The Climate Crisis

Coming to Grips with the Truth of Our Situation

Creighton University Associate Professor Richard Miller delivered the keynote address at the 2016 Annual Peace Conference October 29 in Omaha. The article below, which he wrote specifically for the Nebraska Report, expertly summarizes the substance of his talk.

The climate change problem is unlike any other problem that we face as a society because it is irreversible on time scales of thousands of years with impacts that can last millions of years (e.g. the loss of biodiversity through species extinction). The shocking truth is that the decisions we make over the coming years will determine the conditions of life for human beings and non-human nature for thousands and possibly millions of years. This is due to the long life of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the thermal inertia of the oceans, and the cascading effects that their enduring influence will bring into play.

The implications of the long life of carbon dioxide are not widely understood outside the climate science community. Around 50 percent of the CO$_2$ we release is absorbed in around 25 years by soils, land vegetation, and the oceans, while around 25 percent of it will still be affecting the climate after a thousand years, 12 percent after 10,000 years and around 7 percent of it will be affecting the climate a hundred thousand years from now. This means that the mean lifetime of CO$_2$ in the atmosphere is 30,000-35,000 years. Over such long time scales, carbon dioxide’s heat-trapping potential can set in motion the eventual collapse of ice sheets (another irreversible impact) and set in motion other chain reactions (i.e. positive feedbacks) that will substantially increase warming. In addition, most of the energy trapped by greenhouse gases goes into heating the ocean (to date around 90 percent). The ocean takes time to heat up (i.e. thermal inertia), and once the deep oceans are heated, it takes time for them, and the planet, to cool down. This means that once emissions are stopped, temperatures will remain elevated for around a thousand years.

Thus, if we do not reduce emissions substantially, our inaction will, in the words of the distinguished climate economist Ross Garnaut, “haunt humanity to the end of time.”

Through the burning of fossil fuels (around 65 percent of greenhouse gas emissions) and the felling of forests (around 11 percent), which when alive take in CO$_2$ and release oxygen, CO$_2$ levels are increasing in the atmosphere. While CO$_2$ levels have been much higher than they are now at different times in the earth’s history, the increase in CO$_2$ from 280 ppm to 400 ppm since the Industrial Revolution is destabilizing the “Holocene”—the geological epoch in which civilization has developed because it was typified by a relatively stable climate.
Nebraska Report

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Nebraskans for Peace

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The Climate Crisis, continued

including stable sea levels. The terrible truth of this destabilization is being revealed through scientific research perhaps most notably by two studies from leading researchers who maintain that six glaciers on the West Antarctica ice sheet are now in a phase of unstoppable melt that will lead to a sea level rise of 1.2 meters (4 feet). If these studies hold up, this means that we have already condemned to destruction Charleston, South Carolina, New Orleans, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Saint Petersburg, and Miami. These estimates do not factor in storm surge damage, which will likely ravage our coasts much earlier. One study suggests that a five-foot sea-level rise—which we are likely already committed to when we factor in contributions from Greenland—would bring Superstorm Sandy-style surges every other year along the East Coast, putting our cities under siege. This level of sea-level rise (4 feet) also condemns much of the rice-growing regions of Asia to destruction, including 50 percent of the rice fields in Bangladesh (home to 160 million people with projections of 250 million by 2050) and more than half of those in Vietnam (the world’s second-largest rice exporter). This will lead to large-scale movements of people which will likely lead to conflict, as the drought in Darfur led to nearly 300,000 deaths from malnutrition, disease and conflict, and the most intense drought in the history of Syria led to mass migrations of farmers into the cities, contributing to the destabilizing of Syria and its descent into civil war.8

The unstoppable melt from West Antarctica will also, according to NASA scientist Eric Rignot, “likely [a two-thirds chance] trigger the collapse of the rest of the West Antarctic ice sheet, which comes with a sea-level rise of between three and five meters [10 to 16 feet].”9 A 16-foot rise would condemn Boston and Houston and reduce San Diego, Seattle, and New York to remnants of their former selves. While Rignot states conservatively that this collapse could take centuries, a subsequent study has shown that over the past five years there has been a doubling of ice mass loss on Greenland and West Antarctica.10 While it is too early to see if this trend

Richard Miller, Ph.D.

will continue, renowned climatologist Dr. James Hansen has argued that three to four feet of sea level rise is possible, on our current path, in 50 years (i.e. 2065).11

Drought will, however, be arriving earlier. Indeed, the transition to a more arid climate in the U.S. Southwest might already be under way12 and, as we continue on our present path, there is an increasing likelihood of mega-droughts13—the kind that led to the destruction of past civilizations.

