The Drones Come Home
StratCom and the Domestic Surveillance Threat

by Loring Wirbel
Citizens for Peace in Space

Municipal government leaders who have recently been installing surveillance cameras in downtown areas and acquiring surplus military equipment for police forces, now are turning a lustful eye to drones, or unpowered aerial vehicles (UAVs). The same is true for county and state officials who would like to use drones for border enforcement and drug network monitoring in areas ranging from tens to hundreds of square miles.

The procedural hurdle preventing drones on every street corner has been the need to update flight rules from the Federal Aviation Administration. Once FAA gives the green light, federal efforts are in place to assist drone use on a state or local basis, using funds from the Justice, Commerce, and Defense Departments. U.S. Northern Command, based in Colorado Springs, also will play a key role in this technology transfer.

Under its missions for Space, Intelligence/Surveillance/Reconnaissance, Prompt Global Strike and Combating Terrorism, U.S. Strategic Command is playing a leading role in the military use of drones overseas. Should we expect StratCom to be on the front line of this new domestic application of drone technology as well? The chances appear likely.

Government critics like the American Civil Liberties Union are paying close attention to the FAA “Modernization and Reform Act,” recently passed by Congress. While the bulk of the act deals with FAA system modernization, the parts dealing with expanded use of domestic airspace by drones attracted heavy criticism. The ACLU and “Electronic Privacy Information Center” were among several groups outraged that the Senate held hearings without accepting testimony from NGOs prepared to talk about the civil liberties dangers of unrestricted use of drones in U.S. airspace. There is even talk of allowing drones managed by local police forces to carry nonlethal weapons for crowd control—similar in a milder sense to the armed drones in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen that carry “Hellfire” missiles used for targeted assassination.

But don’t think the federal government waited for President Obama’s February 14 signing of the FAA act into law. Agencies like Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Northern Command, Drug Enforcement Administration and Strategic Command have worked behind the scenes the last two years to get the FAA to issue 285 active certificates for 85 users, relying on 82 different types of drones, according to an article in the March/April.

continued on page 3
WHO IS THE THREAT TO PEACE?

Ten Facts You Should Know, That You Probably Don’t Know

1) Attacking Iran would be a War Crime because it would be a war of aggression and a violation of International Law.

2) Iran possesses NO nuclear weapons.

3) Israel has approximately 400 nuclear bombs.

4) The U.S. has approximately 10,000 nuclear bombs.

5) Iran signed the “Non-Proliferation Treaty” regarding nuclear weapons. Israel did not.

6) Iran has the right to enrich nuclear material under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

7) The U.S. has bases and aircraft carriers surrounding Iran, capable of striking Iran at any time with nuclear and non-nuclear weapons.

8) Israel has nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching nuclear weapons at Iran at any time.

9) Iran has called for a ‘Nuclear Free Zone’ in the Middle East and voted for it. Israel has refused to consider a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East, and was the only country in the world to vote against it.

10) Iran would have every right, under International Law, to strike back if attacked by Israel and/or the U.S. In the event that Iran is attacked, there is the possibility that it would result in a wider war in the Middle East, causing more devastating human and economic consequences for the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Prevent an attack on Iran. Contact your Representatives and Senators and tell them NO ATTACKS ON IRAN, END THE CRUEL SANCTIONS, AND TALK PEACE, NOT WAR.

— Distributed through the Peace Action Network

Give the Gift of PEACE

NFP Memberships are just $25
Under its missions for Space, Intelligence/Surveillance/Reconnaissance, Prompt Global Strike and Combating Terrorism, U.S. Strategic Command is playing a leading role in the military use of drones overseas.

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of the first announced domestic uses of such drones, a local sheriff in North Dakota used an “MQ-9 Reaper” drone to track cattle rustling.

It’s natural to envision such drones being used for short-term missions such as the monitoring of protests or public events like concerts and football games. But the range in size of modern drones, which can scale from the size of a dragonfly to that of an SUV, allows the regular use of drones in longer-term domestic surveillance. Using normal batteries and fuel sources, handheld drones can dwell for hours and even days in domestic airspace. Contractor Northrop-Grumman has worked with Sandia Labs to develop drones that can dwell over one location for weeks using lithium battery packs—or even months using a radioisotope thermal generator (a miniature nuclear power source). Thankfully, Northrop and Sandia have admitted that the last design may not be feasible for “political sensibilities.”

John Villasenor of the Brookings Institution recently told National Public Radio that it would be perfectly reasonable to for organized protest—and this intolerance is just as prevalent among Democrats as Republicans. The most visible sign of this is the overt disruption of Occupy encampments and the widespread use of pepper spray by local police at the end of 2011. But it extends much further than that. In city after city, government officials are militarizing police forces by issuing tortoise-shell riot gear to hundreds of their officers. They are expanding ground-based camera networks to systems as large as Chicago’s 10,000-camera “Operation Virtual Shield.” And they are gladly taking advantage of a Defense Department program to donate surplus military equipment to municipal governments at no cost to the local government. The city of Tampa has even purchased two tanks (that’s right, tanks) for use at this summer’s Republican National Convention.

In such a climate, few outside the ACLU and a handful of police-monitoring groups are raising any complaints about the virtual demise of the “Posse Comitatus” law, which restricts the U.S. military from being involved in domestic law enforcement. Indeed, cities, counties and states are clamoring for aid from DHS and Defense Department agencies in coordinating drone use. This is the environment in which Strategic Command and Northern Command will be expanding domestic technology missions.

