



Nebraskans for Peace

# Nebraska Report

*There is no Peace without Justice*

MARCH / APRIL 2011

VOLUME 39, NUMBER 2

## Cut the Military Budget in Half

*With the House of Representatives poised to slash federal spending to reduce the deficit, Nebraskans for Peace held a Valentine's Day news conference at the State Capitol to spotlight the first place Congress should start cutting: America's bloated military budget. The following four statements delivered at the news conference detail the mix of flawed thinking, misplaced priorities and pork barrel spending that is needlessly driving our government to the brink of bankruptcy and threatening to gut its role as an instrument of justice.*

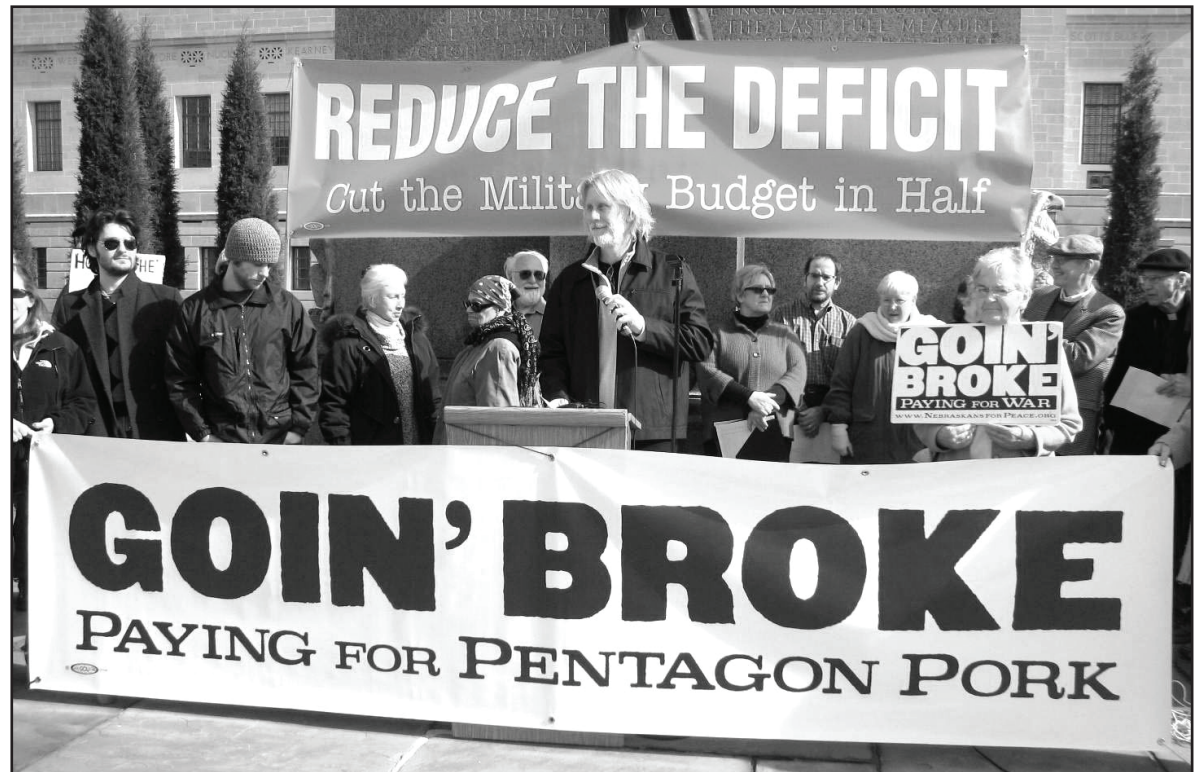
### Why Isn't Military Spending on the Chopping Block?

*by Hendrik Van den Berg, UNL Professor of Economics*

On Monday, February 14, President Obama delivered his budget proposal to Congress. For weeks now we have listened to reactions from politicians, pundits, and the press. We hear that spending decisions are constrained by projections of large budget deficits.

We are told that we all have to accept cuts in our favorite programs. Many commentators tell us that even entitlements such as Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare will have to be scaled back. We must share the burden. But almost always

*continued on page 3*



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## Nebraska Report

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## Nebraskans for Peace

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

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# Nebraskans for Peace Annual Financial Report

## YEAR-END FINANCIAL RESULTS

ACTUAL

BUDGET

### REVENUES

Membership	\$12,945	\$13,000
Donations	33,652	30,000
Peace Foundation Grants	70,000	70,000
CLAB Calendar	22,500	20,000
Peace Conference Registrations	3,230	3,000
Chapter Fundraisers	1,780	2,000
Projects Income	880	500
Miscellaneous Income	<u>93</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$145,080</b>	<b>\$138,500</b>

### EXPENSES

Personnel	\$87,051	\$86,853
Nebraska Report	9,265	10,440
Chapters Expense	2,208	2,100
Projects Expense	5,277	6,200
Peace Conference	5,331	5,300
Printing & Copying	1,775	1,800
Postage	1,719	1,720
Rent	7,092	7,100
Insurance	886	900
Accounting	4,300	4,300
Telephone	2,881	3,000
Supplies	984	2,020
Office Expense	1,454	1,800
Online Information Service	3,753	2,200
Staff Travel	944	1,000
Merchant Mastercard Fees	344	360
Subscriptions	170	180
Advertising	2,324	600
Miscellaneous Expense	<u>1,549</u>	<u>627</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$139,305</b>	<b>\$138,500</b>

### NET REVENUES

\$5,775

\$0

## Invest in a Peaceful Tomorrow

*Make a tax-deductible donation  
to the Nebraska Peace Foundation*

# Why Isn't Military Spending on the Budget Chopping Block?

missing from the interview, comments or speech is the suggestion that we can cut military spending and the myriad other national security expenditures.

With the projected 2011 budget deficit at about \$1.5 trillion, how can we just ignore 30 percent of the overall budget? Just look at what we spend for national defense and security:

1. The Department of Defense budget, plus the special appropriations for our wars of choice in Iraq, Afghanistan Pakistan, etc. sum to \$750 billion.
2. The CIA, NSA, and other parts of the Intelligence Community cost more than \$80 billion officially, probably more in fact. Remember, it is the CIA that flies the drones that bomb unknown people in villages in foreign lands and supports autocratic regimes like that of Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian dictator that the people of Egypt so courageously forced out of office last week.
3. Veterans Affairs costs \$100 billion per year. No, I am not proposing cutting off veterans, but it should be obvious that expenditures on our veterans are directly related to defense expenditures. If we start fewer wars, we will have fewer injured and disabled veterans to care for.
4. The Department of Energy's involvement in the nuclear program adds another \$20 billion or more, NASA's military activities cost perhaps \$10 billion, and the State Department's role in national defense (some significant proportion of the more than total \$50 billion in international programs) add further to the costs.
5. Finally, there is the interest cost on the Federal Debt accounted for by the share of defense and security expenditures in the total budget—nearly \$200 billion per year even if interest rates remain as low as they are now.