To avoid a continued escalation of sea level and drought over the coming centuries, Dr. Hansen argues that we need to reduce CO2 levels from their current 400 ppm levels to below 350 ppm by the end of the century. To meet this goal requires a rapid reduction in fossil fuel use and the removal of a 100 GtC (i.e. 367 billion metric tons of CO2) from the atmosphere over the next 90 years through improved forestry and agricultural practices. Because of the long life of greenhouse gases (especially carbon dioxide), it is not enough to reduce the level of carbon dioxide emissions; rather, there is only a limited amount of carbon dioxide we can still put into the atmosphere. If we assume that we will draw the prescribed CO2 from the atmosphere through improved forestry and agricultural practices, then we must reduce CO2 emissions by 6 percent a year (Hansen’s starting point in his paper was 2013). If we delay emission reductions until 2020, then we need to reduce emissions globally at a rate of 15 percent per year.14

To recognize the staggering scale of this carbon reduction challenge, it is important to recall that the only time that emission reductions over a ten-year period have been more than 1 percent per year was during the economic collapse (i.e. a halving of the economy) of the former Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall when emissions declined 5.2 percent per year.15 This description of the possible impacts and the unprecedented reductions that are necessary to avoid the worst effects of climate change make it clear why 20 Past Winners of the “Blue Planet Prize”16 published a synthesis paper for the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in which they maintained: “In the face of an absolutely unprecedented emergency society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization. Either we will change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us.”17

Since the establishment in 1992 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United States—based on its global economic and political influence and its historical responsibility for the climate problem (the U.S. is responsible

conclusion on page 4
The Climate Crisis, conclusion

for 25 percent of the CO\textsuperscript{2} in the atmosphere)—has done more damage to the international process than any other country. President Obama has trumpeted his climate legacy and even spoken of U.S. global leadership on climate change after the Paris Climate Agreement. The science belies these claims. At Paris, the U.S. pledged to reduce emissions by 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 (including emission reductions from land use change and forestry). Excluding land use change and forestry the U.S. commitment is 19-24 percent below 2005 levels, which is equivalent to reducing emissions 6 to 12 percent below 1990 levels (which is the year most other countries relate their emission reductions). The policies the U.S. has in place, however, will only reduce emissions 9 percent below 2005 levels by 2025—which is 5 percent above 1990 levels.\textsuperscript{18}

What does the science tell us? To avoid or delay the worst of climate change impacts, the U.S. and other developed countries need to reduce emissions 56 percent below 1990 levels by 2020.\textsuperscript{19} While the U.S. policies are woefully inadequate relative to reductions prescribed in the scientific literature and are even inadequate to meet U.S. targets, they were enough to help secure the Paris Agreement in 2015. The Paris agreement was also inadequate. The hope has been that while the agreement was non-binding and thus did not have a legal framework to enforce emissions reductions it could signal to global investors that the world is going to move off of fossil fuels. As such, the hope was that it could precipitate a great deal of investment in renewable energies. It appears that that is indeed happening as the growth of wind and solar has exceeded all forecasts with about 70 percent of all investment in electric power generation worldwide flowing to renewables\textsuperscript{20} in 2015. Leading analysts maintain that the “question is no longer if the world will transition to cleaner energy, but how long it will take.”\textsuperscript{21} While President-elect Trump has pledged to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement, cancel Obama’s “Clean Power Plan” and open up our public lands for more fossil fuel development, he cannot stop the transition to renewable energy. He can, however, slow the process down and, as I have shown, delay is deadly.

There are three final points that must be kept in mind in coming to grips with this situation. First, we have, according to the distinguished Stanford researcher Mark Jacobsen, enough wind and solar in developable locations to power the world 50 times over\textsuperscript{22} and moving the entire world to renewables by 2030 would be comparable to the cost of our present fossil fuel energy mix if we take into account the huge health costs from burning fossil fuels.\textsuperscript{23} Should renewables not be sufficient, there is advanced nuclear technology (fourth-generation nuclear) that might be able to be brought online in several decades.\textsuperscript{24} Second, we have model policies ready to be implemented (dependent upon political will), which will increase employment and make us richer and healthier while meeting the carbon reduction challenge.\textsuperscript{25} Third, small percentages of particular populations\textsuperscript{26} can effect social and political transformation through the practice of nonviolent civil resistance. Right now, around 24 percent of the U.S. population is willing to financially support organizations that engage in nonviolent civil disobedience against entities that make global warming worse, while 13 percent are willing to personally engage in such actions.\textsuperscript{27} Ultimately, the power of a government derives from “the obedience and submission of its subjects.”\textsuperscript{28} The horror that is reverberating among a great deal of the population (some of whom are protesting in the streets) at the election of Donald Trump needs to be channeled to build a coalition among immigrants, people of color, democracy advocates, peace groups, and environmental activists to try to avert many of President-elect Trump’s devastating proposals and to move us on to a World War II-type mobilization to rapidly transition to renewable energy after 2020.
REFERENCES


16. The Blue Planet Prize is a prize (often referred to as the Nobel for environmental sciences) awarded to scientists whose scientific research contributes to solving global environmental problems. Authors for this synthesis paper included global leaders in climate science and climate economics. They included Dr. James Hansen (former director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies & one of the most important climate scientists over the past 40 years); Dr. Susan Solomon (Senior Scientists US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association & Chair of the National Academy of Sciences Committee that produced the 2010 Climate Science Report); Professor Sir Bob Watson (Chief Scientific Advisor in the UK & Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from 1997 to 2002); Lord (Robert) May of Oxford (Former Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK Government & President of the Royal Society of London (1660)); Lord Nicholas Stern (Professor, the London School of Economics Former Chief Economist and Senior Vice-President of the World Bank from 2000 to 2003, and author of the most influential work in climate economics - The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review)


NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016 NE REPORT, P. 5
Like the country itself, Nebraskans for Peace will be undergoing some major changes in 2017. As of December 31st, the NFP State Office—as a physical entity—will close its doors and, starting January 1, become completely virtual with all four of our staff working from their homes. We’ll still have the same phone number we’ve had since the 1970s (402-475-4620), but our days as a ‘store-front’ operation will be over. All snail mail should be sent to our U.S. Post Office address:

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Lincoln, NE 68501-3466

After almost 47 years, it’s bittersweet to see the closing of the State Office. It’s the end of a tradition for sure. But technological advances—particularly the internet—finally eclipsed the utility of having ‘bricks and mortar’ office space with a street address. Since the mid-’90s (with the advent of the internet communication), we’ve seen ‘walk-in’ traffic at the office steadily slow to zilch. We don’t even use the office for small group meetings any longer, with people generally preferring to connect by conference call. (As always, our bi-monthly NFP State Board Meetings are still conducted in person, but in a much larger facility that can accommodate 25 people.)

