Berkshire Hathaway Shareholder Proposal Calls for Divestment from Fossil Fuels

On December 1, the Nebraska Peace Foundation—Nebraskans for Peace’s tax-exempt charitable arm which owns one A-share of Berkshire Hathaway stock—released the following media statement regarding its shareholder proposal for the company’s upcoming 2017 Annual Meeting May 6. News stories about the proposal were filed by the Associated Press and Reuters and appeared in the New York Times, Miami Herald and Omaha World-Herald and on the CBS, CNBC and ABC websites.

Earlier this year, in both the 2015 Annual Shareholder Letter and his remarks at the 2016 Berkshire Hathaway Annual Meeting of Shareholders itself, Warren Buffett did the world and the financial community a great service by acknowledging both the reality and the threat of climate change. In fact, he did so not just once, or in passing—he made this message an explicit focus.

In follow-up, a shareholder proposal has been formally submitted for a vote at the 2017 Annual Shareholders Meeting (proposal text attached at the end of this article). In it, the Nebraska Peace Foundation asks Mr. Buffett to extend his public and corporate leadership by committing to divest Berkshire Hathaway of its fossil fuel holdings over a 12-year period.

Such a commitment would not endanger Berkshire Hathaway’s near-term profitability; instead, it would send a timely and urgently needed message to the international community that—to avoid the worst effects of climate disruption—the world must earnestly undertake a shift toward renewable energy sources.

In addition to the important signal a Berkshire Hathaway transition of this sort would send throughout the world, the personal support Mr. Buffett could lend to the adoption of a revenue-neutral, gradually rising carbon fee would be instrumental in leveling the business playing field and galvanizing renewable energy investment by governments and industry around the globe.

The Nebraska Peace Foundation proposal calls for Berkshire Hathaway to divest of its fossil fuel holdings over the next 12 years.

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Nebraskans for Peace

NFP is a statewide grassroots advocacy organization working nonviolently for peace with justice through community-building, education and political action.

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What We Have Been Up To

by Tessa Foreman & Paul Olson

Nebraskans for Peace has been working on three main issues related to the creation of peace and justice—climate change, nuclear reductions, and Whiteclay and related issues of racial injustice in Nebraska. In addition, we have taken on a passel of ancillary issues.

Whiteclay and Race:

The Whiteclay issue has changed recently in that a legislative study led by Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks has shown how extensive is the alcoholism, dependency, fetal alcohol syndrome and sexual trafficking springing from the beer sales in that border town; the Liquor Control Commission has required store owners in Whiteclay to fill out the ‘long form’ to renew their licenses; stores have been charged with serving to minors; the Lincoln Journal Star has carried a long article on the costs of Whiteclay to Nebraska and South Dakota; and dozens of groups, including the NFP Lincoln Chapter and Sacred Winds Native American Church, have organized around the license renewal process.

State Board member Bill Laird has been the surrogate convener (for Frank LaMere) for the Omaha Whiteclay Action Coalition that has met in Omaha monthly since last January on strategies for closing the beer stores. One Omaha member has been in attendance at the Liquor Control meetings each month since May, sometimes speaking; Omaha people have been in attendance at many “Sober Indian, Dangerous Indian” showings that have attracted from 15 to 25 people every month. The Omaha part of NFP has written a letter to President Obama which “will be read by him” according to a friend of our staff who is an advisor on foreign affairs, and Bill Laird is working on getting permission from the tribe to make sure they want to take on the responsibility of jurisdiction of the 50-square-mile piece of land in Nebraska that Teddy Roosevelt took marketing control of from the tribe without congressional action.

In addition, the Lincoln Chapter sponsored three discussions on race with the NAACP in Lincoln attended by an average of over 100 persons that willed to joint action by the two organizations on issues of the presence of people of color in city government, in small business development, in housing throughout the city, and to more efforts to achieve equity in corrections and police practices. In Omaha, A’Jamal Byndon and Mark Welsch, representing NFP, continue to work with other grassroots groups on race, violence and education problems in Omaha as well as with the “Empowerment Network” that works primarily in North Omaha on Omaha Public Schools. Finally, the Lincoln Chapter has organized, with El Centro de las Americas and others, a meeting on the future for Latinos in Nebraska, given that, in the not-too-distant future, they will be 25 percent of our population and the bigotry related to Trump advisor Kris Kobach (who advised supporters of Fremont, Nebraska’s anti-immigrant ordinance) grows apace in our state.

In the Grand Island Chapter’s activities on race, several of our members were involved with Yolanda Nuncio’s campaign to get people registered to vote. At one of the favorite grocery stores on a Saturday afternoon, NFP registered 43 new voters, and at a meat processing plant (JBS) in Grand Island, the activists registered 64 mostly Latino citizens.
vival, begin building it today, no matter how cloudless the skies appear.”

On June 28, 2016, the leaders of 31 major American scientific organizations echoed Mr. Buffett’s concerns, jointly stating in a letter to Congress:

Observations throughout the world make it clear that climate change is occurring and rigorous scientific research concludes that the greenhouse gases emitted by human activities are the primary driver. This conclusion is based on multiple independent lines of evidence and the vast body of peer-reviewed science.

There is strong evidence that ongoing climate change is having broad negative impacts on society, including the global economy, natural resources, and human health. For the United States, climate change impacts include greater threats of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and increased risk of regional water scarcity, heat waves, wildfires, and the disturbance of biological systems. The severity of climate change impacts is increasing and is expected to increase substantially in the coming decades.

To reduce the risk of the most severe impacts of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions must be substantially reduced. In addition, adaptation is necessary to address unavoidable consequences for human health and safety, food security, water availability, and national security, among others.

