It’s not just ‘Guns vs. Butter’

Does our massive military spending really make us safer?

by Kevin Martin

President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement is not just a disaster for addressing climate change, it is also detrimental to world peace. The Pentagon long ago determined climate change and its effects such as famine and drought help drive armed conflict—and are major factors in current wars in Africa and the Middle East.

Similarly, the president claims to be making progress on Middle East peace, yet honchoed a $110 billion weapons sale to Saudi Arabia, which uses U.S. armaments in the horrific war in Yemen. (The conflict there has the country on the brink of famine.) Either the president can’t connect these dots, or he is selling short-term extractive industries’ and weapons corporations’ interests as ‘American’ interests, when we need longer-term sustainability and peace in the U.S. and the global community.

More broadly, it’s a great time to ask if the government is investing our hard-earned tax dollars in the right priorities to make the U.S. and the world more secure. Do more bombs, guns, warships and missiles actually make us safer?

Most people would probably answer ‘yes’ to that question. However, the state of the world tells us otherwise. Trump proposed a Pentagon budget increase of $54 billion, which is more than the entire annual military budget of Russia or the UK. The U.S. accounts for about 40 percent of global military expenditures at over $600 billion per year, maintaining over 800 foreign military bases, the most sophisticated conventional military hardware ever created, and nearly 7,000 nuclear weapons.

A nuclear ‘modernization’ program begun under President Obama aims to spend at least $1 trillion over the next three decades to completely upgrade and overhaul the entire U.S. nuclear weapons complex. Predictably, every other nuclear state has followed suit, announcing their own nuclear modernization plans, so this should properly be dubbed “The New Arms Race.”

Russia has for some time been more—rather than less—dependent on nuclear weapons for its security, and North Korea, sadly but predictably, sees its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent to the overwhelming military, economic and political power of the U.S./South Korea/Japan alliance. So it’s fair to ask if U.S. nuclear and conventional superiority encourages rather than deters nuclear proliferation, making Americans and the whole world less safe.

It isn’t just Russia and North Korea who maddeningly defy U.S. objectives in the world, but also various governments...
and armed movements in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and many other countries, as a cursory scan of the daily headlines shows us. Is adding even more military might supposed to magically change this equation? How will more nukes or submarines help defeat ISIS or al Qaeda?

At the same time as Trump proposes to add to Pentagon bloat (the Pentagon admits to having lost tens of billions of dollars and has never passed an audit), he advocates slashing spending on human needs in our communities and environmental programs. In the international security realm, his budget also guts funding for the State Department, United Nations World Food Program and U.S. Agency for International Development. These programs provide life-saving food and medical supplies to impoverished and war-torn countries, making the job of the U.S. military more difficult and more effective at resolving conflict than building up and utilizing our considerable conventional wisdom that more guns will make us safer, and more effective at resolving conflict than building up and utilizing our considerable military might.

With the new, pro-diplomacy government of President Moon Jae-in in South Korea, Trump should support a peace deal with North Korea. Trump needn’t even take the lead on this; he could simply state his support for President Moon’s efforts to revive the “sunshine policy” toward the North.

As President Trump has admitted, some issues are more complicated than he thought when he took office. Korea isn’t necessarily as thorny as most think. China has proposed (and Pyongyang signaled support) for a freeze on North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs in exchange for a halt to U.S./South Korea war games.

In the words of Winston Churchill, ‘jaw jaw’ is better than ‘war war.’ Both Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Vice President Mike Pence have stated that “all options are on the table” (which includes using nuclear weapons) regarding North Korea, except the only good one: diplomacy. If Trump wants to live up to his maverick reputation, he should ignore the conventional wisdom that more guns will make us safer, and invest in smart, tough negotiations instead.

Kevin Martin is President of Peace Action and Peace Action Education Fund, www.peace-action.org. Based just outside Washington, D.C., Peace Action is the country’s largest grassroots peace and disarmament organization with 200,000 supporters nationwide, including affiliate member Nebraskans for Peace. Martin was in Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island June 10–12 for events sponsored by NFP and other local organizations.
Thank you! Many Nebraskans for Peace supporters really came through and responded to our request in the last Nebraska Report. We asked you to contact your members of Congress (MOC) to urge them to take action on climate change. Your many calls and emails helped us have very productive meetings with Nebraska’s MOC and their staff. Ten Nebraskans were in the Capitol to lobby Congress for Citizens’ Climate Lobby’s (CCL) Carbon Fee and Dividend (CF&D) bill. From all ten of us: Thank you for your timely action on this urgent issue.

I am grateful to NFP supporters who made special donations to pay for my trip to attend CCL’s annual conference. Your financial support for the work we are doing is critical. It made this trip possible.

While in D.C., we had meetings with all of our MOC and/or their staff. They asked us a lot of very good questions and made comments to help us understand their positions on this issue. One of the things we learned is they need to hear from a lot more people and how we care about this issue.

We need to find more business and community leaders to support us as well. This will help us build the political will that is needed. If you own a business, are an elected official or are a leader or member of an organization of any kind, please contact me so we can talk about different ways you could help.

