Nebraska Peace Foundation Climate Resolution on Berkshire Hathaway 2016 Meeting Agenda

Normally, the only time you hear about Nebraskans for Peace’s 501(c)(3) charitable foundation is during a fundraising drive when we’re seeking tax-deductible contributions to support NFP’s educational work. But this past month, the Nebraska Peace Foundation made some big news of its own.

Following on NFP’s 2013 ‘apology’ urging Warren Buffett to use his financial celebrity to rally international action on climate change, in early 2014 the Nebraska Peace Foundation purchased an ‘A-Class Share’ of Berkshire Hathaway stock with the intention of submitting a shareholder resolution on this global environmental peril. The idea of using the shareholder resolution process to draw attention to the climate change issue wasn’t original. Newground Social Investment/Investor Voice SPC of Seattle, Washington had submitted a resolution calling for Berkshire Hathaway to calculate its carbon footprint at the 2014 shareholders meeting. Corporate regulations however required that new investors like the Nebraska Peace Foundation hold a share for a full year before the November resolution submission deadline to be eligible to submit a proposal. By just two months, the Foundation missed the eligibility window for the 2015 shareholders meeting.

This past November though, former NFP president and current Nebraska Peace Foundation board member Mark Vasina (who worked on Wall Street as a regulator in the 1990s) drafted and submitted a shareholder resolution asking Berkshire Hathaway (BH) to evaluate and report on the climate change risks faced by its insurance division. The resolution was modeled on the Bank of England’s recommendation to its regulated insurance companies, which followed publication of an extensive report on climate change threats to the industry.

Content-wise, the Nebraska Peace Foundation resolution was far from extreme, as three senior BH executives have endorsed corporate action on climate change. Last July, BH Energy chair Greg Abel joined other corporate executives at the White House to launch the “American Business Act on Climate Pledge”—a demonstration of the U.S. private sector’s commitment to taking on the global challenge of climate change. Last September Tad Montross, chair of BH insurance subsidiary “General Re” (a reinsurance firm that insures insurance companies), said that in view of the clear scientific evidence of global warming, insurers should guard against being lulled into overly optimistic underwriting because of recent relatively low levels for catastrophic losses. And this past November, Ajit Jain, president of BH Group, was one of 68 global reinsurance industry leaders who signed the...
Nebraska Taxes

by Paul A. Olson

Nebraskans for peace are in the middle of another season of legislative efforts to cut programs offering poor and lower-middle tax relief. We continue to tax to keep the poor poor. We have a few legislators though who are resisting the tide, based on what I learned at an NFP Lincoln Chapter, Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and Unitarian Church of Lincoln discussion with experts Sen. Mike Gloor, chair of the Legislature’s Revenue Committee, and Renée Frye of the Open Sky Institute.

Eighty-six percent of state revenues go to areas that make or break poor and lower-middle income people: Education and Health and Human Services.

Yet, the tax system that supports thee areas is skewed. Traditionally, property, income and sales taxes each furnished about one third of Nebraska’s state and local revenues. Now the amount supplied by property taxes is 36 percent, sales 29 percent and income 25 percent because of the rise in farm land values. Farm interests are pushing for property tax reductions. The governor’s calls for cuts in the income and property taxes aggressively attack the poor and save the wealthy’s money. But already the lowest 20 percent of income receivers in the state pay about 7 percent of their wealth in taxes while the richest 500 persons pay only 3.25 percent.

Over time, we have reduced the share of taxes going to schools and state-supported higher education—meaning college tuition will likely rise, making it less affordable. We have cut the percentage of our tax revenue going to elementary/secondary education, making schools depend increasingly on things like bake sales and privately assembled backpacks to support low-income kids (Sen. Gloor indicated that private/public education partnerships are more and more likely to become the order of the day). We say we cannot afford Obamacare’s Medicaid provisions.

There are a few encouraging signs: 1) the Legislature’s intergenerational legislative study of kids in poverty; 2) inflation indexing of income taxation to give relief to lower- and lower middle-income people; 3) the appearance of an enlightened group of legislators concerned about these issues. We need to support them. Almost 50 percent of our kids qualify for free and reduced lunches (given to kids in poverty or up to one-and-a-half-times the poverty level). As Renée Frye indicated, research shows that these are the kids who suffer from most of the educational problems plaguing our state. If we seek a more equitable society, we must push to shift the tax burden to the progressive income tax; support all tax-indexing proposals; and support reversal of the present formula of 7 percent taxation on the very poorest, and 3.25 percent on the 500 wealthiest residents in the state.
“Climate Risk Statement of the Geneva Association” affirming their commitment to progress on climate change resilience and adaptation.

In early February, the Nebraska Peace Foundation learned that its resolution would be included on the agenda of the business meeting at the 2016 Annual Shareholders Meeting which will be held Saturday April 30 at the CenturyLink Center in Omaha. Annually, very few resolutions are brought before the shareholders, and this year it appears the Nebraska Peace Foundation will pretty much have the floor to itself.

News of the BH climate change resolution literally went worldwide as Buffett himself made extensive reference to the resolution in his 2016 ‘shareholders letter’ released February 28. Discussing climate change at greater length than he’s ever done previously, Buffett wrote that “It seems highly likely to me that climate change poses a major problem for the planet... It would be foolish for me or anyone to demand 100 percent proof of huge forthcoming damage to the world if that outcome seemed at all possible and if prompt action had even a small chance of thwarting the danger.”

