Author and analyst Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. was the keynote speaker at the 2009 Annual Peace Conference in Grand Island October 24. Focusing on the dangers of escalating the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, Bennis warned that the widening quagmire in that war-torn nation threatens to become, in her words, "Obama’s Vietnam.”

The following excerpt from her new book co-authored with David Wildman, Ending the U.S. War in Afghanistan: A Primer (Interlink Publishing, November 2009, www.interlinkbooks.com) provides an ‘exit strategy’ for the U.S. to begin honorably extricating itself from this eight-year-long conflict. Given the steadily deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, her message could not be more urgent.

When President Obama picked up the flag of the Afghanistan war and began to wave it as his own, he did not have an obvious plan for an end game. The goals and definition of ‘victory’ of the U.S. war in Afghanistan changed during the first months of his presidency. According to The Economist (“Losing Afghanistan?” August 22, 2009), “as the West struggles to maintain its weak hold on Afghanistan, so its ambitions there are narrowing. Early aspirations to bring peace, prosperity and decent government to the country have been replaced by the hope of establishing a functioning state and of improved security. By that measure, success in the short term will look much like stalemate.”

And by any measure, by the end of summer 2009, with a clear majority of Americans opposed to the war in Afghanistan, members of Congress and the public were still demanding an exit strategy from an administration that didn’t have one. As was true in Iraq, there was much talk of the dangers of ending the war in Afghanistan. The Economist article went on to note, though, that “Western governments use a lazy shorthand to justify this war. Its purpose, they say, is to deny terrorists the base and haven that Afghanistan under the Taliban provided to al-Qaida. But al-Qaida’s surviving leaders are reckoned to have decamped across the border to the tribal areas of Pakistan, where Western forces do not tread.”

But with all the discussion of the dangers of withdrawal, there is little acknowledgement of the dangers if the war continues. One wouldn’t expect the editors...
Nebraska Report

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End the Afghan War, conclusion

of The Economist to worry very much about Afghan civilians, or even about U.S. or NATO troops dying in escalating numbers. But one might wonder how they managed to forget to mention the danger so many experts have recognized, that the presence of U.S. and NATO troops is precisely what fuels the insurgency in the first place.

As was the case with Iraq, many people, including those committed to ending the war, are concerned that the U.S. not simply ‘cut and run’ from Afghanistan. That phrase was memorably claimed by the Iraq War’s supporters to discredit and undermine the war’s opponents; those who used the term in fact cared little about Iraqi civilians, of whom more than a million had already been killed by the war. But it was true in Iraq and is equally true in Afghanistan that the U.S. debt to the people of those beleaguered countries is far greater than just getting the troops out. After years of war, abandonment to brutal U.S.-armed warlords, invasion, occupation, more war—the U.S. owes a huge debt to the Afghan people. Pulling out the troops is only step one.

Certainly the exact means of executing a rapid withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, as is the case for Iraq, is a tactical move that Pentagon logisticians will have to plan—using the same combinations of trucks, planes, helicopters and perhaps donkeys that they used to invade and occupy Afghanistan in the first place. But withdrawing the troops—the necessary first step towards ending the U.S. war—is not enough. U.S. responsibility to the people of Afghanistan, whom the U.S. has betrayed so many times before, requires more. So what would a responsible plan to end the war in Afghanistan require?

- Immediately end troop escalation and all combat and counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan; immediately halt drone attacks and threatened escalation in Pakistan; close all U.S. military bases in Afghanistan; begin full withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan.
- Stop identifying humanitarian aid workers as ‘force multipliers’ and remove all humanitarian, development, infrastructure or other assistance programs and personnel from control of the military.
- Immediately close Bagram Airbase prison; help current Afghan government (as long as it remains in power) as well as local and provincial authorities to expand social programs available for former detainees (including huge cash infusion for job training and jobs).
- Immediately increase refugee assistance—financial assistance for returning refugees to Afghanistan and providing assistance to main refugee centers (Iran, Pakistan); acceptance of more refugees into U.S.
- Stop all anti-poppy fumigation programs; invest significant funds in infrastructure and financial assistance for alternative crop cultivation.
- Promote and support (but do not control/dominant) ceasefire, reconciliation and negotiation processes involving all parties including Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan; encourage major role for local & regional leaders, ethnic-based and nationalist, religious and secular, rural and urban, including community-based and civil society representation. Support real, not simply titular, control by the UN, Afghan civil society groups, and others; do not impose U.S. choices for leaders.
- Recognize scale of corruption and illegitimacy in U.S.-backed government; end uncritical political and financial backing.
- Provide large amounts of financial assistance distributed in small-scale amounts to local and regional, tribal and other leaders for job creation, aiming particularly at recruiting young unemployed men who are vulnerable to militias offering pay (whether insurgent or pro-government).
- Support but do not control separate negotiations including all neighboring countries with the leadership of the UN, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and other regional organizations; negotiations should not include all political actors but exclude NATO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and other military alliances.
- Immediately begin shifting majority of Afghanistan military budgets into UN or regional funds for Afghan-chosen, Afghan-planned, and Afghan-implementation construction and reconstruction. Use remaining budget to fund U.S. troop withdrawal. Initiate funding relations with UN agencies, other international development organizations, and governments to create Afghan-controlled capacity-building and training institutions, with at least 30 percent of allocated funds going into Afghan (not U.S. or other international corporate, ‘security’ or contractor) hands. Create new development models.
Why It’s So Hard to Change Public Attitudes

