Mark Braverman’s Love of Israelis & Palestinians

by Paul Olson & Rich Little

The Palestinian Rights Task Force of the NFP Omaha Chapter recently did Nebraskans a great favor by bringing Mark Braverman, executive director of “Kairos USA,” to the state. The following article summarizes and expands on the views expressed in Braverman’s talks.

Mark Braverman has the credentials, describing himself as follows on his website:

Braverman’s roots are in the Holy Land—his grandfather, a fifth-generation Palestinian Jew, was born in Jerusalem, emigrating to the U.S. as a young man. Growing up in the United States, Mark was reared in the Jewish tradition, studying Bible, Hebrew literature and Jewish history. Trained in clinical psychology and crisis management, Braverman devoted his professional career to working with groups and individuals undergoing traumatic stress. Returning to the Holy Land in 2006, he was transformed by witnessing the occupation of Palestine and by encounters with peace activists and civil society leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities. Since then, Mark has devoted himself full-time to the Israel/Palestine conflict, supporting Palestinian land rights and peaceful coexistence in historic Palestine… [He] has been closely involved in the growth of the international church movement to support the cause of Palestinian rights, [and] in 2009… participated in the launch conclusion on page 3
Nebraska Report

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Mark Braverman on Israel & Palestine

of the Kairos Palestine document in Bethlehem, [eventually becoming] Executive Director of Kairos USA, a movement to unify and mobilize American Christians to take a prophetic stance for a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

Braverman’s resume does not give you the marrow of his position: that the Palestinian-Israel conflict is, in essence, not a religious conflict but a human rights one. Israeli colonialism has endeavored to wipe out a people by taking their land, forcing them to flee to refugee camps or live in penury, and imposing a Bantustan-style apartheid rule on them.

Braverman often began his presentations in Nebraska with the story of the Lutheran bishop whom he met in Bethlehem and who was about to visit Hebron, the city held captive by Israeli soldiers guarding several hundred fanatical settlers who have taken over the center of this city. When Braverman saw the bishop after the trip to Hebron, the bishop was white as a sheet. He had observed in Hebron a huge sign saying “There is no Palestine and there never will be.” Mark told the bishop the sign is no surprise; what it says is the unspoken official Israeli policy; Menachem Begin told Jimmy Carter the same thing back in the 1970s; and Zionism from its start, at the turn-of-the-century, had the objective of taking over the entire Holy Land, always wondering what to do with the inconvenient reality of over 1 million native Palestinian inhabitants.

Braverman will no longer argue about the ‘one-state’ versus the ‘two-state’ solution. For him, there exists only one state, the apartheid state of Israel; there is no Palestinian Authority in power, only a ‘Vichy-style’ WWII occupation government which functions as a tool of U.S. and Israeli policy. Indeed, the notion that the U.S. is an honest broker for peace in the region and that Israel is working toward a Palestinian state is false. There is no serious peace process.

Having come to these conclusions, Braverman developed at length the analogies between the apartheid situation in South Africa and that in Israel, reminding us that when the churches, through their ecumenical bodies, insisted that the U.S. and its allies delegitimize apartheid South Africa, South Africa’s system fell within nine years. The same thing could happen in Israel if churches will only realize that the great burden of guilt that they bear for centuries of persecution of Jews will not be absolved by supporting a tyranny in the Holy Land, but through changing radically their attitude toward Jews throughout the world and toward Judaism itself. Opposing injustice requires a kind of love and compassion for all peoples and a refusal to enable the continuation of tyranny by failing to speak out against it regardless of who perpetrates it. Far from being anti-Jewish, submits Braverman, opposing Israel’s policies is an act of love toward the Jewish people. Ending tyranny liberates the oppressors as well as the oppressed.

Presently Israel, as Braverman sees it, is imprisoned by its own apartheid mentality—a a military state locked in by walls of its own creation. That is not Judaism. The Torah provides a code for a compassionate society that takes care of widows, the homeless and the stranger. Historically, Jews throughout the world have been in the forefront of fights for human rights, except in Israel.

Braverman argues that it is not too late for Israel to become a multiethnic state, a multi-religious state, containing many rich cultures and theologies and observing traditional human rights which Jews have always supported. The separation wall could be torn down, dialogues could begin, and the empty places left where hundreds of villages were destroyed in the creation of Israel could be opened for resettlement by Palestinian refugees. Ultimately churches have to recognize that supporting Israel will not assuage the guilt of 1500 years of Christian anti-Jewish sentiment; the notion that opposing what Israel is doing in destroying human rights and colonizing the former Palestinian area is not anti-Semitism (though a rabbi, defending Israel at a national United Methodist conference, told conference delegates that the denomination’s debates on divestment felt like anti-Semitism). What is happening to Palestinians controlled by Israel represents neither Judaism, nor Christianity, and though the shift will be hard, perhaps pitting father against son, brother against brother, it must come.