This issue, he continued, “bears a similarity to Pascal’s Wager on the Existence of God. Pascal, it may be recalled, argued that if there were only a tiny probability that God truly existed, it made sense to behave as if He did because the rewards could be infinite whereas the lack of belief risked eternal misery. Likewise, if there is only a 1 percent chance the planet is heading toward a truly major disaster and delay means passing a point of no return, inaction now is foolhardy. Call this Noah’s Law: If an ark may be essential for survival, begin building it today, no matter how cloudless the skies appear.”

That said, Buffett urged defeat of the Nebraska Peace Foundation resolution by dismissing the relevance of climate change threats to BH insurance profits—a view that stands in apparent contradiction to other BH executives and many in the industry. The BH CEO stated, “As a citizen, you may understandably find climate change keeping you up nights. As a homeowner in a low-lying area, you may wish to consider moving. But when you are thinking only as a shareholder of a major insurer, climate change should not be on your list of worries.”

As the primary shareholder in his own company (as well as the world’s third-richest person), Buffett’s opposition all but guarantees the Nebraska Peace Foundation resolution will go down to defeat. Nevertheless, its presence on the BH business meeting agenda—and the opportunity for numerous people to speak in favor of the measure—affords a tremendous opportunity to educate not only Buffett but the broader public about the imminent dangers of climate change. 44,000 people attended the 2015 meeting. And this year the entire meeting, from start to finish, is going to be live-streamed worldwide.

Nebraskans for Peace and the Nebraska Peace Foundation have been working towards this moment for four years. We’ll never have a better platform. And this could well be the best chance we ever have to get the ear of the 85-year-old ‘Oracle of Omaha.’

This is what we here in Nebraska are uniquely positioned to do. The world is counting on us to make the most of it.
Berkshire Hathaway Shareholder Proposal

The Nebraska Peace Foundation owns one share of Class A Common Stock and has given notice that a representative of the Nebraska Peace Foundation intends to present for action at the meeting the following proposal.

WHEREAS: Climate change is a slow-moving process relative to many other public policy issues. Nonetheless, the future of the world’s climate system hinges heavily on actions taken by governments, corporations, and individuals over the next few decades. Claims exposure to weather-related events requires that insurance and reinsurance companies take the lead in evaluating and managing the impact of extreme weather. Meanwhile, climate change could have unanticipated adverse effects on the investments of insurers.

AND WHEREAS: Reporting of risks helps companies better integrate and gain strategic value from existing operations, identify and anticipate gaps and opportunities, develop company-wide communications, and receive feedback. Reporting on the impact of climate change for Berkshire Hathaway insurance companies would confirm their status as leaders in the global insurance industry, complementing the leadership BH energy companies demonstrate in the provision of renewable energy.

BE IT RESOLVED: Shareholders request the BH insurance division, within a reasonable period of time, issue a report describing the division’s responses to the risks posed by climate change. The report should include specific initiatives and goals relating to each risk issue identified; be prepared at a reasonable cost; and omit proprietary information.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT: Insurance regulators worldwide are exploring the implication of climate change-related risks for the insurance sector and adapting their supervisory approach.

In 2013 the National Association of Insurance Commissioners in the US adopted revisions to the Financial Condition Examiners Handbook to support examiners in assessing any potential impact of climate change on solvency of insurance firms.

In September 2015, the Prudential Regulation Authority of the Bank of England (responsible for regulation of UK insurance companies) issued an 85-page report outlining the risks facing the insurance industry as a result of climate change. The PRA has indicated it expects PRA-regulated insurance firms to consider the risks identified.

The impact of climate change on the UK insurance sector: A climate change adaptation report by the Prudential Regulation Authority identifies three climate-change risk factors affecting insurers:

(i) Physical risks: the first-order risks which arise from weather-related events... such as damage to property, and also those that may arise indirectly through subsequent events, such as disruption of global supply chains or resource scarcity.

(ii) Transition risks: the financial risk which could arise for insurance firms from the transition to a lower carbon economy. For insurance firms, this risk factor is mainly about the potential re-pricing of carbon intensive financial assets, and the speed at which any such re-pricing might occur...

(iii) Liability risks: risks ...from parties who have suffered loss and damage from climate change, and then seek to recover losses from others who they believe may have been responsible ...[through] third-party liability contracts such as professional indemnity or directors’ and officers’ insurance.”

The operations and capital strength of BH insurance companies would benefit greatly from a thorough internal review of the risks posed by climate change.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS UNANIMOUSLY FAVORS A VOTE AGAINST THE PROPOSAL FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

The Board of Directors shares the views of Berkshire’s Chairman and CEO, Warren E. Buffett as to why Berkshire shareholders should vote against the shareholder proposal. Mr. Buffett described his reasons in his letter to Berkshire shareholders that is included in Berkshire’s 2015 Annual Report. A condensed summary of his thoughts regarding this proposal follow.

It seems highly likely to me that climate change poses a major problem for the planet. I say “highly likely” rather than “certain” because I have no scientific aptitude and remember well the dire predictions of most “experts” about Y2K. It would be foolish, however, for me or anyone to demand 100% proof of huge forthcoming damage to the world, if that outcome seemed at all possible and if prompt action had even a small chance of thwarting the threat. If there is only a 1% chance the planet is heading toward a truly major disaster and delay means passing a point of no return, inaction now is foolhardy. Call this Noah’s Law: If an ark may be essential for survival, begin building it today, no matter how cloudless the skies appear.

It’s understandable that the sponsor of the proposal believes Berkshire is especially threatened by climate change because we are a huge insurer, covering all sorts of risks. The sponsor may worry that property losses will skyrocket because of weather changes. And such worries might, in fact, be warranted if we wrote ten- or twenty year policies at fixed prices. But insurance policies are customarily written for one year and repriced annually to reflect changing exposures. Increased possibilities of loss translate promptly into increased premiums.