THE EXAMPLE OF GLOBAL WARMING

by Hendrik van den Berg
UNL Professor of Economics

It is looking like we will not get a new international agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions at the Copenhagen Conference this December. After several unproductive preparatory meetings among government officials, the news media now report that Copenhagen is unlikely to result in more than a bland statement saying world leaders will continue working toward a new agreement. This is a sharp decline in expectations from a year ago, when Copenhagen was seen as the venue where a new international accord would be adopted to replace the Kyoto Protocol set to expire in 2012.

After initial optimism about the Obama Administration’s willingness to take a lead in framing a new climate agreement, the U.S. is now being accused of playing a spoiler role. The U.S. has ended negotiations over specific emissions targets by insisting that countries be given the freedom to decide their own measures for reducing greenhouse gases. The Obama Administration has cynically appealed to the principle of “national sovereignty” to redirect global negotiations away from a new set of binding limits on carbon emissions. “I feel like the Americans have lost the plot a little bit,” the European Commission president was dryly quoted as saying in the September 22 Financial Times.

A country’s national sovereignty is, of course, under much greater threat from climate change than it is from a binding international agreement on preventing global warming. But nationalism serves as a convenient emotional ‘hot button’ that special interests can use to derail serious climate legislation. Opponents of carbon taxes and environmental regulations know very well that voluntary efforts designed by individual governments will not stop global warming. Permitting legislation has increased over the past several years even as the scientific evidence of global warming mounts. The evidence on climate change is now overwhelmingly clear: anything over a 2 degree-centigrade rise in temperatures (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit)—an event that is highly likely before the end of this century if no countermeasures are taken—will almost certainly have very costly and dangerous consequences.

Climate change skeptics are most prominent in the United States, which may help explain why the U.S. was the only major country to not ratify the Kyoto Protocol. It may also explain why, since the Kyoto Protocol was first signed, the U.S. has increased its carbon emissions by about 20 percent, while European countries reduced theirs by 2 percent. But, the question remains: Why are Americans so against policies that are in their own long-term interest? An answer to that question can be found by combining both the scientific understanding of the process of global warming and some interesting ideas from the field of sociology.

Our upcoming environmental disaster is—most simply put—the result of Americans’ inability to deal with two conflicting factors: the powerful hold of our individualistic consumer culture, and the lag-time between when greenhouse gases are emitted and when they actually produce disaster is—most simply put—the result of Americans’ inability to deal with two conflicting factors: the powerful hold of our individualistic consumer culture, and the lag-time between when greenhouse gases are emitted and when they actually produce disaster. American culture is so tightly wrapped around consumption and individualism that we refuse to grasp, much less accept, that our individual striving for larger houses, bigger automobiles, 16-oz. steaks, and frequent weekend fights to Las Vegas constitutes a collective irresponsibility of earth-shattering proportions.

Why the Public Does Not Support Climate Legislation

Environmentalists like us are oftentimes surprised by the public’s lack of interest in climate change. Recent polls even show that public opposition to climate change has very costly and dangerous consequences.

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Our upcoming environmental disaster is—most simply put—the result of Americans’ inability to deal with two conflicting factors: the powerful hold of our individualistic consumer culture, and the lag-time between when greenhouse gases are emitted and when they actually produce disaster. American culture is so tightly wrapped around consumption and individualism that we refuse to grasp, much less accept, that our individual striving for larger houses, bigger automobiles, 16-oz. steaks, and frequent weekend fights to Las Vegas constitutes a collective irresponsibility of earth-shattering proportions. The culture lags behind our scientific knowledge and understanding of our environment.

The momentum of culture has been thoroughly analyzed by the noted French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In several decades of books and articles, Bourdieu argued that an individual’s culture consists of an uncomfortable mixture of what he defines as field, habitus and doxa. These three components often interact in ways that perpetuate cultural assumptions and behaviors even when reality changes—resulting,
Carbon Dioxide Levels: How Much Is Too Much?