As Mr. Buffett sagely advised in his comments to shareholders, to have hope of survival, we not only need to begin building an ark—we need to start today. Through its proposal, the Nebraska Peace Foundation asks Mr. Buffett to be our nation’s ‘Noah’. Renowned internationally as an investment ‘oracle’ and social philanthropist, and outfitted with the expertise and ingenuity of Berkshire Hathaway’s own BH Energy, Mr. Buffett is uniquely poised to lead the world in the construction of a clean energy future. In this season of Advent, we patiently wait for Mr. Buffett to take up the call.

Berkshire Hathaway • Shareholder Proposal
Resolution Requesting Divestment of Investments in Fossil-Fuel Companies

WHEREAS: Climate scientists assert with near unanimity that climate changes caused primarily by greenhouse gas emissions pose an existential threat to civilization. The ubiquitous burning of fossil fuels and their infrastructures must now be radically curtailed within a few short years to prevent the worst of possible consequences of climate changes.

AND WHEREAS: Many investors and advisers warn of large future losses by companies in the fossil fuel industry. The risks of stranded fossil-fuel assets, regulatory action, carbon pricing, litigation, and investor flight have many corporate executives rethinking the value of fossil fuel investments. Recently, Earth Institute Director Jeffrey Sachs urged institutional investors to exercise their fiduciary responsibility to reduce the risk of losses via fossil fuel divestment.

AND WHEREAS: BH and subsidiaries hold considerable investments in fossil-fuel companies, including Phillips 66 and Suncor Energy.

BE IT RESOLVED: Shareholders require that BH divest its holdings in fossil-fuel companies within 12 years to protect its investment portfolio from financial losses.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT:
Originating on college campuses in 2011, the movement to divest from fossil fuels has become the fastest growing divestment movement in history. By September 2016, 595 institutions—including pension funds, foundations, and university endowments—and tens of thousands of individuals have divested $3.4 trillion in assets worldwide from fossil fuels.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a fortune that originated from the company that became ExxonMobil, began divesting fossil fuels in 2014. By the end of 2015, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had followed suit and sold all its holdings in ExxonMobil and BP. In 2015 as well, the London-based Guardian Media Group announced it would sell all the fossil fuel assets in its investment fund. GMG chair Neil Berkett stated that the decision was based on both financial and ethical grounds as fossil fuel assets had performed relatively poorly in recent years and were threatened by future climate change action: “This means we can adopt socially responsible investment criteria without putting at risk [GMG’s] core purpose… to generate long-term returns.”

Major corporations are also beginning to divest. In 2015, insurance giant AXA announced plans to sell €500 million of coal assets. AXA CEO Henri de Castries: “It is our responsibility, as a long-term investor, to consider carbon as a risk and to accompany the global energy transition… Divesting from coal contributes both to de-risking our investment portfolios and to building better alignment with AXA’s corporate responsibility strategy to build a stronger, safer and more sustainable society.”
Climate Change & National Security

by Marilyn McNabb

The Honorable Dennis McGinn, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and the Environment, was the keynote speaker at the Nebraska League of Conservation Voters’ Summit December 7th at Creighton University.

McGinn’s credentials include experience as a naval aviator, test pilot, aircraft carrier commanding officer, national security strategist and former commander of the U.S. Third Fleet before his retirement as a Vice Admiral. He has also served as President of the “American Council On Renewable Energy” and as International Security Senior Fellow at the Rocky Mountain Institute.

He began by asking his audience to think about climate security in context with energy, economic and environmental security, which are all, he said, inextricably linked and form the foundation of our national security.

The U.S. military, he said, already has a deep appreciation for the value of renewable energy. In Afghanistan, troops found that off-the-shelf solar panels fit in a backpack and worked as well as much heavier batteries to charge night vision and other devices. But these clean energy innovations, McGinn stressed, are reaching directly onto the battlefield and saving lives—reducing, for example, the need for diesel fuel convoys, which are often targeted and dangerous.

Petroleum and coal have been very important to building the country we are today, McGinn said, but in the last decades, we’ve discovered their downside—greenhouse gas that won’t go away overnight. We gain more security, he argued, if we reduce it faster. In April 2007, the Military Advisory Board of the Center for Naval Analysis reported that climate change is acting as a “threat multiplier.” “We’re seeing that now,” McGinn said. Political and military fault-lines occur where governments are fragile and stressed. Increased frequency of bad weather puts pressures on such governments to fail, fostering power vacuums and openings for terrorists.

The effects of climate change can be seen in this sixth year of drought in California and in the Hampton Roads area of the Virginia coast (Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News)—home to about 20 percent of the U.S. Navy and threatened by both sinking land and sea-level rise. Our need for resiliency, he stated, is shared by the navies of India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Indonesia. Our common enemy is climate change.

Clean energy, he drummed home, is good for the economy—creating jobs and an infrastructure that is not mortgaging our children’s future. There will be continuing opposition from the vested interests of fossil fuels, so we may not see leadership from the new Trump Administration unless advocates translate the problem into terms that are practical, not abstract, and explain the local benefits. McGinn did however describe the new nominee for Secretary of Defense, General Jim Mattis, as a “very thoughtful guy.” The outgoing Assistant Secretary also volunteered that he supports a revenue-neutral carbon tax.
Nuclear Weapons Modernization

Who Voted for It? Who Will Benefit from It?

The following article by Kevin Martin, President of Peace Action, the country’s largest grassroots peace and disarmament organization with more than 200,000 supporters nationwide, and Paul A. Olson, Professor Emeritus, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, was syndicated by Peace Voice in early December:

When General John Hyten recently assumed his post as the new head of U.S. Strategic Command, he and observers listed an array of possible threats to American and global security. Only one however—nuclear weapons—threatens all life on Earth. We should focus on that more intently than the others, especially with relations between the U.S. and Russia in the worst shape since the end of the Cold War.