In total, we end up around \$1.2 trillion per year in total costs for military operations, special operations, contractor operations, surveillance, military aid to foreign dictators, etc. That is 7 percent of GDP, and 30 percent of the total proposed federal budget.

The President proposes to cut in the Pentagon budget by \$78 billion over ten years by eliminating arms even the

**The U.S. already accounts for half of the world's military spending. No one is going to conquer us even if we halve our military expenditures to a still enormous half trillion dollars per year.**

military does not want. But that is only \$8 billion per year, much less than the overall increase in defense expenditures proposed in the budget. Yes, overall defense expenditures are budgeted to rise, even though they have already risen by 80 percent since 2000 without counting the cost of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We can easily halve our military expenditures. The U.S. already accounts for half of the world's military spending. Our NATO and other close allies account for nearly another 25 percent. Of the remaining countries, most are not enemies

either. For example, India, Brazil, South Africa and South Korea are clearly allies according to official and unofficial statements issued in our recent past. So we, our allies and other assorted friends account for nearly all defense expenditures in the world.

Countries that, with some imagination, could be described as threats—such as Russia and China—spend a very small fraction of what we spend on their militaries. Note that China's announced increase in defense expenditures still takes it only to \$100 billion, or little more than 10 percent of U.S. expenditures. It is likely that China spends as much as it does only because our monstrous military expenditures have forced it into an arms race to counter our growing military presence off the Chinese coast and throughout resource-rich Asia.

Even if we halve our military/intelligence expenditures, we and our allies would still spend at least three or four times as much as all of the countries that could even remotely be considered threats to our security. In short, no one is going to conquer us even if we halve our military expenditures to a still enormous half trillion dollars per year.

So why is the bloated and unnecessary \$1 trillion-plus military budget not at the forefront of the budget discussions? The only ones who gain from this craziness are military contractors, Pentagon bosses looking forward to future careers at those contractors, and politicians who accept military contractors' political contributions. For their benefit, the rest of us are now being asked to accept less social security, higher healthcare costs, fewer student loans, and less educated children.

Shouldn't we be focusing on cutting the \$1.5 trillion federal government budget by cutting the biggest waste first? Ask your Congressmen how it is possible that they cannot see the trillion-dollar elephant in the room.

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# Waste Abounds at the Pentagon

*The following opinion editorial by UNL Associate Professor of Accountancy (and NFP State Board member) Linda Ruchala was published in the Friday, February 18, 2011 Omaha World-Herald as a "Midlands Voices" contribution and is reprinted with permission.*

On the day before the terrorists attacked on Sept. 11, 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld admitted that the money wasted by the U.S. military posed a serious threat to our security. He noted that some \$2.3 trillion in transactions could not be traced—an amount larger than the current annual deficit.

That news quickly became lost in the events that occurred one day later. However, to at least one group, it was neither news nor forgotten in the run-up to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Government Accountability Office, often called the U.S. government's accountants or the watchdog of the federal government, has reported "significant weaknesses in the department's ability to provide timely, reliable, consistent and accurate information for management analysis, decision-making and reporting."

Each year, for more than 20 years, the GAO has attempted audits of the Department

of Defense, and each year the GAO has been unable to issue an opinion on the financial statements because of the problems with the Department of Defense's financial reporting.

The GAO wrote that the main obstacles were serious financial management problems at the Department of Defense that made its financial statements unauditible. I don't think Americans would accept that level of financial misfeasance from any other federal agency, and we should not accept that from the military.

That last GAO statement was from the audit of the 2010 U.S. government's consolidated financial statements. We cannot continue to throw money at a system as incompetently managed as our military.

The annual budget for the government's military-related activities exceeds \$1 trillion. The waste, fraud and mismanagement harm our ability to serve the very soldiers we should be supporting.

As any executive knows, a well-run company requires strong financial information, reporting and analysis. It is hard to imagine that military operations are not significantly impaired by this long-term financial mismanagement.

And now, the magnitude of such misman-

agement is so significant that it is hurting not just our military operations but also the basic fiscal soundness of the nation.

U.S. expenditures on the military are more than the combined total of the next 15 largest military budgets in the world. Military spending

Of course, the rise of misplaced power, he knew, included the acquiescence of the legislative branch in light of political contributions, military-related investments and earmarks for congressional districts.

Just as there is no company that is 'too

## **For more than 20 years, the Government Accountability Office has been unable to complete an annual audit of the Pentagon due to mismanagement and shoddy record-keeping.**

grew on average by 9 percent annually during the 2000-09 period. Proportionally, discretionary Defense Department spending equaled more than one-half of all federal discretionary spending in fiscal year 2010.

Fifty years ago, President Dwight Eisenhower spoke of the "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry [which] is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government."

He went on to warn that the "potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

big to fail,' there is no unit of government that should consider itself so untouchable as to mismanage its financial reporting for more than 20 years without being held accountable to citizens.

Sizable reductions in the military budget would accomplish several goals:

- 1) Begin putting our nation on a more sustainable fiscal footing,
- 2) Begin balancing the domestic and militaristic policies within our country and, finally,
- 3) Send a message to the military that accountability in financial management also applies to its operations.

# The Local Cost of Military Spending

*by Terry Werner*

*Executive Director, Nebraska Chapter National Association of Social Workers*

As you just heard, billions of our tax dollars are going for redundant military spending. In a time of high unemployment, years of recession and local governmental budget deficits, we must re-examine our priorities. This spending directly affects our quality of life. The decision to not cut military spending has serious consequences on individuals and families in Nebraska.

As a Lincoln city councilperson, I spoke out against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I said that these decisions would

affect our city and not make us any safer. According to the National Priorities Project those wars have cost the State of Nebraska over eight billion dollars and the City of Lincoln over a billion dollars. If our priorities were different, think what this could have done for our local economies.