By August, 2009, Rajendra Pachauri, head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (I.P.C.C.), was coming to support a level of 350 parts per million carbon dioxide over the organization’s officially stated position, in its 2007 assessment, that 450 as a peak level was safe enough. This change brings him into line with the position of our friend and Iowa neighbor Jim Hansen (director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies), which he has been asserting for years.

Bill McKibben, author and climate activist, conveyed Pachauri’s change of mind in an email (borrowing from an Agence France Presse report) to people with whom he works: “As chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, I cannot take a position because we do not make recommendations,” said Rajendra Pachauri when asked if he supported calls to keep atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations below 350 p.p.m. But as a human being I am fully supportive of that goal. What is happening, and what is likely to happen, convinces me that the climatic stakes are rising. For example:

We’ve Seen the Last Ice Age

Temperatures are now warmer in the Arctic than during the last 2,000 years, at a time when the Earth is receiving less heat from the sun due to changes in its orbit. The difference is greenhouse-gas emissions due to human activity, Darrell S. Kaufman and colleagues wrote in the September 4, 2009 issue of Science. A cooling trend until the 20th century “was caused by the steady orbitally driven reduction in summer insulation... [which] was reversed during the 20th century, with four of the five warmest decades of our 2000-year-long reconstruction occurring between 1950 and 2000.”

This study also provides fresh evidence for indications that human-generated warming could interrupt the natural ice-age cycle. “The slow cooling trend is trivial compared to the warming that’s been happening and that’s in the pipeline,” Kaufman told Andrew C. Revkin of the New York Times.

For the head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to now support a level of 350 p.p.m. over the Panel’s 2007 assessment of 450 p.p.m., shows just how close to a climatic train wreck we really are.

Methane Bubbles

A group of British and German research scientists using sonar has found that at least 250 sources of methane bubbles have been rising from methane hydrates in the sea-bed off Norway, an early indication, perhaps, of the ‘methane gun’ that could add to the atmosphere’s overload of greenhouse gases. The group reported in Geophysical Research Letters that the methane was rising from between 150 and 4500 meters near West Spitsbergen.

Temperature records indicate that this area has warmed by about 1 degree C. during the last 30 years, destabilizing some of the hydrates. Professor Tim Minshull of the National Oceanography Centre at Southampton told British Broadcasting Corp News August 18: “We already knew there was some methane hydrate in the ocean off Spitsbergen and that’s an area where climate change is happening rather faster than just about anywhere else in the world,” he said. “Our survey was designed to work out how much methane might be released by future ocean warming; we did not expect to discover such strong evidence that this process has already started,” Minshull said.

This research indicates that the methane release may be part of a long-term pattern that reaches, in some cases, to the last years of the most recent ice age. Most of the methane ejected from the hydrates reacts with oxygen in the ocean, forming carbon dioxide as carbonic acid, contributing to ocean acidification. “If this process becomes widespread along Arctic continental margins, tens of teragrams of methane per year could be released into the ocean,” the scientists wrote.

Bruce E. Johansen is a professor of Communication at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and author, in 2009, of Hot Air and Hard Science: Dissecting the Global Warming Debate and the two-volume Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology.
### What NFP Got Done in 2009

by NFP President Paul Olson

This has been a pretty good year for NFP. Obviously the national climate has been a little more favorable to peacemakers since the last election, and the Nebraska political climate may be a bit more so too. People are even becoming complacent again. If popularity was determined solely by the number of bumper stickers seen in Lincoln, you’d think that NFP was the most popular organization in the state. Unfortunately that’s not the case. We still have an uphill battle to persuade Nebraskans of the folly of our common resort to violence and war, and we are continuing to have a tough go of it in the area of finances—to do what we need to do and pay our excellent staff a living wage.

The mission of Nebraskans for Peace is to work at the reduction of violence as a tool for coercion from the local level to the international. Our job is to push for justice for people who, without justice, have nothing to lose if they resort to violence.

We have five priorities:
1. Reducing local violence in homes, schools and cities;
2. Opposing economic, racial and gender-based injustice in Nebraska and nationally;
3. Opposing our current overseas wars;
4. Preventing the militarization of space and the use of space to control other nations;
5. Stopping military pollution in the state and international conflicts over foreign oil by promoting local renewable energy development.

**Priority 1: Local Violence:** We worked on enforcement of anti-bullying policies in local schools, on equivalent anti-bullying protection for gay and lesbian children, and on assisting mentoring programs to counter tendencies toward bullying. We worked with the attorney general to pass the dating violence sections of LB63, and we are now assisting the Nebraska Department of Education in implementing that bill. We contributed some funds to a Standing Rock Indian reservation domestic violence center.