Modernization is the focus that the Defense Department has proposed. However, more money to “modernize” (really overhaul and upgrade) every aspect of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, from weapons laboratories to warheads to planes, missiles and submarines, at a price tag of at least $1 trillion over three decades, is the wrong way to go.

What is striking is the astonishing sense of entitlement by the nuclear priesthood. Equally striking, looked at from voters’ and taxpayers’ point of view, is the lack of democracy. Nobody voted for this. No politicians ran on it. There was no public debate. Nobody asked whether this trillion-dollar expenditure was a priority over addressing childhood poverty (nearly one-third of U.S. children are poor according to a 2014 UNICEF report, a scandal in the richest country on Earth) or investing in repairing our crumbling infrastructure or building a sustainable, green economy.

‘Modernization’ sounds good. It should be called ‘The New Nuclear Arms Race Plan.’ Following the U.S., every other nuclear weapons state has announced its own ‘modernization’ scheme. So apart from the exorbitant cost for this dubious at best ‘priority,’ this whole project will make the U.S. and the world less secure, not more. It will thwart nuclear non-proliferation and fill the world with shiny new weapons.

So who will benefit? Certainly Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and the nuclear weapons contractors in other countries (and the politicians who rely on their campaign cash). Anyone else? Anyone? The children? The environment?

U.S. policy on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation seeks no end to arms races. Recently, the United States and its nuclear-armed allies France, Great Britain and Israel voted against a United Nations resolution establishing negotiations for a global nuclear weapons ban treaty similar to current global treaties on landmines, cluster munitions and chemical and biological weapons. Talks are slated to begin next year in the General Assembly after a positive vote by 123 nations two weeks ago. Among other nuclear states, North Korea voted in favor of the resolution, while India, Pakistan and China abstained.

Other aspects of U.S. foreign policy—NATO expansion to Russia’s borders; the ‘Asia-Pacific Pivot’ to focus more military assets in that region in order to contain China; provocative ‘missile defense’ deployments which are properly seen by potential adversaries as part of a first-strike posture; over 900 U.S. foreign military bases; and overwhelming conventional military superiority (the U.S. spends as much on the military as the next seven countries combined)—also help spur nuclear weapons proliferation and over-reliance by Russia and others.

President-elect Donald Trump is all in on the nuclear weapons modernization plan. However, he has consistently advocated better relations with Russia, and soon he and the new Congress will have many budgetary decisions to make, and it’s entirely possible other defense and domestic priorities will at least mitigate huge investments in the nuclear arsenal. Ten senators, led by Al Franken of Minnesota, have signed onto a resolution expressing concern about the costs of nuclear weapons modernization, or more properly, escalation, and congressional and public opposition is likely to grow.

Unlike nuclear modernization, the smart way forward is not rocket science. Instead of embarking on a plan we can’t afford and that makes our country and the world less safe, let us cancel nuclear modernization, challenge other countries to do the same, and invest in more life-affirming priorities. We can invest in diplomacy and international cooperation, as in the successful cases of the Iran nuclear agreement and the opening to Cuba, and get serious about leadership toward verifiable global nuclear disarmament. Recent polls show Americans want a more restrained, less militaristic and interventionist U.S. foreign policy. Nuclear weapons policy would be a great place to start.
Question of Palestine Will Challenge Trump

by David P. Forsythe
Emeritus University Professor and Charles J. Mach Distinguished Professor of Political Science at UNL

It will be fascinating to see if the depressing complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will change in any fundamental way in the coming four years with Donald Trump in the White House.

From the 1930s through the presidency of Barack Obama, the success of the Zionist movement in pushing for, creating and enlisting support for the state of Israel led to one of the more durable conflicts in world affairs. No one has been able to find the right formula for broad and durable peace on what is still officially called the “Question of Palestine.”

As European Jews fled anti-Semitism and then the Holocaust for immigration into British Palestine, politically aware local Arabs resisted with force. The British, having taken over the area after World War I from the relaxed administration of the Ottoman Empire, dithered by trying to placate both Zionists and Palestinian nationalists before London simply gave up. Israel was created through force of arms in 1948-1949, although mostly in keeping with U.N. recommendations. U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall urged President Harry Truman not to extend recognition to that part of the Palestinian community, believed in the past that a ‘two-state solution’ as recommended and endorsed by various United Nations bodies since 1947 was the best formula for peace. But this formula was greatly complicated by Israel’s victory in the 1967 war. Victory extended Israel’s control of territory further beyond the original partition lines recommended by the U.N. Since then, all Israeli governments have allowed the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank area which is universally considered Palestinian land (except for certain circles of opinion, mostly religious, in Israel).

Rejectionist Palestinians however, particularly Hamas in Gaza, played into the hands of hardline Israelis. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, no dove, decided to withdraw from control of Gaza in 2005, seeing such a move as necessary to preserve the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel. Hamas and its supporters then used their new relative freedom to launch indiscriminate attacks on the Israeli population. This resulted in a renewed Israeli determination not to cede further territory without ironclad security arrangements. Without doubt, the division of the Palestinian community into moderate and rejectionist factions, with Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank being more willing to negotiate peace with the Israelis than the Hamas leadership in Gaza, is a major stumbling block. Israel has zero motivation to make concessions to that part of the Palestinian community still bent on rolling back the Jewish state.

The Obama Administration, with Secretary of State John Kerry taking the public lead, manifested a policy toward this conundrum that was in reality very similar to past administrations of both political parties. It tried to make Israel feel secure with massive amounts of military aid, then criticized Israel’s settlement policy as inimical to peace prospects based on the two-state formula. Recently Washington abstained on a resolution at the U.N. Security Council criticizing settlements, which passed 14-0-1.