Northern Command took the lead three years ago, at a conference in Colorado Springs in March 2009, when it invited federal agencies to talk about collaborative use of drones in the domestic arena. Northern Command had experience in this hemisphere beyond the U.S. border, since it had helped Mexican President Felipe Calderon fly drones over contested areas at the height of the border drug wars. As a result of the 2009 conference, Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) and other members of Congress formed the “UAV Caucus”—not a lobbying group, but a Congressional group that made it easier for drone manufacturers to find a unified audience promoting domestic use of drones.

This is big-ticket business. When global warfare, domestic law enforcement and civilian
by Hank Van den Berg
UNL Professor of Economics

The “Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act” (which cutely abbreviates into the “JOBS Act”) was signed into law by President Obama on April 5. The signing ceremony featured the usual cast of smiling politicians, with the President handing out the pens he used to sign the bill to the various congressional leaders standing around him. The bill passed with huge majorities of Republicans and Democrats in both houses.

But before you celebrate this rare moment of bipartisanship, you should note that this bill does not directly create jobs. Rather, the bill deregulates “Initial Public Offerings” (IPOs) of stock on the alleged premise that job creation is restricted by ‘excessive regulation’ of IPOs, which prevents new companies from starting up and generating new jobs. Any direct job-creation measures had long been eliminated in earlier political wrangling, and only the deregulation provisions of the bill remained.

The JOBS Act reduces most reporting requirements for small- and medium-sized companies when they issue new stock. On the one hand, the act lets more companies issue new stock without facing the usual Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) requirements for full disclosure and periodic reports. Even some of the reporting requirements instituted just a few years ago after the ENRON and WorldCom frauds are waived for qualifying upstart companies. Before, exemptions from SEC regulation were only granted for companies with less than 500 shareholders; the JOBS Act increases that limit to 2,000 shareholders. Of course, these limits are nearly meaningless in practice, because a stockbroker who represents a large number of buyers can register as a single purchaser who counts as just one shareholder under this regulation.

The act also raises the total amount of stock that companies can exempt from SEC reporting requirements from its current $5 million to $50 million. The White House and the legislators touted the act’s legalization of “crowd funding (which refers to active internet advertising and sales of stocks directly to the general public). The bill also permits other forms of ‘general solicitations’—such as phone solicitations through call centers—that are now prohibited for first-time stock issuers. Because of the lack of information available to the public, such small new companies stock offerings without SEC oversight have, for the past 70 years, been limited to sales by certain brokerages to select customers.

But what does this JOBS bill really mean for the economy and the 99 percent that are not protected by their obscene wealth?

First of all, we should point out that ‘excessive regulation’ is not the cause of the sharp decline in stock offerings in the last several years. Unlike what sponsors of the JOBS Act kept suggesting, regulations in the securities industry have not been increased substantially in the past few years. The obvious cause of the decline in stock offerings is the Great Recession. Why invest in new firms when economic conditions are bad?

It is also not at all certain that the JOBS Act will really make more money available to small companies (assuming companies issuing $50 million in new stock are ‘small’). In fact, total flows of funds to IPOs for companies exempted from regulatory requirements are likely to decline. The politicians do not tell us that reporting requirements and regulations for transparency have long been recognized as desirable mechanisms necessary for attracting investors in new stock because they reduce the chances of fraud and enable potential purchasers to better judge the value of the stock. Every IPO by a new company faces the common problem of ‘asymmetric information,’ where the issuing company knows much more about the future of the company than the buyer of the stock. Without the reporting requirements, potential buyers are unlikely to commit their money.

A very recent “National Bureau of Economic Research” study by Glaeser, Johnson and Schleifer (three highly noted financial economists) compares financial flows to newly opened regulated and unregulated financial markets for IPOs, and it indeed finds that the more regulated markets saw steady growth in IPOs while the unregulated markets did not get off the ground. You could say that reporting requirements and other regulations to enforce honesty and transparency help honest businesses and deter dishonest companies from gaining access to investors’ funds.

Because the JOBS Act will undoubtedly allow some dishonest companies to sell stock while reducing the overall flow of funds to businesses, there will not be any jobs created. As MIT’s Simon Johnson recently argued in a widely distributed op-ed, the best we can hope for is that honest companies continue to provide full disclosure and transparency in order to attract funds for expansion—in which case the JOBS bill simply does nothing. Experience suggests, however, that there will be more fraud, and unsuspecting or greedy clients will get bilked of money that would otherwise have flowed to honest companies. We might better refer to this legislation as the ‘UNJOBS’ Act.

The University of Missouri—Kansas City’s William Black, a noted researcher of financial fraud, calls the JOBS Act a “form of insanity” because it will create a lot of new financial assets that no one understands or can put a true value on. It was precisely those types of complex assets that sank the global financial markets in 2007 and 2008.

To illustrate Black’s point, I will finish with some speculation on why the heavy hitters in the financial industry wrote this Act for their representatives, senators and President to enact into law, despite the clear dangers for the economy.

Note that, after deregulating much of the financial industry between the 1970s and the early 21st century, the only part of the

MAY/JUNE 2012 NEBRASKA REPORT, P. 4
by Mark Vasina
Nebraskans for Peace President

The Oglala Sioux Tribe kicked the hornets’ nest in February when it filed a lawsuit against the retail beer stores in Whiteclay and the distributors and brewers which supply them.