So far, climate change has not produced more frequent or more costly hurricanes or other weather-related events covered by insurance. As a consequence, U.S. supercat rates have fallen steadily in recent years which is why we have backed away from that business. If super-cats become costlier and more frequent, the likely—though far from certain—effect on Berkshire’s insurance business would be to make it larger and more profitable.

As a citizen, you may understandably find climate change keeping you up at nights. As a homeowner in a low lying area, you may wish to consider moving. But when you are thinking only as a shareholder of a major insurer, climate change should not be on your list of worries.

Proxies given without instructions will be voted against this shareholder proposal.
An Introduction to Permaculture in Nebraska

by Gus Van Roenn
Omaha Permaculture

In a strong agricultural state like Nebraska, most people would not think there is much room for improvement. As a Permaculture designer, I can confidently claim that if Nebraska were to adopt permaculture principles throughout the state, we would passively create THE healthiest and most abundant paradise on earth.

Permaculture is an ideology that funnels the revelations of sustainability and science through community ethics. Permaculture philosophy begins with a deistic reverence for Mother Nature and encourages ecosystem regeneration through natural or low-impact solutions. Once you have created a system that creates abundance for you and your family, permaculture invites you to assist the less fortunate members of your community. In the city, permaculture is an ecosystem-sensitive design approach to neighborhood development. In rural communities, permaculture is ecological land stewardship that improves the air, water and soil for the next generation and the world. For the world citizen, permaculture addresses how we consume, what we consume, how much we consume and how we manage our waste.

Many endeavors of life can benefit from Permaculture principles: energy, commerce, finance, health, farming, transportation, building, culture and leisure. To many people, Permaculture may sound like a return to the days of sweat and toil when compared with our current farming and land management methods. While there is definitely some initial investment when establishing a Permaculture design system, the subsequent growing years benefit from a perennial landscape that delivers productivity without the dependence on an annual planting cycle. Through Permaculture’s ‘downhill, downwind, downstream’ design approach, passive abundance is provided effortlessly on cue like a Swiss watch throughout the seasons. In many respects, the permaculture farmer works a lot less than your conventional farmer. When people experience a property designed with Permaculture principles, one observes the connections and overlaps of functional landscape features. It is these complementary relationships throughout systems that set the stage for resilience.

Resilience and passive abundance are two important themes in Permaculture. In the current volatile global energy market, new winners and losers are determined virtually year to year. This global volatility ripples throughout the global economy until they reverberate most devastatingly in our rural communities—the same communities pressed to feed a growing population that is migrating to the cities. Therein lies the problem and the solution from a permaculture perspective. Nebraskans are very well aware of our relationship to global markets. As the breadbasket of the world, Nebraska products should demand a premium price on the global market for a Nebraska-grown product produced in an ecologically sound manner without federal subsidies. If a clean environment were incentivized through a local economy rather than playing slave to global economic trade winds, Nebraska would sit very proudly as a regional agricultural powerhouse of passive abundance.

In the context of climate change, resilient land stewardship will be the only way to create enough opportunities for passive abundance through macro-scale ecological habitat restoration. Assuming that you are observing the local weather change caused by increasingly erratic global climate trends, we should begin to imagine our landscapes as dynamic—not stationary—ecosystems trapped in time. As Nebraska paleontology at the Ashfall Fossil Beds demonstrates, Nebraska is in a constant state of change. From an inland sea to rhinos, elephants and the buffalo, Nebraska is very familiar with ecosystem transitions. It is this wide-swing climate resilience, reflected through our hardy flora and fauna species, that positions Nebraska to be in one of the best geographic situations for future experimentation with nature’s climate change-related fluctuations.

To the gardener’s delight, permaculture does not need to be an aggressive management strategy for suppressing weeds manicured to golf-course standards when designing for resilience and passive abundance. Many of the plants

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growing around produce can contribute to soil fertility, moisture retention and ecological habitat. For example, to distract our neighborhood garden predators, we should allow some of our "weeds" to grow around our plantings as a distraction and another option on the menu. Also, plant another nature garden away from your personal garden. Your personal garden may be the only source of tasty vegetation for our bunny friends (foes?) on your block. By planting a landscape that encourages biodiversity, you are creating the harmony that must exist between humans and nature; even in our cities.

To those who aspire to live sustainably beyond the garden and the farm, careful consideration is necessary when building the farmstead, the home or the neighborhood. From building materials to building orientation, Nebraska homeowners should consider growing forests to create homegrown homesteads. When designing for our climate, we need to become acquainted with our native and local tree options to develop the proper windbreak from bitter cold northwest winds and hot southern winds that dry out the landscape. While we have many prairie enthusiasts throughout Nebraska who do not wish to give up any more acreage to invasive forests, the case can be made for both habitats in different regions throughout Nebraska when considering homesteading.

Then, let’s imagine developing all neighborhoods, homes and farmsteads positioned halfway-up south-facing slopes throughout our riparian landscapes. Hilltops are vulnerable to winter winds and valleys are where the water flows. Like the days of our great-grandparents, let’s imagine homes designed with sufficient shade trees that reduce summer energy use. When building the homestead, the wild weather extremes of Nebraska weather need to be considered.

Through permaculture and sustainable design, a neighborhood can be developed to create heat pockets for winter and cool spots for summer, reducing our needs for high energy use.

