Mark Reynolds of Citizens Climate Lobby to Keynote 2012 Annual Peace Conference

With the state suffering through the worst drought on record (worse even than the “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s), Nebraskans are getting a personal initiation into the perils of climate change. Production agriculture in the Midwest is facing its poorest harvest in decades and worries are growing—that—without massive snowfall this winter to replenish soil moisture—next year could be even worse. Skepticism about the science of global warming is being hourly supplanted by fears that climate change is already upon us and that our politicians in Washington aren’t providing any leadership.

Good thing, then, that the featured speaker for the 2012 Annual Peace Conference October 20 is a globally recognized expert at mobilizing citizens to lobby elected officials on climate legislation. Mark Reynolds, executive director of the “Citizens Climate Lobby,” will deliver the keynote address entitled, “Finding Our Voice in Democracy: Our Best Chance at Preventing Catastrophic Climate Change.”

Reynolds has extensive background in bringing citizens and officeholders together to find common ground on energy, environment and public policy. That face-to-face communication is central to the Citizens Climate Lobby’s mission of ending America’s reliance on carbon-based fuels. CCL’s proposed ‘fee and dividend’ policy would assess a progressively rising fee on fossil fuels at the border or domestic source and return the money directly to consumers to offset the increased energy costs. The higher price of oil, coal and natural gas, in turn, would make clean renewable energy sources like wind and solar competitive in the marketplace, propelling us toward a ‘green economy’ while simultaneously reducing the dangers of climate change. (For more information, see: www.citizensclimatelobby.org)

This year’s Annual Peace Conference is again being co-sponsored the University of Nebraska-Omaha Grace Abbott School of Social Work, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary. It couldn’t be more fitting then that the 2012 conference (at Trinity United Methodist Church, 5th & Elm Streets in Grand Island) is being held in the hometown of the School of Social Work’s namesake, Grace Abbott, who was a nationally renowned advocate for children and immigrants in the early part of the 20th century.

Early registration for the 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. conference is $30 per person (if you register by October 17) and $35 at the door. A $10 rate for students and low-income individuals is also available. Registration forms can be requested from the NFP State Office or downloaded from the website (see contact information below). Breakfast and lunch are included in the cost.
Nebraska Report
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Letters, articles, photographs and graphics are welcomed. Deadline is the first of the month for publication in the following month’s issue. Submit to: Nebraska Report, c/o Nebraskans for Peace, 941 ‘O’ Street, Suite 1026, Lincoln, NE 68508.

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Last Call at ‘Club Fossil Fuel’

The following guest editorial by Citizens Climate Lobby Executive Director Mark Reynolds appeared in the July 5, 2012 Richmond Times Dispatch of Richmond, Virginia under the title “Global Warming: Last call at Club Fossil Fuel.”

In Duluth, Minnesota, the bar tab at Club Fossil Fuel came to $100 million.

Never heard of Club Fossil Fuel? It’s the most popular franchise on the planet, everyone’s favorite watering hole for well over a century, because the addictive libations—coal, oil and gas—are relatively cheap. Cheap, that is, until you factor in the hidden costs, like asthma and other respiratory diseases from air pollution or the military costs to secure our supplies of oil from the Middle East.

And now global warming, caused by emissions of greenhouse gases from fossil fuels, is adding to the bill in the form of floods, droughts and other extreme weather events that are becoming more frequent and intense in a warming world.

Those warmer temperatures, scientists tell us, are ‘juicing’ the atmosphere—literally—because warmer air holds more water.

What goes up, of course, eventually comes down, and in Duluth what came down was nearly 10 inches of rain in a day and a half that caused historic flooding. Damage to roads, utilities and parks will take an estimated $100 million to repair, a hefty sum for a city of 89,000.

Floods are nothing new, of course. Just ask Noah. What is new is that climate change has increased not only the odds of floods occurring, but also the severity of those floods. And floods aren’t the only item being added to the bill at Club Fossil Fuel.

In Colorado, the most destructive fire in state history has burned more than 80,000 acres, engulfed more than 200 homes and has already cost more than $20 million to bring under control. Like floods, wildfires are nothing new, but drought conditions brought on by climate change have made forests more incendiary. Another factor that’s turned trees into kindling is the staggering infestation of pine beetles that, thanks to warmer temperatures, are reproducing twice a year instead of once.

The folks in Duluth and Colorado are not the only ones picking up the tab for the destructive consequences of fossil fuel usage.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, there were 14 weather and climate disasters in 2011 each totaling more than $1 billion in damage. Insured losses from those disasters totaled $44 billion.