Three of our four staff have already been working from their homes for years now, as it’s actually more convenient than dealing with downtown parking. What makes the decision to close the office irresistible, however, is the cost-savings from no longer paying almost $6,000 year in rent. As you’ll note from the comparison of our 2016 and 2017 budgets, NF’s operating budget for this coming year will be more than $7,000 less than what we’re currently spending. To be able to keep making ends meet and retain all four of our staff, we needed to significantly reduce expenses. Cutting our rent costs—as well as canceling our business phone landline and implementing a wage freeze—were economizing measures that were simply unavoidable.

Apart though from the ‘cultural’ adjustment, these changes in operation will have no impact on NFP’s effectiveness. We’ll be able to continue doing everything we’ve been doing without missing a beat.

And that ‘everything’ includes working on our new ‘Issue Priorities’ for 2017. The unexpected (and unwanted) election of Donald Trump as president only makes this work all the more critical.

Under our “Anti-war & International Law Priority,” we’ll be endeavoring harder than ever to draw public attention to the scale of U.S. military spending as compared to social investments. We’ll be lobbying to halt the sale of weapons to factions in the Middle East and to raise awareness of how this interventionist foreign policy is playing into the hands of terrorists. Finally, we’ll be encouraging public support for the peacemaking efforts of the United Nations, with special emphasis on increasing aid to refugees and the renewed pursuit of nuclear disarmament. The latter will include opposing the trillion-dollar ‘modernization’ of StratCom’s nuclear triad.

Our “Civil Rights & Economic Justice Priority” will continue its long-standing focus on ending the alcohol sales at Whiteclay, advancing the rights of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered citizens, advocating for a just and humane immigration policy and improving police relations with the African American community. Particularly now, with the disappointing reinstatement of the death penalty, we will be seeking prison reform.

The “Environment & Conflict Prevention Priority” will take on even greater importance and urgency with the election of a climate denier to the Oval Office. In addition to our ongoing advocacy for more renewable energy development by our public power districts, we will again be supporting a Berkshire Hathaway shareholder resolution urging Warren Buffett to take a leadership role on addressing climate change. The peril climate disruption poses to our national security and global food system has only grown in the past year, and in 2017 NFP will redouble its efforts to promote the growing and consumption of local food.

How far we get on all these issues depends in part on how effectively we raise the funds to support our operating budget. Our end-of-the-year fundraiser is seeking to raise $30,000 before December 31 so that we have the resources on hand to be able to set right to work during the first 100 days of Donald Trump’s presidency. The financial support of our members is, as always, paramount. We’re reliant upon it. Indeed, we can’t proceed without it. So, as always, we ask for your continued support.

May the goal of ‘Peace on Earth’ lift your spirits this holiday season and in the challenging New Year ahead.
# NFP 2016/2017 Budget Comparison

## Revenues

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## Expenses

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016 NE REPORT, P. 8

If carbon dioxide had a sense of humor, it would get a monstrous laugh out of Donald Trump’s two-word dismissal of it: “Chinese hoax.” Now that our incoming president, as well as the majority of the House and Senate, are in full-blown denial of climate change, its main causal agent would be rolling in the aisles. Trump even wants to withdraw from the Paris accords on climate change as the rest of the world’s 190 nations seek solutions to this existential threat that, over time, will imperil more people, plants, and animals than any other on Earth. Already, the last three years have set succeeding higher temperature records world-wide by large margins. Carbon dioxide takes no time-outs. Its proportion in the atmosphere continues to rise no matter what politicians say. Over time, that means warmer temperatures, eroding ice, rising seas, and more severe storms. These are the geophysical facts. They do not cease to be true if people with political power do not understand them.

There exists a massive disconnect on the subject of climate change between what most scientists know and the public conversation. Political inertia plus thermal inertia thus presents the human race and the planet we superintend with a challenge to fashion a new energy future before raw necessity—the hot wind in our faces—compels action. The geophysical system thus requires that our industrial and diplomatic systems respond according to the needs of the seventh generation, in accordance with Native traditional ecological ethos.

Ken Caldeira, a researcher at Stanford University’s Carnegie Institute of Science, told Chelsea Harvey of the Washington Post: “The legacy of what we’re doing over the next 50 years will be the first course in everyone’s life, unless we act now. In 50 years, when our children are grandparents, the planetary emergency of which we are now tasting will be a dominant theme in everyone’s life, unless we act now.”

Global warming is a deceptively backhanded crisis in which thermal inertia delivers results a half-century or more after our burning of fossil fuels provokes them. Our political and diplomatic debates react after we see results. Because of the geophysical facts, the situation is much more urgent than most people believe. Because of the geophysical facts, the situation is much more urgent than most people believe.
We’re Going to Have Dinner Guests

The following op-ed appeared in the September 9, 2016 Lincoln Journal Star.