Those of us in the U.S. are complicit in the oppression of Palestinians because of the huge amounts of aid given by our country to Israel. We will not have control over exactly how change occurs in that country, but what is fully within our control is our unquestioning support for Israel as it destroy itself.

[Editor’s Note: As this Nebraska Report issue was in production, we learned of the slaying of four Jewish religious leaders. NFP of course condemns these senseless murders.]
What counts as national security depends on your perspective. Some people consider wars overseas to be national security.

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Others think of national security as having enough to eat, a place to live, plus health care, clean air to breathe and water to drink, and access to an education.

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www.nationalpriorities.org/cost-of/
Stop Recruiting Kids

by Kevin Haake & Barbara van den Berg, Alternatives to the Military–Lincoln

One doesn’t need to look very hard to find references to the military in our society. Indeed, the military’s presence is seemingly everywhere: from retail stores’ sales campaigns, sponsorship of running events, football camps, national and local sporting events and television advertisements, to university ‘welcome-back-to-campus’ events, and even community festivals, such as Lincoln’s “Rib Fest.” This pervasive culture has also made its way into the corridors, classrooms, study halls and lunch rooms of our schools.

This is all quite intentional. Creating a positive image as a community supporter is one of the most important strategies the military has for the purpose of recruiting. Another strategy relies upon the ‘first to contact, first to contract’ axiom: expose kids to the military early and frequently, and they will be more likely to enlist once they are of age. The military has latched onto this second strategy with a vengeance and now regularly sends in recruiters to nearly every high school in America in order to pitch military enlistment to the kids. These visits range in frequency from one or two a year to one or two a week depending upon the demographics of the school. While these two strategies are effective in influencing the young target audience, this seemingly relentless exposure to military culture via the media, our commercial society and within our schools has helped spawn a counter movement across the United States with the goal of ending this deliberate targeting of underage kids by our military recruitment services.

The military now regularly sends in recruiters to nearly every high school in America in order to pitch military enlistment to the kids.

The counter-recruitment movement recently received a boost from a not so typical source: the American Public Health Association (APHA). In October 2012, the APHA adopted a policy statement that came out strongly against the military recruitment of students. The summary statement states that “there are public health reasons to be concerned about military recruitment in public elementary and secondary schools. Adolescent recruitment targets are at a vulnerable stage of brain development and may experience adverse health consequences from stress. Given their limitations in judging risk at this stage in life, they are also unable to fully evaluate the consequences of making a choice to enter the military. APHA should encourage the United States to cease the practice of recruiting military enlistees in public high schools, specifically by (1) removing the “No Child Left Behind Act” requirement that high schools both be open to military recruiters and turn over contact information on all students to recruiters and (2) eliminating practices that encourage military recruiters to approach adolescents in U.S. public high schools to enlist in the military services.” This well-researched policy statement, from a long-standing and trusted organization, provides an important argument for those of us interested in putting an end to the military recruitment of adolescents: such practices can lead to both physical and mental harm.

As mentioned by APHA, Section 9528 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that schools provide military recruiters the same access to students as is given to post-secondary educational institutions and to prospective employers of those students. NCLB also mandates that schools provide military recruiters access to high school students’ names, addresses and telephone listings upon request. Schools have little choice but to comply, as refusing to do so can result in the loss of federal funding. This legislation provides the military with an effective stick it can use if a school or school district wishes to deny military recruiter requests to recruit within the school. It effectively removes the option for schools to act in what they may feel is in the best interest of their students. It also helps to provide the military with a reliable source for student contact information. While NCLB does provide a way for parents to request that this contact information not be released, many are not aware of this option.

Counter-recruitment and anti-militarism groups are often challenged as to why they oppose recruitment within schools when it is done by the military, but often do not offer opposition when it is done by colleges or civilian employers. The comparison is apples to oranges. The military is the only entity which requires the enlistee to enter into an eight-year, reduced-rights, legally binding contract for which the person may have to kill. There clearly is a difference. Given the physiological makeup of adolescents and what is being asked of the enlistee, it is inappropriate for the military to be deliberately targeting underage kids in this manner. Further regulation is needed when it comes to military recruitment policies. Minors should be off limits.

Lincoln’s own counter-recruitment organization, Alternatives to the Military (ATM), has been active since 1991 and has been fortunate enough to have the financial support of Nebraskans for Peace. We provide information to students and parents about the recruitment tactics of the military services as well as less-talked-about aspects of military life.

continued on page 9
Another climate summit has come and gone. Remember the huge “Peoples’ Climate March”? Carbon dioxide has already blown past it.

However, one thing has not changed: reports from the front in the war on greenhouse gases are grim.