Israel’s governing coalition was incensed, as it had come to expect automatic U.S. support of most of its policies—at least at the U.N. The American Jewish community was divided, with many American Jews troubled by the ultra-conservative drift of Israeli politics and the continued hardship for Palestinians under Israeli military occupation since 1967. Leading Republicans were critical, there having been a considerable party realignment on these issues. Many Republican voters are Evangelical Christians who support Israel on theological grounds, seeing in Israel part of the New Testament prophecy about the Second Coming of Christ. There have always been Christian Zionists. Hence Israeli policies are now more likely to draw criticism from the New York Times in heavily Jewish New York City, and from “J Street,” a relatively new Jewish lobbying group, than from conservative Republicans with an eye on their domestic evangelical base in the deep South and greater Midwest.

Donald Trump has so far plunged into this morass of complex foreign policy and domestic political concerns with his usual brash style and lack of evidence of careful strategic thinking. (He has donated to settlement causes in the past, his Jewish son-in-law supports various Zionist causes, and his influential married daughter has converted to Judaism.) A move of the U.S. Embassy, now in Tel Aviv, to the hotly contested Jerusalem, and in general a full endorsement of virtually all Israeli policies, in the name of supporting a democratic ally, will likely lead to a series of short-term negatives—more local violence, easier recruiting for the likes of ISIS and al-Qaeda and other extremist Muslim groups, increased bitterness in Gaza,
more blaming of the U.S. for the cross-cutting instabilities of the region, etc.

He may very well get away with such a full embrace of controversial policies, however, at least in the short term. Egypt, Jordan and even Saudi Arabia seem not to care very much what Israel does to the Palestinians, being more concerned about Iran and ISIS and domestic threats to their own power. Egyptian cooperation with Israel results in sizable U.S. foreign assistance to Cairo. Syria has been devastated by civil war.

John Kerry followed the usual argument about Israel needing to rethink settlement expansion if it wanted to remain Jewish and democratic—the Arab birth rate being much higher than the Jewish one. But this argument assumes Israel might expand broadly into the West Bank but leave the Palestinians in place. A more likely scenario is that Israel will annex the settlement areas on relatively good ground in the West Bank, enabled by its superior power and counting on the full support of Trump, leaving Palestinians in the rest of the West Bank in disjointed enclaves on poor soil.

A few Palestinian activists may be expelled to Jordan. In March 2016, almost half of Israelis were in favor of expelling or transferring some Palestinians, according to the Pew research organization. It is doubtful that Israel would do today what it did in 1948, namely engage in ethnic cleansing on a sizable scale. Back in 1948, as Israeli authors have documented, the Zionists forced certain Palestinians out of their homes at gunpoint. They knew they could not have a viable Jewish state with Arab communities like Lydda at the center. So mainstream Zionist forces, not even the more extreme splinter groups, gave those local Arabs a choice—be killed or move out.

But 1948 is not 2017. Large-scale ethnic cleansing would offend the Europeans if not the Americans, and it would probably destabilize Jordan with whom Israel has reasonably good relations.

This leaves us with a deteriorating status quo in which few believe that a two-state solution is still viable. Hamas shows no signs of accepting the legitimacy of Israel. Netanyahu, ironically like the late Yasser Arafat on the Palestinian side, will take no risks for peace. The Israelis have the upper hand in terms of hard power. In the context of contemporary Israeli politics, Netanyahu is a moderate conservative who mainly wants to stay in power. The challenges to his staying in power come from the extremist far right, not the weak and disorganized left.

Donald Trump may learn a lot in the coming years. The most likely development if he gives Israel carte blanche support is limited Israeli territorial expansion, complete discrediting of the Palestinian authority under Abbas in the West Bank, and continued hostility with periodic violence in Gaza as encouraged by Iran and the other rejectionists. After more than a half century of mediation attempts and peace proposals, the Question of Palestine will either stay bad or get worse.

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.

Global warming is dangerous because it is a sneaky, slow-motion emergency, demanding that we acknowledge a reality centuries in the future with a system of individual, legal and diplomatic reaction that reacts in the past tense. Ken Caldeira, a researcher at Stanford University’s Carnegie Institute of Science, told Chelsea Harvey of the Washington Post. “The conclusion on page 13
The Dakota Access Pipeline

by Matthew Gregory

“Humble yourself” was what Wyatt Nelson heard while he was living and working in the encampment near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. The Standing Rock Sioux Nation and thousands of native and non-native allies are there to protest the Energy Transfer Partners’ Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). It was advice he said he took to heart during his time at what he said could best be described as a “Prayer Resistance Camp”.

The Seven Council Fires of the Sioux Nation, which represents all Sioux groups, has come together for the first time since 1876. “Finally, for the first time in history, over centuries, somebody is listening to us,” Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II told Democracy Now! “We’ve been talking about this for almost two years now... This pipeline... not only threatens our water, it threatens our heritage, it threatens our culture, it threatens our environment.”

DAPL would transfer fracked crude oil from the Bakken field in North Dakota southeast across that state and then through South Dakota and Iowa before joining with a pipeline in Illinois. The pipeline was originally supposed to go through Bismarck but the route was changed because of worries about water contamination. In a move that smacks of racism, the pipeline route was changed to go through sacred tribal lands as well as under the Missouri River.

As the track record of oil company pipelines shows, it’s not a matter of if a pipe will leak, it’s when and the Missouri is the source of drinking water for millions of people. Native Americans and activists—who refer to themselves as “Water Protectors”—have since the summer endured beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets, concussion grenades, attack dogs and water cannons in sub-freezing temperatures. Comparisons have been made to Birmingham, Alabama circa 1963. The camp has also had to deal with false reports being texted by the Emergency Alert Service, icy roads to maneuver, and an ever-growing waste problem.

Water Protectors claimed a cautious victory in early December when President Obama and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers rejected the permit to drill under the Missouri River on the grounds that an environmental impact statement was needed. The announcement came on the heels of the arrival of a delegation of veterans led by Wesley Clark Jr. (son of the retired general and 2004 presidential candidate). When North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple threatened to forcibly evict the thousands of peaceful Water Protectors, U.S. military veterans responded to a call from tribal elders to come defend the camp.