The lawsuit alleges the defendants are engaged in a common enterprise focused on assisting and participating in the illegal importation of alcohol sold at Whiteclay onto the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and have failed to make reasonable efforts to ensure their products are distributed and sold in obedience to the laws of the State of Nebraska and the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The Tribe seeks compensation for all of the damages the Lakota people have suffered as a result of illegal alcohol sales, as well as summary injunctive relief against illegal beer sales in Whiteclay. An amended complaint adds charges of public and private nuisance.

The media explosion included radio interviews of Omaha attorney Tom White, OST legal counsel, on CBC radio and NPR, and news coverage by major newspapers in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Germany, and Brazil (global headquarters of co-defendant Anheuser-Busch). A scathing front page story in The New York Times on March 6 led to BBC radio and television stories, and culminated in a call for a boycott of Anheuser-Busch by syndicated columnist Nicholas Kristof in the May 5 edition of The Sunday New York Times. (You can find links to these stories and other media coverage at http://battleforwhiteclay.org.)

On May 16 The New York Times continued its coverage of Whiteclay by publishing four op-ed pieces on the subject “How to Address Alcoholism on Indian Reservations.” Well-known activist and Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska member Frank LaMere was asked to contribute. His statement is reprinted in full.

Blood on Their Hands
by Frank LaMere, New York Times, May 16, 2012

Any action short of shutting down Whiteclay and crippling the enterprise that peddles alcohol among the Lakota people is unacceptable. The death toll exacted on the Lakota people by Anheuser-Busch and its partners continues to rise, and the sooner the Sheridan County hell-hole can be leveled the better off Nebraska will be.

Defendants named in the complaint:
Anheuser-Busch InBev Worldwide, Inc.
SAB Miller d/b/a Miller Brewing Company
Molson Coors Brewing Company
Miller Coors, LLC
Pabst Brewing Company
High Plains Budweiser (Scottsbluff)
Dietrich Distributing Co., Inc. (Gering)
Arrowhead Distributing, Inc. (North Platte)
Coors of West Nebraska (Gering)
Jason Schwarting d/b/a Arrowhead Inn, Inc. (Whiteclay)
Sanford Holdings, LLC d/b/a D&S Pioneer Service (Whiteclay)

County, state and liquor industry officials have long known of the lawlessness and illegal activities that go on there, but they have been allowed to run from their responsibilities as public trustees by reducing the sad reality to a discussion about personal responsibility and market demand.

Lakota children are orphaned and struggle through life with the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome. Their fathers, their mothers and their nation slowly bleed to death while officials wring their hands, proclaim that there are no easy answers, and mutter something about legal businesses and capitalism.

They would rather assert their morality than address the fact that, under their watch, people are freezing to death in the streets, violence against women is epidemic, sexual abuse continues, and murders go unsolved. Nebraskans used to have nerve. It has now been purchased by Anheuser-Busch, which further asks: What price their souls?

To change things at Pine Ridge, have Anheuser-Busch allocate to the Lakota what it allocates to its Clydesdales! The local economy would be built in a year. The company could treat people at least as well as it treats its horses.
Describing the heat wave across the eastern two-thirds of the United States at the end of March, weather watchers nearly ran out of adjectives. Across the U.S. in March, more than 7,000 record highs were set, 25 for each record low. During the third week of March, the temperature broke 90 in Michigan. It hit 91 in Omaha March 31, April 1 and April 2—a spectacular 40 degrees above average in Illinois. It was 67 at 6:00 a.m. April 2, a usual mid-summer morning. March ended 16 degrees above average in Omaha, a record.

Atlanta, Buffalo, Chicago, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Tampa, Washington, D.C. and many other cities set records for the month. The month set a record for the country as a whole. Even International Falls, Minnesota (which is usually notable for ice-box metaphors) hit 79 degrees F. Chicago hit 87 and Detroit 86—both record highs for the month.

What About Summer?

With temperatures peaking 40 degrees above average in Omaha at the end of March, a flaming global-warming advocate would be tempted to ask: What about summer? The average high around here in mid-summer is 88. That plus 40 is 128. Omaha’s all-time high is 114. In my 30 years here, I’ve felt 109 twice, and that was plenty hot for everyone.

In meteorological terms, the record warmth was the result of a ‘blocking high’ over the western Atlantic Ocean and Eastern two-thirds of the United States—a giant dome of stagnant air that forces the jet stream northward and sucks warm air from the south. Our worst heat waves in summer result from this pattern, as did the lethal heat waves that enveloped much of Europe in 2003 and Russia in 2009.

A summer high of 128 degrees in Omaha is not likely, first because the pattern may change; secondly, because the humidity that usually characterizes our summers holds high temperatures down during afternoons, even as it pushes the heat index up. That same humidity holds night-time temperatures up. So while 128 degrees in the shade is not probable, 110 may be, with an absolutely miserable heat index—if the blocking high remains in place. Drought also would be possible under these conditions, punctuated by a few periods of intense (and hydrologically nearly useless) storminess.

In sum then, while the long-term accumulation of greenhouse gases most certainly played a role in our March heat wave, it was also an extreme weather episode—the kind that will become more likely as global warming intensifies.

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Spring Six Weeks Early

When I arrived in Omaha the next day, however, the magnolia in our yard was dropping flower petals. The Bradford pears were exploding in bloom, and the high temperature was hanging around 80 again, after a week of this.