We have one very accurate measure of whether we are winning this war: greenhouse gases’ proportion in the atmosphere. For carbon dioxide, the quick reference is the “Keeling Curve”—now about 400 parts per million. According to a new report from the United Nations, the Curve is rising more quickly than ever (since direct measurements began in the 1950s and, by proxy, since the Pliocene Era, 2 to 3 million years ago). We are failing this test. The level of methane, also a greenhouse gas, is also rising at record rates. According to BP’s “Statistical Review of World Energy (2014),” cited in USA Today (September 23, 2014), carbon-dioxide emissions worldwide have risen 38 percent since the year 2000. Most of the increase has come from the Asia-Pacific region, where emissions doubled during this period.

The World Meteorological Organization said the carbon dioxide level rose 2.3 parts per million in 2013, more than the 1 to 2 p.m.m. annual average of the past few decades. Carbon dioxide is now 42 percent higher than the usual cyclical peak before the advent of the industrial age. Methane, the second-most-prevalent greenhouse gas, is 150 percent higher. Greenhouse gases matter: 2014 will very likely be the hottest year on Earth’s instrumental record. We are now “at the level that climate scientists have identified as the beginning of the danger zone,” Michael Oppenheimer, professor of geosciences at Princeton University says. “It means we’re probably getting to the point where we’re looking at the ‘safe zone’ in the rearview mirror, even as we’re stepping on the gas.”

As emissions of carbon dioxide rise, new sources of oil and natural gas are cropping up all over North America, including Alberta’s oil sands and ‘fracking’ from North Dakota to Pennsylvania. We are being told that the oil boom is good for us, and by some measures it is. The New York Times tells us that manufacturing for the great oil boom is bringing parts of the rust belt back to life.

Where “stepping on the gas” is often considered an unmitigated blessing, 15 years ago, North Dakota was 39th among the 50 states in per capita income. Now it’s sixth. Why? New oil and gas from the Bakken Formation. The New York Times describes “a transformation spreading across the heartland of the nation, driven by a surge in domestic oil and gas production that is changing the economic calculus for old industries and downtrodden cities alike.”

In Ohio, according to the Times account, “In an arc stretching south from Youngstown past Canton and into the rural parts of the state where much of the natural gas is being drawn from shale deep underground, entire sectors like manufacturing, hotels, real estate and even law are being reshaped. A series of recent economic indicators, including factory hiring, shows momentum building nationally in the manufacturing sector.”

According to NASA, the Alberta oil sands fields, which were first mined in 1967, are the world’s largest oil-sands deposit, with a capacity to produce 174.5 billion barrels of oil—2.5 million barrels of oil per day for 186 years. By 2013, one-third of Alberta’s economy was tied to oil-sands output.

And so it will be, until the boom eventually dissolves into a hot, miserable bust in a climate so hot that our area’s iconic corn goes sterile. We will arrive in a scalding future in an air-conditioned new car with a full gas tank.

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacs Professor at the UNO and author of The Encyclopedia of Global Warming Science and Technology (2009).
Colonizing Nature – It’s Our ‘Manifest Destiny’!

by Hendrik Van den Berg
UNL Professor of Economics

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a project that has involved nearly 10,000 scientists from around the world, a few weeks ago once again reconfirmed earlier conclusions that climate change is underway and that human activity on Earth is the main cause. Scientists have also concluded that if we are to keep temperature increases below two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), we can only burn a small portion, perhaps just 20 percent, of the known reserves of carbon fuels. And yet, Congress just came within one vote of approving the Keystone XL Pipeline, which is intended to carry the dirtiest possible crude oil from the isolated Alberta tar sands to the world energy market to be burned into the atmosphere. Our political leaders do not seem to be paying attention to what is happening to our environment.

One of the common themes of those who either voted for the pipeline or those who went along with the decision is that the pipeline will bring economic growth and employment. This argument holds little water since resource-destroying economic expansion is not really growth and the pipeline creates almost no new permanent employment. But, the idea that economic growth comes first resonates with Amerindians, accustomed to a high-energy lifestyle. Of course, many of those legislators who voted for letting more tar sands crude oil flow into the international energy market claim that they just do not believe the climate science. A popular reaction is that global warming is some kind of socialist plot against the American way of life.

Such statements suggest that there is something uniquely American about our unwillingness to accept the unmistakable conclusions of climate science. After all, polls routinely show majorities of people in other countries in agreement with the need to deal with global warming, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity. Then I read Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’ An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States (Beacon Press, 2014), and I now understand why it is Americans who are most likely to deny the clear scientific facts on global warming, climate change, and dwindling biodiversity.