The delegation of over 2000 calling themselves “Veterans Stand for Standing Rock” traveled to the camp to form a human shield around the Water Protectors. Air Force veteran and Crete resident Bud Clouse was there when the announcement came that the pipeline permit had been denied. “I will never forget the energy, the drums, the singing. It was a

The Water Protectors at Standing Rock still need propane and money for supplies as needed but not clothes or food. Most of all, they need people (preferably with trucks or hauling vehicles) to help relocate camps Oceti Sakowin and Rosebud, which are on lower ground, to higher ground near camp Sacred Stone over the next month or two. The lower areas will flood in the spring when ice melts and may lead to river pollution if camps, supplies, donated items and garbage are not relocated or hauled away.

Oceti Sakowin Camp; Photo by: Leo Yankton

conclusion on page 13
This is an old Setswana proverb from Botswana that one repeats when someone is talking bad about the dead. I have been socialized that one should not speak evil about the dead. It is why I question the so-called ‘celebration’ of many Cuban Americans about Fidel Castro’s death 57 years after the 1959 revolution.

While most African countries had achieved their independence by the 1960s, a few southern Africa countries were still struggling to free themselves from their colonial masters up into the ’70s and ’80s. In both Angola and Mozambique, the South African apartheid regime and Portugal—one of the massive historical slave traders—fiercely opposed these independence struggles. There were indiscriminate killings of thousands of liberation fighters who merely wanted freedom from the chokehold these colonial powers were placing on their existence.

Cuba under the leadership of Fidel saw a way of aiding these nascent liberation movements in Africa. Many African countries lacked basic health care during and after their independence struggles. With one of the highest numbers of medical doctors in Central and South America, the Cuban government sent many of its doctors and health care workers to these nations in need. Small countries like Cuba and Sweden have in fact provided more aid to developing African countries than some of the world’s more powerful and wealthy nations.

For many wealthy Cubans who were dispossessed of their property during the 1960s and 70s, Fidel Castro was a dictator. As the old saying goes though, one man’s meat is another man’s poison. While admittedly deprived of some political rights, Cubans enjoy one of the highest literacy rates in the world and free and universal health care.

In the United States, where the media is controlled by the rich and powerful, too many are spoon-fed the lies and propaganda of the ruling class. The United States has a long history of supporting the wrong foreign leaders for capitalist reasons. This appalling pattern is detailed in Eduardo Galeano’s book, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*.

Many countries in Central and South America are in their current condition because of this legacy of oppression and exploitation by the United States and its western allies. Half a world away, during the U.S. invasion we call the Vietnam War, it is reported that anywhere from one to four million civilians were killed. It was a wasteful war of American lives and tax dollars that finally caught up to the long and wrong militaristic mentality in this country. This country, in its original bloodthirst and greed, was built on the enslavement of African people and decimation of the indigenous Indian population, followed by overseas wars, the creation of a military-industrial complex and the global peddling of the weapons of war. Meanwhile, the media elite and its apologists celebrate the death of Fidel Castro who many, worldwide, consider a friend and hero in their quest for liberation.

Some years ago, I attended a local community meeting to hear a visiting delegation from Cuba. Local Cuban immigrants also attended the meeting. What was supposed to be an exchange of ideas on the conditions in Cuba became a shouting match between the local Cuban immigrants and the visitors. I was turned off by the Cuban immigrants because they were so rude and illogical in making their voices heard. It was not just their shrill voices, but the lack of common courtesy and refusal to exchange ideas.

I never forgot those voices. Years later when visiting with an African American who was from Miami, I asked her about the relationship between Cubans and African Americans in Miami.

The media elite and its apologists celebrate the death of Fidel Castro who many, worldwide, consider a friend and hero in their quest for liberation.
Pete Ricketts and the End of Nebraska’s Nonpartisan Dream

by Sally Herrin

Conservative pundit Ann Coulter may have said it most affectingly, on Washington Journal last October. A certain congressman, she said, “…is living proof of what all Americans are discovering now… I’ve never seen my own party, my ex-Republican Party, exposed as just the party of the powerful. And it isn’t the Republican Party and the Democratic Party anymore. It is the ruling class against the American people.” Her dismay was touching, fresh grief compared to my own shopworn rage and despair over the class war, and the appropriation of America’s loyal opposition party by pirates, yahoos and other human tire fires.

Coulter was talking about Paul Ryan, but her words might be meant for Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, the man who would take the ‘non’ out of nonpartisan. Ricketts stood there in The People’s House, on January 9, 2017, a grinning Mr. Clean wrapped in the flag tattoos sloughed from a sailor’s burned arms at Pearl Harbor. Ricketts spoke of true grit and invoked the nonpartisan Unicameral. That man has a lot of gall.

In the 2016 primary, Ricketts allied with the Koch brothers and worked to remove five troublesome state senators from the Unicameral. Two Democrats were targeted and three moderate Republicans. The five were outspent five times over at least—each—including secret money from sympathetic donors, up to $300,000 from the Nebraska GOP and $50,000 from Ricketts himself. At the 2016 state GOP convention, Ricketts called out Republican senators by name for failing to vote with him. Medicaid expansion and Nebraska’s split electoral vote are surely the sort of issues where people of conscience may in good faith disagree. But the Governor insists on loading the legislature with “platform Republicans”—his phrase—who will prioritize the agenda of the partisan radical right, somewhere between the Tea Party and Donald Trump.