Your calls and emails and our lobbying work during the conference seems to have also helped with a recent vote in the House of Representatives. On Thursday, July 14, 2017, Representatives Don Bacon and Jeff Fortenberry both voted to kill a bad amendment to a bill. The amendment would have stripped all references to climate change from the measure. Because of 46 Republicans voting NO on the amendment—including Bacon and Fortenberry—the bill still contains good language on climate change. CCL’s leader, Mark Reynolds, said:

With the defeat of this opposing amendment, the original one from Rep. Langevin still stands. “This amendment is a responsible first step in recognizing what most of the world already knows—that climate change is real, and it will have a devastating effect on the readiness of our armed forces,” Rep. Langevin said in a statement. Indeed, Trump’s Navy secretary nominee Richard V. Spencer told the House Armed Services Committee this week, “The Navy is totally aware of rising water issues, storm issues, etc.” (You can read more about it here: http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/341447-trump-navy-secretary-nominee-climate-change-is-real-poses-a-threat.)

Everyone who attended the conference continues to work by setting up meetings ‘back home’ with our MOC to discuss CCL’s Carbon Fee and Dividend and build good relationships with them and their staff.

I can’t emphasize enough how important it is for you to help in this effort. Please continue to contact your MOC whenever you read or hear a story relating to climate change. If you want to learn how to become more involved, please call me at 402-453-0776.
by Sally Herrin

Not in my backyard. This expression signifies opposition by stakeholders to local habitation for something valuable, even necessary, but deemed unpleasant, threatening, even dangerous. Many residential neighborhoods, for example, resist certain new neighbors as undesirable: group homes for people living with mental disabilities, halfway houses for addicts, teens and ex-convicts fresh from prison and, back in the day, hospices for gay men suffering from AIDS. Build it, yes, these citizens say, just not in my backyard. This reaction is so widespread and so reliable among human beings, it even has an acronym: NIMBY.

At one extreme, NIMBY creates stratified societies like the caste system in India and deeply segregated cities in much of the U.S. Yes, the blacks and the Mexicans and the poor have to live somewhere, but… I greatly suspect this reflex is very old. At its root is ‘stranger’ fear and, superstitious or not, the fear of contagion. Easier to empathize with folks who resist not just personal economic loss (If you build that recycling center here, my property value will decline), but serious threats to health and quality of life from new neighbors like large hog confinements and chicken processing plants.

According to the July 8, 2017, New York Times, “The pushback against renewable energy has been years in the making.”

In 2012-13, the largest investor-owned U.S. electric companies—through their mouthpiece, “The Edison Institute”—declared that the power industry was in danger of “being sucked into… a ‘utility death spiral.’” As consumers increasingly opt off the grid, the utilities foresee, the costs of running conventional coal, oil, gas or nuclear power plants will be shared among an ever-smaller customer base. “That could cause rates to spike, chasing even more customers away… [As more people] fully exit… from the grid,” the group said, the industry faces “irreparable damages to revenues and growth.”

Utility lobbyists argue that credits for rooftop solar panels lead to higher rates for other customers. Solar production allows some homeowners to “avoid paying for use of the grid, even though they use it almost constantly to buy or sell electricity,” was one talking point prepared by lobbyists and circulated among Republican state legislators in Indiana. (Note: Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory released a study in 2017 concluding effects of rooftop solar credits on electricity rates for non-solar customers would be “negligible for the vast majority of states and utilities” for any foreseeable future.)
Not all concerns about solar energy installations are so self-serving. In Lincoln, Nebraska, some Capitol Beach residents are concerned about proposed solar arrays—built by a group of homeowners—and the effect on the lake’s relict saline wetlands, which are certainly both precious and rare. According to the *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 29, 2017, the proposed 300-panel installation at Capitol Beach, set on an unbuildable lot near I-80 owned by the neighborhood association, would generate 100KW. Though about 70 LES customers own small solar systems, Capitol Beach would be the first ‘community solar’ project in Lincoln. On July 7, the *LJS* reported that the Lower Platte South NRD, the Army Corps of Engineers, and other regulators had reviewed the plan and concluded the installation would not create environmental problems related to flooding or habitat for endangered Salt Creek tiger beetles. Still, staff from Nebraska Game and Parks Commission recommends the panels be moved to the north to avoid the Category 1 wetlands.

While Nebraska is about 5th among the 50 states in wind energy potential, we rank just 18th in development. A half century of failed export-oriented farm policy has driven two thirds of U.S. agricultural producers out of business, and current trade rules are killing what’s left of crop and livestock operators with cheap imported competition. In the first years of this century, a Nebraska wind task force identified barriers to wind energy development, with a view to bolstering the Nebraska economy which is heavily based on agriculture. Progressive ag groups like American Corn Growers Foundation and Nebraska Farmers Union have worked to promote wind development in rural communities to improve the rural economy, and I was privileged to be part of these efforts. So I personally find it very tough to stomach NIMBY arguments against wind energy production.

In 2015, the Lancaster County Board passed restrictions to “prohibit wind turbines from generating more than 40 decibels of noise during the day—about what’s generated by a household refrigerator—as measured at nearby residences…” Currently, 50 decibels is recognized as a standard noise limit by several Nebraska counties,” according to the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Wind energy advocates say opponents use ‘fear mongering’ about possible health effects of ‘swishing’ noise and blinking lights, even of ‘flicker’ from blades at dawn and dusk.