None of us likes to go without eating.

Even Warren Buffett—who claims to be one-quarter Coca Cola from all the calories he daily ingests drinking Coke—has been known to make an emergency run to one of his Dairy Queens when he gets a case of the hungries.

Whether we’re billionaires, ambulance drivers or newborns, we’re biological organisms. We need to eat. Miss just one meal and our blood sugar goes off, our energy level slumps, and we get stupid (and oftentimes irritable).

Hunger is a condition we have no choice but to address every few hours.

For a huge swath of the world’s population, though, satisfying that hunger can be an insurmountable challenge. Food insecurity—not having enough to eat to meet our daily nutritional requirements—is a fact of life for nearly one billion people on earth.

That one out of seven people are either officially hungry or teetering on the edge is a human calamity that cries out for moral action.

But addressing the problem of world hunger is more than a matter of moral conscience. It’s an issue of national security.

Six years ago, in its “2010 Quadrennial Defense Review,” the Pentagon began warning that “Climate change will contribute to food and water scarcity, will increase the spread of disease, and may spur or exacerbate mass migration.”

The very next year, during the “Arab Spring,” civil war erupted in Syria—due in part to the impact of the worst drought the country had experienced in 900 years. With no water to grow food, over a million starving farmers and their families fled to the cities, overwhelming the government’s inadequate social service system, unleashing pent-up political and religious grievances, and engulfing the country in chaos.

And as we all now know, those climate refugees did not just stay in Syria. The influx of a million Syrian immigrants into Europe created a social crisis for the European Union… and a corollary political backlash.

Alas, the Syrian Civil War is just the precursor to the scary new world we’re entering. As global temperatures rise, extreme weather events will become more frequent and intense. Super-storms like Sandy and Katrina, and torrential rains and flooding such as Baton Rouge just experienced will become fixtures in this increasingly erratic climate. All of which will make it harder and harder to produce the food needed to feed our hungry populations.

But it isn’t just the Department of Defense that’s worried. According to a 2009 State Department cable divulged by WikiLeaks, Nestle—the world’s largest food company—is convinced that our global food supply is at imminent risk. “On present trends,” the classified cable reads, “Nestle thinks one-third of the world’s population will be affected by fresh water scarcity by 2025, with the situation only becoming more dire thereafter… Nestle believes that the world will face a cereals shortfall of as much as 30 percent by 2025.”

If four million Syrian refugees can throw the world community into uproar, just imagine two billion hungry and thirsty people pouring over borders looking for food and shelter. It will be anarchy.

Nor is this danger confined to the developing world in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

With the melting ice caps raising sea levels and 40 percent of America’s population living on the coast, you can bet the farm that our coastal citizens will be moving inland to escape the flooding.

An agricultural state like Nebraska, sitting on top of the largest freshwater aquifer in North America, will be a destination location for these millions of climate refugees. Without our spending another dime on tourism promotion and business recruitment, folks are about to start showing up on our doorstep.

That being the case, instead of mostly growing corn and soybeans to feed livestock for the international market and having our own food trucked in from California, Mexico and who knows where else, our state might want to consider once again growing food for the tables of those of us who live right here…

Because, at the rate temperatures are rising and the polar caps are melting, we’re going to be having guests for dinner.

Tim Rinne is the State Coordinator of Nebraskans for Peace. He is a co-founder of the Haxley Hamlet, a neighborhood garden in the block bounded by 25th and 26th, T and U Streets in Lincoln.
An Introduction to Permaculture in Nebraska, Part Four

The new world presented to us after the election is in dire need of a Permaculture salvation. Permaculture was enjoying some well-deserved momentum under the global leadership of President Obama. As a grassroots movement addressing all of the cultural habits that exacerbate climate change, Permaculture is more important now than ever before. The late founder of Permaculture Bill Mollison described his brand new movement as “Earth Repair.” Science is teaching us about our glaciers and ice shelves nearing imminent collapse, and it is science through a cultural philosophy of Permaculture that teaches us how to heal our soils, clean our waters, filter our dirty air and feed our grandchildren.

The Paris Climate talks attended by a U.S. president for the first time gave the whole world a glimpse of hope. For those who are up-to-speed on the latest climate change news, Obama’s participation in climate talks could not have come at a more important time. Climate scientists have been raising the alarm for decades, but a climate change discussion without the U.S., China and major corporations at the table is a fruitless endeavor. With a new conservative U.S. government imminent, we (the planet) need to find more creative ways that garner popular support for planet repair.

This is why Permaculture becomes the only way humanity can move forward towards something that resembles dignified civilization. I am exclusive in this claim because there is no other philosophical or cultural endeavor in the world that repairs our damaged ecosystems while feeding us. While cultures still exist that tread a light human footprint, they are not numerous and they are not always guided by earth repair objectives. Modern, technologically-advanced societies are demonstrating smaller footprints over time. However, “Jevon’s paradox” suggests that advancements of efficiency actually contribute to increased consumption of a region’s resources (the better gas mileage you get with an energy-efficient vehicle, the more miles you drive), which is limited only by population carrying capacity due to drought.