An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Dunbar-Ortiz examines U.S. history from the perspective of the Native American nations that were in present-day North America before European colonial powers invaded. This perspective makes it clear that the growth of the United States was a continual process of invasion, theft and genocide. As the historian Frederick Jackson Turner noted shortly after the Spanish-American War (The Frontier in American History, 1920): “The U.S. had had a colonial history and policy from the beginning of the Republic.” We all know that the colonists who became our founding fathers were here because of British colonialism. But, what we like to forget is that independence did not change the colonial mentality one bit. Perhaps the expansionist desires even grew. We should not forget that the first law passed by the Continental Congress (note the word “Continental”) was the “Northwest Ordinance”—a law that reversed the British prohibition on settlement on land west of the Appalachian Mountains. The newly formed nation was just itching to occupy more of the ‘empty’ land!

Said the often-glorified President Thomas Jefferson in 1801: “However our present interests may restrain us within our own limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits and cover the whole northern, if not southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar form by similar laws” (quoted in Dunbar-Ortiz, p. 3). Jefferson made no mention of the indigenous nations that would have to be destroyed for the Thirteen Colonies to expand westward. Today, U.S. historians like to talk about the ‘clash of cultures’ perpetrated by U.S. expansionism. But what actually happened was simple theft and genocide. Worse, this theft and genocide was justified under the guise of freedom and civilization. Soon the theft and genocide was covered up under the term “Manifest Destiny,” which gave the elimination of indigenous nations a moral dimension.

Dunbar-Ortiz provides all the horrible details of how our Manifest Destiny was carried out by means of violence and theft. Many Americans have vaguely heard about the forced migration—known as the “Trail of Tears”—of Native Americans from today’s southern states, yet our history books almost never link Andrew Jackson directly to that act of pure genocide. Dunbar-Ortiz is careful to check the United Nations definition of genocide before making her charge; her case is solid. Dunbar-Ortiz depicts the obvious: Jackson was a ruthless murderer of Native Americans, and he inspired others to do the same. He authorized bounties for Indian scalps (yes, white settlers did most of the scalping, not Indians) that turned most settlers in the southern states into bounty hunters. In the process, the Native Americans lost their land and their populations were annihilated.

In 1860, six of the seven divisions of the U.S. Army were stationed west of the Mississippi River, effectively operating as a colonial army. Interestingly, the longest military counterinsurgency in U.S. history did not happen recently in the Middle East; rather, it was the war on the Apache Nation from 1850-1886. Then, once the insurgencies were ruthlessly put down, the theft could continue in a more ‘civilized’ manner.

For example, Senator Henry Dawes in 1887 sponsored the “General Allotment Act,” which divided commonly owned land on Indian reservations into individually owned plots, often just 180 acres of...
Humans have the ability to carry out sophisticated scientific research that clearly explains global warming and the unprecedented losses of biodiversity...

terprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization.” In the name of improving their economic well-being, Native Americans effectively lost more of their land because somehow the allotments never used up all of the land given to Indian Nations under earlier treaties. The remaining land—which included much of present-day Oklahoma—was then opened to white settlers. Laws such as the “Homestead Act,” “Morrill Act” and the “Pacific Railroad Act” further legalized the theft by describing it as ‘free’ land for farmers, education for farmers’ children and economic development.

Most Americans simply refuse to entertain such facts or revise their take on American history. To test the blindness of Americans to our colonial theft and genocide, Dunbar-Ortiz writes that at the beginning of every course she asks her students to draw a rough map of the United States in 1776. She reports that nearly all students draw the U.S. as the contiguous 48 states today, despite the fact that in 1776 there were numerous other nations of indigenous peoples occupying much of the continent. When questioned, those same students admit to knowing that indigenous nations occupied the lands west of the Appalachians. Students, like most Americans, simply took for granted that the full continental U.S. was the natural shape of the country—our Manifest Destiny.

We could take this colonial experience within our continental borders and extend it to our current activities across the globe. A self-acclaimed ‘exceptional’ nation that is the natural leader of the ‘free world,’ we still engage in theft and genocide to promote the interests of the mostly descendants of white Europeans who confiscated the territory of indigenous nations. Note the indiscriminate war on terror and the multiple bombing and drone campaigns abroad that kill unknown civilians in our quest to eliminate the modern-day equivalents of indigenous ‘savages’ who dare to resist what we believe we are entitled to do. The violence is still followed by forced ‘economic development’ (like the allotments), carried out by Western corporations and financial firms. But I will leave you to ponder these parallels with regard to our foreign policies. Here, I instead shift to another manifestation of our delusional destiny: our active theft and destruction of the natural environment.

Colonizing the Earth

The only way to explain the lack of concern for climate science by our politicians (and the majority of Americans who vote for these people) is that we view the natural environment with a typical American attitude of Manifest Destiny. Never mind that it is well-known that if everyone in the world lived the way Americans see as their natural right, then we would need the resources of seven planet Earths. Or that about one-third of the carbon currently in the atmosphere can be traced to the exceptional economic growth of the United States. Yet, our political leaders, attuned to their voters’ shortsightedness and the money of the special interests, ignore or minimize these facts.