State Senator Ken Haar offered evidence to the board, maps showing that a 40-decibel standard rules out commercial wind farms in Lancaster County. Setbacks required from residences would cost hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars in potential tax revenue lost and land lease payments as well. It is in the interest of everyone to move to clean, renewable

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My Reflections on the Interfaith Peace-Builders Trip to East Jerusalem and West Bank, May 2017

by Sharon Conlon

Before I left on this trip to East Jerusalem and the West Bank, someone asked me if I would be presented a balanced view. ‘Balanced’ is a code (tip-off) that a person is unaware (clueless) of the Apartheid here. Hearing and seeing the illogical, erratic, arbitrary racial discrimination of the Occupation, it is difficult indeed to have a ‘balanced’ discussion.

Our delegation of 31 people traveled in East Jerusalem, Yaffa & Tel Aviv, Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Naqab and their surrounding areas. We talked to Palestinians, Israelis and numbers of organizations and saw the Apartheid system of government here. There are so many injustices, the few I mention are only a small fraction of an institutional system that is not held accountable… The Bedouin woman who had her 300 sheep poisoned by settlers (colonizers)… We stayed in two refugee camps where they only get municipal water every two weeks, sometimes only once a month, so they must buy private water at exorbitant prices… Our Hebron guide couldn’t walk some of the same streets with us… The YMCA counselors who treat children for PTSD because they are ripped from their homes in the middle of the night and ill-treated from the moment of arrest, then detained in Israeli prisons for anywhere from 3-12 months. These arrests and rearrests affect everyone in the community.

Biblical Judaism is not the same as Political Zionism. The first is a religion, the second a land grab to create a Jewish (religious nationalist) state. Zionism uses Judaism to further its goals. Zionism is about control and the legalization of terrorism against the Palestinian people; it is not about religion. Seen on a t-shirt, “Occupation Is Not Our Judaism.” Anti-Zionism is not the same as Anti-Semitism (Palestinians are also Semitic). Zionism is a strategic, systematic colonizing plan by the Israeli government to ‘maximize land and minimize Palestinians.’ It is called the “Silent Transfer.” They make the lives of Palestinians so miserable and intolerable that they will voluntarily leave.

“The Wall” here is OBSCENE! Six hundred miles, and more to come (85 percent of it in occupied territory). It is one wall, making two prisons. You may be adamant about not funding Trump’s Mexican border wall, but your tax dollars have underwritten this one.

Everything in this country is based on racial profiling. If you are a Jew (the desired population) coming from anywhere in the world, you set foot here, and you are a full citizen with every privilege and right. With NO constitution, the indigenous Palestinians are second-class citizens. The legislature makes laws that are illegal by international standards. Israelis can violate Palestinian rights with impunity: steal land; demolish houses; destroy people’s livelihoods; imprison with no charges or trial and it’s renewable indefinitely (called administrative detention); the list goes on.

There are way too many 18- and 19-year-olds walking around with
M16s, even at city bus stops. The U.S. gives Israel 10.2 million dollars A DAY in military aid! ($38 billion over the next 10 years—a 20 percent increase from previous U.S. aid agreements of $3.1 billion annually.) This is the most military aid given to any country in our history (even while Israel continues to expand the illegal Jewish settlements). That spending is evident everywhere: soldiers, surveillance cameras, watchtowers, nearly 600 checkpoints, fighter jets or drones flying over us, electric fences and unseen sophisticated technology. **When you are over-militarized, you don’t have to think about peace.**

The laws are applied by nationality. Only Palestinians are tried in military courts, where a military officer, writes and signs the laws and there is no oversight. (Jews are tried in civilian court where the laws meet international standards and Israelis have rights and protections). Israel is the only country in the world that systematically prosecutes between 500 and 700 children in a military court system each year. With every encounter with a soldier you know your place—who has the power—and you are at the mercy of their mood that day. As a Palestinian, you can get up to a one-year sentence for insulting the honor of a soldier.

Checkpoints suck. We went through Qualandia Checkpoint, it is time-consuming, inconvenient (putting it mildly), unpredictable and humiliating. It is a hundred times worse than going through airport security. (Settler cars and buses zoom through.) Thousands of Palestinians go through a checkpoint to get to work every morning and have to do the same at night, always being suspect. You can easily be detained or sent back. Between the wall and checkpoints, you know you are not welcome in this country.

Everything here, living under Israeli military occupation, is about restriction and humiliation. I am a white privileged foreign visitor who can leave this Jim Crow country. I can’t say this softly: the government’s polices here disgust me. Everyday I have been filled rage at an illegal colonizing system that is not held accountable by anyone. They treat one set of people, the Jews, as superior to the ‘other.’ I could never forget which side I was on. If you are Palestinian, this is the land of a million cuts: cuts to your freedom of movement (within your own country); your future aspirations; your pride; your health access and education; your right to be innocent before proven guilty; even extrajudicial killing.