The world uses the 18th century notion of capitalism to quantify the value of land, labor and capital. Notice that our natural environment is considered ‘capital.’ In Permaculture, respecting Mother Earth is ethic number one. Humanity’s ability to live depends on a healthy biome. Imagine if we gave back to our natural environment at the same rate we take from our natural environment. I am not talking about saving dolphins caught in fishing nets or planting one tree in a manicured lawn. Imagine if we built soil as a culture; soft, nutritious, humus for all of life to benefit from. This amazing, locally grown soil would remove all of the reasons to need unsustainable foreign resources. Our love of soil would bloom into a love of land. Consequently, our connection with the land could be restored again through stewardship of the commons. Just like we have lost connection with food, we have lost our connection to the land. It is the land after all, that provides our food.

Hoping for this cultural transformation towards soil exultation is a moot point if we do not have stable climates from which to grow food reliably.

Cultures in the past were so intrinsically connected with the cycles of the earth that population control mechanisms were practiced to ensure the survival of the group. The compassion imbued in Western culture believes all life is sacred and there are more than enough resources to feed all of us. Prior to the industrial revolution, all land masses around the world had a population carrying capacity. The carrying capacity was determined by what nature could provide. Once human-kind found stored energy in our Earth’s mantle (fossil fuels of coal, oil and gas), we did not need earth’s living veneer of soil as much. Now, our food systems resemble a creature of technology and mechanization. Life and our living ecosystems are what allows us to be here. Once we are completely surrounded by concrete, glass and steel environments, we lose our ability to feel connected. It is an unfortunate scenario.

In humanity’s assent toward enlightenment and leisure, we have eliminated almost all of the other Earth passengers with whom we shared the earth. This arrogance of dominion over the Earth has created monocultures, eliminated biodiversity, changed the climate and left us with few options but to blame each other.

As a 21st century objective, Permaculture is trying to change our tendency toward dominion over the earth to something that resembles...
Nebraskans for Peace was born out of the 1970s struggles for civil rights for people of color, equal rights for women, and rights for colonized people—to be free of colonial oppression, especially the rights of the people of Vietnam. In the early days, Rural Nebraskans for Peace marched in civil rights marches in Omaha and bought ponies for kids to ride. Merle Hansen and the Rev. Tom Rehorn of Rural Nebraskans for Peace gave some of the best civil rights addresses I have ever heard; on the other side, Reuben Snake, Ernie Chambers, and Mondo We Langa addressed peace crowds with the need to cut military spending, liberate oppressed minorities, and feed the poor in this country. As recently as a decade ago, Lela Shanks and Leola Bullock pushed home the need for the fight for civil rights.

Now we have lost some of our zing, I fear. Of course, some great things are happening through Nebraskans for Peace on the civil rights front. After decades of work by Frank LaMere, Mark Vasina, Tim Rinne and others, as well as by freedom organizations on the Pine Ridge, Nebraska government is beginning to attend to the horror of the genocide going on at the Pine Ridge—the role that the liquor stores, the liquor commission, law enforcement and public indifference have played in that genocide.

The Grand Island NFP Chapter has done good work with Latinos, and members of the Omaha Chapter have worked, somewhat successfully, on empowering a movement toward community policing in Omaha. The Lincoln Chapter steering committee has had African American, Latino and Native American members and has worked on community policing, the militarization of police and issues of poverty in Lincoln.

But the energy of the ’60s and ’70s does not seem to be there, to my mind. We have retreated to our separate cells and are sitting, complacent, while Nebraska is changing, becoming a much more cosmopolitan place. While we had been sitting in our enclaves, many Nebraska rural towns have become largely Latino in population and business district. Many new African, Latin American and Asian refugee populations are settling here. If Nebraskans for Peace cannot speak for peacemaking, negotiation, decolonizing and disarmament to these new Nebraskans, we are doomed to a segregated and impotent life in the future.

Recently, Nebraskans for Peace’s Lincoln Chapter collaborated with the Lincoln NAACP and UN-L’s Othmer Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) in sponsoring three sessions of discussion on race, using the PBS video disc series, “Race: the Power of an Illusion,” as the springboard. From the outset, we knew that the NAACP had to assume the leadership of a series, and they chose the discs and the theme of the discussions. We held the event at the predominately African American Clyde Malone Community Center. To avoid accusations of politicizing or politicizing the debate, we chose this highly researched video disc series and framed our discussion questions closely on those provided by the PBS network, only applying them to Lincoln. Our discussion leaders came from many races and cultures. Then we invited not only the only NAACP and NFP Lincoln Chapter members, but also the City Council and most significant city officials. An average of about 115 people came to the three sessions, including many members of the City Council, police and fire departments, and human rights workers in the city. Because the NAACP sponsored the events and they were held in African American environment, an average of 30 to 40 African American people came, as well as a goodly number of Latino people.

The discs looked at where the myth of “race as species” came from in the U.S. and what economic and class interests that myth served. We looked at how segregation and unfairness of all sorts grew after World War II with federal and bank reinforcement of segregation, in housing and a general cultural enforcement of segregation in employment, in voting in the South, and education everywhere (through housing policies and school tracking). These policies have made us the angry society that we are here and throughout the nation. The discussions were intense, uncomfortable and very candid. One good sign of the success of the series was that people stayed after the discussions for further one-on-one exchanges.

These meetings were not designed to prompt political action. Later dis-
Banking on Racism

by A’Jamal-Rashad Byndon

We recently received a phone call from an official of our bank (Great Western Bank) at our home. He talked with my wife about a recent cashier’s check that we’d purchased at the bank for payment for replacing the roof on our home. The roof was replaced in October 2016. The contractor had asked that I pay him with a cashier’s check.