The cocky grackles were back, pushing the smaller, more courteous sparrows from our bird feeder. The blue jays returned. Usually, these are all April fare. Spring had suddenly been advanced a month. And what was that jingle I heard on the street in the third week of March?—the popsicle man trolling for some early action, up with the flowers.

The warmer days felt like July, and people were beaming: “Nice day, eh?” It was dry heat, without the stupefying humidity of summer. A friend from Wilmington, Delaware, who is a gardener, but not a climate scientist or activist, wrote on March 20: “It is a very nice and warm weather. Forsythias and daffodils are out. Magnolias are already finished blooming, dogwoods are on.”

I’m sure the skeptics will continue to remind us that one month of weather does not make an enduring global trend. They are partially correct, of course. But evidence forms patterns, and it accumulates. These people will be denying that human greenhouse-gas emissions are a problem down to the last ice cube. Of course they will. One clinical definition of insanity involves repetition of the same failed motion ceaselessly, without reference to reality. Some of them are being paid to lie. The ones who are not being paid are merely insane.

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacson Professor at the UNO and author of The Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology (2009).
Climate Activists Tell Warren Buffett Why They Are Blocking His Coal Trains

On May 5, thirteen Canadian citizens stepped onto a railroad track and stopped a BNSF coal train owned by Warren Buffett, whose cargo was headed to export markets in Asia. The BNSF was specifically targeted to draw Buffett’s attention to the dangerous impact coal burning is having on the Earth’s ecosystem. According to 350.org founder Bill McKibben, Buffett—though just “a single human being”—is a person “with power enough to make an immediate difference in the fight against climate change.” Thanks to this civil disobedience action, McKibben stated, “Warren Buffett will get the chance to face squarely the role he might play in solving our worst problem, not with future philanthropy but with present-day courage.” Reprinted below is the courtesy letter sent to Buffett notifying him of the protest.

April 30, 2012
Warren Buffett
Berkshire Hathaway Inc.
3555 Farnam Street
Suite 1440
Omaha, NE USA 68131
Dear Mr. Buffett:

We want to inform you that on Saturday, May 5th, from midnight to midnight, we intend to prevent BNSF coal trains from passing through White Rock, British Columbia to deliver their coal to our coastal ports for export to Asia. We have chosen May 5th to take this action because it has been designated an International day of action by 350.org, with the theme “Connecting the Dots.” We can’t think of a more important connection to emphasize than the one between burning coal and putting our collective future at risk.

Who we are and why we are prepared to engage in civil disobedience to stop your coal trains:

We are a group of citizens in British Columbia, Canada who are deeply concerned about the risk of runaway climate change. There is a broad scientific consensus that we must begin to sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions this decade to avoid climate change becoming irreversible. At the same time, governments and industry are eager to increase the production and export of fossil fuels, the very things that will ensure climate change does get worse.

These two things are irreconcilable, and since we can’t dispute the scientific findings or change the laws of nature, those of us who care about the future must do what we can to reduce the production, export and burning of fossil fuels—especially coal.

Since we know what is at stake we feel a moral obligation to do what we can to help prevent this looming disaster. On Saturday May 5th that means stopping your coal trains from reaching our ports.

Our actions will be peaceful, nonviolent and respectful of others. There will be no property destruction. We are striving to be the best citizens we can. We will stand up for what we believe is right and conduct ourselves with dignity.

Why we are involving you:

We know that you have canceled plans to have your utilities build coal fired power plants. Like us, we are sure you know that coal is the dirtiest of fossil fuels; when burned it produces the most global warming pollution per unit of energy. We assume you are familiar with the growing number of scientists—including NASA’s Dr. James Hansen, and IPCC member Dr. Andrew Weaver—who warn us that if we burn the world’s accessible coal reserves, we will destroy the benign and hospitable climate that has allowed human civilization to flourish.

What we can’t understand is why you allow your railway, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, to continue shipping vast amounts of U.S. coal out of Canadian ports to be burned in Asia. No matter where this coal is burned, it brings us closer to a climatic point of no return.

Mr. Buffett, you have spoken eloquently about the need for shared sacrifice. But with all respect sir, when it comes to climate change, it appears that other people are doing all the suffering while you profit from the very causes of the problem. That’s not fair, and we urge you to apply the same moral reasoning to the climate crisis as you have to the problem of economic inequality in your country.

You are in many ways an important figure of conscience in the world. We appeal to you to seize this opportunity and make a bold decision on coal. With your support we can ensure a healthy future for our children and people around the world.

We acknowledge that this action is taking place on unceded Coast Salish territory.

Sincerely,
British Columbians for Climate Action
http://stopcoal.ca
A Salute to Loyal and Mary Alice Park

How a miniscule Nebraska anti-war group, founded in 1970, endured to become what is now ‘the oldest statewide Peace & Justice organization in the entire U.S.’ is nothing short of miraculous. Luck unquestionably played a hand. But it’s also taken the pluck of generations of activists, laboring diligently year after year, to ensure Nebraskans for Peace’s longevity. And in our storied 42-year-long history, no member household has been more responsible for NFP’s survival than that of Loyal and Mary Alice Park.