Palestinians’ main form of solidarity is nonviolent resistance. (Why do we have an expectation that Palestinians be nonviolent but we never hear that expectation of Israelis?) We listened to Omar Barghouti, founding member of the “Boycott, Divestment and Sanction” (BDS) movement. A nonviolent world effort against multinational corporations that are complicit in the settler-colonization, BDS’s goal is to pressure Israel to comply with international law. (Companies don’t do morality unless they are forced to.) It is a task of the world ‘to do no harm’ by withdrawing our cooperation. Israel has labeled the nonviolent BDS movement as a “threat” equivalent to the threat of Iran and also links it to anti-Semitism.

Whether one state or two states, the discussion is about basic human rights. I am impressed by the dignity and perseverance the Palestinians. They were so grateful that we took the trouble to come to them to hear their stories. And so very hopeful that we would go back to our countries and advocate for them. One Palestinian asked us to “take responsibility and please be faster so Palestinians do not die.”

I don’t know where this phrase comes from, “To be awake in a land of sleepwalkers,” but I ask you all to start waking up to the taxpayer-funded system of oppression and injustice that Americans are supporting in this country. Does Israel have a right to exist, yes. But a nation that practices Apartheid isn’t where our tax dollars should be going.

Consider going to “Palestine.” Go with a church group: Christian Peace-makers Team, Sabeel Witness Visits, Interfaith Peace Builders and others. I am not exaggerating to say that this trip was life-altering.
STOP THESE BUDGET PROPOSAL CHANGES:

Percent change in discretionary spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
<td>-31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Department</td>
<td>-29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>-21%</td>
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<td>Labor</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
<td>-20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Human Services</td>
<td>-16%</td>
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<td>Commerce</td>
<td>-16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>-13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing &amp; Urban Development</td>
<td>-12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>-12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>-6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasury</td>
<td>-4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASA</td>
<td>-1%</td>
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<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>+6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeland Security</td>
<td>+7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>+10%</td>
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A Fair Federal Budget Protects:

- Health care/health facilities for all.
- Sustainable ag and environment; stable climate.
- Worldwide peaceful security and development.
- Economic security and justice for all.
- The rights of voters, people of color, immigrants, and women.
- Affordable quality education and training

Ask Representatives Jeff Fortenberry, Don Bacon, Adrian Smith and Senators Ben Sasse and Deb Fischer for a fair budget. See Page 5 for contact info.

$52 billion increase in military spending paid for by $52 billion in cuts to domestic programs

Nebraskans for a Fair Federal Budget: Appleseed Center, Center for Rural Affairs, NAACP, NFP, NASW-Nebraska, Nebraska State AFL-CIO, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, Sacred Winds NFP, United Nations Assn.
Earth to President Donald Trump: you can’t wish away climate change by backing out of the Paris accord. Even as president, you can’t annul the laws of geophysics—in this case, that carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases retain heat in the atmosphere. Your denial will only make the problem worse, and history will judge you harshly, as scorched future generations wonder how such a monstrous loser could have become the single most powerful person on our unfortunate Earth. Climate change cannot be ‘canceled’ by ‘bubble-gum science.’ In two generations, people will be throwing rotten tomatoes at your portrait in the Greenhouse-Gas Museum.

Even today, coal is so out of date that even the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum is switching to solar power. The number of coal mining jobs peaked in 1948, roughly the year that “Sixteen Tons,” describing the life of a coal miner, hit the top of the pop-music charts: “Sixteen tons, what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt. Saint Peter don’t you call me, ‘cause I can’t go. I owe my life to the company store.”

Some of the power industry’s largest customers, including General Motors, Amazon.com and Microsoft, are planning to go 100 percent renewable as soon as power companies can provide it. These days, Donald, wind and solar are not only cleaner than coal. They are often cheaper, too—even in coal country. Twenty-three of the Fortune 500’s companies have pledged to eventually operate entirely on renewable energy, including Google, Wal-Mart, and the Bank of America. Wal-Mart has built its own wind turbine pilot project, at a distribution center in Red Bluff, Calif. Wal-Mart, Facebook, Hilton, Procter & Gamble, Marathon Petroleum, Amazon, Caesars Entertainment, DuPont, Marriott and Starbucks have told American Electric Power, parent of Appalachian Power, that they want more low-carbon energy.

“[I am] suggesting that the world’s most powerful leader might put the whole planet’s future at risk so that he can keep telling politically convenient lies.”

— Paul Krugman, New York Times

International and Starbucks have told American Electric Power, parent of Appalachian Power, that they want more low-carbon energy. JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, and Morgan Stanley by 2016 were refusing to provide financing for new coal-fired power plants and other support for the coal industry. “There are always going to be periods of boom and bust,” said Chiza Vitta, a metals and mining analyst with the credit rating firm Standard & Poor’s, told Michael
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NIMBY, CONCLUSION

energy, according to climate activist John Atkeison. “It’s disappointing because these restrictions are simply not necessary to protect safety and health,” said Jeffrey Wagner, who sought to build a wind farm near Hallam, Nebraska.

“There are plenty of areas across Nebraska where these industrial wind farms can be located without being an intrusion,” said Lincoln attorney Mark Hunzeker, representing the aggrieved neighbors. And there it is. Not in my [client’s] backyard.