The conversation with my wife and the banker was about whether we knew the contractor who had a Spanish first and last name. She told this banker that she knew the contractor and that she was not home when I paid him for replacing the roof. She directed him to talk with me about it. When initially talking with this banker about the transaction, I thought there was something wrong with the cashier check. He assured me that was not the problem. He said the Spanish-named contractor had a common name and asked if I knew him. I told him that he had replaced our roof about five years ago, and this was my second time doing business with him.

As the conversation continued, the banker proceeded to ask me a series of questions until, becoming angry at his repeated, sometimes thinly veiled racial insults, I finally told him my financial transactions were none of his business and that he was racial profiling the contractor. He implied during the call that we were engaged in illegal drug dealing or that I was a terrorist because of my Moslem name. I told him that I found it inherently wrong for him to contact me. In his arrogant defense, he told me that he was under “government compliance” and had to talk with me about this check. There are individuals who—because of their names—are on a government watch list and the banking industry is keeping under suspicion or even surveillance. Many are aware of the ‘no-fly’ listing, but banking? What is next?

A number of questions and concerns immediately arose for me from this encounter with my banker. One could ask:

1. When did it become the policy for any bank to call customers with ‘special names’ asking them about financial transactions?

2. In light of all of the corruption and malfeasance at Wells Fargo Bank, are other lending institutions carrying water for an illegal fishing expedition on the U.S. government’s behalf?

3. We found out a few months ago that Yahoo was scanning the emails of millions of its users without their knowledge for the federal government. At what point should corporations alert their customers when they are being strong-armed by government officials?

4. I have been a customer with Great Western Bank for over 20 years. The bank had previous owners, and we remained with the bank in spite of the incompetence of the bank officials not allowing our ATM card to be utilized when we made an international trip to both Botswana and South Africa in May and June of this year. We had notified bank officials on two occasions about this trip, and after we got over there, found ourselves unable to withdraw funds from our checking account. Is there greater racial profiling being developed by Great Western Bank?

Over the years, the newspapers have reported on two occasions where Latino and African American customers had been discriminated against by Wells Fargo Bank. The bank had to pay millions of dollars in fines to the federal government because of their discriminatory practices of charging higher interest to people of color as compared to white customers with equal credit scores. This serves to illustrate another pet peeve of mine. The auto insurance industry charges higher rates to customers with poor credit reports, in spite of the fact that their product (an insurance policy) is ‘pay-as-you-go.’ In other words, the insurance industry does not ‘loan’ its customers anything. So why are they using credit reports when they are not offering credit to their customers?

I wrote a series of letters about the bank officer conversation to both government and bank executives. It was predictable that one of the replies was apologetic and another was defensive—because these financial institutions do not understand that with cultural humility comes real contact with people of color. Fifty years after the Civil Rights movement, it is way past time for corporations to be trying to defend discriminatory behavior.

With America becoming ever more diverse and more and more of our residents seeking to gain justice, the private sector must not be permitted to do business in ways that run counter to the public’s better interests. Legally, we need both stronger oversight from government. And personally we need to be mindful to treat diverse populations (particularly those with ‘strange-sounding names’) with the same respect we show to those who came from Europe. This is common courtesy.

Need I say more?
Palestinian Christians
How Do They Fare? What Do They Want Us to Do?

by Paul A. Olson

The Palestinian people are often regarded as Muslims, but Palestinians have long been a religiously mixed population including Muslims, Christians and Jews.

Experts estimate that nearly 500,000 Palestinian Christians exist in the world, most of them in refugee camps or in countries other than Palestine to which they have immigrated. However, about 2 percent of the people in the Palestinian territory remain Palestinian Christians, regarding themselves as imprisoned in exactly the same way as Muslim Palestinians. Palestinian Christians include Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholics (Eastern and Western rites), Anglicans, Lutherans and other Protestants.

Recently, Tarek Abuata, Executive Director of the organization called “Friends of Sabeel North America” (FOSNA), at the behest of the Palestinian Rights Task Force of Nebraskans for Peace, visited Nebraska to speak of the strategies of his organization. FOSNA is committed to the movement for justice in Palestine and Israel and to upholding universal principles of human rights by addressing structural violence. Additionally, FOSNA supports the “Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center” in Jerusalem. SABEEL is a theological center in Palestine “concretely working on justice for Palestine/Israel through intersectional programs that vie for the liberation of those in Palestine/Israel and the United States.” By liberation, SABEEL means something like the book of Exodus means when it describes the liberation of the Jewish people from under the foot of the Pharaoh. (Abuata himself was born into a Palestinian Christian family in Bethlehem and moved to Texas during the first Palestinian Intifada when he was 12.)

Abuata described the removal of Palestinian people from their historical lands, the walling in of these people from decent land resources, water, housing, and transportation—Palestinians often having to take very indirect routes to reach their destinations. He also described the efforts of SABEEL and FOSNA to encourage American denominations and American cities to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israeli economic entities until such time as Palestinians receive a fair deal. FOSNA’s nonviolent tactics imitate those of black South Africans under apartheid, and it works closely with “Jewish Voice for Peace,” another good group, to find routes to peace and justice in Palestine.

Mr. Abuata’s message to his Nebraska audiences ran parallel to that he offered in a recent newsletter message to his FOSNA organization:

“In 2016, you have supported some major successes, including three church denominations’ divestment from Israel’s occupation, numerous local municipal efforts aimed at passing investment screens, and major FOSNA conferences that put liberation theology into practice through advocacy.

. . . [W]e have continued to do what Sabeel-Jerusalem has requested of us: Support our sisters and brothers in Palestine to assert their place at the table of justice. And in so doing, we’ve affirmed the “other side” of the truth, stating: “This table is God’s table. We do not accept your exclusion of the Palestinians, as the table includes everyone—Israelis, Palestinians, and all humankind. We will work with all in fulfilling His spirit, jointly growing in love in our quest to bring His will to Earth as it is in Heaven.”

As we take direct actions in claiming that space at the table, let us also be mindful of inclusivity, remembering that our successes today for Palestinian justice are ones that all, including those who are opposing us today, will one day celebrate with us. As such, we will continue to act and continue to love, remembering these words for that day of rejoicing.

Mr. Abuata encourages Nebraskans to visit the occupied Palestinian territories to see the reality he described for themselves. Whether one is a Christian or not, one ought to visit FOSNA’s website (www.fosna.org) and support its goals.

Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

Late last year Congress approved tax legislation that made permanent the provision for IRA owners to donate up to $100,000.00 to charitable organizations from their IRA accounts and not have to pay income tax on the withdrawal from the IRA account.

Now at this time of the year IRA holders that are over age 70½ are faced with making a withdrawal from their account to meet the yearly Required Minimum Distribution (RMD). Choosing to donate all or part of the RMD to a charity such as Nebraska Peace Foundation will save having to pay income tax on the donated portion of the withdrawal. Please check this out. It is a great way to save on taxes and at the same time help support Nebraskans for Peace through a donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation.
Making NFP, conclusion

cussions in other contexts, and under other sponsorship, hopefully will do that. But it is clear from the discussion groups that I attended in Lincoln to address the following issues:

1. Why we have so few elected officials that come from communities of color;

2. Why we have so few small business developments in these communities (The Center for Rural Affairs is doing a very good job of small business development among people of color in rural communities);

3. Why we are so slow to recognize the genius of cultural leaders among persons of color in Nebraska;

4. Why our correctional and penal systems are so manifestly archaic and unfair;

5. Why our religious institutions are almost altogether segregated.

To work with organizations advocating for communities of color requires that one encourage them to take the leadership, that one work with them for a long time so that they know that we are firmly on their side. In the long run, the experience is rich with new cultural experiences and with joy. I would encourage local NFP chapters to form discussion groups of this kind in local communities with the NAACP, the Urban League, the Mexican-American GI Forum, community centers that serve communities of color, and with pastors and priests that work in churches where people of color are in the majority. This is not just a feel-good call. If we care about peace at all, we must care for it at home. I would be happy to speak with people interested in this work. I can be reached at 402-475-1318.

Permaculture, conclusion

stewardship. Most people think that Permaculture is only innovative food production. But as you can see, Permaculture is attempting to change the innate biological instinct within humans to consume everything we stand on. It is an umbrella philosophy that allows us to step back from our destructive tendencies and see all resources and living beings that exist as paints on a palette for our ‘Bob Ross’ art demonstration. Just like a painter creating a ‘happy tree’ environment, a Permaculture designer uses the palette of living and nonliving ‘paints’ to create a system that works for all living beings. This system can resemble any analogy you prefer; a painting, a fine-tuned watch or even life itself.

A desert climate is not the best environment for humanity; nor is the arctic. Humans inhabit these places because we have used our ingenuity to overcome scarcity. People who live in these fringe environments will be the first to tell you that the climate is changing. Scarcity is hitting a whole new level in environments dependent on stable seasonal cycles. The picture of a skinny polar bear is symbolic of climate change. The picture of a starving African is a symbol of humanity’s failure in an era of gluttonous overabundance. The picture of any animal struggling to survive is a symbol of human arrogance. Mass animal die-offs accompany our seasons now as animals are missing their food source by a week. The Anthropocene Era (named after us) is causing our own demise. Permaculture is the only method of earth regeneration in all of modern science. And we need to embrace it now—in our own communities—while there’s still time.

What’s HOT, conclusion

next decades and the next centuries is really going to have a dramatic influence on this planet for many tens of thousands of years.”

The proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere continues to rise worldwide, a trend that has not changed since the beginning of the industrial revolution. That level reached 400 parts per million in 2015, as high as it was in the Pliocene, 2 to 4 million years ago, when sea levels were 100 feet higher and temperatures 4 to 6 degrees F. warmer. This is a key figure, and one that indicates how much change has yet to be experienced because of thermal inertia, within the next few centuries.

This cake is already being baked. In terms of geologic time, the change is coming about remarkably quickly. Carbon dioxide is a trace gas, a tiny proportion of the atmosphere; at 400 p.p.m., it comprises only one-tenth of one third of one percent of the atmosphere. It is, however, a remarkably efficient retainer of heat, and it is now increasing at a rate more quickly than at any time in the geophysical record, hundreds of millions of years.

Greenhouse gases have no morals, loyalty, nor party affiliation. Carbon dioxide is not having a debate with us. It merely retains heat.

Thus, in 50 years, when our children are grandparents, the planetary emergency of which we are now tasting the first course will be a dominant theme in everyone’s life, unless we act now. Within a decade or two, thermal inertia will take off on its own, portending a hot, miserable future for coming generations. This reality is becoming more certain with the swearing-in of our climate-change denier in chief.

Bruce E. Johansen, Frederick W. Kayser Professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, is the author of the forthcoming Climate Change: An Encyclopedia of Science, Society, and Solutions.
Paul Olson, conclusion

American hostages in Iran, during the 1979-80 election season, Ronald Reagan sent Bill Casey, later his head of CIA, to Madrid to negotiate secretly with the Ayatollah Khomeini’s representative to prevent any Americans’ release until after the election, thereby ensuring Reagan’s election. Again, neither Reagan nor Casey was charged with a crime, and Reagan became the Abraham Lincoln of the Right.

Finally, Donald Trump’s use of Russian connections and assets, his promise to ease tensions with Russia and perhaps to recognize its takeover of Crimea as legitimate portends yet a third example of improper political interference. This is a serious charge and it requires a bit of explanation.

Though the United States is not presently at war with Russia, there is talk of a new Cold War. We, the Germans, and the Poles have over 40,000 troops positioned near the Russian border, and we have a new line of missiles stationed nearby. We would expect a hawk like Trump to support this hawkish stance, but curiously President-elect Trump has found it in his bounty to praise Vladimir Putin and to call for a relaxation in our relations with Russia. Similarly, Putin has praised Trump as a strong leader, and the Russian parliament applauded when he was elected. Not accidentally in my view, the WikiLeaks hacks of the Democratic Central Committee that destroyed much of Hillary Clinton’s campaign came from Russia (according to President Obama and nearly every responsible journalistic outlet).

Trump apparently did not leave connecting with the Russians to Obama alone, perhaps because, in his business dealings, he has had a long history of shadowy work with the American Mafia and more recently with their Russian counterparts:

• In 1971, Trump entered Manhattan real estate markets using the heft of lawyer Roy Cohn—Sen. Joe McCarthy’s 1950s attack dog in persecuting innocent people as Communists. Cohn was also a lawyer for Mafia leaders Tony Salerno and John Gotti, and for 13 years Trump relied on Cohn for contacts on the grey margins of New York business. Trump bought his concrete for Trump Towers from a company run by the Mafia’s Salerno and a New York Mafia family;
• In Atlantic City, Trump bought his first bar, later his first casino, at highly inflated prices from a mobster, and then hired Mafia concrete companies do the work that created the Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino from that bar;
• More recently Trump has had strong connection with a Russian mobster figure, Felix Sater of the Bayrock Group, whose company allegedly received cash infusions from Putin and was the leader in the development of Trump Soho, a high-rise on Manhattan;
• Trump’s early campaign manager, Paul Manafort, had ties to Dmitry Firtash, an oligarch who made his money selling natural gas through his connections with Putin and with Semion Mogilevich, the Russian Mafia’s ‘boss of bosses’;
• Russian mob leader, Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov, was a VIP guest at Trump’s Miss Universe contest in Moscow.

One cannot prove that these Russian connections led to Russian criminal hacking of the DNC, but they seem likely to have swayed Russians to Trump’s side—the Russian Mafia having close ties to Russian intelligence agencies thought to have done the hacking. They seem likely to have delayed serious U.S.-Russian negotiations on Ukraine and implied the promise of a better deal from Trump.

Three instances—the Nixon instance, the Reagan instance, and the Trump one—of using delaying or interfering with a peace process by a non-incumbent candidate should be enough.

Many commentators called the Nixon and the Reagan instances treasons that were never charged as such. They may not have been treason, but they should have been punishable. They were certainly disruptive of the democratic process. No one, not even a candidate for the presidency of the United States, should be allowed to conduct foreign policy for the President. I have written earlier that I did not believe our escalating of tensions over the Ukraine and Crimea to have been wise. I still don’t. On the other hand, I do not believe in candidates’ using devious “peace” contacts, using private emissaries, as tools to win elections. I do not believe that prolonging wars or escalating potential wars is a lawful election strategy. Negotiating behind the backs of our authorized officials is in no one’s national interest.

It is ironic that the candidate who spoke often of “crooked Hillary” should have a spider web of connections to the mob. It is further ironic that his lawyer should have been Roy Cohn, the man who accused so many of betraying the interests of America to Russia’s predecessor, the USSR. Do we need an explicit law to prevent such covert negotiations from controlling our elections? I believe so, without question.

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Trading Peace for Election Victories

“If This Be Treason...”

Nebraskans for Peace always wants peace. The American people say that they want peace whenever they are polled. Yet we spend more on war than the next eight countries together, and we sometimes trade peace prospects to gain presidential election victories—an increasingly frequent practice that threatens our democratic system of governance. Let me give some examples of the problem.

First, a 2013 article in the reputable *Smithsonian* magazine shows that Richard Nixon in 1968 used Republican activist and private citizen Anna Chennault as a conduit to the South Vietnamese government to tell them not to cooperate with the North Vietnamese and Americans representing Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey in nearly completed peace negotiations. She succeeded in stopping cooperation with a promise to the South Vietnamese that they would get a better deal from Nixon. The peace agreement was not consummated in 1968, and the war went on for another five years—with 22,000 American lives lost and many more Vietnamese killed. Obviously, neither Chennault nor Nixon was prosecuted for that crime. Nixon won the election by 1 percent of the vote, partly through the impact of Chennault’s work.

Second, Joseph E. Persico, in the December 22, 1991 *New York Times*, shows that, when Jimmy Carter was endeavoring to secure the release of