**If popularity was determined solely by the number of bumper stickers seen in Lincoln, you’d think NFP was the most popular organization in the state.**

### What NFP Hopes to Do in 2010

Each fall, the NFP State Board conducts an priorities planning process in which we review what we did the previous year and specify what we hope to do in the year to come. Much of our 2010 plan is a direct continuation of what we’ve been doing.

**Priority One: Local Violence:** In the area of anti-violence work, we will continue to ask what our school districts are doing about bullying and dating violence and evaluate how successful they’re being in reducing school violence. We will also work on the problem of violence against women—both here at home and in the war zone. Rape has always been a feature of war, but it is now a genocidal tool in many arenas. New laws and international mandates are needed to combat this crime.

**Priority Two: Anti-War and International Law:** We will push for the end to the U.S. and NATO military presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan and for the substitution of a UN peacekeeping and nation-building mission. We will counter propaganda for military intervention with arguments for increasing the U.S.’s share of economic aid to these war-torn regions—to be administered by the people living there. We will argue for reduced military aid to Israel and for a stepped-up movement toward a solution to the issue of Palestinian statelessness.

**Priority Three: StratCom:** In cooperation with our national and international allies, we will continue to press for the U.S. to enter into meaningful negotiations for a treaty Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), and to back all diplomatic efforts to reduce and abolish all nuclear weapons stockpiles, as mandated in the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. International accords are our best hope for reining in StratCom’s new authority to militarily dominate space and offensively wage the ‘War on Terror’ with conventional and nuclear weapons.

**Priority Four: Racial and Economic Justice:** We will continue to organize and work on the Whiteclay issue until the situation is remedied. On the immigration front, we will seek to tamp down the overt racism in the present climate, to encourage state government to create accurate measurements of who is a legal resident, and to conduct a legislative study examining the impact of INS raids on immigrant families when a parent is deported. With the Appleseed Center and others, we will organize campaigns promoting interracial and gender equality on our college campuses, and strive for increased employment and development opportunities in North Omaha, and greater sensitivity and accountability by law enforcement.

**Project Five: The Military and the Environment:** To try to lessen the dangers climate change poses to our environment, we will encourage Nebraska’s federal delegation to support strong legislation restricting greenhouse gas emissions. Given the growing nature of this threat, a weak federal bill or international accord will not give the Earth’s species a chance to adapt. We will conduct this lobbying campaign through op-eds, letter-writing, congressional visits and general hell-raising, including protests here in our own backyard against the burning of coal—the single worst source of greenhouse gases and the primary fuel of Nebraska’s public power districts. Finally, we will support the legislative agendas of Nebraska state senators who are trying to end our addiction to coal and promote the solar and wind power resources readily available in this state.

We can’t promise that we will get all of this done, but the 1750 of us can surely try.
Fran Kaye Named ATM Peacemaker of the Year

by Ruth Thone

Representatives of Nebraska’s peace and justice organizations gathered this past August to honor Fran Kaye, Professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Great Plains Institute, as the “Peacemaker of the Year.”

Upwards to half a hundred people turned out for the “Alternatives to the Military” (ATM) annual pot luck supper and salute at Christ United Methodist Church.

Kaye’s long-time work for peace and justice includes teaching at prisons, working with the Native American community, protesting against the death penalty every Monday noon at the Governor’s Mansion, writing thoughtful letters to the editor for the Lincoln Journal Star, leafleting with Alternatives to the Military at Lincoln’s high schools, and essentially responding whenever there’s a call for help.

By custom, the format for this annual recognition event calls for everyone present to speak briefly about the honoree and their own peace and justice work. Kaye’s old friend, George Wolf, had this to say about their decades-long friendship:

“I met Fran Kaye over 30 years ago when she came to UNL to interview in our English department. As an ersatz Canadianist, I found it easy to recognize her as the real thing... Though I had a pretty good idea that Fran’s contributions to the intellectual life of the university would be substantial, I was amazed and humbled and challenged by her deep commitment to fostering peace and social justice.”

Wolf spoke of his and Kaye’s love for the work of the Canadian novelist Margaret Laurence and quoted a passage from a recent speech by Laurence that, he said, described Fran’s attitude exactly:

“Do not despair. Act. Speak out. In the words of one of my heroines, Catherine Parr Trail [an early 19th-century Ontario homesteader], ‘in cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one’s hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing.’”

