by Dan Schlitt
Local Contact for the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Four months after President Obama pledged to bomb Syria for conducting chemical weapons attacks, the truth about their use is still unknown. Bits of information keep coming out, but as we have been cautioning people all fall, it’s still too early to jump to conclusions about use of the nerve gas sarin. It will be up to future historians to straighten things out.

An important new collection of information has been provided by Seymour Hersh in an article published in the London Review of Books [www.lrb.co.uk/2013/12/08/seymour-m-hersh/whose-sarin]. Hersh is the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter who, among other things, exposed the My Lai Massacre and its cover-up during the Vietnam War and the torture practices at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Over the decades he has cultivated many contacts in government and the intelligence community.

His article “Whose Sarin?” is a devastating indictment of the Obama Administration’s intelligence claims about the August 21 chemical weapons attack in the Ghouta suburbs near Damascus. It even looks like the Administration was ‘cherry picking’ the information about this event to justify eventual large-scale military intervention in the chaotic Syrian civil war, starting with small missile strikes that would lead to greater and greater levels of intervention.

Sensing a fatigue in the American public for yet another foreign military action, Congress balked at the White House unilaterally authorizing a missile strike and insisted that they should be involved in any decision to attack Syria. Timely and vocal public opposition played a critical role in delaying Congressional and Administration authorization for an attack. But what ultimately wound up saving the day was what still looks like a fortunate coincidence: the Russian government’s offer to broker a deal with Syria to eliminate its chemical weapons.


Hersh’s article reveals an even more important story. Drawing from extensive public source research and interviews with anonymous but high-level intelligence officials, Hersh concludes that the U.S. intelligence community has determined that “al-Nusra Front”—an opposition group affiliated with al-Qaida—possessed the capacity at the time of the attack (and may still have it) to manufacture and use sarin as a chemical weapon.

This revelation adds to the uncertainty about who was responsible for the sarin attacks. Buttressing Hersh’s findings, UN observers have since verified the use of sarin in earlier smaller incidents than the Ghouta event.

Further, Postol and Lloyd’s examination of the photos of the rocket parts left after the attacks contradicts the Administration’s claims about the range of the missiles used in the attack. Not only was

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What Is The Truth About Syria & Sarin?

Dr. Bashar Hafez al-Assad
President of Syria

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Syria & Sarin, conclusion

the range of the missiles involved less than asserted—signaling a lesser level of sophistication—the direction that they came from is not as certain as alleged. The doubt surrounding the official story continues to increase.

Although the full picture of what happened is not clear, we can learn something by considering the possible motives of the suspects involved. Who, for example, stood to gain from the timing of the Ghouta attack? The Assad regime had little military motivation for using chemical weapons. Reports suggest that the Syrian government was making significant military gains against the rebels, and the choice of target at Ghouta was not one that supported their gains.

The rebels, on the other hand, did gain from the assumption that the attack was committed by Assad, because it made the regime look bad and invited a response by the U.S. In fact, a move by the U.S. to intervene failed only because Assad—at the urging of the Russians and the reluctant agreement of the U.S.—agreed to sign and ratify the “Chemical Weapons Convention” and turn over the weapons to the international organization in charge of the enforcement of the convention.

An argument against the rebels launching the attack was that the victims were on the rebel side. Al-Nusra, however, is known to have carried out scores of suicide bombings against Christians and other non-Sunni Muslim sects inside Syria, and to have attacked its nominal ally in the civil war: the secular “Free Syrian Army.” This division within the rebels has become increasingly more obvious.

Hersh’s account highlights the need for continued investigations into the Administration’s previous justification for the attack, as well as investigations into whether there are existing stockpiles of chemical weapons in Syria, under opposition control.

You are encouraged to read the whole Hersh article, along with the New York Times story about the analysis of Postol and Lloyd. They contain a wealth of details.

One conclusion that we can draw from all of this is that we cannot depend on the major news sources in our country to give us a real account of events. Too often they uncritically repeat what they are told by the government spokespeople.

Interesting as the story of the use of chemical weapons is, we must not lose sight of the larger picture. Chemical weapons are a minor part of the killing that continues in Syria. The displaced population, both inside Syria and in the neighboring countries, is a massive humanitarian disaster. Negotiations to end the killing are essential. Providing aid to the displaced people is a fundamental need.
A Winter Travelogue…

On the Road with an Economist

by Hank Van den Berg
UNL Economics Professor

As happens on the first weekend of every new year, professional economists again came together at the annual meeting of the “Allied Social Sciences Association” to meet friends, discuss issues, interview job candidates, promote new books and reaffirm one’s status in the profession. This year’s meeting was in Philadelphia, so my wife and I found ourselves traveling to the East Coast on New Year’s Eve.

We flew to Boston and then, after a couple of pleasant days in Vermont and Massachusetts, we traveled to Philadelphia by train. I have to say that Amtrak’s description of its northeast corridor express service as “high-speed” is an extreme case of false advertising. Even local trains in France, Germany or Holland run faster. The six-hour ride did provide ample time to reflect on the state of American infrastructure. Between the train itself and the dilapidated highways, bridges and industrial sites we passed between Boston, New York and Philadelphia, it is clear that we have serious infrastructure problems. It is ironic that we have millions unemployed while there is so much to be done. But Americans have bought into the idea that government no longer can afford to maintain our common assets, so nothing gets done and workers stay unemployed.

Promoting Heterodoxy

I spent a good part of the three-day annual meeting at the “Heterodox Economists’” booth in the exposition area. The term heterodox is derived from Greek; hetero means ‘other’ or ‘different,’ and the word -dox refers to a doctrine or a framework of analysis. Heterodox economics effectively describes an alternative set of economic ideas and approaches to doing economic analysis. Some heterodox economists embrace the ideas of the ‘institutional’ school, others the German historical school, the Austrian-libertarian school, Marxism, socialist perspectives or post-Keynesian perspectives on macroeconomic policy. Also, many economists who take a more inter-disciplinary approach to economics fall into the heterodox camp.

The booth was an attempt by a group of heterodox economists to urge their fellow economists to come out of the intellectual box that prevented them from anticipating the financial crash of 2008—or now designing economic policies to deal with problems such as unemployment and income inequality. My discussions with the economists at the booth (and with those I had to accost in the aisle as they tried to sneak by our booth) made me wonder how so many highly educated people can voluntarily restrict their perspectives of the real world. Many actively resisted being introduced to alternative ideas.

Why Were Heterodox Economists Able to Foresee the Crash?

In listening to the many papers presented in Philadelphia by mainstream economists, it was again made clear that orthodox economists almost always view economic issues through mathematical models that assume the economy consists of a system of competitive markets in which ‘supply and demand’ equilibrate each individual market and, thus, the entire system. These mathematical models—widely used and applied by our leading think tanks, financial firms and economics graduate programs—are explicitly designed to show that free markets produce a stable economy. The well-known columnist for the Financial Times, Martin Wolf, noted that these economists were simply unable to evaluate the possibility of an economic crisis. Hence, any economists who are indoctrinated with these models in graduate school (and later in their career) and nudged by the culture of the field to use these models to analyze all economic issues simply cannot recognize that long-term unemployment, for example, is a problem that needs a policy response.

Heterodox economists, however, generally see the economy as an ever-evolving, complex system in which economic outcomes are difficult to understand, much less to predict. The economic system is complex because an economy is not simply a system of competitive markets. Even when markets exist, they are seldom really very competitive. In reality, businesses have market power to impose prices and terms that do not favor consumers, workers or the general welfare. And most economic interactions do not involve markets at all. People provide for each other within families; most production occurs among many people within large business operations run by command and instructions; governments are involved in many transactions; and social culture heavily influences people’s decisions.

By recognizing that complex economies embedded in even more complex social and natural structures do not have a full set of competitive markets that automatically maintain an ideal level of full employment, heterodox economists often end up providing ranges of possible outcomes rather than specific point estimates. More important, because they understand that complex systems can end up in severe financial crises and deep depressions for extended periods of time, heterodox economists generally urge caution when it comes to deregulation, free trade and other laissez-faire free market policies. Of course, mainstream economists often criticize heterodox economists for their lack of precision. But note that the ‘precise’ prediction that a financial crash was impossible had disastrous consequences—namely a financial crash that no one was prepared to deal with. And the false belief in precision enabled the Reagan, Bush, Clinton and second Bush Administrations to plow ahead with financial deregulation, dismantling of welfare, and the cutting of taxes on the wealthy under the assumption that markets would quickly respond to keep everyone employed and production growing.

In Philadelphia, Ben Bernanke, the outgoing chair of the Federal Reserve, showed no inclination to shift away from his support of the private banking industry or towards more direct policies to boost employment, despite the fact that Federal Reserve monetary policies had helped to engineer the financial crisis in the developing countries and an S&L crisis in the U.S. in the 1980s, caused numerous financial crises in Latin America, Asia and Japan in the 1990s, fueled a ‘dot.com’ bubble in 2000, and provided the means for greed and fraud to create the financial collapse in 2008.

An Interesting Heterodox Idea

Several of my colleagues at the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC), where I am spending a delightful sabbatical year, presented interesting papers in Philadelphia. They built on the tradition of John Maynard Keynes, who argued that the only solution to the Great Depression was for government to increase

continued on page 4
spending and direct employment of people. Keynes noted that it only takes the loss of confidence by one side of finance—either lenders or borrowers—to trigger a crisis, but an economic recovery requires that both borrowers and lenders regain confidence. Today, five years after the crash, banks are still unwilling to lend because they cannot trust that potential borrowers will be able to repay their loans, and borrowers see no reason to borrow when people have insufficient income to purchase the stuff that they would produce by expanding employment and production. Keynes thus urged government to jumpstart the economy by directly putting people to work—providing them with income to spend—directly making it economical for the private sector to add to its labor force.

My UMKC colleagues, Randall Wray, Stephanie Kelton and Matt Forstater, propose that the government act as employer of last resort (ELR) by offering to employ anyone and everyone at a basic living wage. As I noticed during my train trip, there is no lack of things to do. In addition to renewing our infrastructure or actually building some modern trains that really do go fast, there are currently not enough teachers to educate our youth adequately, we do not employ enough caregivers to provide preventive healthcare and take care of our aging population, and we are not making the adjustments to deal with environmental problems like climate change or the loss of biodiversity.

If we take the level of labor force participation we had before the 2008 crisis as our employment goal, then we currently have about 15 million people who need a job. Contrary to what mainstream economic models predict, our economy is not automatically providing those jobs. Worse yet, many of the jobs being provided pay a minimum wage that cannot fully support a worker without additional assistance.

One immediate objection brought up to this ELR proposal was that its cost would be prohibitive. That criticism is easily disposed of, however, by recognizing that the guaranteed job and living wage would partially substitute other costly forms of assistance now provided to the 15 percent of Americans living in poverty. Nor would government have to directly employ all 15 million jobless people because, as Keynes quite clearly noted, when some people increase their incomes, they then spend those incomes (especially relatively low-income earners), which then increases the demand for labor elsewhere in the economy. Keynes referred to this as the multiplier effect.

We Can Do This!

Hence, even if the government has to directly employ, say, 5 million people at a living wage of $10.00 per hour (or $20,000 per year, still less than the minimum wages could just print the money and give it to the Treasury, in which case there would not even be any increase in government debt, as there is no government debt when the Fed bails out the banks.

An ELR program would end youth unemployment, it would effectively raise the minimum wage to over $10 per hour since people could always work in a government employment program at that wage, and multiplied demand for output and more workers would rise to employ many additional workers. Without the huge ‘reserve army of the unemployed’ (to use a good Marxist term), all workers would see better wages, income inequality would decline, and business and financial profits would return to more reasonable shares of national income.

Of course, this shift in income suggests why there is little political support for ELR. Most people who I spoke with in our booth were not aware of the ELR idea or even recognized the possibility that government could directly put people to work.

Further Wanderings to Washington D.C.

Speaking of government, after Philadelphia we traveled to Washington D.C. to visit our son and daughter-in-law. Our son is studying for his Ph.D. in economics at American University—one of the few schools with an economics department that teaches heterodox economics. His wife, a native of Nevada, works on Harry Reid’s Senate staff. Among other things, she handles those nicely reply letters to those of us who insist on writing our senators. Needless to say, as Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid gets more letters than other senators. Reid’s suspension of the filibuster rule for senate confirmation votes and his battle to prevent a Senate vote to increase sanctions on Iran (and derail diplomacy in favor of war) have, no doubt, added to the angry letter flow. But our daughter-in-law enthusiastically accepts such things as doing her job.

With such insider connections, we were able to visit the Senate chambers on a Friday when the Senate was not in session. We then got to actually walk around the floor and into the famous cloakroom from which the majority leader’s staff manages the Senate. We even got to go out on Harry Reid’s balcony overlooking the Mall. While visiting Reid’s office next to the Senate floor (only the majority leader gets a large Capitol office), it was clear that he was a Mark Twain fan, with many documents, paintings and memorabilia on display. Twain, of course, got his start as a writer while managing a newspaper in Virginia City, Nevada, during the silver rush. The fact that Reid was very fond of Twain, a pacifist, was a comforting thought.

Speaking of peace, I should mention that William Jennings Bryan’s statue is still prominently displayed in the U.S. Capitol. This stands in stark contrast to the removal of his statue from the steps of our own State Capitol.

Less comforting was the belated passage of the 2014 government budget while we were in Washington. Even though commentators often praised this bipartisan success, the true story is less rosy. Every indication suggests things are still extremely tense in the Congress. Despite continued high long-term unemployment, unemployment insurance was not extended because the Senate could not muster the needed 60 votes. This is a reminder that Harry Reid only changed the rules on confirmation votes—not all Senate votes. A majority of Republicans can still ‘just say no’ and stop major legislation in its tracks. And the budget deal that did manage to pass both houses included, among other things, a nearly half billion-dollar cut in funds for financial oversight by agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission. Financial firms will be even less watched

Several of my colleagues at the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC), where I am spending a delightful sabbatical year, propose that the government act as employer of last resort (ELR) by offering to employ anyone and everyone at a basic living wage.
NFP Legislative Priorities

by Tessa Foreman, NFP Legislation Monitor

The final day of bill introductions has just concluded with over 450 new bills introduced in the Nebraska Legislature’s 2014 session. We will be monitoring a number of bills concerning voting, healthcare, criminal justice, Native American affairs, human trafficking and social justice.

We believe one of the most important bills this year is LB 887, which would bring health care coverage to some 54,000 working Nebraskans who currently fall into a coverage gap. The “Wellness in Nebraska Act” (LB 887), sponsored by Senator Kathy Campbell, is a comprehensive healthcare bill that will expand Medicaid to some and help others purchase healthcare plans through the private insurance exchange market. A public hearing for this bill will be held by the Health and Human Services Committee on January 29.

Several bills have been introduced this year dealing with voting, elections and voter rights. One of the most concerning is LB 662, which would require some individuals to show a government-issued photograph identification with their current address on it in order to vote. This bill is aimed at individuals who have changed residences and have not properly notified or responded to election officials. This would overwhelmingly impact young people, the elderly, low-income individuals, persons with disabilities and those who live in rural areas.

LB 928, introduced by the “State-Tribal Relations Committee,” would change provisions of the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act. It would improve and clarify child welfare laws involving Native American children in our state. LB 722, introduced by Senator Rich Kolowski, would adopt the “Recognition and Enforcement of Tribal Civil Court Judgments Act.” This bill would ensure that state entities recognize civil rulings made in Indian tribal courts.

In the area of criminal justice, LB 832 has been introduced on behalf of the governor and attorney general. This bill is aimed at increasing prison time served by eliminating the automatic calculation of ‘good time.’ Senator Brad Ashford has introduced a counter to that bill, LB 907, which would provide for several changes—including ‘re-entry’ probation officers, supervised release and improved access to services designed to decrease recidivism. Senator Ashford and 12 other senators have also introduced LB 999, which would adopt the “Criminal Justice Reentry and Data Act” and create the “Reentry Programming Board.” This bill would change the approach of Nebraska’s criminal justice system to focus on offender transition and reentry, with the goal of enhancing public safety by supporting offenders’ successful transition back into the community.

Three important bills were introduced to strengthen middle- and low-income families: LB 943 would raise the state minimum wage to $9.00 per hour by 2017; LB 955 would adopt the “Paid Medical Leave Act”; and LB 956 would increase the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Throughout last year’s session, we strongly supported the passage of LB 255, introduced by Senator Amanda McGill, to address the issue of human and sex trafficking. She has proposed two follow-up bills this session, LB 933 and 934. These bills would further strengthen the existing laws in an effort to put an end to these ghastly crimes.

NFP will monitor these bills (and the plethora of legislation modifying the tax code) as they move through the legislative process and do our best to keep you informed. However, advocacy works best when there is strength in numbers. The more of us who reach out to our state senators, write letters to the editors of our local newspapers and respond to our action alerts, the louder our voice and the greater our impact.

Death Penalty Update

by Ahmad Arraseef
NADP Communications Intern

As we begin the new year, Nebraskans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty has been reflecting on the achievements of last year and planning for further action in 2014. You can sign up to stay informed about the group’s work at nadp.net/signup.

The Nebraska Unicameral’s stalled vote on a bill to repeal the death penalty in May of 2013 was the closest the state has been to repealing the costly policy in years. Thanks to the help of repeal supporters from all over the state, NADP was able to muster overwhelming support for a repeal bill last year, which passed out of the Judiciary Committee with a unanimous vote. However, despite well-informed arguments for the repeal of the death penalty and the support of a majority of members of the Legislature, opponents of the bill were able launch a filibuster that stopped a vote on repeal from being taken.

Throughout last year, NADP set out to build even more support for the repeal of the death penalty in Nebraska, and plans continue into this year. Evangelical leader Shane Claiborne and “Dead Man Walking” author Sister Helen Prejean both visited the state in 2013 to urge repeal from both a religious and moral standpoint. Bud Welch, whose daughter Julie was killed in the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building, spoke about the need for forgiveness and reconciliation at NADP’s annual banquet. And, in November, death row exoneree Curtis McCarty ignited many Nebraskans’ passion for justice by telling the story of his experiences as an innocent man who spent almost two decades on death row.

Moving into this year, NADP will continue to communicate with the public about the death penalty and keep a close eye on events in the Legislature. More and more Nebraskans are coming to understand the enormous flaws in the death penalty system. Nationwide, 143 innocent people have been exonerated from death row after a wrongful conviction—mistakes that have allowed real criminals to evade justice while causing pointless suffering for the families of both the victim and the exoneree. There is also considerable bias in death row convictions based on the race of the victim—a case with a black suspect and a white victim is far more likely to result in a death row conviction than a case in which the roles are reversed. All in all, time and money spent on court proceedings and the acquisition of the drugs needed for lethal injection are better spent solving urgent crimes or funding victims’ services and programs that prevent violent crime in the first place.

Please visit nadp.net/action to connect with the work that NADP is doing in our state and to remind your state senator that Nebraskans want to see an end to the death penalty.
What’s HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

Snake Eyes for Las Vegas?

Grand outdoor pools and ersatz waterfalls. Air conditioners humming in 120-degree heat. A chance to get lucky and beat the odds. Las Vegas, Nevada has always been a symbol of American indulgence and damn-nature ecological arrogance.

Water planners now realize that within a few decades this grand cultural artifact may run out of water. The Colorado River, the principal water source for a large part of the United States Southwest, is slowing to a muddy trickle in a drought that may be the worst in 1,250 years, since two dry centuries that felled the Anasazi and (further south) the Maya. The same warm spell lured the Vikings to Greenland, only to trap them in the Little Ice Age.

Of late, the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, has been pumping Lake Mead dry with a series of pipes, each one lower than the last. The lake’s level is close to a point at which water will have to be severely rationed in that city. People already are using each others’ recycled sewage water. And so what happens to Las Vegas real estate values when the message finally sinks in that no one can run a major city without water?

All along, planners have acted as if the situation is cyclical, and will correct itself. It may not be. Global warming is reinforcing the drought by altering atmospheric circulation patterns, a subject left untouched in much of even the most thorough reporting on the drought. The reporting mentions global warming but misses the science.

Drought, Air Circulation, and Warming

The New York Times in January, 2014 carried an excellent report on the subject, but it missed the punch line: changes in worldwide atmospheric circulation aggravated by global warming. Near the equator, warm, moist air rises, cools and unleashes downpours. In the upper troposphere, the air spreads north and southward toward both poles, descending at about 30 degrees north and south latitude and creating deserts. For reasons that are not yet fully understood, as temperatures rise the “Hadley Cells” reach further north and south of the equator, expanding arid areas.

Droughts in regions where Hadley Cells favor descending air now span the globe, from Australia, to Spain, Iraq, Afghanistan, parts of China and the United States Southwest, including California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Texas. In China, the Gobi desert, also within the northern reaches of Hadley Cell range, has been expanding, sending occasional dust storms into Beijing, aggravating air pollution from coal-fired power plants that produce 15 percent of the United States’ food.

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As Wines reported: “Reservoirs have shrunk to less than half their capacities, the canyon walls around them ringed with white mineral deposits where water once lapped. Seeking to stretch their allotments of the river, regional water agencies are recycling sewage effluent, offering rebates to tear up grass lawns and subsidizing less thirsty appliances from dishwashers to shower heads.” By 2014, for the first time, federal authorities restricted the amount of water entering Lake Powell, about 180 miles up the Colorado River. Lake Mead supplies water to about 40 million people, not only to Las Vegas, but also Los Angeles, and several millions of acres of irrigated farm and ranchland that produces 15 percent of the United States’ food.

Water is already becoming precious, Wines noted: “Virtually all water used indoors, from home dishwashers to the toilets and bathtubs used by the 40 million tourists who visit Las Vegas each year, is treated and returned to Lake Mead. Officials here boast that everyone could take a 20-minute shower every day without increasing the city’s water consumption by a drop.” The Las Vegas’ area’s water consumption did not increase between 2000 and 2012, even as it added 400,000 people.

These boasts come with the customary Vegas bravado—else why would a third intake valve be required at Lake Mead if the city has balanced demand and supply of water? Stay tuned.

REFERENCE

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacsen Professor at the UNO and author of The Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology (2009).
Building Food Security with Local Food

The following guest editorial by NFP State Coordinator Tim Rinne appeared in the Sunday, December 8th edition of the Lincoln Journal Star and was reprinted in the Wednesday, December 11th edition of the Grand Island Independent, under the title “Getting Back to Local Food.”

How embarrassing.

Here I am, a lifelong resident of one of the premier agricultural regions of the world, whose family has farmed in the state since 1868, and I didn’t get it.

You would have thought that eating at least three times a day for 50 years would have stirred me to take an interest in how that food got on my plate.

But no. I just ate.

It took a quote from an aristocratic British farmer (a member of the House of Lords, no less) to get me to grasp not just the centrality of food production in our lives—but how fragile this system is.

“Nine meals away from anarchy” is how Lord Cameron of Dillington described Britain in 2007.

The first time I came across this statement I wasn’t even sure I knew what he was talking about. But the inspiration for his disquieting comment comes, in part, from our side of the pond. From the experience of Hurricane Katrina.

Our grocery stores (where most of us do all of our ‘hunting and fishing and farming’) operate on what is called ‘just in time delivery.’ Your average grocery outlet carries just three days of inventory—the equivalent of ‘nine meals.’ Any disruption to that delivery schedule and our food security is at risk.

Hurricane Katrina, Lord Cameron declared, provided a textbook case of the social disruption that occurs with a sudden calamity. The first day (meals 1-3), people rush to the grocery store to stock up. The second day (meals 4-6), those who can afford it go back and buy whatever’s left. And the third day (meals 7-9), when the larder’s empty and people are hungry, the social order begins to break down.

Or, in Lord Cameron’s words, “there will be rats, mayhem, and maybe even murder.”

Scarcity does ugly things to a population. “The better angels of our nature” (to use Abraham Lincoln’s phrase) tend not to fare very well when people are hungry and afraid. Our first thoughts are for ourselves and our own, and conflict invariably erupts with our neighbors over competition for resources. The Pentagon, in fact, already is bracing for wars over food and water—and not just in the poor nations of the globe. As Lord Cameron warns, everyone who eats is vulnerable to food insecurity. It’s a world we want to avoid if we can help it.

So to bring this all back home, we need to be asking where that food on our grocery store shelves comes from.

And the answer for more than 90 percent of it is: from somewhere other than Nebraska.

Your average grocery outlet carries just three days of inventory — the equivalent of ‘nine meals.’ Any disruption to that delivery schedule and our food security is at risk.

Green Legislation in the 2014 Session

Despite the ‘short session’ (only 60 working days instead of 90) and the politics of an election year (half of the Unicameral’s 49 seats will be on the ballot), several bills dealing with green energy and climate change stand a good chance of passing in the 2014 Legislature.

Senator Heath Mello’s LB 402 is already out on the legislative floor and was advanced to the second round of debate last session. The “Community-Based Energy Development Act” would encourage the development of locally owned renewable energy projects by targeting sales and use tax exemptions to local ownership groups. LB 402 has broad-based legislative support.

LB 411, introduced by Senator Jeremy Nordquist, is also a carryover bill from last year that would establish a state ‘Production Tax Credit’ for renewable energy development. Tax incentives for renewable energy offset the subsidies for fossil fuels that have long placed green energy at a competitive disadvantage. With Congress having just allowed the federal Production Tax Credit to expire, a state PTC is essential to developing Nebraska’s renewable energy resources and reducing carbon emissions from coal.

LB 818, introduced by Senator Ken Haar of Lincoln, would raise the permissible threshold for renewable energy generation by individual ratepayers from 25 to 125 kilowatts. The 25-kilowatt ceiling in the current ‘net-metering law (which Haar succeeded in getting adopted in 2009) is adequate for residential application, but has proven to be too low to enable to commercial and agricultural development. LB 818 has the potential to spur renewable energy development on a far larger scale, particularly in rural areas.

Reducing our energy consumption, however — what the industry refers to as ‘demand-side management’—is every bit as important as developing a clean renewable supply. LB 978, sponsored by Senator Burke Harr of Omaha, provides funding from the previously unused low-income energy conservation fund for utilities to establish or administer an ‘on-bill’ payment program. The on-bill payment program provides a mechanism for private businesses to conduct residential energy audits, obtain financing and do the energy conservation upgrades. The work would be paid for through savings on the customer’s energy bills.

Senator Ken Haar has also introduced a revised version of his legislation from last year—LB 567, “The True Cost of Coal Bill.” The new bill, LB 965, would require public power districts to not only consider ‘affordability’ and ‘reliability’ when making energy investments over $50 million, but to give equal consideration to so-called ‘externalities’ such as carbon emissions, health effects and water usage, as well as issues of financial risk and the impact on local economic development.

Last session, Senator Haar engineered the passage of the first climate change-related bill in Nebraska legislative history. LB 583 required state government’s “Climate Assessment and Response Committee” to study the projected impact of climate change on Nebraska’s economy, utilizing the resources and expertise of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. But when the CARC leadership took it upon itself to stipulate that the study could not examine the role of humans in climate change, UNL’s climate scientists publicly repudiated the committee’s proposal and opted to conduct their own independent assessment. Senator Haar’s new bill, LB 882, would specifically require the Climate Assessment and Response Committee to include the human role in climate change in both its educational efforts and policy recommendations as part of its formal mission.

The shorter session and election year politics will invariably impact the fate of some of this legislation, and not all of it is likely to pass. Even so, the public hearing process will provide an invaluable ‘airing’ for all of these proposals and lay the educational groundwork for even more green legislation in 2015, when we will again have a long, 90-day session, a new legislature and a new governor to work with.
Advancing Our Values by Framing the Debate

by Curtis Bryant,
Social Worker & NFP Member

Growing up in the 1980s, I heard adults lament the rise of the ‘sound bite.’ Politicians, especially conservative ones, became masters of the sound bite. With only a few seconds to get their point across in the media, they sought to pack as much persuasive power as possible into one or two sentences.

Renowned cognitive scientist George Lakoff calls this process “framing.” Framing the issues is the careful use of language and metaphor to succinctly communicate not only one’s position on an issue, but the moral values and principles at stake. Effective framing tells a story in which the speaker’s side is the hero. It also defines the issue and therefore limits the policy options available for solving the problem. I’ll discuss each of these factors in turn.

Careful Use of Metaphor

In metaphor, a symbol represents something actual. For example, in the saying, “The early bird catches the worm,” prompt action to achieve a goal is compared to a bird.

In effective framing, speakers use metaphor to help the listener make comparisons that the speaker wants them to make. The term ‘framing’ is itself a metaphor that symbolizes creating a border around the debate.

Telling a Story

The saying tells a story. More precisely, upon hearing the saying, the mind unconsciously fills in the story’s gaps. Although the saying mentions only one bird, the word “early” implies that there may be late birds that didn’t catch the worm. This further implies scarcity. Therefore, the mind unconsciously continues the story like this: “Other birds arrive too late. It’s a competitive world. They should get up earlier tomorrow.”

Even a phrase as short as ‘tax relief’ implies a story that the mind unconsciously elaborates. The villain—big, bad government—betrays people with a tax. The hero tries to relieve the burden by reducing or eliminating the tax, and the people are grateful.

Defining the Issue

The saying ‘The early bird catches the worm’ frames the issue as individual initiative. Within this frame, only solutions that would help individual birds be early make sense. For example, public-service announcements exhorting birds to get up early would fit, but efforts to increase the worm supply would not. While this example is silly, it shows how a frame limits the policy options.

But what if you want to argue for increasing the worm supply? If you accept the individual-initiative frame, you would probably fail at your goal because you would have unwittingly cast yourself in the role of ‘villain.’ Then the story people would unconsciously hear would go like this:

After the early bird catches the worm through hard, honest work, other birds feast on worms that you have brought. Instead of hunting themselves, they wait for you to bring more worms. Now they depend on you and will go hungry if you fail to feed them. Not only are the late birds still late, they see no reason to be early or to hunt elsewhere.

Because the problem was defined as a lack of individual initiative, this solution would seem unacceptable. But when framing effectively, you can cast your idea as the story’s hero. To do this, you have to change the frame. Dr. Lakoff calls this “re-framing.”

Here’s an example: When your opponent proclaims, “The early bird catches the worm, and that’s the way it is,” you might reply, “While I agree that individual initiative is important, there’s more to the story: The flock that hunts...”

A Few Issues Reframed

Tax Relief

While I used to resent paying taxes, especially income taxes, Lakoff’s work changed my attitude. He argues that taxes are like membership dues that make possible the countless privileges and services we enjoy as Americans. Therefore, when a politician argues for tax relief, should his opponents seem to accept the view of taxes as a burden, they would unwittingly have cast themselves as the villain in the story: While the hero is trying to relieve the public’s tax burden, look! Others are trying to interfere. The people, in this frame, cheer the hero.

But if we reframe taxes as dues, the issue becomes fairness. What is everyone’s fair share? Then we become the hero for arguing that wealthier Nebraskans should pay income tax at a higher rate because they have benefited at a higher rate from the State’s work than the rest of us. The 99% cheer us.

Another way to reframe taxes is as investments. Like financial investments, many tax-funded activities yield returns such as safety (e.g. police and fire protection), health (e.g. public health, Medicare, and medical research), economic development (e.g. job creation, urban planning), and education (e.g. public schools and universities). Unlike financial investments, these returns don’t necessarily bring the govern...
What We’re Up To…

by Paul Olson & Tessa Foreman

Throughout its 44-year-long history, Nebraskans for Peace has operated on the premise that “There can be no peace without justice.” NFP has accordingly molded itself as a ‘multi-issue’ organization, with a wide scope of policy interests. Beginning with this edition of the Nebraska Report, we will be providing regular reports on our varied activities, so that supporters of the nation’s oldest statewide Peace & Justice group have a sense of ‘what we’re up to’.

As part of its “Environmental Priority,” NFP organized a November public program on “Localizing Our Food Supply” and had an op-ed published in both the Lincoln Journal Star and the Grand Island Independent spotlighting the problem of food insecurity and the role it plays in fostering social conflict. The organization also continued networking with Nebraska’s largest public power districts on shifting generation from renewable sources. NFP, for instance, has been particularly responsive to the Nebraska Public Power District’s (NPPD) efforts to achieve some degree of rational energy policy. The NPPD has senior representatives through meetings, letters and op-eds about the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the contribution to this gap made by military spending, and the foolishness of the present proposals to cut the SNAP program (formerly Food Stamps) by somewhere between 9 billion and 39 billion dollars. The Lincoln Chapter has also continued an organizing effort to oppose the so-called tax ‘modernization’ efforts at the Statehouse that would exacerbate this wealth gap in Nebraska through a regressive tax shift.

Some of our NFP members have also worked with native detainees in our prison system and continued the work to end alcohol sales at Whiteclay. We all mourned the premature death of the daughter of our brother in this struggle, Frank LaMere. Lexie LaMere was an already accomplished political activist and a leader in the Creighton University student group “Whiteclay Awareness.” Her death at age 21 is a loss for us all.