Unfortunately, this short-sighted behavior is far from uncommon for humans. Our evolution has led to a complex mixture of basic survival instincts, extraordinary mental capabilities and social cultures that have enabled our species to grow and expand on Earth. Paul Seabright (The Company of Strangers, 2010) and Anne and Paul Ehrlich (The Dominant Animal: Human Evolution and the Environment, 2008) detail how humans developed the intelligence to engage in abstract thought, which gives us the ability to analyze complex issues and project the consequences of current actions into the future. All living species are expansionary in nature. But we humans are indeed exceptional in terms of how successfully we have been able to overcome limits to growth and thus expand our footprint on Earth.

...But, when this science crashes head-on with a culture that glorifies economic growth, our myth of ‘American exceptionalism,’ and our sense of Manifest Destiny to take over the Earth, we are also quite capable of simply tuning out the environmental destruction we are engaged in.

Shouldn’t then our mental capabilities also allow us to understand the damage we are doing? After all, as the Native American historian Jack Forbes writes (quoted in Dunbar-Ortiz):

While living persons are not responsible for what their ancestors did, they are responsible for the society they live in, which is a product of the past.

The answer to this question though is, unfortunately, negative. Our ‘culture’ often gets in the way. Seabright, Ehrlich and Ehrlich, and many other social scientists have also detailed how humans have developed group institutions like culture. Culture is necessary for us to function in the complex societies that humans have been able to build by means of our extraordinary ability to develop new knowledge and technologies. Culture consists of a huge set of information; it is a set of norms, stories, rules of thumb and shared beliefs that get us through the day. We have to make thousands of choices and decisions every day, and have little opportunity to engage in time-consuming deliberations. Culture also provides the overall philosophies (beliefs) that permit us to give meaning to our lives amid the growing complexity of our existence. Our mental abilities and group interactions have made economic growth possible, but they have not been sufficient to enable us to understand the full meaning and implications of what we have brought about.

In short, humans have the ability to carry out sophisticated scientific research that clearly explains global warming and the unprecedented losses of biodiversity. But, when this science crashes head-on with a culture that glorifies economic growth, our myth of ‘American exceptionalism,’ and our sense of Manifest Destiny to take over the Earth, we are also quite capable of simply tuning out the environmental destruction we are engaged in.

If we can completely ignore the fact that our nation was built by means of invasion, theft and genocide, is it any wonder that we have a similar predisposition to mindlessly invade and annihilate our natural environment?

This is the existential challenge that lies before us as Americans. We are going to need to rapidly confront these unpleasant truths, because our very survival depends on it.
Bill Laird’s Fundraising Challenge

Printed below is a transcription of the ‘Fundraising Challenge’ delivered by NFP State Board member Bill Laird at the October 4, 2014 Annual Peace Conference in Lincoln. The event was held at the “Center for People in Need”—a non-governmental social services operation in our state capital.

Hello. I am entirely excited and not the least bit sheepish about the privilege I have today to give our yearly speech to solicit donations to Nebraskans for Peace, because I see it as a lifeline to my being faithful to who I am as a person.

I want to put The Center for People in Need out of business. While I am a charitable person and believe in the absolute necessity of charity in our responses to poverty, I think charity maintains the status quo. I am pushing for systemic change such that people will have less need of charity because they are getting paid enough at work to accommodate meeting their basic needs. Unfortunately, it seems that such efforts proceed slowly—at the pace of creation.

If I were to entitle my speech today, I would call it “The Parallel (and therefore, according to Science) Intersecting Histories of Nebraskans for Peace and Bill Laird.”

My history with Nebraskans for Peace actually predates its inception because my best friend from high school is one of its founding fathers. Mike Shonsey and I graduated from Creighton Preparatory School together, and he went on to the University of Nebraska and to forming a student group which actively protested the war in Vietnam. His spirit is in me and mine was in him.

I went into the Jesuit seminary and came back to Omaha as a clergyman and joined “Clergy and Laity for Peace” briefly. However I did not spend much time with them because my commitment to service to individuals superseded my commitment to systemic change.

After that I became aware of the group which the student group and the faith group morphed into—Nebraskans for Peace. I became a member and maintained my connection through reading the Nebraska Report. I read every issue of this publication from cover to cover. And that brings me to reason #1 for donating to Nebraskans for Peace.

The Nebraska Report is an amazing resource for insights and wisdom about what to think of and how to respond to the disconcerting issues our world faces today. In it, readers are exposed to the brilliant and prophetic analyses of Dr. Hank Van den Berg, Professor Bruce Johansen and Dr. Paul Olson, among others. These gentlemen are thorough researchers and reflective and intelligent writers. I do not miss out on exposing myself to their insights.