Instead, Nebraska has over 200,000 people living in poverty and thousands more who would be considered the working poor. Between 2000 and 2009, Nebraska's child poverty rate went from 10 percent to 15.2 percent. 31,000 of Nebraska's children have no health insurance. Counties and towns across Nebraska can no longer provide basic services, forcing

increases in fees and property taxes. And after this legislative session, things are only going to get worse.

This legislature has already advanced a bill to eliminate state aid to cities and counties, saying that it is a minor piece of their budgets. Lincoln's mayor, however, disputed that claim by pointing out that the legislature's cuts to cities are the equivalent of a 20 percent property tax increase.

The legislature is looking to cut provider rates to Medicaid, affecting access and services to our most vulnerable citizens. Already the Lancaster County Mental Health Center has cut staff that provides needed services to the mentally ill. Draconian cuts to education will dramatically

affect property tax rates, but more importantly affect the future of our children and our state. Cuts to prenatal care for women have resulted with in utero deaths to babies in Columbus. The legislature has taken aim at working men and women, blaming them for both state and local budget deficits, further eroding away the middle class and economic stability.

We must bear responsibility for the social justice travesties that our military expenditures have created. The excessive money going to the military could instead go towards the many budget deficits that our state, counties and cities now face. These huge military expenditures threaten our standard of living and quality of life.

# The Pentagon Budget and Moral Conscience

by Dan Schlitt  
Retired UNL Professor of Physics

My name is Dan Schlitt and I am a Quaker and a member of the Lincoln Friends Meeting. I am here today because of my long involvement in the governing group of the “Friends Committee on National Legislation,” which has served as the Quakers’ lobbying organization in our nation’s capital since 1948. We work in cooperation with other religious organizations that share our stated goals:

*We seek a world free of war and the threat of war*

*We seek a society with equity and justice for all*

*We seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled*

*We seek an earth restored.*

In Washington, in order to have the resources to accomplish three of those goals, it is clear that we must work toward achieving the first—a world free of war and the threat of war. We must, accordingly, bring our government’s exorbitant spending on the military under control.

President Eisenhower warned us of the Military-Industrial Complex that was growing in post-World War II America. We have not heeded that warning and slowly our country has fallen under the influence

of that complex. Today we face a very difficult task in even discussing Pentagon spending. But it is still true, as Eisenhower said, that every bomb made represents theft from the poor.

There are those who maintain that the Soviet Union collapsed because of its spending on the military in order to remain a world power. That was certainly one of the causes. Today our country is in two wars that we are not willing to pay for. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has identified very expensive weapon systems that we have no need for, which Congress insists on funding. Our nation is on the same path that the Soviet Union was on.

There are some hopeful signs that the Pentagon budget may be given the same careful examination by Congress that other spending is receiving.

A “Sustainable Defense Task Force” was formed in response to a request from

Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), working in cooperation with Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-NC), Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX), and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) to explore possible defense budget contributions to

deficit-reduction efforts that would not compromise the essential security of the United States. The report of this group, entitled “Debt, Deficits, and Defense: A Way Forward,” opens with two quotations:

*Conservatives need to hearken back to our Eisenhower heritage, and develop a defense leadership that understands military power is fundamentally premised on the solvency of the American government and the vibrancy of the US economy.*

—Kori Schake, Hoover Institution Fellow and former McCain-Palin Foreign Policy Advisor

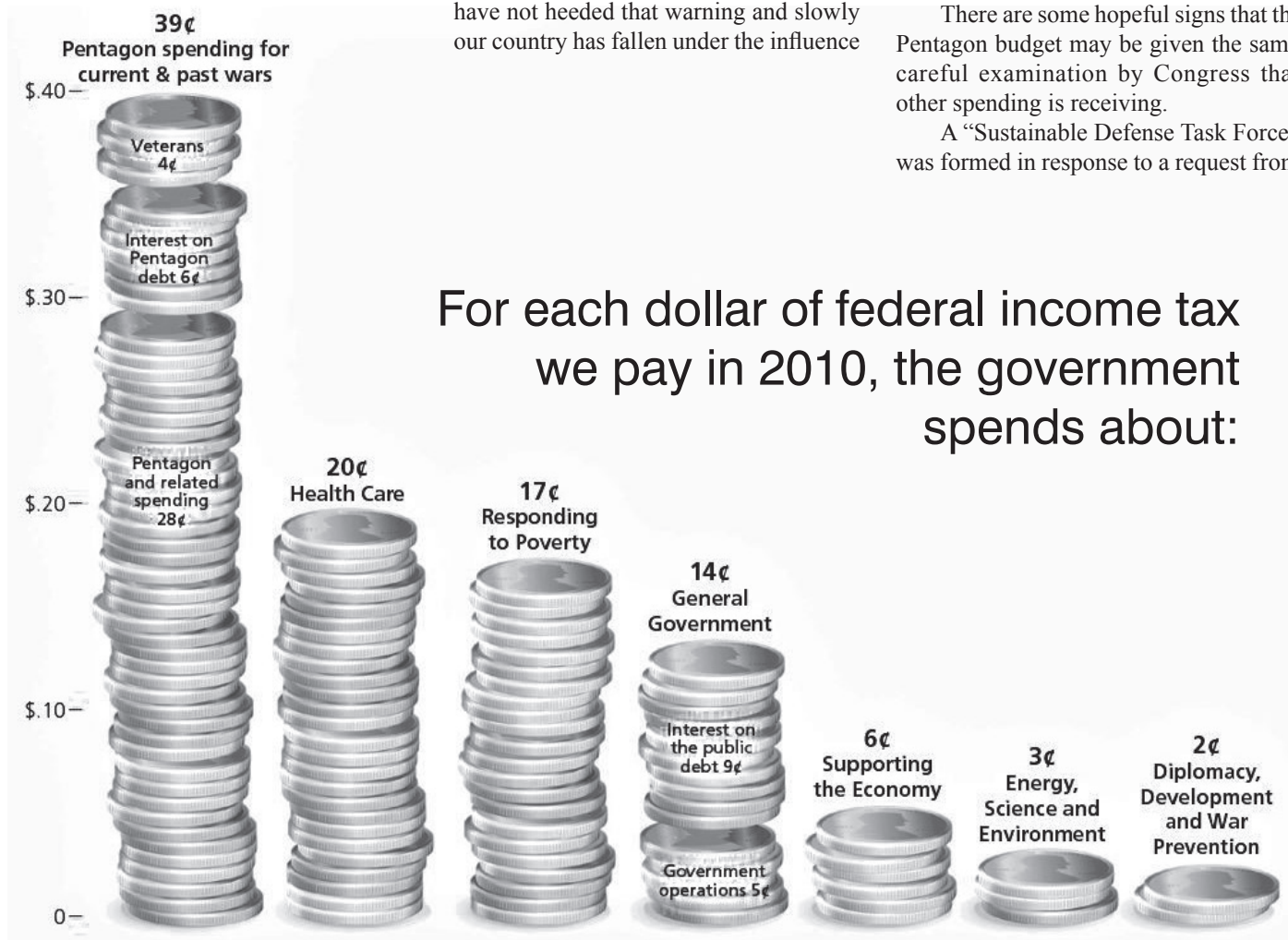
*A country that becomes economically weakened because it has shortchanged necessary domestic investments and carries excessive levels of debt will also eventually be a weaker country across the board. An overall defense strategy that is fiscally unsustainable will fail every bit as much as a strategy that shortchanges the military.*