Between the two of them, they are the epitome of Nebraskans for Peace activists. Members virtually from the organization’s founding, Loyal early on served as the treasurer for the State Board of Directors while Mary Alice worked as the State Office Manager from 1975-85. In the early ’90s, Loyal was instrumental in the establishment of the tax-exempt “Nebraska Peace Foundation” to fund NFP’s educational activities. Today, Loyal is still serving as the Foundation’s president, overseeing the operation of this tax-exempt entity that annually grants funds to NFP. And the Park household has matched this unstinting record of volunteer service with an equally generous stream of financial donations to both the Foundation and NFP.

Their labor of love for Nebraskans for Peace, however (and it is labor, given the countless hours of work involved) is the annual production and marketing of the “Cat Lovers Against the Bomb Calendar.” Now in its 29th consecutive year, the “CLAB Calendar” is a veritable work of art that each year brings international attention to NFP—as well of thousands of dollars of dearly needed revenue.

It is literally impossible to place a price tag on the contribution Loyal and Mary Alice have made to Nebraskans for Peace and the Nebraska Peace Foundation with their time and money. In 2000, the NFP State Board honored the two of them as “Peacemakers of the Year” for a lifetime of service to the organization. But that was now 12 years ago—and their freely given labor and donations have just kept coming. So another salute is in order to recognize the commitment, generosity and unrelenting diligence of NFP’s foremost household, whose record of service to the organization is every bit as storied as the organization itself.

Thank you, Loyal. Thank you, Mary Alice. We’re forever in your debt.

Destructive financial deregulation sold to the public, conclusion

![Image]

We might better refer to this legislation as the ‘UNJOBS’ Act.

issue their quote/unquote ‘objective’ opinions. More than a few ‘AAA’ ratings will be handed out, on the assumption (programmed into the models) that bundles of diverse assets always reduce risk below that of any individual asset. Invariably, some renegade economists (yours truly among them) will warn that deregulation tends to drive honest businesses out of the IPO market, so that the overall investment bundle would be subject to higher default rates than the models suggest, but those ‘fringe’ pessimists will be categorically ignored. Goldman Sachs et al, on the other hand, understand this increased risk very well, and will in turn bet on the eventual failure of the new businesses by purchasing credit default swaps after they ‘aggressively’ sell the junk investments to their customers. The investment banks would then be able to top off the earnings from 1) underwriting the IPOs,

2) creating and selling the CDOs, and

3) marketing the swaps by also collecting their full value of the failed CDOs from the insurers.

What a deal!

This is sure worth a few campaign contributions to those smiling Democrats and Republicans standing around the smiling President at the JOBS Act signing ceremony on April 5.

The rest of us can celebrate knowing that our corrupt political leaders have just created another potential source of financial instability for the benefit of their financial masters. You should, in fact, be just as happy as when similar bipartisan groups of legislators stood around Ronald Reagan in 1982 during the signing of the bill that let S&Ls venture into commercial banking and generate the $200 billion in S&L fraud and losses. Or when Bill Clinton signed the bill that abolished the restrictions that would have prevented the mortgage derivatives from pushing the entire world economy into the recent Great Recession.

A toast to insanity, anyone?
In Remembrance

Wally Peterson

by Hank Van den Berg

On April 15, Wallace Peterson, passed away at the age of 91. One of Nebraska’s most prominent economists, he led a long and productive life, serving as an inspiration and example of what the economics profession should be.

I first learned of Wally as an undergraduate in 1968 when I purchased the textbook for my intermediate macroeconomics class at the State University of New York at Albany. Wally’s book was one of the most popular macroeconomics textbooks at the time. When I first came to the University of Nebraska as a new assistant professor in 1989, I was awed when the Chair of the Economics Department told me that my new office would be just two doors down from Wally Peterson’s office.

I ran into him in the hallway later that first morning, and soon he and I were walking out of the College of Business Administration building to find a place to have lunch. “There is a small sandwich shop just down the street. It’s not bad, and it’s pretty inexpensive,” Wally suggested. Actually, I do not remember the sandwich or the price, but I do remember that we were the only two people in the small restaurant. Also, for the next hour we were engrossed in a wide-ranging conversation on economics. I think Wally wanted to find out what kind of an economist I was.

I had just received my PhD from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where the economics department had some years earlier swung far from its progressive and institutional roots to become a very highly ranked mainstream economics department. After four years in Madison, I had been led to believe—as virtually all graduate students in economics still are—that “neoclassical” economics is the only legitimate form of economics. Wally and I talked occasionally, and he was always ready to discuss economic ideas and issues. Only later did I appreciate that Wally had very subtly started a process that would eventually lead me to challenge the mainstream culture of economics. Unfortunately, Wally was forced to retire at the young age of 70, the year after I came to Nebraska. I was left on my own to deal with the strong neoclassical bias of the majority of the members of the UNL Economics Department.

Over the next few years, some of my new colleagues at UNL joked about how, during the 1970s and 1980s, Wally had occasionally invited this eccentric economist from Washington University in St. Louis to give guest lectures on economic instability and financial crises. The humor in this, apparently, was that economic instability was no longer an important issue. After all, Alan Greenspan of the Federal Reserve Bank and Robert Rubin at the Treasury Department had instituted the modern economic policies—especially financial deregulation—that presumptively made financial crises a thing of the past. We conclusion on page 10

Clayton Brant

by Rich Maciejewski

NFP State Board

“LIVE SIMPLY, THAT OTHERS MIGHT SIMPLY LIVE”

Nebraskans for Peace recently received word that it was getting a very large donation from the estate of Clayton Brant. When the bequest was disclosed at the NFP State Board meeting, I sat in amazement and a few tears of joy. Clayton provided a few such moments for me during the years I knew him. At his funeral I used the saying, “Live simply, that others might simply live,” because I felt it summarized an amazing person who truly lived those words. In the time I knew him, dating back to the “Nuclear Freeze Campaign” in the early 1980s, he was always involved in groups and movements that worked to bring about a more just world and a better environment. Those beliefs led him to work with Nebraskans for Peace and later for the Sierra Club.