I get it. People don’t want their pretty landscapes ‘spoiled’—people who work hard and pay good money for a nice acreage they can call home. People enjoy the delights of living “in the country,” as exurban development is often described, and are willing to pay extra and tolerate long commutes to do so. That such a lifestyle has a greater carbon footprint than many others is an ‘externality,’ a cost not covered by the immediate beneficiaries, but which does indeed get paid for by the rest of us.

Without doubt the greatest pushback against renewable energy has been the decades-long campaign by the petroleum industry against ethanol. Sadly, many on the left have bought Big Oil’s lies and anti-corn propaganda, though the ethanol industry has rescued the U.S. rural economy until very recently and is just about all that stands between this country and a farm crisis like no one living has yet seen. I am reminded of the scene in “Doctor Zhivago” where the doctor’s moral gap is exposed—he is willing to sacrifice the woman he loves for his principles. “Are you so fastidious?” the government official asks.

We have no more time. Climate change is here, in case you haven’t been outside lately. Lincoln just released a promising first draft environmental action plan, and of energy brought to market, LES will reach 50 percent renewables this year, and OPPD is on track to hit 40 percent in 2019. Nebraska is first nationally in Wind for Schools. But Nebraska is the only state in the nation which increased the use of coal over the past decade, and the rural electric associations and NPPD are much to blame. Are Nebraskans so fastidious that we cannot embrace solar, wind and biofuels because there are trade-offs? I for one would rather drive a car fueled by ethanol than an electric car that runs on burning coal.
Turn It Green

The increased rate of human activity has greatly affected the world and its climate. Some may say that humans don’t have much to do with global warming, but they’re just in denial. According to Dr. Harwood, a geologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, there was a steady rate of carbon dioxide emission up until the peak of humanity began. That rate then spiked, and the parts per million of carbon dioxide released have never been higher. There is a direct relationship between human activity and the increased rate of carbon dioxide emission. The human race can’t undo everything they’ve already done, but there are many simple things the average household can do in order to steer the environment back to its healthy self.

Promotion and education is something that needs to be improved in the area of environmental studies. The environment is something that I am very passionate about, as well as writing. In my future, I would like to become a more knowledgeable woman in the area of environmental studies or applied climate change, and translate that scientific information into something for the public to see and digest. The biggest issue with climate change today is denial. Many people ignore the fact that our Earth is indeed warming, and call it all a ‘hoax’. The science behind this clearly proves otherwise, and admitting the first step. By acknowledging climate change, people can become more aware about this issue and begin to make changes to their everyday lives. Some of these actions are as simple as recycling and turning traditional heating and cooling systems over to geothermal systems.

With the amount of science being conducted each day across the world, somebody is bound to find good alternatives for energy, transportation, household appliances, etc. In an article titled, “Power to the People” by William McKibben, many of these alternative options are explored, and in the end, he has a good proposal for a solution. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says “‘Typical’ annual CO2 emissions of 8,049 pounds per household based on national average monthly consumption of 5,583 cubic feet of gas.” (Household Emissions). That number can easily be decreased like simple things such as recycling. Recycling helps reduce pollution caused by waste. Many products are made with harmful chemicals that, when burned, release bad greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Recycling essentially takes the same amount of work as throwing trash away, except one must categorize it in a different bin. On top of recycling, many homeowners can make other small changes to turn their homes green.

Geothermal systems are environmentally friendly systems used for heating and cooling, and are actually much cheaper. These systems use renewable energy, which benefits the environment in many ways. Systems that use geothermal heating take thermal energy from below the ground, so as long as the Earth’s core burns, this way of heating will be around. Many people today use fossil fuels to run their heating and cooling systems, but once those resources are gone, they’re gone. A high percentage of energy used to heat or cool a house with geothermal energy is renewable. Not only do they use renewable energy, but they use clean energy.

The use of geothermal heating and cooling systems produces nearly very few emissions. Carbon dioxide emissions are one of the leading causes of global warming, and traditional systems also have the potential of releasing poisonous carbon monoxide. With geothermal systems, there is no fuel being burned so the risk of carbon monoxide is demolished. These systems are the first step to a greener world that we so desperately need.

Taking the step to install or purchase these systems is a success in itself. Right now, a lot of people are switching over to geothermal systems, but many still have traditional heating and cooling systems. The process of switching is definitely a benefit; it uses clean, renewable energy, and it costs less. There is no apparent reason why many homeowners should not switch to geothermal heating and cooling systems. Promotion and action are the first steps in creating a better world!

My dream would be to be able to promote these systems and help make sense of them to the public. By doing this, people could better understand the issue that we face today, and how crucial it is that action takes place. Many people could indeed still be skeptical, but if there is evidence to back up this dilemma, many people could come around and realize the effects of global warming.