Insurance companies, which have to adjust our premiums to cover those losses, are well aware of the economic impact climate change is exerting.

“From our industry’s perspective, the footprints of climate change are around us and the trend of increasing damage to property and threat to lives is clear,” said Franklin Nutter, president of the Reinsurance Association of America. “We need a national policy related to climate and weather.”

More precisely, we need a policy that will end our addiction administering a fatal shock to our economic system.

We can do that with a revenue-neutral price on fossil fuels known as carbon fee and dividend. A gradually increasing fee is placed on carbon-based fuels, starting at $10 or $15 per ton of the carbon dioxide those fuels will emit when burned. The fee would increase $10 per ton each year, sending a price signal to private investors that wind, solar and geothermal will be more profitable than coal and oil. This market-based approach—a market in which the hidden costs of fossil fuels are accounted for—would spur a rapid transition to clean energy and energy efficiency. Where does the dividend come in?

Instead of taking the money from the carbon fee and spending it on more government programs, the revenue would be returned to the American people in per capita shares, thereby offsetting the increased cost of energy associated with the fee. To protect American businesses from unfair competition, border adjustments would be made on goods from nations that do not have equivalent carbon pricing.

Last fall, the International Energy Agency warned that we have only five years before we lock in the carbon-intensive infrastructure that will make the process of global warming irreversible. Given what’s at stake, it’s time for last call at Club Fossil Fuel.

We need a policy that will end our addiction to fossil fuels. Like an alcoholic who has been on a bender longer than he can remember, we need a 12-step program that will restore sanity and order to our currently unsustainable lifestyles.

“Most impressive is the work of Citizens Climate Lobby, a relatively new, fast-growing, nonpartisan, nonprofit group with 60 chapters across the United States and Canada. If you want to join the fight to save the planet, to save creation for your grandchildren, there is no more effective step you could take than becoming an active member of this group.”

- Dr. James Hansen, Director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies
Nobuko Tsukui, a scholar of Japanese literature on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, delivered the following statement at the Lincoln NFP Chapter’s August 5 ‘Lantern Float’ commemorating the victims of these horrific weapons. In recognition of her generous support of Nebraskans for Peace, Nobuko—who lives in Tokyo—was honored as a “Peacemaker of the Year” at the organization’s 2011 Annual Peace Conference.

Further, I regret to say that Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not produce the only Japanese victims. As a result of the U.S. H-bomb testing at Bikini Atoll in 1954, a Japanese fishing vessel was covered with the ‘ashes of death’ and one of the crew members, Kuboyama Aikichi, died of radiation disease.

What are we to make of ‘nuclear power’ when applied in the so-called ‘peaceful use’ of nuclear energy? The March 11 disaster of Fukushima forced us to look at again nuclear power facilities around the world. Before Fukushima, we had the Three Mile Island accident (March 28, 1979); then, another and much worse disaster at Chernobyl in 1986; and the accident at the Tokai Mura plant in 1999 killing two men. Still, in Japan the myth of the safety of nuclear power had prevailed until March of last year. The Fukushima nuclear disaster symbolized the problem of civilization in the nuclear age vis-à-vis the forces of nature in their most destructive form. The world witnessed how utterly defenseless a nuclear power plant could be against the combined forces of earthquake and tsunami. I believe that the Japanese government declared the ‘shusoku’ (meaning the ‘end’) of the accident last December. The declaration has proven, day by day, to be the most absurd action taken by the Japanese government in recent memory.

But that is not all. In June, Prime Minister Noda officially decided to re-start two reactors at the O-i nuclear power plant. These reactors are just as vulnerable as the four reactors at the Fukushima plant against the forces of nature.

On June 15, just before this government decision, I visited the mayor of Tokai Mura, Mr. Murakami, at his office. He was the mayor when the nuclear accident occurred at the JCO site in Tokai Mura in 1999. After March 11, 2011, he was among the first Japanese administrative officials to state publicly that all nuclear power plants in Japan should be shut down. One of the reasons for the shutdown he gives is the most obvious fact: that Japan, about the shape and size of the state of California, sits right on active faults. Earthquakes occur daily, and threats of tsunamis are constant. How could any sane mind have planned to install 54 nuclear reactors, all along the coast, to begin with? Another Fukushima nuclear disaster would finish Japan.

Mayor Murakami is now one of the three officers of the 73-member organization called the “Conference of the Mayors, Town Managers, Municipal Heads to Promote the Abolition of Nuclear Power.”

In my interview with the Mayor, I spoke about Nebraskans for Peace and showed him the photos of the Lantern Float of 2010. I also presented him the “Cat Lovers Against the Bomb Calendar” for this year. He commended the long-standing activities of Nebraskans for Peace.

I am convinced that although the physical distance between Nebraska and Japan is large—across half the continent plus the Pacific Ocean, all of you here and the mayor of Tokai and I are united in spirit to work for our common cause.

Let me close my speech with two poems by Shoda Shinoe, a Hiroshima hibakusha who survived long enough to write beautifully. The poems apply equally to weapons and power nuclear catastrophes in my view:

A flash and explosion!
An instant of utter silence. When I opened my eyes,
The world had turned to a scene of carnage, Ghastly with moans.

I dedicate a diary of sorrow
To the souls of my fellow countrymen,
Forced to die before their time.
Quantitatively Easing into Financial Dictatorship

by Hank Van den Berg
UNL Economics Professor

Early this month, the president of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi, announced a new program of *quantitative easing*. That same day, interest rates on new loans paid by the Italian and Spanish governments immediately fell by several percentage points, and stock markets everywhere rose by several percent.

OK, so the financial markets like this thing called quantitative easing (QE). But, what exactly is QE? And what does it mean for ordinary people?

Monetary Expansion with a Twist

QE is similar to the age-old central bank monetary policy consisting of using newly issued money to buy government bonds on the open market and thereby putting more cash into circulation. Also, when the central bank purchases assets, it tends to raise asset prices and lower the effective rates of return paid by those assets. Note that this is just a simple case of supply and demand; the increased central bank demand for bonds means debtors do not have to offer such high-interest payments to sell their bonds. In the process, it is hoped that interest rates of all competing forms of financing fall as well and that the cheaper credit leads to more investment and jobs.

Compared to traditional monetary expansion, QE is somewhat broader in that the central bank uses newly created money to buy all types of assets—not just government bonds. As in the case of traditional monetary expansion, if both the banks and their depositors who sell the bonds and other assets to the central bank decide to not lend or spend the cash, the demand for the economy’s output will not increase and QE will not stimulate economic activity. John Maynard Keynes pointed out that monetary policy did not work well during the Great Depression because banks and people indeed tend to hold on to cash. There is little incentive to build a new factory—even at near-zero interest rates—when existing factories are operating at less than full capacity. This is why Keynes recommended that governments use money creation to directly fund government expenditures on infrastructure and products that immediately employ people. So, will QE work now?

QE Does Not Always Work

We have seen the effects of two QE episodes involving nearly $2 trillion in the U.S. since 2008: near-zero interest rates, but not much of an increase in investment or jobs. Of course, things could have been worse without the QE. In the case of the ECB now, it is hoped that, in addition to stimulating employment, the purchases of specific Greek, Italian and Spanish euro assets will lower interest rates on those countries’ private and public debt. Deep recessions and high-debt levels make it likely that the cash paid for the bonds will be held by banks or shifted to other more prosperous EU economies like Germany and Finland rather than stimulating employment in Greece or Spain. But, the potential of QE lowering long-term interest costs for the indebted governments is real, so governments will be able to continue borrowing.

There are some more worrisome features of QE, and these are seldom discussed in the financial press. First, since lower interest rates are likely to permit deficit countries to continue accumulating debt, it may become more likely that governments will find themselves unable to service their higher debt when the ECB decides to stop using QE to keep interest rates low. Secondly, the ECB’s board single-handedly decides which and how many private and public assets to buy. The fate of Greece, Spain, Italy and other debtor countries is entirely in the hands of a secretive central bank. Thirdly, QE mostly ends up bailing out the banks who hold the questionable public and private assets that the ECB buys. As has happened in the U.S. with the Fed’s massive asset purchases, under QE the central bank effectively replaces the unsound and risky bonds and other assets in bank balance sheets with real cash. So far, there have been only a few voices objecting to this poorly understood form of *crony capitalism*.

A result of QE and the fiscal ‘austerity’ it requires is that governments are forced to shrink while economic oversight is passed on to an unelected and secretive central bank.

The ECB Is Run by Bankers

We have to remember that the ECB, like most central banks, is effectively managed by bankers. Draghi was Goldman Sachs’ Vice-Chairman for Europe prior to accepting the position of president of the ECB. More ominously, Draghi was at Goldman Sachs when the firm advised the Greek government how to hide a large part of its government debt so it could qualify for Eurozone membership back in 2000. At the same time, the prime ministers of Greece and Italy, Lucas Papademos and Mario Monti, are unlikely to be suspicious of Draghi’s motives towards their governments because—and I am not making this up—they too are former high-level Goldman Sachs managers! In fact, Papademos was not even elected prime minister; he was appointed by the two leading political parties following ‘negotiations’ with the ECB and the IMF over financial assistance two years ago.

It Gets Worse: QE = Fiscal Oppression

As Keynes explained, when an economy is in a depression, monetary policies like QE will have little effect on employment. So governments must directly increase demand for output through increased government expenditures. But, a little-noticed provision of Draghi’s announcement of QE rules that out. The ECB will only use QE to lower interest on a country’s government debt if that country agrees to carry out severe austerity programs negotiated with the ECB and the International Monetary Fund.

Austerity programs in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy have already led to sharp cuts in government infrastructure expenditures, massive layoffs of government workers, new regressive consumption tax increases, and widespread cuts in healthcare, pensions, education, and the social safety net in general. What is clear throughout Europe is that austerity drives an economy deeper into recession. It can be argued that with QE the ECB is making it a bit easier for Greece, Spain, Italy, and others to meet debt obligations by means of austerity.

Of course, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and other governments with excessive debts would be better off abandoning the euro and converting all prices and debt back into their own respective currencies. A government with its own currency cannot go bankrupt because it can always create money to fund its government’s expenditures. Yes, excessive money creation creates inflation, but given Greece’s or Spain’s extremely high unemployment rates (over 20 percent), inflation is not an immediate problem. Of course, converting the government debt to domestic currency and the conclusion on page 9
The Hunger Wars in Our Future
Heat, Drought, Rising Food Costs & Global Unrest

by Michael T. Klare

Scholar and activist Michael Klare has long been an inspiration to Nebraskans for Peace. His book War Without End, published as the Vietnam War was winding down, was influential in the development of NFP’s foreign policy analysis. In 1982, he actually came to Nebraska to speak at our Annual Peace Conference, delivering a talk on the topic of “U.S. Intervention: Back to Policing the World in the ’80s.” He has been a dependable ally in opposing the Pentagon’s expanded war-fighting efforts on earth and militarization of outer space (missions for which our own Strategic Command in Omaha is directly responsible). Now a Peace and World Security Studies professor at Hampshire College and the Five Colleges consortium in Amherst, Massachusetts, he has lately been focusing on the foolishness of our reliance on other countries for our energy supplies and our feckless overuse of fossil fuels.

In a year when global warming is devastating the farm sector in Nebraska (see the map below), Klare expertly connects the dots between climate change, the increasing prevalence of natural disasters like drought, and the consequent scarcity, violence and militarism that invariably result. His article originally appeared on TomDispatch.com August 7, 2012.

U.S. Drought Monitor for Nebraska – September 11, 2012

The darkest areas of the map comprise ‘Exceptional’ drought conditions. The lighter area shows ‘Extreme’ drought, the second-worst condition. Only two small patches in southeastern Nebraska are lucky enough to be in the third-worst category, ‘Severe.’

The U.S. Drought Monitor is produced in partnership with the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Great Drought of 2012 has yet to come to an end, but we already know that its consequences will be severe. With more than one-half of America’s counties designated as drought disaster areas, the 2012 harvest of corn, soybeans, and other food staples is guaranteed to fall far short of predictions. This, in turn, will boost food prices domestically and abroad, causing increased misery for farmers and low-income Americans and far greater hardship for poor people in countries that rely on imported U.S. grains.

This, however, is just the beginning of the likely consequences: if history is any guide, rising food prices of this sort will also lead to widespread social unrest and violent conflict.

Food—affordable food—is essential to human survival and well-being. Take that away, and people become anxious, desperate, and angry. In the United States, food represents only about 13 percent of the average household budget, a relatively small share, so a boost in food prices in 2013 will probably not prove overly taxing for most middle- and upper-income families. It could, however, produce considerable hardship for poor and unemployed Americans with limited resources. “You are talking about a real bite out of family budgets,” commented Ernie Goss, an agricultural economist at Omaha’s Creighton University. This could add to the discontent already evident in depressed and high-unemployment areas, perhaps prompting an intensified backlash against incumbent politicians and other forms of dissent and unrest.

It is in the international arena, however, that the Great Drought is likely to have its most devastating effects. Because so many nations depend on grain imports from the U.S. to supplement their own harvests, and because intense drought and floods are damaging crops elsewhere as well, food supplies are expected to shrink and prices to rise across the planet. “What happens to the U.S. supply has immense impact around the world,” says Robert Thompson, a food expert at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. As the crops most affected by the drought, corn and soybeans, disappear from world markets, he noted, the price of all grains, including wheat, is likely to soar, causing immense hardship to those who already have trouble affording enough food to feed their families.

The Hunger Games, 2007-2011

What happens next is, of course, impossible to predict, but if the recent past is any guide, it could turn ugly. In 2007-2008, when rice, corn, and wheat

The 2012 harvest is guaranteed to fall far short of predictions, boosting food prices domestically and abroad.

continued on page 8
A New Ozone ‘Hole’ Coming to a Latitude Near You?

We know the more familiar by-products of greenhouse-gas overload in the atmosphere, such as more frequent heat waves, droughts, and occasional deluges. Scientists keep finding new subplots in this story, however, such as the discovery announced earlier this summer by a team of scientists indicating that super-sized thunderstorms stoked by warmer weather are punching holes in the stratosphere.

With all the problems we face, you ask, who but a gang of hypersensitive global warmists would give a damn about an anvil top in the stratosphere? The problem here is that the taller storms—already well known in our part of the world—are pumping moisture into a level of the atmosphere that is usually very dry. And what does that do? It accelerates destruction of ozone that protects us from skin cancer.

An increasing level of carbon dioxide near the Earth’s surface also acts as a blanket, trapping heat. Deprived of emitted warmth, the stratosphere cools, aggravating depletion of ozone. Chemical reactions that drive ozone depletion tend to accelerate as the stratosphere cools, retarding the restoration of ozone anticipated after the ban of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) under the “Montreal Protocol,” enacted during the late 1980s. As levels of greenhouse gases rise, the cooling of the middle and upper atmosphere is expected to continue, with attendant consequences for ozone depletion. Because of this relationship, problems with ozone depletion depend, in a fundamental way, on mitigation of greenhouse warming. In 2006, summer thunderstorms are becoming larger and more violent, and thunderheads are building higher into the atmosphere. Thunderstorms are one way that the atmosphere discharges heat, and more heat makes them larger and more intense. Where previously thunderheads usually stopped growing within the layer of the atmosphere closest to the surface (the troposphere), they now sometimes build into a boundary level (the tropopause), and then inject moisture into the stratosphere which accelerates depletion of ozone by speeding up reactions based on the presence of CFCs remaining from before the ban by the Montreal Protocol. These updrafts punch through the storms’ anvil tops and inject moisture into the stratosphere.

As surface weather warms, the destruction of ozone is far more sensitive [than previously believed] to water vapor and temperature.”

Mario Molina, whose work during the 1970s linking CFCs to ozone depletion led to a Nobel Prize and the CFC ban, told the New York Times that the new findings add “one more worry to the changes that society’s making to the chemical composition of the atmosphere”—of concern to many people worldwide in areas that experience increasingly severe thunderstorms, including a large part of the United States.

I read this news in the New York Times while on vacation with my wife and grand-daughter Madison near Daytona Beach, Florida, in a beach-side condo owned by my mother. I have known this beach since I was young, and it evokes many memories. These days I watch the beach slowly shrink as the sea level slowly rises. This year is the warmest on the instrumental record. On the record, we have passed the point of conjecture.

The problem is that to get there from Omaha we had to take a carbon-spewing aircraft from Omaha to Atlanta into the greenhouse-gas factory otherwise known as Hartsfield-Jackson In-

continued on page 11
The next price spike in 2010-11 was, however, closely associated with climate change. An intense drought gripped much of eastern Russia during the summer of 2010, reducing the wheat harvest in that breadbasket region by one-fifth and prompting Moscow to ban all wheat exports. Drought also hurt China’s grain harvest, while intense flooding destroyed much of Australia’s wheat crop. Together with other extreme-weather-related effects, these disasters sent wheat prices soaring by more than 50 percent and the price of most food staples by 32 percent.

Once again, a surge in food prices resulted in widespread social unrest, this time concentrated in North Africa and the Middle East. The earliest protests arose over the cost of staples in Algeria and then Tunisia, where—no coincidence—the precipitating event was a young food vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, setting himself on fire to protest government harassment. Anger over rising food and fuel prices combined with long-simmering resentments about government repression and corruption sparked what became known as the Arab Spring. The rising cost of basic staples, especially a loaf of bread, was also a cause of unrest in Egypt, Jordan and Sudan. Other factors, notably anger at entrenched autocratic regimes, may have proved more powerful in those places, but as the author of Tropic of Chaos, Christian Parenti, wrote, “The initial trouble was traceable, at least in part, to the price of that loaf of bread.”

As for the current drought, analysts are already warning of instability in Africa, where corn is a major staple, and of increased popular unrest in China, where food prices are expected to rise at a time of growing hardship for that country’s vast pool of low-income, migratory workers and poor peasants. Higher food prices in the U.S. and China could also lead to reduced consumer spending on other goods, further contributing to the slowdown in the global economy and producing yet more worldwide misery, with unpredictable social consequences.

It’s becoming evident that the Great Drought of 2012 is not a one-off event in a single heartland nation, but rather an inevitable consequence of global warming which is only going to intensify…

The Hunger Games, 2012-??

If this was just one bad harvest, occurring in only one country, the world would undoubtedly absorb the ensuing hardship and expect to bounce back in the years to come. Unfortunately, it’s becoming evident that the Great Drought of 2012 is not a one-off event in a single heartland nation, but rather an inevitable consequence of global warming which is only going to intensify. As a result, we can expect not just more bad years of extreme heat, but worse years, hotter and more often, and not just in the United States, but globally for the indefinite future.

Until recently, most scientists were reluctant to blame particular storms or droughts on global warming. Now, however, a growing number of scientists believe that such links can be demonstrated in certain cases. In one recent study focused on extreme weather events in 2011, for instance, climate specialists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Great Britain’s National Weather Service concluded that human-induced climate change has made intense heat waves of the kind experienced in Texas in 2011 more likely than ever before. Published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, it reported that global warming had ensured that the incidence of that Texas heat wave was 20 times more likely than it would have been in 1960; similarly, abnormally warm temperatures...
subsequent devaluation of the domestic currency relative to the euro implies a partial default. But, we have recently seen such returns to national currencies and partial defaults in Argentina and Iceland, where recessions were quickly reversed through government expenditures funded by the creation of domestic currency. Austerity in Greece is now estimated to keep unemployment extremely high for a decade.

A More Sinister Purpose of QE

Another result of QE and the fiscal ‘austerity’ it requires is that governments are forced to shrink while economic oversight is passed on to an unelected central bank. The ECB is not a democratic institution. It is controlled by a board consisting of the 17 euro-area national central bankers and—for its daily decisions—a six-member Executive Board (which includes Draghi). There is not one woman among the 23!

The ECB does not hesitate to aggressively shape government policy in Greece, Spain and elsewhere. Just listen to the German member of the Executive Board, Jörg Asmussen, quoted in the September 11 issue of the Guardian:

‘It should be clear to everyone that we stand ready to do our part, but… others must do their part. Member states must show fiscal discipline, regain competitiveness, and where needed clean up bank balance sheets. And the community states in Europe must improve the institutional architecture…’

The existing “institutional architecture” in Europe already includes many good democratic practices, excellent public infrastructure and public transport, worker-friendly labor regulations, well-funded public education, and universal healthcare systems. What do you suppose the ECB wants to “improve”?

The Lesson of QE

Europeans are being asked to sacrifice to ‘save the euro’ as an act of European solidarity. Among other things, pensioners throughout Europe are taking huge cuts in monthly payments as interest rates are pushed to zero by means of QE. Also, those with the lowest incomes suffer the most from the reduction in the government safety net as the ECB forces austerity on national governments. The wealthy who hold most of the bonds and other assets whose prices will rise with QE stand to benefit greatly. This is disaster capitalism at its best. So far, only in Denmark and France have voters shifted support to political parties more likely to oppose the growth of the financial dictatorship.

Meanwhile, here in the U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke just announced a third round of QE. If QE3 works just a little, it takes some pressure off of the president and Congress to directly enact programs to increase employment and maintain the social safety net. More ominous is the announcement that the QE3 round of money creation and Fed purchases of private and public bonds is open-ended and will end only ‘when unemployment has fallen to acceptable levels.’

Or is that: ‘Until the economy is entirely under control of the wealthy and their financial operatives’?
The Hunger Wars, conclusion

like those experienced in Britain last November were said to be 62 times as likely because of global warming.

It is still too early to apply the methodology used by these scientists to calculating the effect of global warming on the heat waves of 2012, which are proving to be far more severe, but we can assume the level of correlation will be high. And what can we expect in the future, as the warming gains momentum?

When we think about climate change (if we think about it at all), we envision rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, freakish storms, hellish wildfires and rising sea levels. Among other things, this will result in damaged infrastructure and diminished food supplies. These are, of course, manifestations of warming in the physical world, not the social world we all inhabit and rely on for so many aspects of our daily well-being and survival. The purely physical effects of climate change will, no doubt, prove catastrophic. But the social effects including, somewhere down the line, food riots, mass starvation, state collapse, mass migrations, and conflicts of every sort, up to and including full-scale war, could prove even more disruptive and deadly.

In her immensely successful young-adult novel The Hunger Games (and the movie that followed), Suzanne Collins riveted millions with a portrait of a dystopian, resource-scarce, post-apocalyptic future where once-rebellious ‘districts’ in an impoverished North America must supply two teenagers each year for a series of televised gladiatorial games that end in death for all but one of the youthful contestants. These ‘hunger games’ are intended as recompense for the damage inflicted on the victorious capitol of Panem by the rebellious districts during an insurrection. Without specifically mentioning global warming, Collins makes it clear that climate change was significantly responsible for the hunger that shadows the North American continent in this future era. Hence, as the gladiatorial contestants are about to be selected, the mayor of District 12’s principal city describes “the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land [and] the brutal war for what little sustenance remained.”

In this, Collins was prescient, even if her specific vision of the violence on which such a world might be organized is fantasy. While we may never see her version of those hunger games, do not doubt that some version of them will come into existence—that, in fact, hunger wars of many sorts will fill our future. These could include any combination or permutation of the deadly riots that led to the 2008 collapse of Haiti’s government, the pitched battles between massed protesters and security forces that engulfed parts of Cairo as the Arab Spring developed, the ethnic struggles over disputed croplands and water sources that have made Darfur a recurring headline of horror in our world, or the inequitable distribution of agricultural land that continues to fuel the insurgency of the Maoist-inspired Naxalites of India.

Combine such conflicts with another likelihood: that persistent drought and hunger will force millions of people to abandon their traditional lands and flee to the shantytowns and expanding slums surrounding large cities, sparking hostility from those already living there. One such eruption, with grisly results, occurred in Johannesburg’s shantytowns in 2008 when desperately poor and hungry migrants from Malawi and Zimbabwe were set upon, beaten, and in some cases burned to death by poor South Africans. One terrified Zimbabwean, cowering in a police station from the raging mobs, said she fled her country because “there is no work and no food.” And count on something else: millions more in the coming decades, pressed by disasters ranging from drought and flood to rising sea levels, will try to migrate to other countries, provoking even greater hostility. And that hardly begins to exhaust the possibilities that lie in our hunger-games future.

At this point, the focus is understandably on the immediate consequences of the still ongoing Great Drought: dying crops, shrunk harvests and rising food prices. But keep an eye out for the social and political effects that undoubtedly won’t begin to show up here or globally until later this year or 2013. Better than any academic study, these will offer us a hint of what we can expect in the coming decades from a hunger-games world of rising temperatures, persistent droughts, recurring food shortages, and billions of famished, desperate people.

Keep an eye out for the social and political effects we can expect in the coming decades from a hunger-games world of rising temperatures, persistent droughts, recurring food shortages, and billions of famished, desperate people.
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ternational Airport. I can dream that Google will come up with a way to adapt Einstein’s notions of space and time to get my suit-case and myself from Omaha to Florida by stepping into a cubicle and pressing a few computer keys, but until then, I can’t get to the beach on my bicycle. In fact, one airplane trip easily blows an entire year’s worth of bike commuting at home.

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Speaking Our Peace, conclusion

Spring” movement. The Administration’s policy in Libya killed that, however.

One should also understand that real danger lurks in Obama’s ramping up of its military force in the South China Sea. Nothing could be more dangerous than our leaving behind the ‘pacification-through-trade-policy’ we’ve had with respect to China and our going for a hegemonic policy in such a strategically sensitive region. That said, does anyone seriously believe that Romney would offer a more restrained view?

As to the Senate, Deb Fischer has made the following boiler plate statement on national security:

“In the Senate, I will not play politics with our security and our troops. I will give our military the tools they need to keep America safe and free... America cannot allow nuclear arms to get in the hands of terrorist states or allow rogue nations to threaten or bully others with nuclear threats. That is why we must fight—and win—the war on terrorism. To succeed in this mission, fighting terrorism needs to be the top priority of the federal government, not an afterthought.

Fischer was endorsed by Sarah Palin whose ability almost to see Russia from her front porch is well-known. It is not clear exactly how Fischer will vote on foreign policy in such a strategically sensitive region. The Administration’s increased defense appropriations, they were at least far lower than those we have now. To his credit, Kerrey has released a campaign ad in which he asserts that an attack on Iran would be a disaster. In the same ad, he says concerning the past wars in the Middle East and Central Asia and any future war with Iran:

Three trillion dollars for Afghanistan and Iraq... Six thousand Americans dead. I don’t know what the numbers are that are disabled with all kinds of injuries. There’s 80 million people living in Iran. I mean, if we were undersized with 250,000 men and women going into Iraq, it’s going to take a million to go to war with Iran... It would be a disaster... It’ll make Iraq and Afghanistan look like a cakewalk.

Kerrey also believes that climate change is happening.

I am no prophet, and I cannot tell how people will behave in new circumstances and under new threats. Woodrow Wilson and FDR both promised peace at election time and did everything they could to create a crisis that invited war. Daily though, as Russia and China and the United States and the great powers of the Middle East choose sides—lining up behind Sunni or Shia, Arab or Israeli—I am becoming more and more alarmed at the prospect of a Third World War just over the horizon. If the peace movement does not do a thorough job analysis and vote and write and protest with discipline, there will be no stopping the momentum toward such a conflict.

I beg of you: analyze the present candidates carefully, vote, and get all of your friends to vote.

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We must vote precisely as that: as peace settlement with the Palestinian Authority. Sheldon Adelson, who opposes a peace vada casino mogul and Romney supporter PAC ad attack on Obama funded by Ne- insidiously pairs with the 'inside' Super Benjamin Netanyahu about attacking Iran saber-rattling by Israeli Prime Minister is no fluke. In the same vein, the recent and Egypt by al-Qaida or its surrogates attacks on the U.S. embassies in Libya the presidential race. The timing of the ing to provoke a crisis that will influence pro-Israel belligerents are actively work- the Middle East, where both Islamic and 'outside' efforts more apparent than in inside and outside the United States. danger of being hijacked by forces both us can change things that's crucial. Rep. Jeff conclusion. It's how they vote when they grabbing and the outcome was a foregone voting scorecard. His opponent is John Ewing, an African American and Democrat who is serving his second term as Douglas County Treasurier. Ewing cannot fail but improve on Terry’s dismal scorecard ratings, should be elected November 6. 2nd District incumbent Lee Terry, who has a rating of 8 on a scale of 1 to 100 on Peace Action’s congressional scorecard. Though it is easy to posit some slumbering revolutionary impulse out there among the populace just waiting to awaken, it does not in fact exist. The vote is all we have right now. And we need to exercise discipline in using it. Elected officials who have a conservative voting record, for instance, may have voted conservative when nothing was up for grabs and the outcome was a foregone conclusion. It’s how they vote when they can change things that’s crucial. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, for example, put together the bipartisan coalition that got through the $17 million dollars that enabled the decommissioning of large numbers of nuclear weapons—this despite his gen- erally hawkish record. He also publicly repudiated the Grover Norquist pledge of no new taxes precisely when it has assumed the stature of a litmus test for members of his party, because it was making negotiation on the budget in Congress impossible.

Contrast that leadership with 2nd District incumbent Lee Terry, who has a rating of 8 on a scale of 1 to 100 on Peace Action’s congressional scorecard. His opponent is John Ewing, an African American and Democrat who is serving his second term as Douglas County Treasurer. Ewing cannot fail but improve on Terry’s dismal scorecard ratings, should be elected November 6.

But the marquee contests on the fall ballot dealing with peace and justice at the national level are those for the presidency and the Senate.

On issues having to do with racial and gender justice, the presidential race presents a clear choice. So does it on climate change issues. On issues of the military budget, peacemaking and international security, the record is more mixed. Despite President Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize and his laudable effort to assure world security through multilateralism, he has not gotten our troops out of Afghanistan; indeed, he has escalated the war, extended it into Pakistan, and used the drones in ways that are likely to make the whole world a killing field in the future. Though he has said that he would support the sequester agreement with its mandatory $500 billion in cuts in military spending in the next decade, his Secretary of Defense has argued that such cuts are untenable.

On the other hand, Mr. Romney has said that he will raise the military budget by 50 percent and has poured gasoline on the fire in the Middle East whenever he has had the chance through his comments on Israel, Syria and Iran. He has also given comfort to climate change deniers.

We do not have a credible candidate who has any real understanding of how the tools of international law and nonvio- lence might be used. Secretary of State Clinton for a time seemed to support the use of these tools in parts of the “Arab conclusion on page 11