Initially, he felt those beliefs could best be worked out through his religious convictions, and he studied for the Jesuit Community and taught in their schools. That experience, of living a simple community life that didn’t require a lot of material goods or acknowledgement, was something that remained with him for the rest of his life. After he left the Jesuit order and obtained his law degree, Clayton began working with VISTA volunteers and later Western Nebraska Legal Services. Again, he wanted to use his talents and expertise for people who didn’t have much to spend for legal services, rather than amass his own fortune in the court system. It was while he was working for Nebraska Legal Services in Grand Island that our paths crossed. For many years we worked on peace and justice issues through groups like NFP. Clayton served on the board of directors for NFP, and was always willing to assist the organization when asked. His conviction that we needed to pay attention to the environment and preserve our resources led him to working with the Sierra Club in the last years of his life.

Because I knew him for almost 35 years, I knew how conscious he was about living a simple life. He always lived in modest apartments, was careful about how much and what he ate, drove gas-efficient cars (generally well-used before purchased), often used his bicycle for traveling in Lincoln, never spent much money on lavish vacations or clothes (how well we knew that), and furnished his apartments with little and very plain furniture. We knew how he helped others in need and allowed other young lawyers get their start through his practice. That is why his gift to NFP is so amazing. Few of us would have thought he had amassed the money to leave such a gift.

I could relate lots of fun stories about Clayton, because he had a great sense of humor and was fun to be around. He wasn’t someone who hoarded things or refused to spend appropriate money. He just decided that he didn’t need to spend or use up more of this earth’s goods than his own share. The only slight ‘upgrade’ in the simplicity of his life came when he decided to marry Joan, and he wanted me to officiate the wedding. Most of us were amazed that he had time to date and had found someone that could understand his lifestyle. As we would expect, the wedding was in their newly rented apartment with just close friends and family.

As I came in and out of Lincoln over the years, I would sometimes call Clayton to have supper or to play a round of golf. If we could work it, we would usually play at the Pioneer Park course later in the evening because they offered a discounted rate. Clayton was always the calculated, consistent player and usually beat me. Walking was the mode, to save using energy and money for a cart, and supper included places like “Popeye’s Chicken.” In all the time I knew Clayton and in all the golf games we played, virtually no one knew that he had hit three ‘holes in one.’ Not many of us can claim even one. That fact didn’t come to light until after his death when three golf balls were found autographed with the dates and courses on which he had accomplished the feat.

Such was the modesty and simplicity of this amazing individual. He truly believed and lived the saying, “Live simply, that others might simply live.” I’m sure Clayton knew how important his gift would be to NFP and the cause of peace and justice. We who continue to walk with him in that cause are grateful.
Wally Peterson, conclusion

now know how unrealistic and destructive that mainstream neoclassical economic analysis is. Neoclassical economists (and nearly all of my colleagues) completely failed to foresee the 2007-2008 financial collapse.

Wally’s eccentric friend was, of course, Hyman Minsky—an economist who constructed a macroeconomic model that predicted the recent financial crisis and the Great Recession with perfect accuracy. I had never learned about Minsky at Wisconsin. I wish Wally had been allowed to stay around a few more years (or that the Supreme Court decision banning age discrimination had come a few years sooner) so that he could have invited Minsky one more time after I came to Nebraska. I had to discover Minsky’s work myself.

Fortunately, Wally had only been retired from teaching class at UNL—he had not retired from economics. In 1994 he published Silent Depression: The Fate of the American Dream. This book was not well received by most mainstream economists in the 1990s, a period of rapid economic growth allegedly stimulated by free trade agreements, the ‘end of big government’ and financial deregulation. In his new book, Wally argued that a majority of Americans were not sharing in the reported growth of the gross domestic product (GDP); instead, they were stuck in stagnant parts of the economy. The hype about the so-called ‘high-tech’ and financial sectors of the economy obscured the underlying—or silent—depression for most Americans.

I came across a copy of the book on the table next to the mailboxes in the faculty lounge where faculty normally put unwanted things they receive in the mail. I took it home, and, more importantly, I read it.

In Silent Depression, Wally carefully supported his conclusions with data that was readily available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. This was data that everyone should have noticed. The data showed clearly that “the upper 20 percent of the population experienced unchallenged prosperity and affluence, while the remaining 80 percent struggled to stay afloat economically.” Wally further noticed that the average real wage, adjusted for real purchasing power, peaked in 1973 and had by 1994 declined by ten percent. Wally also noticed that family income was stagnating, even though more family members were working. Only the family incomes of the top 20 percent rose between 1973 and 1990.

Wally concluded that: “The growing inequality in the distribution of income, plus the extreme—and increasing—inequality in the distribution of wealth, gives the ‘contented fifth’ at the top enormous economic and political power. This is why there has been so little concern in Washington about the emergence of a silent depression, with its adverse effect upon large numbers of American families.”

This is an accurate description of the world today; Wally wrote this in 1994.