So often, a development company likes to imagine a blank canvas. Let us imagine we are a set-designer for a future agricultural sci-fi movie. What is the future of Nebraska’s landscapes? As a new homeowner or aspiring farmer, all you can do is assess the pros and cons of each parcel on the market. I would propose developing your own slice of heaven on a cost-effective parcel of improperly used land; giving a Nebraskan the opportunity to restore and nurture a slice of Nebraska ecosystem paradise proliferated with Savannah Oaks, Little Blue Stem, cottonwoods, goldenrod, deer, beaver, seasonal birds, prairie dogs, bobcats, cougars, quail, eagles, buffalo, dung beetles, pheasant, cranes, ground-hogs, butterflies, squirrels and fish. Who needs a zoo?
Increases in levels of greenhouse gases in Earth’s atmosphere are part of a broader, intensifying trend in a geological epoch now widely called the “Anthropocene,” in which human activities have been altering the planet, in the words of Colin N. Waters and colleagues (writing in Science), “sufficiently to produce a stratigraphic signature in sediments and ice that is distinct from that of the Holocene epoch.” The Anthropocene actually began tens of thousands of years ago, with the first uses of fire and deforestation, but intensified with the advent of fossil fuels about 1800 C.E. By 1950, humanity’s role in shaping the Earth system was dominant, as population and industrialization exploded.

Climate Change in Context

The controlling role of humanity includes much more than infusion of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere at levels previously unknown in the natural system after the Pliocene, 2 to 4 million years ago, with consequent (and anticipated) increases in temperatures. It also includes rising levels of several artificial pesticides and herbicides, lead, flyash and other forms of air pollution, fertilizers, plastics and radioactivity, due to testing of nuclear weapons. Nuclear radioactivity from past atmospheric tests will be detectable in ice and sediments for at least 100,000 years.

As human population has increased, extinction rates of other species have risen at an accelerating rate. “Unlike with prior subdivisions of geological time, the potential utility of a formal Anthropocene reaches well beyond the geological community,” commented Waters and colleagues. “It also expresses the extent to which humanity is driving rapid and widespread changes to the Earth system that will variously persist and potentially intensify into the future.”

Humanity’s role has shaped climate so fundamentally that some research suggests the fossil-fuel age has played a major role in short-circuiting the onset of a new glacial cycle, and that any new glaciation may not occur for at least 100,000 years—outside any period that scientists can reliably model.

The Role of Religion

Pope Francis has been re-interpreting the book of Genesis [1:28] that commands humans to multiply and subdue the Earth. Now, he says, the Bible recommends stewardship. I mention the role of religious doctrine in the context of Earth’s ecological fate to illustrate its still-powerful conclusion on page 14.
Nebraska’s Water Challenge

by Ann Bleed
Former State Hydrologist and Director of the State Department of Natural Resources, Ann Bleed is a director of the Lower Platte South NRD Board.

The demand for water is increasing, and in Nebraska climate change is increasing the likelihood of drought. If we are to reduce conflict and costly litigation, Nebraskans must figure out how to use our water today but maintain water for use by future generations.

Can Technology Solve Our Water Shortage Problems?

Achieving this goal is a significant challenge because less than 3 percent of the precipitation that falls on the earth is available as fresh water for lakes, rivers and groundwater aquifers. However, the good news is that the world’s water supply is a constant. It is unlike gasoline—which is destroyed when it is used to fuel our cars. But, if the earth’s water supply is a constant, how can we use it up? And what must we do to conserve it?

The key is to provide sufficient quantities of clean fresh water at the right place and time to meet our needs. First, we must prevent water pollution. It is usually a lot cheaper to keep water clean, especially groundwater, than it is to clean it up once it has been polluted. Today, primarily because of water pollution, many cities have had to install very costly water treatment systems to provide drinking water to their citizens.

Second, we must conserve, or reduce the ‘non-beneficial consumptive use’ of the water we have.

What does it mean to reduce the non-beneficial consumptive use of the water? When water is pumped from a stream or groundwater aquifer, say for washing clothes or flushing toilets, much of it will probably return to a nearby stream or aquifer. This water is ‘used’ but not ‘consumed’ and, depending on the level of contamination resulting from the use, can be recycled and used again in the same general area. On the other hand, when water is used to irrigate lawns or crops, most of the water pumped either evaporates directly into the atmosphere, or is evaporated by the plants in the process of ‘evapotranspiration.’ The
Water that goes into the atmosphere is considered to be consumed. It is not destroyed; it will return to the land surface as precipitation. But it is lost to the local system and therefore no longer available for use at that location. Reducing this loss of water by evaporation is the key to conserving water in any given locale.

There are basically only two ways to reduce water consumption: reduce the amount of water that evaporates but provides no beneficial use, or reduce the use itself. We can reduce non-beneficial evaporation in many ways—such as not watering the grass on a hot windy day. Technology can and no doubt will continue to be part of the solution. But there is a limit to the amount of reduction that can be achieved without reducing the amount of benefit we derive from the use—such as when we are growing food. In some areas, we can also relocate and ‘retime’ the water that is available so that we can make better use of this water. Storing spring runoff in surface or groundwater reservoirs for use later in the summer has long been used to accomplish this retiming and relocation. In some areas, it may also be possible to import water from another basin. However, as water becomes scarcer, these options will become less viable. Thus, although better technology and water management can help solve Nebraska’s water issues and water demands, technology alone is not likely to resolve all these issues or satisfy all the state’s future demands. No doubt, in the future (as we have in the past), we will have to regulate the use of our water supplies and allocate them among users. Maintaining the peace will depend on how we govern these processes.

Preserving the Peace Using Wise Water Governance

In the United States, approximately 80 percent of the consumptive use of water is caused by agriculture—and the number is even higher in Nebraska, which has more irrigated land than any other state, and more than all but a dozen or so countries. To date in Nebraska, conflicts over water supplies have centered on the use of water for irrigation.