Back to the history. My connection continued for many years through reading the Nebraska Report until I began a friendship with Frank LaMere. I was returning home with my son and daughter from the “March for Justice” from Pine Ridge, South Dakota to Whiteclay, Nebraska, and it was time for lunch. We stopped at a Subway and, coincidentally, there too was Frank. We connected during our conversation there, and eventually Frank recommended me for board membership. I met with State Coordinator Tim Rinne and jumped at the chance to become a core member of this organization, which I had admired so much. That in turn led me to meeting the state staff—Susan Alleman, Britanny Cooper and Mark Welsch—and today they and Tim are my second reason to strongly encourage your generosity toward our efforts.

I want Nebraskans for Peace to thrive, not just survive. We are doing a good job of surviving, but a large part of the reason for this is that our team of employees is willing to accept a wage so far below what they deserve. I want to pay them a wage with which they too can thrive, and not just survive.

I have remained a member of the board ever since because Nebraskans for Peace is doing what I want to do for the rest of my life, and that brings me to reason #3. We are involved in opposing military intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Iraq; we are active in seeking a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian discord; we support comprehensive immigration reform; we are pushing for cuts in the military and national security budget; we are working locally to end domestic violence, bullying and human trafficking; and we are alerting Nebraskans about the imminent threat posed by climate change. A couple of recent successes I highlight have occurred with the Lincoln Electric System’s commitment to initiating a new solar energy program and Omaha Public Power District’s decision to significantly cut back the use of coal for the production of electricity.

So, please, with all of this in mind, give even more generously than you already have.

Thank you.

Stop Recruiting Kids, continued

Each year ATM gets permission from high school principals to hand out fact sheets that include topics that most military recruiters avoid, such as the prevalence of rape for women in the services, increased rates of substance abuse and suicide for soldiers and veterans due to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, difficulties returning to civilian life after tours of duty overseas, unrealistic career promises made by recruiters, and so on.

There are several military-related programs in addition to direct recruitment that are active now or were active in the recent past in our area schools: the “Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps” (AFJROTC) program for Lincoln Public Schools, the Nebraska “STARBASE” program for elementary students, and the “Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery” (ASVAB).

The LPS Air Force JROTC program is based at Lincoln Northeast High School, with students attending the program from all public high schools in Lincoln as well as two parochial schools. Military-style uniforms are a requirement, and each semester cadets enroll in one of the eight different courses that are provided by the program. The courses themselves are designed by the Department of Defense and are taught by retired Air Force personnel. Marksmanship training was recently added. While JROTC markets itself as a leadership and character-building program and stresses that the instructors are forbidden to directly recruit their cadets, JROTC functions in aggregate as a recruitment tool, and recruiters are advised to work closely with the program. In fact, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen referred to JROTC as one of the best recruitment devices we could have. Nationwide, there are more than 3000 JROTC programs located within both middle schools and high schools.

STARBASE is a program funded by the Department of Defense that focuses on disadvantaged elementary students—primarily fifth graders. The stated goal of the program is to motivate the students to explore Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) as they continue their education. While this stated goal is commendable, the tactics used are quite questionable. The five-week program takes fifth conclusion on page 10
Stop Recruiting Kids, conclusion

Most public schools and some private schools require students to wear lanyards with personal identification. Some schools require official school lanyards, but not all. In the schools where different lanyards can be used, the military services hand out lanyards with their own logos. This not-so-subtle advertisement hanging around the necks of students becomes a daily visual reminder of the military in a civilian environment.

Nationwide, there are many organizations working to stop the recruitment of our children. Many of their websites have even more distressing stories about the militarization of our schools beyond what is happening in our own communities here in Nebraska. Check out the following organizations to find out more about counter-recruitment efforts and the militarization of our youth: Stop Recruiting Kids, Project YANO (Project on Youth and Non-military Opportunities), American Friends Service Committee, CodePink, NNOMY (National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth), United for Peace and Justice Coalition–Counter Recruitment Campaign, Veterans for Peace and War Sisters League.

In the end, there are many things our schools should be, but a military recruitment center is not one of them.

We would be very interested in any experiences you or your children have had with military recruiting in Nebraska. Also, we can always use more assistance with our leafleting campaigns and other tasks. Please contact us if you would like to help out.

Alternatives to the Military–Lincoln’s contact information: atmlincoln@gmail.com and www.facebook.com/atmlincoln.

Graders out of their schools and onto a military base where they learn some science along with, conveniently enough, the promotion of military careers. (Think back to the ‘first to contact, first to contract’ axiom. That idea is stressed in the recruitment services literature.) The program has been recently halted in Lincoln schools because of lack of DoD funding, but in the past, starting in 2002, children from various Lincoln elementary schools were bused out to the Penterman Armory on the Nebraska National Guard Base in Lincoln where they were taught in a military cultural environment instead of a civilian one. Many suggest that STARBASE targets low-income, minority schools for a reason: recruitment into the military services tends to be more successful in this demographic. While teaching STEM courses to disadvantaged youth is a positive thing, why should this fall upon the Department of Defense when we have a Department of Education? In any case, STARBASE is still active in many states across the country.

