by 2006 had reduced oil use in home heating by 70 percent in 20 years. Oil consumption has remained unchanged in industry since 1994, despite a 70 percent increase in production. In 2006, according to the government, Sweden's energy use was roughly 35 percent dependent on oil products.

The proportion of oil-heated homes in Sweden was down to 8 percent by 2006, as many neighborhoods use hot water from central plants that burn bio-fuels, often wood-based pellets. In December 2005, all Swedish gas stations were required by an act of Parliament to offer at least one alternative fuel. Since the beginning of 2006, householders have been paid to replace oil-burning boilers with environmentally friendly heating systems. Such financial incentives already were available to libraries, aquatic facilities and hospitals that wanted to switch to more efficient renewable energy.

Sweden has experienced some political bumps in the road on this issue, however. The oil independence panel has its critics. For example: in a country that produces more private cars per capita than any other, the proceedings of the body have completely omitted the word “bicycle.”

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One controversial measure, “congestion charging”—tolls to drive a car in downtown Stockholm—was approved by just 52 percent of voters in a general election referendum on September 17, 2006. Stockholm initiated a test program charging drivers electronic tolls to enter the downtown district on normal business days. Tolls range from $1.28 to $2.56 to pass in and out of the district, depending on the time of day and its relation to rush hour. The total tolls per day can go as high as $7.50.

What’s HOT, conclusion

prepare Swedish society for such a development, by know-how, technology and economic means. The sooner this process can get under way the better.”

Ulf Perbo, who heads BIL, Sweden, the national association for the automobile industry, said that even automakers there want to end oil dependency. “Many people have asked [why BIL] is not against the Oil Commission, but it is not in our interest to be dependent on oil, with regard to the production and sales of cars. Oil is not what interests us; cars are. And oil is going to be a limitation [to the production and sales of cars] in the future.”

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A sort of historical proverb says that Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Of course, Nero would have had no fiddles since they were invented more than a millennium later. What is more probably—though possibly also inaccutely—alleged is that Nero set fire to Rome and sang exultingly as the great old city went up in flames. Suetonius has the story as follows:

[H]e showed no... mercy to the people or the walls of his capital. When someone in a general conversation said: “When I am dead, be earth consumed by fire,” he rejoined “Nay, rather while I live”...[U]nder cover of displeasure at the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow, crooked streets, he set fire to the city so openly that several ex-consuls did not venture to lay hands on his chamberlains although they set fire to their estates with tow and firebrands... For six days and seven nights destruction raged, while the people were driven for shelter to monuments and tombs... [H]uge numbers of dwellings, houses of ancient Roman leaders, older temples and antiquities were destroyed.] Viewing the conflagration from the tower of Maecenas, and exulting, as he said, “with the beauty of the flames,” he sang the whole time the “Sack of Ilium [Troy],” in his regular stage costume. Furthermore, to gain from this calamity too the spoil and booty possible, while promising the removal of the debris and dead bodies free of cost, [he] allowed no one to approach the ruins of his own property; and from the contributions which he not only received, but even demanded, he nearly bankrupted the provinces...

This story appears fabricated partly because we deem it impossible that a ruler could burn his own capital. We might deem it even more impossible that he could sing the fictions of Troy’s burning even as he scorched Rome. But it is not so improbable when we consider that the rulers of the United States have been setting the stage for burning the world for about half a century. I speak not of nuclear holocaust but of global warming.

A few columns ago I wrote of the threat of the nuclear industry to Nebraska’s environment. (I plan later to write of the pollution created in Nebraska’s soils by the conventional military plants left over from World War II and later wars.) However, such pollution pales beside the wastage of the planet posed by global warming. The Rome that is burning is our planet. Prominent members of our military, using scientific consultants, now tell us that we must stop it, while our president tells us that we do not know whether we or nature make the heat. The president says this in spite of the 100 percent consensus of scientific studies saying that we are lighting the fires.

President Bill Clinton, though now an advocate of attention to and action on global climate change, was little better while president. He made a speech about it. Nobody paid any attention so he quit. Reagan and the Reagan Administration regarded people concerned about green things to be insane enemies of progress. Reagan pooh-poohed the idea of global warming and spent a token sum on research into it. Before Reagan, Carter concerned himself about our consumption of fossil fuels. He didn’t know or care deeply about global warming then, but OPEC had put the squeeze on him and us by jacking up oil prices. However, even as early as Carter, Congress passed a “National Climat Act” in late 1978 which established a National Climate Program Office to monitor global climate change. The history of the last 40 years, save for a brief period in Carter’s ’70s is—for the most part as Spencer Weart documents—a history of scientific (albeit piecemeal) vigilance and governmental and business indifference and destruction (see Spencer Weart, The Discovery of Global Warming at http://www.aip.org/history/climate/Govt.htm and also Weart’s shorter book by the same name published by the Harvard University Press).

Though we do not have emperors so learned as to sing of the burning of Ilium while they scorch our planet, we do have leaders on the religious right who have seen the signs of global warming as either fictional or evidence of the coming ‘end-time.’ They sing their ditties. The Tim LaHaye group (see my February 2006 “Marketing the Apocalypse”) that has an ‘in’ with the White House believes that the burning of the earth is a prelude to the Rapture. Evangelicals from James Watts to Tom Delay have told us that environmental and global warming ‘spiritual’ concern is just bull. (Fortunately recently religious leaders, including evangelicals, have said that global warming is real and responsible citizenship requires action against it). Still the Tim LaHaye and the Tom Delays of the world sing on. Too ignorant to know Homer and Troy, they re-enact Suetonius’ Nero by singing the “End Times” musical anthem while applauding the earth’s burning. Our president does virtually nothing.

But the forces in American culture that despise talk of global warming as a danger, whether they are composed of neo-cons or religious rightists, are also strong believers in the military path to glory. They can ignore that ‘left-wing extremist’ Al Gore—ignoring his Southern roots and his membership in the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church—may they find it harder to ignore National Security and the Threat of Climate Change issued by the government-financed Center for Naval Analyses, a think tank overseen by a military advisory board consisting of ten of our most distinguished admirals and generals and issued under their imprimatur. The “FINDINGS” of the report stated in the executive summary read like a hippy’s nightmare, e.g.:

Projected climate change poses a serious threat to America’s national security. The predicted effects of climate change over the coming decades include extreme weather events, drought, flooding, sea level rise, retreating glaciers, habitat shifts, and the increased spread of life-threatening diseases.

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