As regards our hallmark “Anti-War Priority,” we hosted the Lincoln appearance of Syrian nun, Sister Agnes Miriam of the “Unity of Antioch.” While we reserve judgment about some of her views, we concur that the myth being propagated in the United States that the Sunni uprising is largely made up of democratic forces is grossly mistaken, that both the Sunni and Shiite sides are driven by undemocratic religious convictions, and that only an agreement jointly brokered by China, Russia, the U.S., Iran and the Saudis with the active involvement of grassroots participants in Syria can succeed in restoring peace in that war-torn nation. Part of our effort to achieve some degree of rational skepticism about what is going on in Syria has centered on educating both the public and our political officials that the highly publicized sarin gas attacks may not, in fact, have come from the Assad government, and that the Obama Administration and the Syrian rebels may have fabricated a scenario (similar to the alleged “Gulf of Tonkin” incident during the Vietnam War) to justify U.S. military intervention in Syria. This more skeptical position, we are glad to report, is gaining traction. We have also supported the UN and White House diplomatic effort encouraging Iran to scale back its program for uranium enrichment to levels supporting only the non-military uses of nuclear energy.

In Omaha, the “Palestinian Rights Task Force” has continued both its public education outreach and lobbying contacts with our federal officials. In addition to helping give voice to the Palestinians who are suffering under the Israeli government’s occupation, the Task Force markets fair trade products made by Palestinians to financially support their goal of statehood.

Finally, in a demonstration of international solidarity, “Turn Off the Violence Priority” committee member Shela Shanks will attend an event in New York City next month commemorating the 25th anniversary of lay Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda’s presentation of peace proposals to the United Nations. This gathering will include people who are well known in their fields—economists, political scientists, writers, professors, civil society organization leaders as well as laity. And as these global efforts for peacemaking need to be matched by actions reducing violence at the intimate and local level, members of the TOTV committee continue to give public talks on the social dangers of bullying as well as working with Senator Amanda McGill’s office on sexual trafficking issues.

If you wish to volunteer to help with any of these activities, please send an email to Paul Olson (polson2@unl.edu) or Tessa Foreman (tessa6161@gmail.com) and we will put you in touch with people who can help you make a difference.
our country. Americans show we care for one another and should be, and these activities are ways we and the nation enjoy the benefits. That's as it ment income. Instead, citizens, communities, and the nation enjoy the benefits. That's as it should be, and these activities are ways we Americans show we care for one another and should be, and these activities are ways we and the nation enjoy the benefits. That's as it

Raising the Debt Ceiling

Although this phrase has a precise meaning to people involved in the congressional budget process, it confuses normal people when used out of context in sound bites. That's because it inaccurately frames the issue as "future debt." The metaphor of raising a ceiling implies drastic, difficult and expensive change to a building. These associations also deceive because passing the measure is usually no big deal. Because the measure's practical effect is that the U.S. Treasury can borrow to pay the bills for the past year, I think we should call it "bill-pay authorization." This term accurately conveys the measure's meaning to non-wonks and reduces the emotional charge. And it might be harder for Republicans to justify shutting down the government over a bill-pay authorization. Obamacare

Coined by opponents of the law, the term "Obamacare" sarcastically frames the issue as President Obama instead of the law. When supporters use this term, we unwittingly reinforce the emotional charge. Although the law's full name is the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010," it's often shortened to the "Affordable Care Act" (ACA). This nickname frames the law as being mainly about money. As such, the national debate has tended to focus on the law's

success or failure at lowering insurance costs. But the first part of the name, "Patient Protection," emphasizes the law's moral mission. It tells a story of patients suffering medical bankruptcy and abuse by insurance companies. The hero is the government that protects patients by requiring the companies to treat them better. What difference would it make if the law were known as the "Patient Protection Act"?

Of course, if you don't like the law, "Medicare for All" is a perfectly valid alternate frame (and a better policy).

War on Terror

The war on terror is a brilliant and lethal neo-conservative frame. The best reframe I've heard comes from the Friends Committee on National Legislation: "the peaceful prevention of deadly conflict." I understand this to mean using law enforcement (national and international), diplomacy, economic development, and other measures to fight terrorism instead of the armed forces. It also means strengthening systems to prevent conflict from turning deadly. I believe this is the way out of the war on terror. "Handcuffs, not bombs" would be a more accurate slogan.

Conclusion

Unlike "political spin," framing as advocated by Dr. Lakoff raises public consciousness by revealing truth that careless or dishonest speech has obscured. The truth it reveals contains moral values—not facts alone. Framing can help us communicate our views and values effectively. It worked for the Reagan Revolution and can work for us.

Join NFP at the New Member Rate of $25

Name: ____________________________________________________________
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As our nation has grown in size and stature, however—as our industrial economy expanded—these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness. We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. Necessitous men are not free men. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made. In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race or creed.

Roosevelt detailed a set of economic rights he felt were necessary to create not only the economic conditions in which people could actually enjoy the basic human rights that the U.S. has always touted, but also to increase the fairness of our economy and society. Specifically, he listed:

- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

Conclusion on next page
Local Food, conclusion

Agricultural powerhouse that we are, barely a tenth of what we grow in the state is consumed locally. The other ninetينths is exported to out-of-state markets.

It hasn’t of course always been that way. My father assures me that, growing up on the farm in Johnson County in the 1930s, 95 percent of their diet came from within 5 miles of where they lived. They had to buy their coffee and sugar. And they never had fresh strawberries in December. But they ate three times a day and they could tell you where their food came from—because they either grew it themselves or got it from a neighbor.

That kind of food localization is something we need to get back to, particularly those of us living in towns and cities where the single-largest irrigated crop in America is grown: our lawns.

We can’t eat the grass they’re made of. They sap enormous amounts of water, fossil fuels and arable land. But we religiously nurture them in our yards, while the average bite of food on our plate travels 1,500 miles or more.

This is a recipe for disaster. And with the increased risk that extreme weather events like drought and flood pose to agriculture because of climate change, we frankly have no choice but to develop a more stable—and locally based—food system.

In April of this year, yet another British government official, Agriculture Minister David Heath, warned of coming food shortages and exhorted Britons to replace their lawns with gardens and “dig for survival.”