The ASVAB is an aptitude test that many schools rely upon to help assess students’ skills for the purpose of career planning. The test itself was designed by the DoD and is used by the military to determine enlistment eligibility and placement within the military. When the school sets up the exam, which is done through the closest “Military Entrance Processing Command” (USMEP-COM) station, it is supposed to select an option which determines if and when the students’ test results are to be released to the military recruitment services so they can be used for recruitment purposes. Of the options available to the school, only one will prevent the automatic release of this data—Option 8. If the school does not select a release option, USMEP-COM will select one for the school and the data will be released.

While Lincoln and Omaha schools which administer the ASVAB usually do select Option 8, across the state only 35 percent of students have Option 8 selected on their behalf. Nationwide this number is even lower: only 15 percent. While this is a substantial improvement from where things were ten years ago (less than 5 percent), we still have a long way to go. It should be noted that even if the school selects Option 8, if a student wishes to have their ASVAB results used for enlistment purposes at a later time, they can still do that. Option 8 protects the privacy of the class by default while still providing for this possibility. It is a common sense solution to this privacy loophole.

Military encroachment into our schools can come in many other forms. For example, North Star High School in Lincoln holds a ‘welcome-back-to-school’ celebration at the beginning of every year called “Gatorfest.” In recent years the event has been partially sponsored by the Nebraska National Guard, which sets up a large inflatable obstacle course in the gymnasium along with a simple game where students and other children can ‘win’ various items such as water bottles, cups, notebooks, and seat cushions that are decorated with both the North Star and National Guard logos. (The National Guard logo has included the recruiter’s name and phone number.) While it is entirely inappropriate for the military services to use a venue such as this for public relations/recruitment purposes, inappropriateness doesn’t seem to matter much to the DoD.

Another illustrative example of recruitment under the guise of community service occurred at Lincoln East High School. A friend of a retiring military service person recently related this story to a member of ATM. The service member was asked to volunteer as a running coach as a requirement for obtaining certain retirement benefits. The Lincoln East runners often asked the retiree about his experience in the military and he would reply honestly by saying that sometimes you are asked to do things that your family and your entire community has taught you not to do. One of these things might be killing. His honesty discouraged one of the runners who was considering enlisting in a branch of the military services. News of this got back to the retiree’s supervisors and the retiree was asked not to run with the students anymore. Perhaps community service wasn’t the primary reason behind the volunteer coaching assignment. If nothing else, there were obviously strings attached.

Given the physiological makeup of adolescents and what is being asked of the enlistee, it is inappropriate for the military to be deliberately targeting underage kids in this manner.

The Nebraska National Guard at NorthStar High School’s ‘welcome-back-to-school’ event, “Gatorfest,” Fall 2014. Photo by Kevin Haake
Speaking Our Peace, conclusion

Asia, and perhaps in parts of Argentina and the American West. Changes in rainfall patterns will also mean that areas having ample topsoil may not have enough rainfall to produce traditional commodity crops, and that areas having heavier rains may have very thin soils unable to sustain agricultural production.

Cities: In 1900, the population of the world was about 1.5 billion people; by 2050, demographers project that it will be over 9 billion people. The larger proportion of these people will be city dwellers dependent on massive city water supply systems. Adding to the natural tension between urban and rural in all societies will be the fight over water distribution between city and country. Many cities may have to be abandoned, as was the city of Fatehpur Sikri built by the Moghul Indian Emperor Akbar in the 16th century. Sanaa, a city of over 2 million people and the capital of Yemen, will, according to prediction, run out of water in 2025; its 2 million-plus residents, when displaced, will probably create significant social conflict in Yemen and in the Arabian Peninsula. Tripoli, the capital of Libya, another city of about 2 million people, is entirely supplied by fossil water; what will happen when that water runs out? Quetta in Pakistan, Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, and Los Angeles and Phoenix in the United States are supplied by now virtually dry rivers or limited underground aquifers. Climate change will undoubtedly stress the fragile water resources of these cities—and should they run out of water, we can be certain there will be abrupt migrations and social conflict.

The right wing in this country may not believe in climate change, but the Defense Department it has championed does. In October, Defense Secretary (and former Nebraska Senator) Chuck Hagel released an updated Pentagon study that designated climate change an immediate ‘national security threat’ that will increase global poverty, infectious diseases, food and water shortages, terrorism and mass migrations of peoples, while spawning fortress states meant to shut other people out and fascist-like regimes to keep order. Clearly water is not a fungible resource as are the fossil fuels replaceable by renewables. Desalination is extremely expensive, and even the Saudis had to abandon their great project to pull icebergs from the Arctic to provide freshwater to their country. (There are also those who fear that military installations, built near the sea, will drown with the rising oceans—especially those in the Low Countries in Europe and low elevation cities such as Norfolk, Virginia, in the United States.) Because Nebraska will have one of the world’s largest supplies of usable groundwater and, therefore, capacity for crop production, it will be under intense pressure to draw up its groundwater to send it across the Great Plains and also to produce massive amounts of food for profit or ‘aid’ to feed the world.