Silent Depression also presented a thorough discussion and diagnosis of the growing income and wealth inequalities. Wally noted that productivity growth was slowing, and he offered some obvious explanations. He mentioned “military Keynesianism,” by which he meant that the government expenditures that might stimulate economic activity were increasingly in the form of unproductive military expenditures. He noted that “America’s decaying infrastructure” was not being dealt with. Private investment was declining, in part because of the process of ‘deindustrialization’ effected by the outsourcing of manufacturing to overseas plants. And, investment in education and public health was also slowing. Wally called for a universal single payer healthcare system for the U.S. The book devoted ample space to how the healthcare/pharmaceutical lobby prevented progress towards such a goal in the early 1990s. Wally also mentioned the rising rate of incarceration as a rising burden on society from both humanitarian and economic perspectives.

The only thing that has changed since Wally Peterson wrote his Silent Depression in 1992 and 1993 is that everything he described has become more obvious. Today, the data tells a similar, but much more violent, story. The recent ‘recovery’ of the U.S. economy after the 2007-2009 recession has seen 93 percent of all income gains accrue to just 1 percent of the wealthiest Americans. In 2010, the latest year for which the number is available, the percentage of Americans below the poverty line was the highest it’s been since the government began tracking the statistic in 1947. The healthcare/pharmaceutical lobby again stopped every attempt to move towards a single-payer universal healthcare system in 2010, even though the number of completely uninsured persons passed 50 million and at least 100 million Americans are underinsured. The U.S. continues to fall farther behind the rest of the world in terms of health outcomes despite the highest per capita healthcare costs, driven by a for-profit system with ample taxpayer subsidies but no price controls. We talk today about the deterioration of both the physical infrastructure (i.e., roads, bridges, electricity grids, etc.) and social infrastructure (schools, public health, corrections) as if these are some new discovery. Clearly, not enough people read Silent Depression. Even fewer acted to change the course of our economy.

Still today, few of my colleagues in the economics profession will admit these economic problems require our immediate attention. Our two major political parties can only suggest ‘lower taxes’ and ‘privatization’ as solutions to the same (but even more clearly visible) economic problems of income and wealth inequality, declining living standards, relative decline in health outcomes, still deteriorating infrastructure and military Keynesianism. We can now add global warming and other environmental problems to the list of things the ruling class chooses to ignore and the rest of society is forced to endure.

I should also note that Wally Peterson stood for peace. He did not merely rant against “military Keynesianism.” In the late 1960s, disgusted with the complicity of the Democratic Party in the Vietnam War, Wally decided to run for office. He campaigned to become the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1970 and again in 1972. While he failed in both attempts, his activism shows that Wally was anything but a detached academic. He believed that professors should do more than observe life from the sidelines: they should be fully engaged in the world. The greatest honor we can accord him today is to follow his example. As Wally proved throughout his life, there are more than enough reasons to act and get involved.
The Drones, conclusion

cording to the “Law Enforcement Support Office of the Defense Logistics Agency,” more than $500 million worth of equipment was ‘donated’ to local police forces from the Pentagon in Fiscal 2011.

No one is suggesting that the Pentagon or contractors will be willing to donate surplus drones to law enforcement in the near future, but the military commands have ‘greased the skids’ for local governments to get law-enforcement equipment. They are helping contractors such as Boeing and General Atomics outfit drones with non-lethal crowd control weapons to substitute for the lethal missiles and bombs used in international missions. And as soon as FAA waivers become commonplace, it is likely that both Northern Command and Strategic Command will aid such efforts through JTFs and other collaborative efforts created in the name of fighting terror.

Often, the degree of federal assistance depends on the size of the drone. The “Predator B” used in border monitoring is the size of a small plane, requiring a rudimentary airfield for takeoff. Thus, an agency like DHS or Northern Command will almost certainly be involved in aiding the local authorities. While regular procedures have yet to be established, it is likely that local governments may rely on training and flight-control services from bases like Creech Air Force Base in Nevada and Holloman AFB in New Mexico. Other local governments are turning to hand-launched, miniature and even micro-miniature drones such as Honeywell’s “T-Hawk,” AeroVironment’s “Wasp” and Dragan Innovations’ “DraganFlyer X6.” The smaller the drone, the less a municipal government will need to rely on either funds or support services from federal agencies.

While military involvement in drone planning may represent a civil threat by blurring the restrictions put in place by Posse Comitatus laws, there may be instances where a federal oversight role is preferable to state and local governments managing ‘rogue drones’ on their own. The Pentagon or DHS may refer to Justice Department guidelines that would limit the role of dozens of micro-drones in urban areas, where local authorities acting on their own, after receiving FAA approval, might consider it an unlimited field day for drone surveillance.

This underscores an important point that needs to be made. Activists often look at a problem from a ‘top-down’ perspective, with federal involvement in surveillance perceived to be the worst of all possible worlds. But often, the biggest civil liberties threat in the post-Occupy environment has come from local authorities that encourage militarization of law enforcement. In events as diverse as tuition-hike protests at the University of California schools, Tucson School Board protests to stop the ending of Mexican-American studies, and raids on Occupy camps nationwide, government officials and school administrators often have called out dozens to hundreds of riot-squad troops, using pepper spray and stun guns, where a half-dozen officers on the beat may have sufficient to keep dissent under control. All too often in the last six to nine months, liberal Democrat community leaders have been in the forefront of encouraging such overkill in law enforcement.