—John Podesta and Michael Ettinger, Center for American Progress

The report presents a series of options which could save nearly \$1 trillion dollars between 2011 and 2020 if they were adopted.

This week, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) plans to offer an amendment that would insist that the Pentagon budget be part of any effort to bring the federal deficit back under control. Other members may also offer amendments to rein in military spending. Representatives need to hear that their constituents support these cuts.

We must raise our voices so that our Senators and Representatives know our wishes to reduce Pentagon spending.



# Our Growing Income Inequality (It's NOT an Accident)

by *Hendrik Van den Berg*  
*UNL Professor of Economics*

Something very disturbing has been happening in the United States, the land of equal opportunity: Income has become much more unequal. The U.S. is now the least equal of all developed countries.

Official statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor paint a very dismal story about the distribution of income in the U.S. Some samples of the statistical data are:

- Forty years ago, the minimum wage was about 25 percent higher in terms of real purchasing power than it is today. Specifically, the \$1.60 minimum wage in 1968 would buy about \$9.00 worth of goods and services today. Today, a person working a 40-hour week at the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour lives below the poverty line.
- Since 1980, just about all of the growth in total U.S. national income has been captured by the top 10 percent of income earners. The average real income accruing to the remaining 90 percent of the U.S. population has not changed for 30 years.
- In 2009, an average non-supervisory worker earned \$18.62 an hour in the U.S. That sounds good, but in 1972 the real purchasing power of the average real non-supervisory wage was the equivalent of \$20.20 today! Even more stunning is the fact that productivity of the average worker rose by over 100 percent over those 40 years. So, for producing more than twice as much, the average worker took a pay cut!
- The top ten percent of income earners in the U.S. captured almost exactly 50 percent of total U.S. income in 2007—a higher percentage than the top ten percent captured during the unequal “Roaring Twenties.”

- The top one percent of U.S. income earners took about one quarter of total income in 2007.

New data suggests that the 2008-2009 recession has hurt high-income earners very little, but low-income earners lost substantial income to high unemployment, underemployment and falling real wages. A U.S. Census Bureau report from September 2010 shows that the number of working people living in poverty rose to the highest level since the “War on Poverty” programs went into effect in the late 1960s, or 14.3 percent of all workers. The number of people

**Since 1980, just about all of the growth in total U.S. national income has been captured by the top 10 percent of income earners. The average real income accruing to the remaining 90 percent of the U.S. population has not changed for 30 years.**

without health insurance rose to over 50 million in 2010 from 40 million in 2007. Infant mortality has risen, and life expectancy has actually fallen in over one third of U.S. counties.

## **The Distribution of Wealth Became Even More Skewed**

Wealth is accumulated by saving and investing income, and it is easier to save from a high income than it is to save a portion of a low income. It is, therefore, not surprising that the distribution of accumulated wealth is distributed even less equally than annual income.

- In 2007, the top 20 percent of wealth holders in the United States held exactly 85 percent of all wealth.
- About 70 percent of the average Americans’ wealth consists of equity in their principal residence. Even so, median household wealth including housing was only \$43,600 in 2007. Median wealth (including home equity) for Hispanics or Blacks was an incredibly small \$500 and \$400, respectively!
- Now, if we just look at financial wealth, which includes such things as stocks, bonds and other forms of savings, the

have huge power over most Americans, who have only a bit of home equity to protect them. Their sheer economic clout lets this small elite capitalist class have a dominant say in where Americans work, what they consume, where they live, how much they earn, and what their society looks like. As individuals, the overwhelming majority of Americans really have no input into what happens in our economy.

## **Something Very Sinister Is Going On**

The growing inequality in income and wealth may be a surprise to many Americans, pacified by the ‘greatest democracy in the world’ and ‘land of opportunity’ rhetoric of our political leaders. But the inequality is very real, and it was no accident. The concentration of income and wealth is the predictable and intentional result of changes in government policies that we as citizens stood by and let the wealthy impose on us through our allegedly democratic system. Not surprisingly, the corporations and wealthy capitalists who set the political agenda changed the rules in order to make themselves better off. Their gains came at everyone else’s expense. There has been no ‘trickle-down’ benefit. The ‘trickle down’ theory is a hoax.

Fundamentally, there are several fundamental economic changes that economists have identified as the causes of the growing inequality:

- Lower taxes for the wealthy
  - Globalization and offshoring
  - The decline in unionization
  - The shrinking of government
- Worse yet, the top one percent of wealth holders own 63 percent of business equity. That is, one percent of the population owns two-thirds of the private sector economy.

So much for the ‘ownership society.’ The truth is that a small number of people

Tax rates on high-income earners and business have been reduced substantially. Often justified as necessary for economic growth, the numbers show that what

# What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

## West Antarctic Ice: Slipping Away

It's the end of winter here, but summer along the coast of West Antarctica, with ice melting in ominous ways that may reshape coastlines around the world for coming generations.

Recent analysis by glaciologist Ted Scambos of the "National Snow and Ice Data Center" in Boulder, Colorado and several

undulations with the timing of warm water pulses in the waters adjacent to the ice shelf. When surface winds are strong, they stir the Southern Ocean and lift the warm water onto the continental shelf where the additional heat contributes to melting. A channel of relatively warm water running below the Pine Island Glacier also

The idea that global warming could provoke the disintegration of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet was aired as theory by glaciologists as early as 1979. J.H. Mercer has suggested that the West Antarctic Ice Sheet fell apart during an interglacial period about 125,000 years ago—without an added boost from the burning of

America's east and west coasts, because "the shift in a huge mass of ice away from the South Pole would subtly change the strength of gravity locally and the rotation of the Earth."