As early as 1895, state government adopted the ‘prior appropriation system’ to allocate the water in our rivers. Under the prior appropriation law, the oldest or most senior water right gets the first right to divert water, but if water is short, the next oldest right may or may not get to divert, and the most junior right may not get any water at all. This ‘first-in-time, first-in-right’ allocation system is administered by the State Department of Natural Resources (State DNR). Until fairly recently, this law, for the most part, kept the peace among competing irrigators.

However, starting in the 1940s, groundwater wells increasingly were used to irrigate crops. In the early years of pumping, Nebraska’s plentiful supply appeared to be limitless. But irrigation consumes 70–90 percent of the water that is pumped, depending on the efficiency of the system. Therefore, it should be no surprise that where precipitation and the inflow of water surface water from neighboring states is low, and the use of groundwater is high—such as in Box Butte County, the upper reaches of the Republican Basin, the Central Platte Basin and the Upper Big Blue Basin—the groundwater supplies started to decline.

By the mid-1970s it was apparent that the State had to do something to prevent the depletion of our groundwater resources. Thus, in 1975, the Legislature authorized the newly established and locally controlled Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) to manage and regulate the use of groundwater under a ‘correlative rights system,’ in which water is shared in times of shortage.

But today, with over 114,500 registered irrigation wells in Nebraska, groundwater supplies are still being depleted in some areas. Furthermore, in many areas of our state, groundwater pumping not only depletes the aquifer, but also depletes stream flows. In the late 1970s and early ‘80s, surface water users—many with permits dating back to the 1880s or early 1900s—started demanding that the Legislature do something to keep groundwater pumpers from robbing them of the surface water appropriated to them by the State.

Unfortunately, it was not until 2004 that a comprehensive law (Legislative Bill 962) to integrate the management and regulation of surface water and groundwater was passed. Under this law, the State DNR still regulates surface water under the prior appropriation system, and the NRDs regulate groundwater under the correlative rights system. But if the State DNR determines that a basin’s water supplies (including both surface water and ground water) are “fully or over-appropriated,” the State DNR and the affected NRD are required by law to develop an “Integrated Management Plan.” Moreover, the law requires this

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plan to maintain a balance between water uses and water supplies, and in the Platte River (officially designated “over-appropriated”) to reduce the consumptive use of water in the basin, in order to “sustain a balance between water uses and water supplies so that the economic viability, social and environmental health, safety, and welfare of the river basin can be achieved and maintained for both the near term and the long term” (Neb. Rev. Stat. 46-715). Another required goal of these plans is to protect existing water users from being adversely affected by any new water uses.

Under this law, roughly the western one-third of the state was determined to be fully or over-appropriated and integrated management plans have been required to be developed by the State DNR and the NRDs for these areas (see map on page 9). In other areas the NRDs and DNR have voluntarily developed integrated management plans, but there are no specified legal requirements for these voluntary plans.

Where the DNR and NRD have worked with both surface water and groundwater interests in the basin to develop a plan, these plans have accomplished a great deal and are moving toward the goal of reducing conflicts and sustaining the State’s water resources for use today and into the future. For example, the Central Platte NRD with help from the State DNR, has provided funds to develop water banks to reduce the number of acres irrigated in the basin on a ‘willing-seller, willing-buyer’ basis, and has worked with surface water irrigation districts to rehabilitate surface water canals to make more efficient use of whatever water is available, and to retime the diversions into and return flows from the canals to enhance streamflows for endangered and threatened species and other uses of the Platte River. An effort is also being made by the NRDs and the Game and Parks Commission in the Niobrara Basin to satisfy both the out-of-stream demands of agriculture and the instream demands for wildlife and recreation. When collaboration among all the key water interests in the basin has occurred, these efforts have achieved a high degree of success. However, where collaboration with all interested parties is lacking, conflicts have arisen and the plans have been less successful.

Conflicts are particularly prevalent where water uses have already exceeded the supply, and surface water users have not been part of the planning process. For example, in the Republican River Basin there are now four separate lawsuits alleging that even though the Republican River NRDs have been required to develop Integrated Management Plans with the State DNR, the State illegally took surface water from appropriators without compensation, in order to keep Nebraska in compliance with the “Republican River Compact” with Kansas and Colorado. These lawsuits are costly both in terms of dollars, and in terms of the loss of good-will and cooperation that is desperately needed to solve the basin’s problems.

In the future increasing demands and droughts due to climate change are even more likely to increase such conflicts. Will Nebraska’s water governance system, with its emphasis on the use of locally controlled NRDs be able to meet the challenge? My co-author Christina Hoffman Babbitt and I tried to answer this question in our book Nebraska’s Natural Resources Districts: An Assessment of a Large-Scale Locally Controlled Water Governance Framework, published as Policy Report 1 by the Daugherty Water for Food Institute. Based on the research of Elinor Ostrom (who won the 2009 Nobel Prize for her work) and her colleagues, we concluded that Nebraska’s legal framework for water governance system puts the State in a very good position to meet our challenges. However, these researchers also point to the importance of communication, collaboration, equity in allocations, good leadership and the development of trust as essential for long-term success. These criteria for good governance can be encouraged by laws, but in the end it is up to the water officials themselves to ensure they are met. This research also shows that locally controlled systems that can work more closely with the people being governed, and that have the flexibility to make changes when needed, not only provide better governance today, but are likely to be more adaptive and resilient in the face of climate change. However, particularly in large-scale systems like in Nebraska, in addition to local control, it is important to have a higher-level authority that can set enforceable standards that have to be met by the local entities to ensure the welfare of the State as a whole. This authority is important because surface water and groundwater flow across the boundaries of the NRDs so that what one NRD does can impact water users in other NRDs. Furthermore, as Ostrom stated, because local entities are under intense pressure from local entitlement holders, it is difficult for them to restrict water rights without support from higher-level institutions.