It is easy enough to be ‘Chicken Little’ and say the sky is falling. However, people who care about peace can do things to counter these terrors, to protect peace, and even use the threat of disaster to persuade others of our need to solve problems amiably and jurisprudentially.

• We can employ tools like those suggested in the USAID water-and-conflict toolkit, employing these tools with our own neighbors in this country and with people in other countries that we trade with.

• In a specific river basin or ecosystem area, we can work as a nation to create collaboration to solve problems within the river basin and across national lines through work among cooperative groups of farmers.

We are not now doing these things on any significant scale. We have failed. We are failing because of a lack of vision. Like Lakota vision questers, we need to cry out, “Vision, vision, vision.” When the Book of Proverbs says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” we may think of the future. But we should rather discern that these words apply to us, to our world, right now.
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These matters have, or may have, human solutions. Until the Palestinian Au-

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that were allocated by a treaty between

Pakistan and India in 1960—a treaty that

has been kept even during the subsequent

Pakistan-India wars despite their bitterness.

My church, First Lutheran Church in Lincoln, has become something of an integrated church for an unusual rea-

son. Several Sudanese people joined this past fall: tall beautiful people with perfect posture and wonderful African clothes—people who fled as refugees from the war in South Sudan. Their war in Sudan began in Darfur over ten years ago and extended to the rest of the country as Islamic North Sudanese were forced south by drought in northern Sudan—until civil war developed. Then the warring Islamic North and the Christian South were separated into different countries. The drought continued and tribal groups from the mostly Christian South Sudan began fighting one another over scarce resources. Resource shortages contributing to each of these sets of tribal conflicts brought my fellow co-parishioners here.

In the Sudan case, the wars were apparently largely occasioned by water shortages precipitated by global climate change. Indeed, climate scientists have generally ascribed the recent droughts in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda to changes in the earth’s climate—causing the reduction of rainfall in the Nile Vale-

ley, the desertification of its grazing lands, and the fleeing of desperate people to non-traditional lands. The positive integration of my church came about, paradoxically, because people fled the negative violence in their native country.

Military people have ascribed many of the destructive recent wars in the Nile area to the same causes. The Department of Defense’s “2014 Quadrennial Defense Review” warns that, because of climate change, Africa will increasingly see such events.

Climate change contributes to outbreaks of violence in three contexts—the drying up of rivers crossing national boundaries; regional rainfall changes and warming that lead to diminished local food supplies; and the depletion of water supplies for large cities.

River change: The Nile River is not the only major river or body of water that crosses boundaries separating nations and cultural groups. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers do so in the Middle East as do the Indus and Ganges in the Indian subcontinent. The Jordan does this in Israel/Palestine, as do the Mekong in Southeast Asia and the rivers and storage lakes of Central Asia. The drying up of lands in the already dry upper Tigris/Euphrates valleys has probably contributed to the destabilization of populations in that area, to the tensions between Turkey and Syria; between Kurd, Turk, and Iraqi; and perhaps to some of the concern over ISIS’ potential control of the Haditha and Mosul Dams that provide irrigation water to Iraqi dry areas. In the future, as the glaciers in the Himalayas feeding the Mekong and Ganges rivers melt from climate change, we can expect that these rivers will at first increasingly flood Vietnam and Bangladesh. When the glaciers have largely melted, severe shortages of water will affect the rice paddies of both countries, contributing to their tensions with neighboring countries. New large-scale migrations of people will occur, and wars such as we are seeing in the Sudan.

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Rainfall pattern change: As the climate changes, prevailing winds will alter their courses and deliver rains to different lands, affecting what crops and herds can be grown where. In a recent issue of the Nebraska Report, I reviewed a book that argued persuasively that much of the Civil War in Syria had been caused by a drought in its eastern provinces that drove the Sunni pastoral tribesmen into the eastern cities where they came into conflict with their Shiite compatriots. The first demand of the Syrian rebels, starved out in the coun-

tryside, was for food and jobs. Gener-

ally, scholars believe that, as rainfall patterns change, pastoral peoples who have lived on traditional grazing lands will be forced into formerly agricultural areas where they will come in conflict with farmers, reenacting the classic conflict celebrated in the American Western where the farmers (commonly described as “rustlers”) fight with the upright ranchers (supposedly the heroic defenders of law).

This kind of neo-Western conflict is likely to occur in Africa, in central

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