### Questions about the Pine Island Glacier



Two-thirds of the ice-mass loss from the West Antarctic Ice Sheet stem from the Pine Island Glacier and its environs, where release of ice doubled during the decade ending in 2008. Radar images from satellite observations of the Pine Island Glacier in Antarctica taken during the 1990s indicate that it has been shrinking rapidly. The shrinking of this glacier is important "because it could lead to a collapse of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet," said Eric Rignot, a computer-radar scientist at the "Jet Propulsion Laboratory" in California, who led the study.

"The continuing retreat of Pine Island Glacier could be a symptom of the WAIS [West Antarctic Ice Sheet] disintegration," said Craig Lingle, a glaciologist at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, who is familiar with the study. By 2009, the Pine Island Glacier was losing ice four times as quickly as a decade previously, according to satellite imagery—a disclosure that provoked alarmed scientists to cut their estimates for the demise of this glacier from 600 years to one century.

A modeling study published in 2010 argues that the Pine Island Glacier has passed its tipping point, which could bring on collapse of parts of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. The study by Richard Katz and colleagues at the University of Oxford projects that the glacier may lose half its mass in less than a century. Katz and M. Grae Worster wrote in Britain's Proceedings of the Royal Society: "Our results indicate that unstable retreat of the grounding line over retrograde beds is a robust feature of models that evolve based on force balance at the grounding line. We conclude, based on our simplified model, that unstable grounding-line recession may already be occurring at the Pine Island glacier."

*conclusion on page 9*

**The idea that global warming could provoke the disintegration of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet was aired as theory by glaciologists as early as 1979... [C]ollapse of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet could raise global sea level by about 11 feet.**

colleagues indicates that after major Antarctic ice shelves ("Larsen A" and parts of "Larsen B") collapsed, remaining ice shelves have continued to lose ice for a decade or more. Warming ocean waters driven by strong winds seem to be eroding the ice on the Antarctic Peninsula and the edges of the "West Antarctic Ice Sheet." Today, only parts of Larsen B and Larsen C remain.

The West Antarctica Ice Sheet's "Pine Island Glacier" also is losing more than 19 cubic miles of ice per year. Using satellite images, scientists spotted a series of large surface undulations on the ice shelf. Next they matched the

may be accelerating the melting. The channel, according to an analysis posted by NASA's Earth Observatory, conducts ocean water to the grounding line, melting the ice shelf from below.

### How Much Sea-level Rise?

The stability of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet (which comprises about a quarter of the Earth's largest mass of frozen water) has been a subject of intense scientific inquiry for many years. A vibrant debate has grown up regarding the future of the ice sheet, with assurances of stability on one side, and speculation of future collapse on the other.

carbon-based fuels. T.J. Hughes has examined the geophysical mechanisms which may cause the West Antarctic ice sheet to collapse.

An analysis by Jonathan L. Bamber of the United Kingdom's "Bristol Glaciology Center" and colleagues estimated that collapse of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet could raise global sea level by 3.3 meters (about 11 feet), but with large regional variations. The analysis, published in the May 15, 2009 issue of *Science*, said that sea-level rise would vary around the world, with an extra foot and a half (25 percent more than the worldwide mean) on North

# 'Race Card' Gets Played in the Legislature ( but thankfully comes up short )

by Paul Olson  
NFP State Board

Several weeks ago, NFP President Mark Vasina and I were meeting with a state senator at the State Capitol when I remarked that I'd never recalled seeing so much introduced legislation that seemed to openly sanction race baiting. The senator replied with some verve, "Boy, you've got that right. I have never seen anything like this."

One can hardly fathom the tide of race-baiting that is aggressively sweeping our state right now—though almost no one will call what's happening racism. Perhaps the explanation lies in the threat posed to white privilege by the election of a black president, or the growing numbers of Hispanics in our state and country, or the resurgence internationally of nations such as China, India, Iran and Brazil, that barely half a century ago were under the thumb of white colonial powers. Whatever the impulse, though, it's ugly to see.

And the only saving grace to emerge from this legislative onslaught designed to make people of color go away (or at least get them sitting again at the back of the bus) is that little of it has succeeded. Nebraskans for Peace and its allies have been surprisingly successful in stopping the most pernicious bills:

1. The Judiciary Committee bottled up LB 48, the Arizona-style anti-Hispanic bill in committee. The coalition cre-

ated to defeat LB 48 perfectly exemplified what people committed to justice and peace can do if they pull together. A raft of organizations—NFP, the Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, the church-based Peace & Justice Workshop, Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League, Nebraska Catholic Conference, United

**One can hardly fathom the tide of race-baiting that is aggressively sweeping our state right now—though almost no one will call what's happening racism.**

Methodist Church, ELCA, many Mennonites and Brethren, the law enforcement community, OTOC, Nebraska State Education Association, NAACP, Center for Rural Affairs and many others—worked together. Senators Brenda Council, Amanda McGill and Burke Harr were especially effective in the committee hearing. The opponents of LB 48 had a comprehensive outreach program to get citizens to contact senators, an orderly structure for presenting written testimony, and a fairly well-developed media strategy. Together we rose to the occasion to show what we can do.

2. The Education Committee

blocked the effort to repeal the "Dream Act" (LB 657): Here the Appleseed Center and former Senator Diana Schimek took the lead in opposing the effort to prevent the children of undocumented immigrants who live in the state from receiving a college education in Nebraska with in-state tuition rates. NFP's action alerts, urging letters, phone calls and visits to state senators helped

keep this law on Nebraska's books.

3. With our help, the attempt to repeal the multicultural education requirement from Nebraska statute was taken out of LB 333 by the Legislature's Education Committee. The original multicultural education bill was passed some years ago through the efforts of students from Norfolk High School. LB 333, as it was originally proposed, would have eliminated any multicultural education requirement in the state's schools and encouraged the kind of "Whites Only" history, social science and literature that characterized Nebraska education before the Civil Rights movement. It would also have eliminated

some staffing support for bilingual education and education for the children in poverty. The testimony against these parts of the bill by NFP members and allies Thomas Christy, Jessie Payne, Lela Shanks, Christy Hargesheimer, Amelia Montes and others was powerful. Initially, the committee appeared to be ready to eliminate the multicultural requirement without consulting the study that it itself had commissioned through the Bureau of Sociological Research at UNL, which showed the program to be quite effective. But we and our allies made a powerful case and prevailed.