Kaye joined a celebrated succession of peacemakers honored by ATM, which alternate between men and women who are less-heralded than others: the late Betty Olson, Dwight Ganzel, Don Tilley, Marj Manglitz, Carol McShane, John McCall, Leola Bullock, Terry Werner, Michael Baker, MJ Berry, Christy Hargesheimer, Nan Graf, George Wolf and John Taylor, Dan Williams, Bob Epp, Bob Hitchcock and Elizabeth Goodbrake.

Formed at the outset of the first Gulf War, ATM is currently led by Marge Schlitt, Ruth Thone, Jim McChesney, Dwight Ganzel, Marj Manglitz, Nina Williamson, Bob Boyce and Nye Bond, chair emeritus. Bond cites being older than 90 as good reason to quit such demanding activity.

ATM provides literature to seven high school media centers and guidance departments to help high school students understand their choices for college and/or employment. Every semester, it leaflets outside each high school before class in the morning, and maintains an information table next to the lunch rooms.
The discussion over healthcare has gone off track. While the media obsess over ridiculous people shouting about death panels and an impending socialist takeover of our government, the private healthcare/insurance industry is quietly ushering through Congress legislation that raises their profits—and our medical costs—even further. So let’s put the discussion back on track with a few important facts and a realistic policy option that actually improves Americans’ health.

We’re last among developed countries

In August, it was reported that the projected life expectancy of newborn Americans now surpasses 78 years. However, reading past the reassuring headline reveals that 78 years only puts us in 30th place among developed countries. A newborn Japanese can expect to live five years longer than a newborn American. American infants die at a rate twice that of Sweden’s, and Americans in every age group die at higher rates than their counterparts in other developed economies.

Ellen Nolte and C. Martin McKee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine categorize all recorded deaths in 19 of the world’s highest-income countries according to whether or not these deaths could have been avoided “in the presence of timely and effective health care” (Health Affairs, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2008). The incidence of such avoidable deaths constitutes a clear measure of success for a country’s medical system. Nolte and McKee find that among the 19 countries in 2002-2003, the U.S. had the highest failure rate. Specifically, if the U.S. medical system had been as good at avoiding avoidable deaths as the three best performers—France, Japan and Australia—then 101,000 fewer Americans would have died per year. Worse yet, while the other 18 countries reduced avoidable deaths by an average of 17 percent between 1997-98 and 2002-03, the U.S. could muster only a 4 percent improvement. We are not only behind, but we are falling further behind.

So much for the claim that our high drug prices and medical payments are necessary stimulants for rapid innovation. Other countries with lower government-negotiated prices seem to be innovating at a more rapid pace.

But we spend much more

Incredibly, the U.S. spends twice as much per person on health as other developed countries. In the U.S., we spend over 16 percent of our national income on drugs, doctors, hospitals, physical therapy, out-patient procedures and band-aids, while countries like France, Britain, Japan, Canada and New Zealand spend between 8 and 10 percent of their slightly lower per capita incomes. How is it that we spend so much, but we are last in our league?

Where have we gone wrong?

The U.S. healthcare system provides very uneven coverage. The lagging U.S. outcomes are due to our healthcare system’s very uneven performance. Currently, about 50 million Americans do not have health insurance. This means that when they get sick or responsibly seek routine preventive medical care, they are charged rates much higher than those charged to the insured and those covered under Medicare, Medicaid or the Veterans program. The uninsured are mostly people employed at very low wages, the unemployed, the chronically ill and disabled who have no access to private insurance plans, or the newly unemployed who lost their health insurance along with their job. The combination of higher out-of-pocket costs and lower income obviously translates into less medical care, especially preventive and the standard types of elective care that make life more comfortable.

There are also at least 25 million ‘underinsured’ Americans whose insurance plans have high deductibles and co-payments and payment caps that kick in well below the cost of any serious illnesses or accident. And, of course, insurance companies routinely, and cruelly, find ways to drop customers who develop chronic illnesses. The underinsurance problem is reflected in the fact that about 70 percent of people facing private bankruptcy from medical payments, or 35 percent of all personal bankruptcies in the U.S., have some form of health insurance.

The major reason for the failure of the U.S. healthcare system is its lack of universal coverage and preventive care. Every other developed country has a ‘universal’ healthcare system that provides healthcare to everyone; the United States is the only developed country that does not guarantee health care for every resident.

Our healthcare is provided through a mixture of public programs, employment-based insurance, individual private insurance...
Why It’s So Hard to Change Public Attitudes, conclusion

oftentimes, in people acting against their own best interests.

Bourdieu defines a ‘field’ as the social or intellectual arena within which people spend much of their active hours of the day, such as their job, their intellectual field, their profession or their social group. Young people’s field is usually their school environment, and members of the military similarly adopt military culture. In sum, the field constitutes the realities of our daily existence where we focus our efforts to advance our economic and social interests. People may simultaneously visualize themselves as part of a broad national culture while, on a daily basis, they perceive only their immediate social environment or job. People thus usually strongly embrace a narrow field’s particular culture, and that particular cultural field can dominate the other cultures that might also be influencing them.

People, Bourdieu argues, necessarily adopt a ‘habitus,’ which is a set of subjective but persistent perceptions, beliefs, and norms of behavior that enable people to function within their field or fields. Since conflicts invariably emerge between the objective reality of one’s field and the more subjective habits that a field member embraces, individuals in turn develop a set of conceptions of reality—or beliefs—that Bourdieu calls ‘doxa.’ This doxa, or belief structure, serves to ‘explain’ the inconsistencies and gaps in understanding between the reality of the field and the subjective habitus. Doxa are essentially cultural behaviors that people view as ‘normal’ and use to judge events and their personal circumstances. According to Bourdieu, doxa serve to self-justify—and thus legitimize—the combination of a particular objective field and the subjective habitus that people rely on to manage their participation in that field.

Bourdieu argues that because the fields we occupy are shaped by both outside events and our internal habitus and doxa, we in effect create much of these fields’ reality. And, because our subjective views and assumptions change very slowly, our fields also change slowly. Even when external events shock our reality, we tend to continue operating in accordance with our familiar habitus and doxa. (Hence, the field of economics continues to teach neoliberal economics even after the financial crisis made it clear that free markets are not efficient.) Humans, accordingly, have difficulty dealing with changing circumstances. We should note that this sociological tendency is further strengthened by the physical nature of the human mind, which is hard-wired to protect the status quo and its accustomed ‘territory.’

The ‘Political Field’ and Global Warming

Our biological ability to deal with a phenomenon like global warming—where individualism continues to shape the reality of our jobs and professions, our entertainment, and our politics. Since our culture provides few incentives to act on global warming, we vote for whichever political party best identifies itself with consumption and individualism.

As the head of climate change research at the United Kingdom’s Meteorological Office recently lamented: “I don’t understand the psychology here. It should be about evidence but it’s actually about beliefs” (quoted in “Public scepticism takes the steam out of debate,” Financial Times, 9/22/2009). This dominance of belief over scientific evidence that so concerned the U.K. climate official seems to be strongest in the U.S. Is this because our lobbyists are more active in reinforcing the doxa and habitus components of culture through advertising, misinformation and fear? Or is it because Americans already have a habitus, or a disposition, to favor beliefs over scientific reasoning? Author Thomas Frank, of What’s the Matter with Kansas? fame, suggests that the U.S. has a long cultural tradition of anti-intellectualism. Bourdieu would conclude that this anti-intellectual habitus, perhaps based on a strong doxa of fundamentalist religious orthodoxy, makes it difficult for American political culture to generate sound environmental policies.

For people to change their beliefs and begin to understand the dismal consequences of global warming, they would need to envision themselves as occupying a field with a habitus that encourages scientific thought and values the experience of understanding complex scientific information.

The world may have to wait a long time before America’s culture finally catches up with the reality of global warming. Add to this equation the strength of special interest lobbyists the world over determined to impede a new climate accord, and it is clear that it is going to be very difficult to stop the coming train wreck.

Medicare for All, continued

Insurance plans, and pay-as-needed individual expenditures. Public programs include Medicare (for all Americans over 65), Medicaid (for low-income Americans), and the Veterans System (for former members of the military). The latter is a full provider of healthcare that owns hospitals and directly employs doctors; the former two are ‘single-payer’ programs under which the government pays individuals’ medical bills according to rates the government negotiates with private healthcare providers. Note also that in the U.S. employment-based health plans enjoy an implicit subsidy in the form of a tax exemption that effectively comes off the top of workers’ incomes.

This gets us to the second reason for the failure of U.S. healthcare: the system’s high costs. The bloated costs are the result of its confusing mixture of profit-maximizing private healthcare providers, monopolistic private insurers, tax-funded public programs and assorted public subsidies, which interact under regulations designed, and often written by, lobbyists for the private sectors of the industry. Employers negotiate healthcare plans with private insurance companies, which their employees can then take or leave. In tough economic times, these employer plans tend to reduce coverage, increase deductibles, require larger employee contributions or get abandoned altogether. Private insurance companies have every incentive to avoid high-risk customers, such as those with pre-existing conditions or older people. Employer-based health insurance gives employers substantial power over their employees, even as they have been ratcheting down such health benefits.