Call me overly cautious, but I’m taking the minister’s advice. I don’t like missing meals. It makes me crabby.

Tim Rinne is the state coordinator of Nebraskans for Peace. He and his wife, Kay Walter, have converted their entire property in the Hawley Historic District to an ‘edible landscape.’

Paul Olson, conclusion

Recently some useful signs have appeared. Mayor de Blasio of New York has won an election based on a massive critique of income disparity in New York City and been commended by the Clintons. A number of cities have enacted a minimum wage of ten dollars an hour or above (it should be double). The Nebraska Legislature has refused to pass the horrific Heineman tax modernization scheme that would give away the store to the rich. Pete Ricketts, the Koch Brothers and their innocuously named but malevolent “American Legislative Exchange Council” (ALEC) seem to have a little less power. But the power of the military goes on—sequester or no-sequester—and we will not move from a military security state to a democracy until that changes. As Blake exhorts, we need to tune our hearing to the cry of every man, every voice, every ban. We need to free ourselves from the mind-forged manacles, and hear the equivalents of the chimney-sweeper’s cry and the hapless soldier’s sigh in our own streets. That is where democracy begins.

I hope that you will talk with your city and town officials, your legislators and your Washington representatives about these matters—sincerely and humbly but also with the passion of a righteous conscience. The future of our country depends on patriots like you who will.

On the Road, conclusion

• The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment;
• The right to a good education.

Eleanor later campaigned to incorporate such economic rights in the 1948 United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Among the economic rights that ended up in the document are:

Article 23: (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment; (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

Article 25: (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 26: Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit...

The Universal Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 by a vote of 48 in favor, 0 against, with 8 abstentions. The U.S. was one of the ‘yes’ votes. Would such a declaration still be signed by a U.S. delegation today? Would it be approved by our Congress today? After failing to get enough Republicans to go along with a mere extension of unemployment benefits, would Harry Reid be able to get enough votes to pass a treaty that recognized the responsibility of society to enable its members to have housing, work and education?

Thankfully, the Japanese court recognized that others influence and share in our successes and failures. Now, we need to convince present-day Americans that until we collectively—through government—build a more equal environment by supplementing the deficiencies and reducing the advantages that individuals are given by the misfortune or luck of birth, we cannot have a just society.
Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

Nebraska Peace Foundation was set up nearly 30 years ago as a supporting foundation for Nebraskans for Peace. Donations made to Nebraska Peace Foundation are exempt from federal and state taxes to the extent allowed by law.

You can support the peace education work of Nebraskans for Peace and receive a tax deduction for your donation by making a donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation. As we approach that time of the year when preparation of tax returns begins, it is also a good time to consider how you might benefit from making a tax deductible donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation. Discuss this with your tax preparer or tax advisor. They can advise you in the best way to save on taxes and support the peace work of Nebraskans for Peace.

Blake & Military-Industrial Bunkum

by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

In 1794, the poet William Blake published his “London,” which described the nexus between militarism and the meanness characterizing his society (also that of King George III). The first three stanzas go:

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant’s cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper’s cry
Every blackening church appalls,
And the hapless soldier’s sigh
Runs in blood down palace-walls.

The “mind-forged manacles” valorising militarism and class disparity are still here. We could in 2014—220 years later—paraphrastically exclaim, “I can wander through each country road (or city street, for that matter) near where the emptied Platte does flow” and see the “marks of weakness, and woe (and poverty).” I can see them if I go into the older parts of our cities, whiskey towns adjacent to reservations, the ubiquitous trailer parks, or the declining rural towns like that portrayed in Alexander Payne’s “Nebraska.” The chimney sweeper is no longer dying of smog, but the earth is—of CO2—and the hapless soldier, homeless and terrorized by PTSD, lies in our streets, jobless, and drug-infested. The soldier’s sigh no longer runs in blood down palaces but it stains Congress—a Congress that has funded our wars, but not our veterans, our hates but not our loves.

Our mind-forged manacles are myths that tell us that military spending can make us safe, that poverty can make us strong—especially the impoverishment of 22 percent of our children and their working parents, both often working two or three jobs to get by. Even with federal, local and religious programs, about 15 percent of our families are food insecure. Bad nutrition means brain damage, and yet we yammer on about how our schools make us strong—especially the impoverishment of 22 million long-term unemployed workers—workers whose families will descend into poverty when their benefits stop. The Senate has put that money back, but the House seems to be stuck in its usual mud. At the same time, assistance with those things that help people escape poverty—college tuition, early childhood education and constructive policing in low- and middle-income communities—is being cut to under 2010 levels in the Murray-Ryan agreement. That is how to build a strong society?

Consider also that the Murray-Ryan budget cuts “Emergency Unemployment Compensation” for the 1.3 million long-term unemployed workers—workers whose families will descend into poverty when their benefits stop. The Senate has put that money back, but the House seems to be stuck in its usual mud. At the same time, assistance with those things that help people escape poverty—college tuition, early childhood education and constructive policing in low- and middle-income communities—is being cut to under 2010 levels in the Murray-Ryan agreement. That is how to build a strong society?

Consider what $1.5 trillion would do for child nutrition, poverty reduction, unemployment compensation, the extension of early childhood education, and the creation of alternative energy. It is not as if American business is not doing well. Columnist Froma Harrop has recently argued, rather persuasively, that Obama has been better for business than any other president in the last 60 years and that Democratic presidents had in general been better for business than any other president in the last 60 years and that Democratic presidents had in general been better for business than any other president in the last 60 years and that Democratic presidents had in general been better for business than any other president in the last 60 years and that Democratic presidents had in general better for prosperity than their Republican peers. It isn’t that we are poor. It is that we are callous and cover our hard heartedness with a veneer of “charity.”

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