One reason for seeing levels of surveillance and police brutality often exceeding that of the 1960s may be that, in a 100-percent networked, surveillance society, local government officials feel that there is zero room for error and zero room for tolerance of dissent. If something goes awry, all blame will stop at their desks. Thus, conservative and liberal administrators alike see a need for enforcement overkill and surveillance overkill.

The current fascination with airborne robotic vehicles soon will be augmented with robotic ground vehicles and even robotic water-surface and underwater devices. All of these drone types are being used by Pentagon commands today, and many will be offered to local officials within the next few years. The Pentagon and Justice Department are excited about offering local authorities the perfect-surveillance, perfect-enforcement state. Most local authorities seem all too willing to accept the help.

The question crying to be asked is who will speak for civil liberties in such an environment, other than the protesters out on the street who are themselves the targets of these technology advances?

Speaking Our Peace, conclusion

 What if Fremont had had a chapter before Charlie Janssen’s LB 48-like ordinance poisoned its air? What if Sheridan County had had groups to protest Whiteclay? What if Nebraska’s meat-packing towns had had chapters to question labor’s exploitation in the hog-butchering business? What if Bellevue had had one to question things when General Curtis LeMay and Strategic Air Command were planning nuclear holocaust to save the world from the Soviets?

Neighbors know the peace and justice issues in their neighborhoods best, and neighbors know best the style of local action that gets things done. That is what chapters assume. Three people and a good book can make a chapter. Action can make it strong.

Recently, chapter effort has crawled out of the local burrows where it begins. The bullying issue that we have worked on since 2001 has become a state and nationwide concern, and a policy issue in almost every school district in the state. This past session, the Nebraska Legislature defeated efforts to prevent undocumented residents from getting prenatal care and passed most of the anti-poverty bills before it. We were a bit of that. The work at Whiteclay that Mark Vasina, Frank LaMere and Byron Peterson started—while not exactly a chapter, those three—has resulted in a multi-million-dollar lawsuit for justice for the Oglala Lakota Tribe, and policy changes for border towns are not far behind.

These local changes are the roots of grand national changes. And in every case, they have gotten their start with small groups of committed people.

Which is why we must not, dare not give up.

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MAY/JUNE 2012 NEBRASKA REPORT, P. 11
Paralysis abounds.

You see it in the endless ideological jockeying that pervades government and the media. …In our foreign policy where, no matter what, we just can’t seem to stop waging real and surrogate war on the Muslim world, or quit militarily provoking a China on whom we are financially and commercially dependent.

It’s in our economic policy debates over whether we need to be coddling billionaires, dare use government stimulus funds to boost employment or should shred the social safety net in order to balance the budget.

And as the climate warms, fostering resource wars around the world, you see it in our adamant refusal to even frankly acknowledge the problem, let alone do something about it.

Legitimized by the Supreme Court’s “Citizens United” ruling and backed by the Koch Brothers’ Tea Party minions, paralysis has infected the whole of our political life.

We’re blocked.
Thwarted at every turn.

But we can’t give up. Disheartening as it seems, our handfuls of activists and tiny organizations must continue to act in the spirit of Margaret Mead’s remark, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Small is not only beautiful. It may be effective. No great religion has ever changed anything without being organized around small groups—synagogues, churches, mosques, the ashrams from ancient Hinduism to Gandhi, the Buddhist monasteries. Remember the Saul Alinsky neighborhood organizations. The philosophers had their academies and lyceums, changing the whole process of inquiry. Slavery was not first defeated in the Civil War but in the petition of the Germantown Friends in 1688 and in small and large repetitions of that statement until slavery was banned in the state of Pennsylvania and then in the nation. The New Deal did not begin with Franklin Roosevelt, but with Woodrow Wilson’s 1912 platform, dictated by William Jennings Bryan; with Bryan’s prior presidential campaigns; and, before Bryan, with little groups in the Farmers’ Alliance of the 1880s that became the Populist Party in 1892.

Little groups of Populists gathered in rural one-room schoolhouses and changed the nation. The Populist Party in Custer County, at its 1892 meeting, called for the public ownership of railroads, utilities and other large companies, equal rights for women and African Americans, progressive taxation, and, as part of the broader Populist movement, the use of currency to stimulate the economy. Little groups of rural people set the agenda that changed America up through the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. The era of robber barons died in rural schoolhouses.

NFP also has its little chapters that can be pretty terrific. My experience is with the Lincoln Chapter so, as a touchstone, I will describe how we work:

1. We have no officers, as the ten of us on the steering committee, each take responsibility for one mphase of the chapter’s work. We plan the work ahead for a year, and our only official is Terry Werner, the former Lincoln City Council member, who deposits our meager funds.

2. We pass the hat at our meetings. We use the money for mailings, cookies and tea, an occasional ad, and an occasional small contribution to a speaker such as Jim Hightower.

3. We meet, as a steering committee, once a month or so to chew the fat and set up the next event. By the meeting’s end, everybody generally has an assignment.

4. We meet with the public to organize. Our first meeting with Lincoln-area NFP members and the public dealt with anti-immigrant demagogue Chris Kobach’s legislative effort—via State Senator Charlie Janssen’s LB 48, to penalize all Hispanics in Nebraska under the guise of catching Hispanic ‘illegals.’ It was, I believe, the first public meeting in the Lincoln area regarding LB 48. The discussion was great, and the meeting was followed by serious organizing initiatives by NFP, Appleseed, the churches of Nebraska,