Establishing a low-cost conflict resolution process (such as requiring the parties of a potential lawsuit to participate in a non-binding arbitration process) to try to reduce conflict and avoid costly litigation could also prove to be useful.

However, as is true for all governance structures, a good legal framework can enable—but cannot assure—good governance. No matter how strong a legal framework may be, good governance depends on the will of the people themselves to communicate and collaborate with all stakeholders, to work to develop trust, and to provide the leadership necessary to ensure that the intent of the laws is in fact realized.
by A’Jamal Byndon, Community Initiative Consultant with Nebraska Families Collaborative and Nebraskans for Peace State Board member

One of the most misunderstood and often ignored scholars of the African Diaspora is Frantz Fanon. He was born July 20, 1925, in the West Indies on the island of Martinique. Over the years I have read books about Fanon, and my introduction to him was from an African American scholar at UNL who was writing his dissertation on Fanon in the early 1970s. This scholar shared a copy of it with my younger brother, who in turn shared it with me. What was unusual about his dissertation is that it was a literature review and critique of Fanon for his prose instead of the normal social, economic and political implications of his books.

I have come to appreciate the scope and complexity of Fanon for providing African folks with a road map out of the madness that still occurs in our respective communities and countries. Fanon was a precursor to the “Black Power” movement and he eerily predicted the pending violence that African Americans and Africans would engage in to gain their liberation from oppression. That cathartic violence, Fanon reasoned, is a natural reaction to the brutality inflicted upon the natives in the colonies—similar, I suspect, to what happened in this country half a century ago.

Fanon authored four books dealing with political science, two of which have particular significance for African Americans and Africans born on the continent. The first was *Black Skin, White Masks*. This book defined the psychology of Africans of the diaspora who face identity crises. This book helped the readers to understand the masks that Black people wear in a Eurocentric society. Hence, too often, Blacks frequently work against their self-interest because they are not authentic to either themselves or their group members. There have been other books that examine the psyche of Black folks, but Fanon also illustrates the “double consciousness” that W.E.B. DuBois defined in his treatises.

The second book, *A Dying Colonialism*, and the third, *Toward the African Revolution*, were good. His final book though, *The Wretched of the Earth*, was his greatest and best in terms of serving as an international voice of the oppressed. He also produced plays, short stories and articles that were printed in various revolutionary publications during the French occupation of Algeria during the 1950s.

What is most intriguing about Fanon was his ability to discern the psyche of Africans who were experiencing various forms of psychological and physical oppression.

In both my teaching of Black Studies courses and in conversations, I am amazed at the number of Afrocentric scholars who are not familiar with Fanon’s major themes. His evolution from a resident of a tiny island in the Caribbean to worldwide icon for African liberation is not widely known by those who need to understand his rejection of oppression. There are hundreds of articles and books about Fanon. Yet, it is ironic, he does not enjoy the acclaim enjoyed by other insignificant players.
Black Lives Matter, conclusion

such as George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington who are imposed onto students in our educational system. Depending upon one’s perspective and understanding of Fanon’s unapologetically critical analysis of White supremacy, you either see him as a great revolutionary leader or—as some have depicted him—an apostle of violence for merely defining the tools for liberation. Fanon and Malcolm X never killed anyone. Some critics though like to depict them as promoting violence for simply speaking about the defense of African folks and their families.

While many writers outlined the psychopathological impact of violence on the natives, Fanon was one of the best because he deconstructed the colonialism and capitalism of his times. His treatises were drafted over 60 years ago, yet the words still ring true today. When one considers the level of oppression and the problems experienced in the African American and African communities, Fanon should be required reading as a tool for the reduction of both mental health issues and the physical violence that occurs in our society. In being routinely subjected to this violence, Black people, as Malcolm X once noted, are the “victims of democracy”—for whom America’s claim of equality and justice for all is rank hypocrisy.

I recently participated in a panel discussion sponsored by Nebraska Educational Telecommunications. As part of the program, NET showed the new video that was produced on the Black Panthers. After the viewing, I along with a retired African American police officer and three UNL African American students discussed the history and the implications of the FBI’s destruction of the Black Panthers with respect to the African American struggle for equality in the 1970s. This panel discussion, held in Lincoln in front of about 90 participants, helped me better understand the problems and ‘disconnect’ African Americans face in not understanding our history and our present situation. What was particularly interesting was how the international dimension of Fanon’s writings offered a blueprint for where we go from here.

Fanon’s writings illustrate that history does repeat itself—or that societies can, at least, get stuck in time warps. (Just as reading about and examining the life and words of Malcolm X or other great human rights advocates who have died remind us that we have not learned the lessons of the past and things really haven’t changed much.) For African American communities and African nations, our experiences and Fanon’s writings are tools to address the realities we face today. It is sad to see that when many attempt to make sense of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, they fail to comprehend that it is only a part of the ongoing struggle that our ancestors dealt with generations ago. As the old saying goes, history repeats itself, and those who fail to understand it are bound to get caught up in a time warp.
Peace in Palestine and Israel and What We Can Do

by Sandie Hanna & Mark Welsch

A Jewish Rabbi and Christian from Palestine walked into a coffee house... in Omaha!

We know, it sounds like the beginning of a joke. But these two men were serious about how we can help bring peace and justice to the people in Palestine and Israel. They both want us to join the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction) movement. This movement has a lot of support in many parts of the world and needs more traction here in the U.S.

The principles of the BDS movement were used to help end the apartheid White government in South Africa. The organizers hope this nonviolent effort will cause the ultra-right wing Zionist government in Israel to treat all people with equality and justice. You can learn more about BDS here: https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions/

Rabbi Joseph Berman and Bshara Nassar discussed their personal histories and work for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel before a crowd of 80 young and old people at the Urban Abbey coffee house in downtown Omaha Sunday, February 28. Rabbi Berman talked about how he was raised by his Jewish parents and community to believe Israel could do no wrong. He had a change of heart and mind after he visited Israel and Palestine and saw for himself how badly the Zionist Israeli government treats Palestinians, and what they allow illegal Jewish settlers to do to them.

One day in the West Bank, when Rabbi Berman was walking up a hill to a Palestinian family’s olive farm to help with their harvest, a Jewish man from an illegal (according to the UN) Israeli settlement came running down the hill with a machine gun shooting at them. They all ‘hit the dirt’ and were not killed. The settler then though took a rock and smashed it down on the head of another Jewish man who, like Berman, was simply trying to help the Palestinians with their olive harvest. The settler sent the man a message as well as to the hospital. Berman told us about seeing many things like this that are contrary to the teachings of his Jewish faith. One of the core tenants of that faith is that we are supposed to treat other people as we want to be treated.

Bshara Nassar is a Christian Palestinian born in Jerusalem and raised on his family’s Bethlehem farm. The government of Israel will not even allow him to visit the city where he was born because he is a Palestinian. His family has owned the “Tent of Nations” farm for 100 years [http://www.tentofnations.org/]. They are working in the Israeli courts to stop Israel from confiscating their land so settlers can build another illegal settlement there. The legal deck though is stacked against them because the Zionist Israeli government makes the laws that allow the government to take land and homes that are owned by Palestinians.

Nassar created the “Nakba Museum Project of Memory and Hope” in Washington D.C. [http://www.nakbamuseumproject.com/]. It has many pictures from the first Nakba in 1947-1948. That is when the Israeli government forced over 750,000 Palestinians out of their family homes and farms at gun point, so Jews could take over their property. The United Nations, when it proposed the creation of the state of Israel, did not give it the right to steal Palestinian homes and farms. Some of the Palestinians were forced off of property that had been owned by their families for hundreds of years. According to the Israeli government, these displaced people and their descendants have no right to return to their homes.

Nassar talked about how there are over 50 laws in Israel that apply to citizens only if they are of Palestinian descent. These laws discriminate against a group of people simply because of their ancestry, not because of anything they have done. They must use different streets with cars that have different colored license plates than Jewish citizens’

Pictured from left to right: Fran Moore, Elaine Wells, Bshara Nassar, Rabbi Joseph Berman, Andrea Paret, Mark Welsch and Sandie Hanna
What’s HOT, conclusion

force. Witness Judeo-Christianity as a driver of our behavior, but also examine the appeal of the Islamic State. People can convince themselves that the starkest cruelty is excusable in the name of religious doctrine. Religion also still drives human beings to deny the role of geophysics in our lives.

Twenty years ago, who would have dreamt that our imagined glittering bridge to the third millennium would sprout an off-ramp to the dark ages? Yet so it is with ISIS, which has been sired in conflict that began, in Syria, largely because of drought driven by human changes in the environment.

Syria’s civil war and the rise of ISIS has been associated by scientists with prolonged drought in the region (beginning in 2007) which, in turn, has roots in global warming. The drought intensified after that. According to Elizabeth Kolbert, writing in the New Yorker, “The country [in 2008] experienced its driest winter on record. Wheat production failed, many small farmers lost their herds, and prices of basic commodities more than doubled.”

Within months, as the drought continued, hundreds of thousands of people abandoned their homes and farms in the countryside and moved to Damascus, Homs and other cities, crowding them with more than a million refugees from war in Iraq. By 2015, more than 4 million Syrian refugees had moved to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as several European countries.

Geophysical facts still write the script, but humanity today drives nature in ways heretofore unknown... and the destination is disaster.

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacson Professor at UNO and author of the 2015 book, Eco-Hustle!

Palestine, conclusion

cars. If a Palestinian who is not an Israeli citizen marries an Israeli citizen, they cannot live in Israel. If an Israeli citizen who happens to be Palestinian leaves the country for five or more years, they lose their citizenship and cannot return to their country. But if you are Jewish, that does not apply to you. In the Occupied West Bank, there are laws that treat the Jews who live in the illegal settlements far better than the citizens of the West Bank. Settlers have swimming pools and electricity 24 hours per day. Some Palestinian farms get no water or electricity. In Gaza, they are lucky if Israel turns on the electricity for two hours per day. They can’t get water if the electricity isn’t on.

Nassar and Berman want the people in the U.S. to stand up and talk about human rights and justice in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. We must not be afraid when Jews use the term ‘anti-Semitic’ as a weapon and scare tactic. We should simply say that we are working for human rights for everyone. The two men want us to ask our members in Congress to stop giving the Israeli government over $3 billion every year. This money and U.S. support allow Israel to continue the occupation of Palestine and to build illegal settlements on Palestinian land—turning the Palestinians into refugees in their own country.

Rabbi Joseph Berman is the Government Affairs Liaison for “Jewish Voice for Peace.” Bshara Nassar is the Founder and the Executive Director of the Nakba Museum Project of Memory and Hope. They both ask you to join them in their work for equality and justice wherever people live. Please join the BDS movement to help bring stability to that part of the world.

The February 28th event was organized through the “Holy Land Task Force, Peace with Justice Ministries” and the “Mercy & Justice Team of the Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church” in collaboration with the Palestinian Rights Task Force of Nebraskans for Peace. You can watch the event here http://bit.ly/1M7KiIY

To learn more about the Palestinian Rights Task Force and what you can do to help bring peace and justice to this land, contact Sandie Hanna at hanna7@cox.net or 402-571-7218 or Mark Welsch at 402-453-0776.

Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

Congress has enacted changes in the tax code that allow tax-free Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) up to $100,000 annually from traditional IRA accounts for those over 70½ years of age. For those who meet this age requirement and have a traditional IRA account, this can possibly be a tax advantage when making a charitable contribution.

With traditional IRA accounts, usually any withdrawal is taxable. However, with this tax code change the QCD withdrawal is tax free. Consider making your yearly Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA as a donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation through a QCD withdrawal.
leading military spender, leading presidential candidates on the Republican side tell us that the president has left our Air Force destroyed, our army weak and our nation impotent. Hillary Clinton has generally held high defense-spending views in the past (though she has equivocated in the present campaign). In a country where over 20 percent of our children under six live in poverty, our electorate is telling us to up our outrageous military spending. We know that child poverty affects learning, employability, mental health and the national well-being. We don’t care.

Militarism wins elections. Feeding children doesn’t. In districts where the military brings in a lot of money, congressional and presidential candidates run on more military spending and cutting social programs. Witness the recent races in South Carolina—the most militaristic and military-dependent state in the union. Omaha gets StratCom’s pork, and Democratic Congressman Ashford released the following news statement after his 2016 defense budget vote:

Putting the country’s security first and foremost, Rep. Brad Ashford (NE-02), a member of the House Armed Services Committee, today voted in favor of a bipartisan bill authorizing $515 billion in national defense spending. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2016 passed the House 269-151, with the support of 41 Democrats... During debate on the NDAA, Rep. Ashford was instrumental in ensuring key U.S. StratCom programs including nuclear command and control, space, cyber and missile defense were protected.

Every congressional district now has military-related jobs, and most congressional representatives will spend more time slopping the Pentagon hogs than feeding America’s children, even though the Pentagon has proved itself incapable of handling present forms of warfare reliant on militias, private operators, jihadists and insurgents mobilized by social media. It has proved itself inept in countering the causes of violence in the Middle East and Central Asia—climate change, water shortages, religious rivalry, unemployment and corrupt government.

There are other ways to go, and sometimes (almost despite ourselves) we have pursued courses that may make America ‘just again’—more important than ‘great again.’ In Syria, the United States, Russia, the Syrian government and several rebel groups aside from ISIS have initiated a cease-fire that appears to be ending much of the killing and perhaps limiting the Islamic State. In Iran, according to UN reports, the UN deal to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons appears to be holding. Consequently, first results show the Iranian people to have chosen, in all likelihood, a path to reconciliation in electing a moderate majority in the parliament and council of clerics that control Iran. In Myanmar, the world community that pushed the military dictatorship to restore civilian rule and civil rights is about to see the democratic leadership of the country restored under Nobel Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi.

These are tokens of possible futures. President Obama often rejects paths that I prefer in military and foreign policy, but he has understood that peace requires the mobilization of many peoples and nations, many minds and hearts. As he said in his Nobel Prize speech:

Agreements among nations. Strong institutions. Support for human rights. Investments in development. All these are vital ingredients... And yet, I do not believe that we will have the will, the determination, the staying power, to complete this work without something more—and that’s the continued expansion of our moral imagination; an insistence that there’s something irreducible that we all share...

Adhering to the law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. For we are fallible. We make mistakes, and fall victim to the temptations of pride, and power and sometimes evil. Even those of us with the best of intentions will at times fail to right the wrongs before us...

We do not have to live in an idealized world to still reach for those ideals that will make it a better place. The nonviolence practiced by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance, but the love that they preached—their fundamental faith in human progress—that must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey.

We might ask that this election make America ‘just’ again—or for the first time.
Speaking Our Peace
by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Make America Just Again

As I sit here in my easy chair, another primary proceeds—perhaps to determine the fate of the earth. Clinton and Trump lead the polls, and Trump has received the endorsement of David Duke and effective neo-Nazi organizing behind the scenes. Students suggesting that ‘Black Lives Matter’ have been thrown out of Trump’s rallies at his command. Undocumented aliens, we are told, are scum to be thrown back to their drug cartel-infested countries. The cry appears to be, ‘Mr. Trump, build up this wall.’ Sitting in my easy chair with my cup of tea, I am nonplussed. I have just seen “Son of Saul”—the bleakest Holocaust film in existence. I fear the Holocaust furnaces already burning in our hearts may also lie in our external future.

We have cultivated hatred as foundational to our elections since the beginning, and most noticeably in the Reagan elections where Atwater’s and Reagan’s made-up stories of Chicago welfare Cadillac queens, forced busing, food stamps and the need for states’ rights uttered only a few miles from Philadelphia, Mississippi, where the 1964 murders of civil rights workers occurred, gave the signal that old-fashioned race hatred was good again. We now are told that Reagan was a ‘great president.’ Extreme nationalism and neo-Fascism temporarily rule the roost in certain American political sectors even as, in the longer term, they may be in decline in the world.

Super-nationalism, militarism and the rejection of other peoples and religions on racial grounds also afflict our foreign policy discussions. As President Obama pointed out recently, the United States spends more than eight times as much on its military as does the next...