The third reason for the poor U.S. health outcomes is the lack of preventive care. Private healthcare providers have little or no incentive to provide preventive care.

In the case of global warming, American culture lags behind our scientific knowledge and understanding of our environment.

Conclusion on next page
Medicare, conclusion

After all, people often switch jobs and insurance companies, lose their health coverage altogether, or get older and get covered under Medicare. The insurance companies, therefore, do not benefit from paying for preventive care when it merely serves to lower future payments by another insurance company or Medicare. The other private players in the healthcare industry also do not gain from preventive care; the profits of drug companies and hospitals are directly related to the amount of drugs used and operations performed.

Fortunately, the solution is staring us in the face

The solution to the incomplete and inequitable healthcare coverage is straightforward: establish a ‘universal’ healthcare program that makes preventive, emergency and standard elective medical care equally available to everyone. This is what all other developed countries have done.

The solution to the cost problem is also surprisingly straightforward: move towards universal coverage by extending the Medicare program to everyone. For the same amount of national income, these countries spend about 60 percent as much on healthcare as the U.S. does.

With everyone covered by a single program run by our government, there are strong incentives to provide preventive care. Long-run savings accrue to the same program that pays the costs of preventive healthcare. Our government also has the means to nudge more Americans towards preventive care. And, because they would cost little or nothing in direct payments, Americans would not be as discouraged from seeking preventive care as they now are because of co-payments, deductibles and other out-of-pocket payments.

Overall, we will spend less for better healthcare

The persistent opposition to a universal single-payer system in the U.S. seems to revolve around the fear that it will cost too much. This fear is completely unfounded. Rather, it is our lack of a universal single-payer system that makes our healthcare so expensive.

To grasp the error of the cost argument against universal healthcare, note first that the U.S. government already pays about 45 percent of all U.S. healthcare expenditures through Medicare, Medicaid, the VA, and other public programs. Then if we add the implicit cost of exempting medical insurance premiums from income tax, it becomes apparent that the government effectively pays for nearly 60 percent of all U.S. healthcare. Overseas experience with single-payer universal healthcare systems, which cost on average less 60 percent of what we pay for our inefficient system, suggests that we, the taxpayers, already pay enough to fund a healthcare system that covers everyone.

Thus, for the same amount that our government already directly pays for healthcare or implicitly subsidizes through tax exemptions, we would get a true first-world healthcare system. Everyone would be covered, we would get fully ‘portable’ coverage, workers would have greater freedom to change jobs and locations, we could retire with healthcare before the age of 65 if we so wanted, and medical catastrophes would no longer be compounded by personal bankruptcy. The real kicker, of course, is that Americans would be richer by eliminating the 40 percent of total health expenditures now eaten up by insurance company profits, misleading advertising, over-priced prescription drugs, and the excessive resort to emergency care because of irregular preventive medical care.

There is this myth that a government healthcare program will inevitably cost more than competitive private programs. Evidence from healthcare experiences around the thoroughly refutes that myth. Here in the U.S., healthcare markets are not at all competitive. After all, there are but one or two hospitals in each town or city, we have virtually no choice over which insurance company we use when it comes to employer-based healthcare, and consumers of healthcare do not have sufficient information or understanding of the products to make good choices, especially in the case of emergencies. In the case of drugs, a small number of drug companies, who financially influence doctors to prescribe their products and pay millions to run misleading and uninformative advertisement, find it easy to extort high prices from 300 million uninformed individual consumers. Only a single-payer government-run program can stand up to the drug companies and other private suppliers of healthcare services and demand reasonable prices. And, while each American does have a vote to influence the government, let’s not forget that the average person has no influence on the small number of large corporations that now dominate the healthcare industry. These corporations act only in the interest of their stockholders and managers, and it takes more money than 99 percent of Americans have to become one of those privileged few. Perhaps with our government providing our healthcare, we will even take an interest in politics again.

What kind of a country are we?

Since the continuation or extension of the status quo will eventually bankrupt our government, the practical need for healthcare reform is obvious. But we also face a clear moral issue: the current dysfunctional private/public system created by years of special interest politics allows 101,000 people to die from preventable causes each year. How can we possibly justify maintaining, or even expanding, the current inefficient system when a less deadly system is staring us in the face? The smart thing to do, and, more important, the right thing to do, is to expand Medicare to everyone.
on local culture. Their disruptions can be like the arrows in Gulliver’s hand. They hurt. But only we can destroy ourselves through the myth of total control and total expenditure of resources to obtain it.