4. The bill to eliminate the Indian Affairs and Latino-American Commissions (LB172) was heard by the Government, Military Affairs and Veterans Committee. The two commissions relate to people of color who generally do not have senators in the legislature and have little presence on the state's judiciary or in the upper echelons of its executive branch: Native Americans and Hispanics. Contrary to depiction reported in the media, the charge of these commissions is not to be advocacy agents, but to inform Nebraska government of the state of things in their respective communities. NFP and NFP members played a crucial role in the establishment of these commissions, and we have fought for their survival under several other governors who sought

to abolish them. This year Native Americans and Hispanics themselves gave powerful and well-researched testimony that witnessed to the political sophistication of their communities. Many NFP members, though, attended the hearing, gave testimony and sent letters to the committee. The bill to eliminate the commissions did not advance out of committee.

We had many allies in these efforts, especially the Appleseed Center, the NAACP, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and often times the churches. They did a wonderful job, and we should thank them.

But we should not be complacent. While it's gratifying to know that our efforts were successful, many of these bills will be proposed again in slightly altered forms. Other bills having race-baiting content are still in the hopper. As long as we have Whiteclay and Fremont and massive child poverty in North Omaha, we have no reason to sit back in our easy chairs.

(Incidentally, I hope that many NFP members from around the state will attend the annual Omaha NFP chapter "Rice and Beans Dinner," bringing their own bean potluck item to go with the rice. State Senator Brenda Council will be talking about child poverty in Omaha's black community, which is among the highest in the nation. The Saturday, April 2, 2011 program begins at 6:00 p.m. at Hanscom Park United Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street, Omaha: RSVP 402-453-0776.)

# Chiapas 2011

by Bob Epp, NFP State Board

Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan erupted, only sporadic attention has been paid to the countries to our south. Even the Peace & Justice community has seemingly lost interest in this part of the world. Yet, as it is the source of what has recently become America's so-called 'immigration problem,' this region merits more attention than ever. So when I had a chance to be part of a "Work and Learn" delegation to Mexico the first two weeks in January, with a little prodding, I took it. We would be spending most of our time in Chiapas—an area I hadn't been to for at least 15 years.

The 'work' half of the trip consisted, initially, of painting the concrete walls of the home base of an organization working to bring together cultural and religious groups that have historically been at odds with each other. In addition to its 'on the ground' mediation efforts, the group is seeking to expand its agenda into influencing public policy. Later on, we built benches for a primary school that serves children of underprivileged families in Cuernavaca.

The 'learning' part involved presentations by speakers discussing issues that affect not only Mexico, but extend to the wider world. In San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, we learned the history of the "Zapatista Movement," which burst onto the world stage January 1, 1994 in an attack

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on San Cristobal and several surrounding villages. The Zapatistas took their name from Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The Zapatistas, as you may remember, were indigenous people led by a mysterious, charismatic non-indigenous man who called himself "Subcomandante Marcos." After 12 days of fighting, a ceasefire was called and negotiations with the Mexican government

ensued. The Zapatistas presented a list of economic and social grievances, which had the support of the Catholic bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz. A strong advocate for the indigenous cause, Bishop Ruiz had taken part in the post-Vatican II Conference in Medellin, Colombia in 1968, where the

"Liberation Theology" movement with its "preferential option for the poor" took root. Echoing this theological movement, the Zapatistas insisted that their struggle was not only for themselves, but for the poor and disenfranchised all over the world. A year later, in 1995, they in fact sponsored "The Conference for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism," an international convocation in Realidad, Chiapas that was attended

by nearly 3,000 people. The negotiations between the Zapatistas and the government eventually ended in substantial agreement. The settled-upon terms, however, were never enacted into law, so there is still ongoing tension between the indigenous and the government.

The date of the January 1, 1994 uprising in Chiapas was deliberately timed to coincide with the implementation of the "North American Free Trade Agreement" (NAFTA) between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Warning of the disastrous economic and social impacts that would result from the agreement—including the required sale of communal lands (called 'ejidos') to highest private bidder—the Zapatistas decried NAFTA as "the death knell for indigenous people."

Once the subject turned to NAFTA, we spent several hours one afternoon with a representative from the organization "Otros Mundos" (Other Worlds) who gave us an overview of the effects the trade pact has had on Mexico. The original intent of

*conclusion on page 11*

"Chronicles a painful odyssey that should give pause to the caring, the oblivious, and those who don't give a damn." Frank LaMere  
Chair, Native Caucus, Democratic National Committee

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## What's HOT, conclusion

Warming water in the "Amundsen Sea" is eroding the glacier from below, pushing the grounding line higher up the continental shelf. This model may underestimate the speed at which glacier's grounding line is retreating, says Katz. "Ours is a simple model of an ice sheet that neglects some important physics," said Katz. "The take-home message is that we should be concerned about tipping points in West Antarctica and we should do a lot more work to investigate," he said.

The Pine Island Glacier is important because it is part of stream of ice that moves more rapidly than the ice cap surrounding it. This glacier is part of an ice stream which runs from the interior of the West Antarc-

tic Ice Sheet into the surrounding ocean waters. If a glacier in this ice stream melts more quickly from the bottom than snow accumulates on its top, the net ice melt goes into the ocean, raising sea levels.

A "disaster scenario," as described by Richard Alley, a glaciologist at Pennsylvania State University, has the Pine Island Glacier retreating enough to "make a hole in the side of the ice sheet... The remaining ice would drain through that hole."

*Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacson Professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and author of The Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology (2009).*

# Our Growing Income Inequality, conclusion

growth did occur accrued only to the high-income earners. At the same time, the U.S. economy did not grow faster with the lower taxes on the rich. To the contrary, the two decades of fastest economic growth were the 1950s and 1960s when the marginal income tax rate was nearly 90 percent, the corporate income tax was a third higher than it is now, and capital gains taxes were nearly double what they are now. Clearly, economic growth does not require low taxes for the wealthy. Nor is there a trickle-down effect to the rest of the population. Despite these facts, the news media only ape the corporate call for even lower taxes.