Global warming isn’t going to slow down for the human race. The human race needs to become more active and aware in saving our environment. Whether that be done in one big step or baby steps, each action counts and, in the end, makes a difference. There’s only one planet Earth, and we best not take it for granted before it’s too late.
Dylan Miettinen
Elkhorn, NE
2nd Congressional District
Elkhorn High School
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

The Nebraskans for Peace priority with the largest personal connection for me is Priority #2, focused on Civil Rights and Economic Justice. I wish that there were a singular solution to all of the problems that plague disenfranchised minorities; however, I know that that is an unrealistic dream of mine. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I recognize the work yet to be done to ensure true equality. Although the LGBTQ+ community has made leaps and bounds in the past several decades, especially in recent years with the passage of marriage equality thanks to Obergefell v. Hodges, there is a necessity for an expansion of legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition, it’s of utmost importance that legislation be put in place to better race relations, abolish the death penalty, and diminish the taking advantage of minority populations, especially Native Americans.

I believe that the best way to further the resolution of these important issues is, first and foremost, education. For example, at a school and community level, I am a founder of Elkhorn’s Tolerance, Equality, and Acceptance (TEA) Club. The club’s aim is to, as stated in its bylaws, “create a judgement-free, safe environment for all students, (regardless of gender expression or sexuality), to develop a sense of school-wide acceptance, and to promote tolerance and acceptance of difference.” Each week, I facilitate lesson plans aimed at combating homophobia, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, or xenophobia. I believe that the highest result of education truly is tolerance. I have grown to see a greater sense of acceptance of differences fostered by my peers. One of my teachers recently said to me, “I think you’ve really changed the tone of this school.” I believe that similar approaches can be instated at all societal levels, with similar results.

Education must be delivered at every age level. Implementing more inclusive curriculum—for example, books written by authors from diverse backgrounds with an array of diverse characters—would increase the perceived notion that diversity and difference is the norm. Diverse guest speakers would do the same, and cement the truth that compassion, virtue, and personal difficulties are not things that are associated with a single race, sexuality, or gender identity; these themes are universal. This emphasis for inclusive education should only grow with education level.

However, I believe that the time frame most critical to personal growth and development is young adulthood. That is when political affiliations, biases, and prejudices are honed and refined by parents, educators, and media. At that point, inclusive education should be not just textual but should be more hands-on and interactive. For example, students should attend conferences and seminars, such as the Anti-Defamation League’s Prejudice-Elimination Workshop, that allow students to work alongside other youth to problem-solve by way of discussion and active listening.

It is far easier to construct worlds without walls and barriers from the ground up; it is far more difficult to break those barriers down. That being said, I believe that the largest obstacle for implementing positive change is persuading older generations, whose views may have been shaped by old-fashioned perspectives that may be now seen as prejudicial. It may be more difficult to have civil discussions with those who refuse to listen. For those stubborn individuals, I believe, it is easiest to sway beliefs when empathy can be at play. For example, an elderly person whose granddaughter is transgender may be more willing to accept LGBTQ+ individuals and protections for those peoples. A man who may volunteer at rehabilitation facilities or who participates in Alcoholics Anonymous may be more empathetic towards legislation aimed at protecting Native people afflicted with alcoholism, such as those on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation lured by the unethical and illegal alcohol distribution practices taking place in Whiteclay, Nebraska. An individual who lives in a predominantly black neighborhood may be more willing to have active dialogues about the importance and effects of race. Empathy grows with personal connection.

It may be nearly impossible to sway the opinions of those who have no personal affiliation with an issue. Creative solutions are possible, however. Education and seminars may be beneficial at retirement communities, populations who vote heavily. Contrastingly, utilization of social media has the power to impact younger generations. I hope to pursue a career in journalism, and, as such, I am cognizant of the role that media can have in shaping ideologies and, therefore, support or condemnation of certain legislation. The publishing of news stories that profile wrongly convicted death row inmates, the struggles of immigrants, and women who may be victims of rape or who choose the difficult decision to have an abortion may sway the beliefs of people with strongly held convictions. I also do not underestimate the power of cinematography. Documentaries and movies have the power to move mountains. Stories, whether the written word or visual tales, shed light on the truest forms of humanity and instill a sense of interconnectedness with its subjects with which readers or viewers can empathize.

My approach to reform of civil rights and economic justice is centered around education and empathy. In theory, my approach starts at the individual level and proliferates; this personal theory of acceptance is then reflected in legislation and tangible change. The largest obstacle is individual stubbornness and pride. In that sense, I believe that my approach is realistic in that it entails personal growth and simply going the extra mile. It involves talking, even if it is uncomfortable. In this case, conversations do, indeed, lead to change.
Aurora Fowler
Gibbon, NE
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Minden High School
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The Nebraskans for Peace priority I chose to write about is climate change. Of all the social issues facing our generation, climate change by far poses the greatest risk to the most people. No one will escape from the consequences of our warming planet, regardless of socioeconomic status. However, the most disadvantaged members of our society will be impacted the hardest as they will not have the resources to relocate or offset the negative impacts to their homes, businesses, and workplaces. It is out of these reasons and my own personal passion for combatting climate change on behalf of the planet’s biodiversity, that I would propose a neighborhood-based approach to change.

Despite the climate-denial rhetoric of our current president, I feel that most Americans believe that the burning of fossil fuels is having a catastrophic impact on our atmosphere and accelerating climate change. While most accept our role in climate change, most also feel helpless to make any impact. The issue feels too big and to change the current course of the climate feels like we would need to change everything we do. When we turn on the lights in the house or adjust the thermostat, we may think about where our energy comes from, but most of us don’t feel like we can change that.