The 3,000-plus killed on 9/11 constitute a great many people, particularly if you loved one of them. Their deaths though do not justify the 6,000 and more American and allied casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan (www.icasualties.org) and the hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths there. One death does not pay for another. Nor do a thousand foreign deaths pay for one American one. The only way to pay for these deaths is to counter the culture of death. It is clear from the work of Three Cups of Tea author Greg Mortenson’s in Pakistan and from reports of NGOs still active in Afghanistan that, even in the valleys where the Taliban operate, people want education, health care, food other than poppies, and they want to make for themselves in their own way. They mostly want a little peace and quiet after 30 years of what Matthew Hoh describes as a rural-urban civil war. That, non-partisan NGOs can work to create.

Most NFP members probably voted for Obama. I did. He has done good work in turning to diplomacy, promoting nuclear abolition, stopping torture, withdrawing from Iraq and actually talking with Iran. But we need to challenge the logic of his administration’s position on Afghanistan. This is not change we can believe in. It is the same old changeless imperialism. It’s a black hole of endless destruction... And it will ruin all of the other changes we do believe in.

We need to talk to our senators and representatives (Republican as well as Democrat) about our concerns over this escalating war. Surges and drones will not capture hearts and minds. They will kill people—ours and theirs.
When Gulliver comes ashore in Lilliputia and immediately goes to sleep from exhaustion, the mite-sized Lilliputians bind him to the ground with tiny ropes, then loose “a shower of above a Hundred Arrows, discharged on my [Gulliver’s] left Hand, which pricked me like so many needles.” The Lilliputians disrupt Gulliver’s life temporarily and cause him pain, but cannot destroy him. They are, I think, a metaphor for modern post-Cold War conflicts: insurgencies waged through small-scale sorties and provocative threats that annoy and create disruption. They cause hurt and upend our sense of security and feelings of control. We respond with modern military assets: smart bombs, surges, drones, counter-insurgency surge and a ramping-up of ‘counter-terror’ drone strikes. This new escalation, we are assured, will quell the Taliban and restore just and democratic rule to Afghanistan. Though we’re seeing both Republicans on the right and Democrats on the left separately advocating various forms of military withdrawal, such proposals (including the one our 2009 Annual Peace Conference Phyllis Bennis speaker describes on the front page of this Nebraska Report issue) are not on the table. We are not going to withdraw, rely on NGOs and the UN to provide needed aid to rebuild Afghanistan, and depend on help from the regional security alliance.

But why not?
We know that our announced ‘enemy’ is al Qaida and not the Afghan villagers we’re daily killing. We know that fewer than one hundred al Qaida live in Afghanistan. We know that Pakistan is in fact the strategic hot spot, with its volatile mix of both al Qaida and nuclear weapons. We know that al Qaida can organize and is organizing in Somali, Yemen, the U.S. (witness the recent Fort Hood killings), and a host of other counties. The powers-that-be know as well as did Matthew Hoh—the recently resigned Obama official working with development in Afghanistan—that the insurgency in Pashtun territory is composed of “multiple, seemingly infinite, local groups…fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies.” Hoh argues that “The U.S. and NATO presence in Pashtun valleys and villages, as well as Afghan army and police units that are led and composed of non-Pashtun soldiers and police, provide an occupation force against which the insurgency is justified.” We know that we are an occupying power firing the resistance and that the logic of ‘valleyism’ rather than ‘nation-statism’ prevails in predominantly rural Afghanistan.

We also know that the Afghanistan’s current national boundaries and notion of nationhood came about largely from Russian and British imperial decisions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and that rarely has the country operated under a centralized governmental authority. We know that Hamid Karzai’s writ doesn’t run beyond Kabul, that his election was fraudulent, that his brother is a big shot in the heroin trade that enriches both Taliban and Afghan officials. We know we are fighting for Unocal’s long-standing goal of running a pipeline across this vast country to haul Central Asian oil. And yet we are going in—full force. Why?

The military demands it. The Military-

Industrial Complex profits from it. Some Republican and moderate Democrats want it. The unemployed need it to get a job. And so on.

But these are not the basic reasons in my view.

Basic is our trust in the modern industrial nation-state’s capacity to control everything—and our failure to understand the forces of culture and history in these remote and sparsely populated valleys. Nothing can prevent dissidents in our own or other countries from disrupting complex technological, communication, transportation, governmental or industrial systems. They are darts in the hand…And they will come. We don’t realize that. We don’t even build much redundancy into our systems to prevent the disruption when it happens. (Remember how all air flights were canceled for two weeks after 9/11 and how much havoc that caused?)

No nation-state or military alliance of nation-states can change the cultures of every valley, tribe, village, and madrasa in Afghanistan or in other countries where al Qaida operates. The Taliban can only exist when they feed

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