Clearly, Ricketts and the Koch brothers hope to do for Nebraska what Governor Sam Brownback did for Kansas. In 2012, Brownback led and the Koch brothers bankrolled a purge of Democrats and moderate Republicans from the Kansas legislature. After the stitched-up election was done and dusted, Brownback rammmed through a series of large and irresponsible tax cuts for the wealthiest. Today, Kansas has a record budget deficit, a sluggish economy and some of the poorest public schools in the country.

Ricketts and the Koch brothers hope to do for Nebraska what Governor Sam Brownback did for Kansas. In 2012, Brownback led and the Kochs bankrolled a purge of Democrats and moderate Republicans from the Kansas legislature.

In June 2016, 13 Nebraska state senators issued a statement: “Governor Ricketts believes political party trumps principle…Our nonpartisan, unicameral legislature has lasted for 80 years, and, barring the will of the people for a new legislative experiment, we will not surrender our nonpartisan and constitutional duties.” The group included five Republicans, and quoted Unicameral founder George Norris, the Progressive Republican who fathered the Unicameral: “Qualifications, not politics, should be the criterion for public service.”

One just-defeated Nebraska state senator, Al Davis, recently shared on Facebook some observations from former colleague Senator Roy Baker (District #30) on unsettling trends in the Nebraska Legislature. “It is concerning that secret meetings are taking place outside the building to decide who will lead specific committees and who should be marginalized because they didn’t kowtow to the organizers of these meetings. Roy is a man of integrity. He is honest, trustworthy, intelligent, and works for his constituents. Just what George Norris had in mind when he designed the nonpartisan Nebraska Legislature,” Davis posted.

Baker writes: “We are seeing the full impact of term limits in the Unicameral. Seventeen new Senators were sworn in… Of the 49 Senators, only 14 have four or more years of experience in the Legislature… This year, a crack has appeared in George Norris’ legacy. It appears that 27 ‘like-minded’ Senators held private meetings prior to the session for the purpose of creating a bloc of votes. I am told that the bloc coordinated voting instructions for the new Senators who were part of the group, with a predetermined slate for each leadership position.”

Baker cites Norris’ belief that a nonpartisan unicameral body would allow Nebraska senators to base their actions on the needs of the districts they represent and their own convictions, rather than on party platforms. “Our congress in Washington D.C. seems to function not as citizen representatives together solving the country’s problems, but as an ongoing battle between the political parties,” Baker writes. “It is my fond hope that the Nebraska Legislature will not fall into the same pattern.”

Even a stopped clock is right twice a day. In fairness I have to thank Governor Ricketts for promoting a better way to value agricultural land, a change long overdue for Nebraska. That said, I fear that Pete Ricketts is no Warren Buffet, and Donald Trump is no new FDR. No class traitors at the head table today. Like the country, Nebraska is having the Ann Coulter experience, and the truth hurts.
What We Have Been Up To, conclusion

in five hours. Some went back after the shift change to register more workers who did not have time to complete a voter registration form during their break. Yolanda has been the chapter’s best entry to work with the Grand Island-area Latino population. The Grand Island Chapter also remains active in the LGBT cause, where it is supporting a PFLAG organization with up to 15 people attending, plus Hastings and Kearney LGBT groups.

Climate Change:

Nebraskan for Peace will again have a resolution before the Berkshire Hathaway Annual Shareholders Meeting asking the company to divest from the fossil fuel industry to help head off climate change. A resolution on this topic received worldwide publicity last year. At the state level, Senator Ken Haar (who has worked closely with NFP), Senator Tyson Larson and other legislators have endorsed statewide planning for climate change, including “improving efficiency in transportation and irrigation as well as increased development of renewable energy… study of carbon and methane capture, next-generation nuclear technology and smart grid systems” and “changes to how the Nebraska Environmental Trust awards monetary grants.” The committee supports possible “pieces of future legislation, including financing of energy-efficiency improvements to more homes,” authorization of “self-driving vehicles, wind-friendly counties and virtual net metering, a strategy for encouraging development of solar projects.” Additionally, NFP is working with the Center for Rural Affairs on a grant to establish a statewide food policy council in the face of climate change.

Nuclear Disarmament:

Nebraskans for Peace has been working on opposing the trillion-dollar nuclear modernization plan that the current administration supports and the much more expensive nuclear plans that the new administration, with its love of a new arms race, will likely support. Our proposal for nuclear arms reduction has been translated into Japanese and circulated in Japan. In addition, we have off and on been in communication with Representative Fortenberry’s office on the nuclear threat. As the Lincoln Journal Star noted recently, “Fortenberry also has an eye cast on a special concern of his, the dangerous spread of nuclear weapons and increasingly loose talk about nuclear arms that should also be ‘a grievous concern not just for Americans, but for humanity’… Fortenberry, who is entering his seventh term as Nebraska’s 1st District congressman, is co-founder of the Congressional Nuclear Security Caucus.” NFP needs to continue to work with the congressman to encourage nuclear reductions. We are also distributing video material on the U.S.’s escalation of the nuclear and conventional arms race with China.

Other Issues:

We continue to work on military spending, hold vigils against our various wars and near-wars, oppose the death penalty, and work for justice in the Israeli-Palestine struggle. At the James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs, “Migration, Borders, and Identity: Building Bridges or Walls,” NFP provided speakers for two of the workshops: Tarek Abuata, made a presentation on “Palestinians in the Diaspora” and Batoul Rabaa and Izdehar Qaud led a workshop entitled “Getting to Know Our Muslim Neighbors.” Former state board member, Will Aviles, was a member of the planning committee for the conference. The Grand Island Chapter is looking at either a NFP Chapter in Kearney, or possibly a “Tri-City Chapter” instead of just the Grand Island group. At the last meeting of the chapter in Grand Island, it had representatives from both Kearney and Hasting who are showing some interest in these new developments. The article the Grand Island Chapter wrote for the Grand Island Independent, “Trying to Make Sense of Our Political System,” was published Dec. 15th and later published in the Kearney Hub through the efforts of our Kearney NFP folks working with Grand Island.