Globalization, persistently promoted by U.S. business (two thirds of which, remember, is owned by the wealthiest 1 percent of the population), increased the economic and political clout of employers. 'Accept a lower wage, or we'll move the factory to China' became the standard corporate bargaining strategy during labor negotiations. Many jobs did indeed move, and in the jobs that remained, labor was forced to work for less. That is why the median wage is lower today than three decades ago despite a doubling of labor productivity.

Globalization has not only lowered wages, but it destroyed the labor unions that stood as the only remaining protection workers have. In a capitalist economy, individual workers have little power vis-a-vis corporate employers. Workers learned this a century ago, and they responded by organizing. We owe the 8-hour workday, the 40-hour week, the minimum wage, workplace safety

regulations, and many labor measures to the union movement. Unions made the labor market more competitive, and there was a persistent improvement in the sharing of national income up to the early 1970s, when unions were strong. Now, few unions remain in the private sector. And the corporate-funded politicians are now going after public sector unions.

The demise of unions, and the decline in union funds for political lobbying, led the Democratic Party to abandon labor in favor of the much wealthier corporate interests. Not surprisingly, tax cuts were embraced by Democrats and Republicans alike, and in the 1990s, Bill Clinton ended "government as we know it." Obama received more corporate donations in 2008 than John McCain.

And so 90 percent of American workers have not shared at all in the last 30 years of growing national income. Tragically, many people at the wrong end of this growing inequality still support the policies that pushed them towards the bottom. Well-intentioned Americans are reluctant to embrace labor unions, and they continue to vote for candidates who push for 'Free Trade' policies and lower taxes on the wealthy. That 'trickle-down' mindset runs deep in the American psyche, it seems.

## Solution Is Obvious

It is interesting to note that amid all the bad news about the distribution of income, Americans over 65 actually enjoyed a reduction in the incidence of poverty. This shows that Social Security and Medicare have worked. Of course, the


U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups are out to undo this success as well. But, think about the lesson here: equality depends on government policies that intentionally tax, redistribute and support minimum living standards. That is, we need to collectively decide as a society—through our democratic government—to fairly distribute the productive bounty of our large and powerful economy. The monopolized market system, dominated by autocratically-run corporate entities with the single purpose of maximizing profit and CEO salaries, does not generate an equitable income distribution. The wealthy who run the system have no intention of sharing any more than they are forced to share with the workers, small businesspeople, professionals, teachers, firefighters and all the other workers that produce our

national wealth.

Perhaps Americans are at last waking up to the corporate takeover of our government, economy and society, as evidenced by the 100,000 demonstrators in Madison, Wisconsin, this past February. Alternatively, if we continue to accept the joint Republican/Democratic sellout to the wealthy, we had better—in the words of political analyst Chris Hedges—prepare for an inevitable return to a modern form of feudalism in which most people work for a few privileged owners of society's resources. In any case, there is little doubt that without a restoration of government's role in mitigating the inequalities inherent in capitalism, our children are going to be worse off than we are.

This is what the government's own numbers show is already happening. Is anyone paying attention?

*Nebraskans for Peace lost a dear friend and colleague January 18, 2011, when former NFP State Board Vice President Jeanette Sulzman died from medical complications at her home in Kansas. An active member of the Grand Island Peace & Justice community for years, Jeanette was just about the sweetest soul who ever walked the face of the earth. Her presence is dearly missed and we send our deepest condolences to her family — particularly to her brother and faithful NFP ally Bill Sulzman of Citizens for Peace and Space in Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

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# Chiapas, conclusion

the agreement was to eliminate trade barriers and encourage international investment—and for multinational corporations and people of wealth, NAFTA has been a bonanza. Open pit mining, for example, is now occurring in Mexico as a result of the agreement, and the speaker referenced a Canadian company at Cerro de San Pedro that was mining for gold and silver. Pollution from the mine had poisoned the local water supply, however, making the water unfit to drink. Despite protests, the inhabitants have no legal recourse, as the free trade agreement trumps any federal, state and local restrictions. The agreement even allows foreign corporations to sue host governments if they feel their corporate prerogatives are being restrained by a country's laws or regulations.

The effect on the rural areas of Mexico has been especially devastating. In Mexico, 10 million people—a quarter of the work force—live off the land. Since NAFTA's adoption, the U.S. has annually exported huge quantities of subsidized corn to Mexico, undercutting the local price and driving small farmers out of business. Roughly 2 million people have been displaced from the agricultural sector since 1994 and the rural poverty rate has climbed to 85 percent. Well over half a million of these former farmers have wound up migrating to the U.S. in search of work.

With the dramatic rise in the world price for grain, there is now no surplus corn to export to Mexico. And with Mexican farmers having been driven off the land and little local corn available, the price for corn has risen to where it is beyond the reach of many people in a country where it is a staple in making tortillas. Is it any wonder then that people who are economically desperate to leave their homes and families to seek work in another country? Or that, having found a place to live and work, send money back to their starving families in Mexico?

NAFTA has undoubtedly contributed to the influx of undocumented workers into the U.S. Our immigration laws, however, have not kept pace with the human tide coming north. Even if an immigrant wants to do everything legally, the path to citizenship is complicated. It may take as long as 16 years. Crossing the border without legal documentation is oftentimes the only recourse for uprooted people fleeing poverty and want.

In the industrial section of the economy, NAFTA has also contributed to some bizarre economic inequities. The gentleman from Otro Mundos told us about a case where a U.S. manufacturing plant set up a factory in Mexico because of the cheap labor, but its product cannot be sold from the factory to any Mexican distributor. It is instead sold to a distributor in the U.S. who then can sell it back to an outlet in Mexico, but must of course pay a tariff for crossing the border back into Mexico. Therefore, a product made in Mexico by Mexican workers sells for more in Mexico than it does in the United States.

He also had some interesting comments about how the future economy would function. With energy becoming more and more expensive, transportation of goods, he said, would become a major factor in the pricing of food. Transportation costs are the 'Achilles heel' of 'globalization.' Inevitably, he told us, for people everywhere, we will need to rely more and more on locally produced food.

Many of you may remember Richard Flamer, formerly of Omaha. He is now operating a small Catholic mission just outside of San Cristobal de la Casas. The day before I left, I contacted him and he came and took me to his home for supper. He says he is as happy as he has ever been. He works with the poorest of the poor. So, all in all it was a valuable, albeit, somewhat exhausting two weeks.