The need for clean, renewable energy sources is great. Considerable investments in research, technology, and infrastructure have made renewable energy an achievable goal for our country. Yet, here at home, our public power provider, Nebraska Public Power District, set a meager goal of attaining 10 percent of the energy it distributes from renewable sources by 2020. Like many things in life, it is easy to be complacent and challenging to be an active force for change. My plan would take the opportunity for change into people’s homes among their friends and neighbors.

To activate the voter and consumer base in order to pressure Nebraska Public Power District to aggressively increase its renewable energy commitment, I propose a “Green Outlets Campaign.” The effort would be a grassroots, feel good, positive, community-based education and outreach effort. A coalition of organizations, agencies, and businesses would be created to build the foundation for the education campaign. At the heart of the effort would be a Green Outlets Campaign Host Kit. The cost of producing the kits would be underwritten by the coalition and possibly other private funders. These kits would contain everything a host would need to hold a Green Outlets Party at their home.

The ‘Green Out-Lets Party’ is a hosted social gathering of friends and neighbors to learn about renewable energy and how to activate to create a better future. Through the provided kit, the host would have access to a list of experts from organizations, agencies, and businesses who can attend Green Out-Lets Parties. The social gathering could be a backyard barbecue, a bridge club gathering, or a block party. At the party, participants can learn about three things: First they can get good information on how they can be a wise energy consumer. Second, they can learn about our public power company and their role as constituents of the elected officials on that board. Finally, they will learn about how to influence NPPD’s energy commitment. At the end of the party, the host would ask the guests to make a clean energy pledge by taking action and provide all the guests with a take-home packet that includes everything they need to activate. Included in the take-home packet would be green outlet covers that they can put up at home to signify their commitment to renewable energy sources.

The structure of the neighborhood party is one that has been used by many organizations and causes to dispense information and motivate change. It takes advantage of established networks to disseminate information and taps into the credibility we afford our friends to motivate us to join an effort. Some of the challenges of this structure is that in more economically depressed communities or neighborhoods, it may be challenging to find people willing to host parties. I think one way to overcome this obstacle is to partner with the faith community in the Green Out-Lets Party Campaign effort. Churches could easily host social gatherings, like carry-in dinners, for their members and the neighborhood. These would be places people felt comfortable in already. Many faith communities are already aligned closely with green movements. Houses of worship in the poorest neighborhoods often fill the role of being a place where people can get information, aid and counsel. This makes churches a good choice for hosting Green Outlets Parties.

I believe this approach to activating the voter base to pressure Nebraska Public Power District to increase their renewable energy commitment and cut out the coal would be effective. It has been complacency that has allowed our dependency on coal to continue. By creating an easy model to activate large numbers of people, I think we could see a significant shift away from complacency to action. My mom attended an information session about renewable energy hosted by the Sierra Club and a NPPD board member was there. She said while the session was really good, there were only a handful of people there. Everyone loves getting together with their friends and neighbors to enjoy good food, good conversation, and beautiful Nebraska evenings. What better way to get the word out and put a little peer pressure into the movement, than hosting a Green Out-Lets Party!
Corkery of the New York Times March 21, 2016. “But what is happening in coal is a downward shift that is permanent.”

Diane Cardwell and Clifford Krause reported in the New York Times that “Appalachian Power, the leading utility [in West Virginia], is quickly shifting toward natural gas and renewable sources like wind and solar, even as President Trump calls for a coal renaissance. Appalachian Power still burns plenty of coal, but in recent years it has closed three coal-fired plants and converted two others to gas, reducing its dependence on coal to 61 percent last year, down from 74 percent in 2012.”

It’s time to get with the program, Mr. President.

In Wyoming, where coal strip mining has long been a major industry, Black Hills Energy worked with Microsoft to develop wind energy for a major data center in Cheyenne. “I’ve not spoken to a single utility that’s truly holding onto a future of more coal,” Brian Janous, who directs energy strategy at Microsoft, told the New York Times. “They’re looking to attract, as in the Appalachian case, new customers, and those customers aren’t attracted by coal.”

Anyone who is taking policy advice from Trump should hear an anecdote relayed by New York Times columnist Paul Krugman: “Trump reportedly disdains exercise of any kind except golf. He believes that raising a sweat depletes the finite reserves of precious bodily fluids, I mean energy, that a person is born with, and should therefore be avoided. Many years of acting on this belief may or may not explain the weird and embarrassing scene at the G-7 summit in Taormina [during May 2017], in which six of the advanced world’s leaders strolled together a few hundred yards through the historic city, but Trump followed behind, driven in an electric golf cart.”

Coal is Economically Obsolete

Nicholas K. Akins, A.E.P.’s chief executive, told the Times that: “Shareholders are more interested in sustainability going forward and improvements from a climate change perspective and carbon emissions perspective… We are trying to make our company long-term sustainable regardless of administration.”

Even Trump’s chief economist Gary Cohn, chairman of the National Economic Council, believes that coal is past tense: as he said in May 2017, it “doesn’t really make that much sense anymore as a feedstock,” given the rapidly falling costs of cleaner energy sources like natural gas, wind and solar power. It’s not just dirty and (as a major contributor to global warming) a threat to the future of everything that lives on planet Earth. Coal is now also economically obsolete.

So, as Krugman so ably tells it: “I [am] suggesting that the world’s most powerful leader might put the whole planet’s future at risk so that he can keep telling politically convenient lies.”

Are you listening, Mr. President?

FURTHER READING


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

does not know what nation he protects when his faction sells our heritage for a mess of Moscow pottage.

‘Protecting’ is certainly this administration’s talk—protecting us from foreign trade, from immigrants, from the fake media, and from Muslims. The protection usually comes almost only from guns. Trump’s budget for 2018 proposes reducing for the State Department and United Nations by about 30 percent. It would increase military spending by $54 billion, even though we spend more than the next seven nations put together on guns. (The Senate Armed Services committee goes even farther, actually proposing a $74 billion increment.) The budget for the United Nations and the State Department, the official instrumentalities for peacemaking having been starved, the only game left in town is war. War for what? For Russia’s right to choose our leaders?

If one cares for country, and by this I mean something more than wearing patriotic T-shirts, waving flags and crying, “lock her up” when no trial has been held—if one cares for our hills and valleys and our betrayed people—one has to find hope somewhere.

Ironically, such hope comes from outside our local baloney shops.

On July 7, the United Nations adopted its most important resolution in my lifetime—a resolution to ban nuclear weapons. At the time of the adoption, the Secretary General of the United Nations issued the following statement:

The Secretary-General welcomes the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is the first multilateral legally binding instrument for nuclear disarmament to have been negotiated in 20 years. The impetus for the treaty reflects growing concerns over the risk posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons as well as awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result if nuclear weapons were ever used again. The treaty represents an important step and contribution towards the common aspiration of a world without nuclear weapons.

Virtually all faith communities have endorsed the adoption—Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist and others. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions, including dozens of Catholic leaders, endorsed the ban and called upon the U.S. and European nations to work with other nations to “map out a credible, verifiable and enforceable strategy for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.” But no Nebraska politicians were heard applauding.

The treaty was created largely at the urging of Japanese hibakusha, the victims of the first 1945 bombings, many of whom still suffer from the wounds of 1945. Nebraskans for Peace has been the host at its lantern floats for hibakusha, and its Japanese patron, Nobuko Tsukui, has translated the writings that come out of their suffering. No local politicians listened to the hibakusha.

As the nuclear nation politicians decided, the nine nuclear nations did not participate in the negotiations for the July 7 treaty. When the treaty became international law, the United States, Britain and France pontificated, “We do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it... A purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and security.” What are those security concerns? They are our concerns that another country will drop nuclear weapons on us or another country’s concerns that we will drop nuclear weapons on them. We will not eliminate nuclear weapons because we want them like babies want toys. We are willing to break international law to keep our toys.

We—the U.S.—are the only ones who ever dropped nuclear weapons in anger, and, after World War II, we rejected Soviet requests that we get rid of nukes because we knew their advantages when the Soviets had larger numbers of tanks and men in uniform. Similarly, the Russians now fear nuclear disarmament because, after the Soviet fall, they worry about our larger numbers of tanks. The North Koreans fear our South Korea-based military exercises and our nuclear weapons aimed at North Korea. So it goes. We are willing to defy international law and the international consensus of nations in order to impose, as a coalition of great powers, our will on the rest of the world. But as Gandhi observed, “The science of nonviolence alone can lead one to pure democracy... The states that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or, if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously nonviolent. Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by fear of punishment and the other by arts of love.” Our present regime employs fear and tyranny as a basis for democracy and peace. The world’s religious leaders are, in the eyes of Britain France, and the U.S., fools. But ‘fools’ are the last thing they are.

When the July 7 treaty was announced, disarmament leaders recognized that the great powers were not participating. They indicated a hope that eventually the world’s conscience would force them to participate. It is up to us create that conscience.
Speaking Our Peace
by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Hope in a Dark Time

As I listen to television, I hear that the president’s son worked with a Russian lawyer to acquire dirt on Hillary Clinton so that papa might win the election—not treason technically, but certainly treason in spirit. **Our great “America First” administration places us second to Russia; patriotism is the first refuge of our scoundrel.**

Now this administration, ostensibly elected to care for the disenfranchised, proposes taking $54 billion away from people in need to buy guns and nukes. Our leader said, on March 30, 2016, that he might as president use the latter:

**Trump:** Look, nuclear should be off the table. But would there be a time when it could be used, possibly?

**Matthews:** OK. The trouble is, when you said that, the whole world heard it. David Cameron in Britain heard it. The Japanese, where we bombed them in ’45, heard it. They’re hearing a guy running for president of the United States talking of maybe using nuclear weapons. Nobody wants to hear that about an American president.

**Trump:** Then why are we making them? Why do we make them? . . .

Later Trump indicated that nuclear weapons should be last resorts, but did not indicate what these last resorts might be. He’s talked of using nuclear weapons in the Middle East or in Europe for protecting the nation, but one

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