Tessa Foreman has a new Twitter account to monitor the Legislature in the new year and alert you to what’s happening.

Fidel, conclusion

She remarked that many of the Cubans were selfish and similar to other racists that we have in this country. I was shocked and saddened to hear that they were unlike the Cubans that I had come to know and helped resettle, when I was doing refugee work in this community.

We are experiencing challenging times across the world. People should grow up and learn that death is just that—death. We all have to pass from this existence into another state. The measure of a person for many of us is based on how that person helped enrich the lives of others. Castro is dead and he does not know who is weeping at his death or celebrating it. However, one would think instead of wasting time on the dead, adults would move on to work on more constructive activities that can produce results for the living.

We hear shrill voices of Cuban Americans whose families lost their wealth and smug positions because they supported Fulgencio Batista’s military dictatorship of the 1950s. We should not allow them to cloud our reality of a visionary man who helped so many Africans get rid of their colonial masters.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge that there were those who died unjustly at the hands of the Castro regime or had their property unfairly confiscated. In all great conflicts, there are thousands if not millions of innocent civilians who die as a result of collateral damage. If one examines the civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. authorities have lost count or don’t want an accurate count. But as we all well know, a whitewashed version of wars and struggles told by elites is not a true history of events. For the truth, we must also have the story of the oppressed. For 57 years, in the face of an unjust and punishing U.S. embargo on his country, Fidel sought to give the oppressed a voice.

And, as the late liberation fighter and Mozambique President Samora Machel used to say, “A luta continua” (The struggle continues).
What’s HOT, conclusion

legacy of what we’re doing over the next decades and the next centuries is really going to have a dramatic influence on this planet for many tens of thousands of years.”

In 2016, the atmospheric level of carbon dioxide breached 400 parts per million in all areas, at all seasons. Levels of methane and nitrous oxides, the two other principal greenhouse gases, also reached record levels by substantial margins. During 2015 and 2016, world temperatures, stoked by El Nino conditions, surged to a new record as well, above 2014’s previous high. “We’re moving into uncharted territory at a frightening speed,” said World Meteorological Organization Secretary General Michel Jarraud. Radiative forcing of these gases had increased 36 percent since 1990.

Donald Trump: “HOAX!”

The science is evident on this matter, but the mother-lode mode of thinking still enjoys something of a lock on the political rhetoric of the United States’ Republican Party. Witness the party’s 2016 nominee, Donald Trump, dismissing the entire body of evidence in one word (“Hoax!”), as he argued for increased mining of coal to restore jobs in an industry that even the capitalistic marketplace has decided is obsolete.

Because thermal inertia serves us with the impact of today’s carbon-dioxide emissions 50 to 150 years in the future, the geophysical system requires that we heed traditional ecological knowledge to anticipate the effects of our actions on the seventh generation. To do otherwise virtually guarantees that future generations will inherit a scorched, desolate world. The survival of human peoples, as well as the plants and animals upon which we depend, requires planning seven generations hence. This is not an optional luxury. This is basic survival behavior for a sustainable world—and, it goes without saying, one very important example of how indigenous ideas inform the thoughts and actions of everyone. Chief Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa Lakota said a century and a half ago: “Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.”

REFERENCES


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.

The Dakota Access Pipeline, conclusion

cautious, joyful moment. The moment was mixed with a happiness of a win but the reality that DAPL had ignored process and laws since the beginning and that corporations do as they will.”

Those skeptical of the victory were right to be ill at ease. Water Protectors told me that drilling is going on even though the permit has been rejected. Energy Transfer Partners would rather eat the cost of the fines than wait to drill. And on top of that, the environmental impact statement (EIS) hasn’t been started as of press time. According to Tribal Chair Archambault II, the immediate next step following the announcement of the permit rejection was for the Army Corps to publish a notice of intent to start the EIS in the Federal Register. “Doing so helps solidify the decision, setting in motion a thorough regulatory process, thus making it harder for a new administration to reverse.” It has not been published yet and it is unlikely that President Trump will do so.

The Standing Rock Sioux are part of the Great Sioux Nation and come in part from the Lakota nation. A Lakota prophecy warns of a black snake that will come to destroy the world. For so many of the Native Americans who came to Standing Rock, the pipeline was the black snake and the fight against it was a spiritual one. They have fought and won against tremendous odds and the struggle continues as it has over and over again for five hundred years. The odds were long for stopping TransCanada’s Keystone XL pipeline as well. Then as now, an unlikely alliance has come together to defeat a fossil infrastructure project with millions of dollars behind it. And as of now, they are winning. With the right mix of resistance, prayer, humility, cooperation and luck, Water Protectors might just slay the black snake yet.
It still threatens. Now we have a new neo-Fascist order in this country—an extension of the efforts to achieve a neo-Fascist order in McCarthyite America. As Wayne Barrett, Donald Trump’s biographer has noted that “[N]ext to Fred Trump, Roy Cohn [McCarthy’s side-kick] was the single greatest influence in Donald’s life.” As in 1933 Germany, and under the influence of McCarthyite forces, we have a candidate, created by hatred and receiving the minority of the votes, becoming leader through flukes in the electoral system.

Parvez Ahmed, in his blog for the Huffington Post for 03/07/2016, compares Trump’s way to the Fascist path and then argues:

“I am not alone (in calling Trump a Fascist). Famed journalist Carl Bernstein called Trump a neo-fascist pointing out, “I think the word neo is crucial because it means new and it’s a peculiarly American kind of fascism.” While there are important historical divergences between Trump and Hitler, the parallels in their policy choices and their extolling of authoritarianism ought to be concerning enough to venture where political discourse seldom should go.

Parvez speaks of Trump’s love of authority, his approval of torture, his indifference to income inequality, his playing on the fears and anxieties of ordinary people, and his using Mexicans, Muslims, women and those who oppose him as scapegoats, threatening to have his agents punch out opponents and promising riots if he does not get his way. As Ahmed remarks: “Nationalism, condescension towards human rights, use of scapegoats for a unifying cause, sexism, threats to free journalism, subordinating all other concerns for national security, fetish for police power, are some of the common traits of fascism. Trump check marks on all of them, albeit in a modern American context. “

As we go into a new presidency, we seem to face two unworkable 1933 alternatives: silent acquiesce to evil (the way of the intellectual in Hitler’s Germany) or increasingly violent demonstrations (the way of leftist anti-Nazi factions in the early 30s). Neither will work. Silence becomes approval. Violent demonstrations become excuses to call out the troops.

There are other paths but not all are good.

Recently I read a bundle of lists telling us of these other paths. For example, filmmaker Michael Moore tells us that we should

1. [Q]uickly and decisively form an opposition movement, the likes of which hasn’t been seen since the 1960s...
2. Prepare to impeach Trump...
3. [C]ommit right now to a vigorous fight (including civil disobedience, if necessary) that will block any and all Donald Trump Supreme Court nominees who do not meet our approval...
4. Demand the DNC apologize to Bernie Sanders for trying to fix the primaries against him, for spinning the press to ignore his historic campaign, for giving Clinton the questions in advance at the Flint debate, for its latent ageism and anti-Semitism in trying to turn voters against him because of his age or religious beliefs, and for its anti-democratic system of ‘super delegates’ who are elected by no one...
5. Demand that President Obama establish a special prosecutor to investigate who and what was behind FBI director James Comey’s illegal interference into the presidential election 11 days before the vote was held...
6. Begin a national push while it’s fresh in everyone’s mind for a constitutional amendment to fix our broken electoral system, including “eliminating the Electoral College” and other measures to assure fair elections with near 100 percent citizen participation.

Moore’s list is okay. What it and like lists ignore is that Donald Trump was elected by nearly half of America, including most of Nebraska. He is not the sole problem. The half is also, and they had reasons to vote as they did. But we too are the problem.

The Trump populace is concentrated in the rust belt, the South, and the Great Plains/Midwest where Hillary did not

Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

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campaign hard save in Florida and North Carolina. When these suffered severe economic and cultural decline, the Democratic Party failed them. Promulgating a mantra of globalization and ‘Free Trade,’ and staking our political fortunes predominantly on identity politics and the expansion of social rights, the party stood by while most of the economic rewards flowed to the 1 percent. People, whatever their identity, want to feed their kids and have a decent house. In 2017 America, about half of our people can’t do that.

The Party of Roosevelt has, accordingly, lost its base in labor and rural America—as labor unions have found themselves naked before the power of large corporations (union membership having slipped from a high in the 1950s of about one third of our workers to 10.8 percent in 2013), and as the subsidy and crop insurance system has assured a gross competitive advantage to large farms (with small farms having all but disappeared together with the many thriving small towns that once had a multipurpose retail district, a thriving culture and a local school). Economic changes have left small town America with a decrepit bar/restaurant, a dwindling church and a Kwikshop. Exorbitant student fees have assured that rural and laboring class students graduating from college are in debt bondage and cannot go home to find work. Meanwhile rural and rust belt people receive condescension as hicks and dummies from us, the putative ‘progressives.’ They have left us for the seemingly greener emotional pastures of Fox News and Rush Limbaugh.

We have to talk anew with rural and blue-collar people, or they will vote for Donald Trumps again and again. We have to create policies that work for them, and so tear away a portion of that rural and blue-collar constituency from revanchist movements. Obama did when he won some red states that Hillary lost and kept some normally blue rust-belt ones that she also lost. We have to educate ourselves and create policies on rural and blue-collar issues, on what the Constitution says to protect them, on what our international situation really is, on what peace-creating trade and environmental policies could mean to workers and farmers, and on what our military policies cost them.

Everywhere we have to create policies in which they have a voice and a stake: a Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of rural America that takes away the millions in subsidies or crop insurance from corporate and mega farms and invests it in real rural and small town development… a reduction in military spending that pays for rural clean energy and infrastructure… and a bill of rights for labor that undoes the miserable legislation against unions from Taft-Hartley down. If we do not fight for our own, they will bite us—hard. Meanwhile we have to do the usual—defy bigotry, create multi-cultural coalitions with farmers and labor, refuse to bow to authoritarians and say ‘no’ to Big Brother.

Say it: “No, Big Brother.”

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Speaking Our Peace

by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Did We Lose the Second World War in the 2016 Election?

In 1949, at 16, I went to the first ‘festival’ at Aspen, Colorado—a celebration of the German poet, Goethe. Because I and my parents were poor, I hitchhiked partway, and stayed in primitive dormitories in an Aspen still mostly leftover mining town, not posh billionaire’s island. The festival was a collection of the most prestigious intellectual leaders in the humanities in Europe and America, especially persons interested in Goethe, but also people interested in the post-war reconstruction of Europe and the responsibilities of the knowledgeable person in society. I went to hear the theologian and doctor Albert Schweitzer because of his anti-war writings, his research on Bach, Jesus and Paul, and his “reverence for life” ideal. I can’t remember much of his lecture save his great height, his kind face, and his apparent physical strength in old age. Yet, though Schweitzer was impressive, the festival’s most memorable thing were the European intellectuals who came to the podium, metaphorically beating their breasts and confessing that, while Fascism and Nazism rose in the streets of Europe, they sat in the ivory towers of disinterested intellectual work, ignoring the demise of freedom and the rise of barbarism.

I resolved there to fight the fight they had lost. At that time, McCarthy-ism—with its twin persecutors, Roy Cohn and David Shine—was upon us, and its pseudo-patriotic repression of free thought threatened.

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