**Carlton B. Paine, Ph.D. • Clinical Psychologist**

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## Speaking Our Peace, conclusion

Alternatively, Nebraskans for Peace has argued that—even with insanely low taxes—we need not destroy our support for the poor and middle classes, for education, for green economic or for health care. We can cut the Pentagon budget by half (\$350 billion):

1. We could close one third of our bases in Europe and Asia and save about \$9 billion (National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform), or we could cut twice that many, leave Europe altogether, and save about \$12-15 billion. We have bases in Europe and Japan dating back to World War II that have no conceivable relation to a post-Cold War world;
  2. We could end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; 64 percent (some polls say 75 percent) of Americans now oppose these wars that are to be paid for by a \$171 billion dollar budget request in 2011 (Congressional Research Service). The Harvard Political Review says that the Afghan war alone is costing more than \$100 billion;
  3. We could terminate all unnecessary weapons systems still being supported: Ballistic Missile Defense, the Littoral Combat Ship, the V-22 Osprey, the F-35, the Global Information Grid, the Ford Class Carrier, the proposed Future Combat systems that do not work, the Mine Resistant Vehicles and other systems. This would save \$50 billion (RAND consultant John Arquilla);
  4. We could request a return of all military funds that the GAO cannot account for; only six of 33 Dept. of Defense reporting entities received unqualified audited
- opinions. We estimate that each of the 27 programs that are not audited could be cut by at least a billion dollars: \$27 billion dollars (based on UNL Accounting Professor Linda Ruchala estimates);
5. We could cut aid to Egypt, Israel, the Saudis and other Middle Eastern countries—aid that only says to those countries, "Let's see you and him fight." \$6 billion savings (Ron Paul);
  6. We could implement Secretary Gates' \$100 billion five-year savings plan: \$20 billion (Gates);
  7. We could include military health care in the national health care system: \$50 billion (based on National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility recommendations);
  8. We could cut the U.S. nuclear arsenal to 500 warheads and save \$87 billion over the next 10 years, \$8.7 billion in the next budget (Cato Institute);
  9. We could reduce the size of the Army to 360,000 and the Marine Corps to 145,000, saving \$300 billion over the next decade: 30 billion for one year (Cato);
  10. We could reduce military intelligence spending by \$110 billion over the next ten years: \$11 billion in the next year (Cato).
- These savings total \$390 billion dollars. Some might take more than a year to phase in, but most could work quickly and help us save our civil society. They would eliminate the need to cut Head Start, WIC, and heating help to old folks. They would leave us stronger. They would make us all less poor...

# Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

As you have undoubtedly noticed, last fall's election has emboldened some conservative groups to try to reverse all of the gains of the last two years. The *Nebraska Report* counters this political backlash by publishing educational articles on a variety of subjects, including immigration reform, military spending and the environment. The Nebraska Peace Foundation funds a portion of the cost of publishing each issue of the *Nebraska Report*. You can help support the educational work of Nebraskans for Peace with a tax-deductible gift to the Nebraska Peace Foundation.



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## Speaking Our Peace

We now have a \$14 trillion debt, over half of which derives from military expenditures. This year we have a budget proposal of over \$1 trillion for military and military-related costs (\$700 billion for the Pentagon itself). The U.S. together with our allies—Britain and the European Union, India, Israel, Egypt, South Korea and our cohorts in the war on al Qaida—account for 75 percent of the world's military spending. Our closest 'non-ally,' China, spends barely a sixth of what we spend.

All this money lavished on the military... and for what? Our global military ventures sow hatred and vengeance, and we're not even winning on the field of battle.

The 'wars' we're fighting are not the front-line wars one wins. Our so-called 'enemies' are informal militias that live 'underground' and form, dissolve and reform overnight. These adversaries—in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and parts of South America—are the offspring of centuries of grievances against the West or 'Christianity' or British/American colonialism that exploited them grievously for Western benefit. Such resentments are

not controlled by fear or trillion-dollar budgets—even granting the military pacification skills of General Petraeus and Secretary Gates.

We could of course solve the problem of our budget deficit by resetting our marginal tax rates, which—in the prosperous 1940s and '50s—were two to three times higher. But, as I see it, the multinational rich who dominate our present tax policy will not allow this. They are not patriots. For all their flag-waving, they despise paying taxes to the country or loving the countrymen and women who have enabled their prosperity.

America's military budget now accounts for only 4.7 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. Yet it comprises over half of the discretionary federal budget because we tax so little. The Republicans and many Democrats claim that we cannot tolerate more debt than the \$14 trillion sovereign debt we now carry. But rather than raise taxes to increase government revenues, like Ronald Reagan, these 'deficit hawks' wish to cut social and educational programs (perhaps in the hope of making the poor, the sick, and the undereducated disappear altogether). Morally,

we are ourselves too impoverished to help the poor to a decent life.

Even President Obama has bought into this logic in his 2011 budget. His terminated programs include the following: Reintegration of Ex-Offenders; Youth-Build; Green Jobs Innovation Fund; Career Pathways Innovation Fund; National Health Service Corps; Family Planning (Title X); Teen Pregnancy Prevention Grants; Mentoring Children of Prisoners; Even Start; Striving Readers; High School Graduation Initiative; Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (higher ed financial assistance); LEAP program (for low-income college students).

The Obama budget's drastically cut programs include: \$1 billion from Head Start (15 percent); \$1.4 billion from job training; Community Health Centers (46 percent cut); substance abuse treatment (\$200 million cut); Community Services Block Grants (44 percent cut); Low Income Home Energy Assistance (66 percent cut); FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter (50 percent cut); Title I education for low-income students (\$693.5 million); IDEA special education (\$560

million); Commodity Supplemental Food Program (11.4 percent cut); Community Development Fund (\$2.95 billion, 66.3 percent cut); project-based rental assistance (\$715.5 million, or 8.4 percent cut); Public Housing Capital Fund (\$1.07 billion, 42 percent cut); Housing for the Elderly (\$551 million, or 67 percent cut); Housing for Persons with Disabilities (\$210 million, 70 percent cut).

In addition, the House Republicans would cut ten percent from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program that feeds impoverished young mothers and their children.

Recently, Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) wisely stated that Congress's budget cutting had to move from categorical social programs to military spending—move from the discretionary anthill to the discretionary mountain. Tea Party Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) has said the same thing. But establishment Democrats, Independents and Republicans have set the military budget off limits. They appear captive to the belief that security is synonymous with military spending. Inwardly, we are poor indeed.

*conclusion on page 11*

## We Are Poor, Part II

by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus