A Gun Control Strategy for Nebraska and the Country

by Amanda Gailey

Gun violence is as at the fore of national and state political conversations. More and more people are waking up to the fact that most of our elected officials have no intention to save lives from the gun industry, and the most recent annual figures—over 38,000 dead in 2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control—give lie to the tired NRA propaganda that more guns mean less crime.

But what is to be done about it? For decades the national gun control movement sought weak solutions in a timid voice. Of course a background check should be required for every gun purchase—that is a no-brainer. But on its own, that policy change will barely budge the gun death tally. Yet universal background checks have been the big ask of gun control for years, and it seems that almost any time an organization or politician has called for them, the request is tempered with genuflection to the Second Amendment and responsible gun ownership. This is not how public health crises or major social ills are fixed.

So it’s no wonder that the loud, extremist gun rights movement, most powerfully represented by the National Rifle Association, has run roughshod over the country—for them, no gun policy is lax enough and no voice is too violent or demanding to be excluded from their chorus. Consequently, we have seen the assault weapons ban expire, concealed carry became law of the land, permitless carry spread to a dozen states, and ten states force colleges to allow guns on campus.

Yes, the firearm industry influences legislation by buying politicians and hiring lobbyists—in fact, the National Rifle Association pays former Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning about $40,000 a year to visit the Unicameral and talk state senators into votes such as blocking a bill that would keep guns out of the hands of abusers. But part of the problem is that the rest of us have not been loud, organized, or focused enough in demanding that this deadly industry be curtailed.

As we head into significant local, state, and midterm federal elections, I offer a strategy for focusing our energies on gun control. We at Nebraskans Against Gun Violence believe in punching up and not kicking down—that is, dismantling the power of predators at the top and empowering the peaceable people below. This approach is ethical and most effective in toppling an oppressive power structure. So we offer three main principles, each of which carries with it a priority legislative action.

Principle 1: Demand accountability and reparations from the corporations and lobbyists that profit from gun proliferation.

Buffett Must Solely Pursue Clean Energy p. 10
Our Farmers Grow Feed, Not Food p. 11
What If Nebraskans Ran Out of Food? p. 11
Red Pill: Lessons for the Left p. 12
Speaking Our Peace p. 16

inside:

Israeli Miko Peled Calls for Justice for Palestine p. 4
Plight of the “Whistleblowers” p. 6
Easter March for Peace p. 7
What’s HOT in Global Warming? p. 8

conclusion on page 2
Gun Control, conclusion

Legislative change: Repeal the federal Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act of 2005.

Gun and ammunition manufacturers enjoy a barely-regulated firearm market in the United States. They face few obstacles in what kinds of firearms and ammunition they can produce and sell or in what quantities—bump stocks, semiautomatic rifles, armor piercing bullets, and high-capacity magazines are all legal on the private market and can be bought and sold in most places in limitless quantities.

In large part this is due to the “Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act” (PLCAA), which affords firearm makers and sellers unparalleled protection from the kind of lawsuits that help keep other dangerous industries in check. Gun makers can be sued if their product does not function, but they can’t be sued if their product routinely takes lives. So if your gun fails to fire you can sue the gun seller, but if yet another toddler pulls a too-easy trigger, we’re out of luck.

In the 13 years since PLCAA passed, about 400,000 Americans have died by gun. In that time, exactly one negligence case resulted in a jury settlement against a gun seller—a store that knowingly allowed a straw purchase to a man who shot police. The repeal of PLCAA will at least allow for the possibility of tort law making this industry accountable for its damages just as it does for automobiles and tobacco. We need to demand our candidates for federal office support the repeal of PLCAA.

Principle 2: Make so-called “responsible gun ownership” actually responsible.

Legislative action: Pass local and state child access prevention laws that require the safe storage of firearms.

Many states, including Nebraska, have no laws requiring responsible storage of firearms. If a child gets hold of a gun and kills himself or someone else, it is often up to prosecutorial discretion whether to pursue charges under broader laws such as child endangerment. Often prosecutors lack the will to press charges, don’t believe a jury will see the law as applying to the situation, or seem to pursue such charges disproportionately against people of color.

Child access prevention (CAP) laws that require gun owners to lock guns away from minors can be powerful instruments for enforcing responsibility. Locked guns are hard to steal, so CAP laws prevent theft. Locked guns cannot be accessed by curious or distraught children, so CAP laws reduce accidental shootings, suicides, and school shootings. Most school shooters are students and they don’t have to look far to find a weapon. The gunmen at Parkland and Santa Fe got their guns from home, as did the one at Millard South. Strong CAP laws can prevent many of these tragedies. We need to push for local CAP ordinances and insist our candidates for state legislature support a strong CAP law.

Principle 3: Empower the public to protect their communities.
Legislative action: Maintain or regain the right to pass local gun ordinances.

A long-held conservative principle of governing is home rule: leave those things to local communities that can be left to local communities. But this principle has been tossed aside in recent decades for the enrichment of the gun industry.

Local anti-smoking ordinances were key to changing the culture with smoking—as different cities regulated smoking, people came to like it, and change spread. Seeing the fate of tobacco, the firearm industry quietly got state legislatures across the country to pass firearm preemption laws—that is, laws that preempt the rights of cities to pass gun ordinances. Now 43 states have passed laws that forbid municipal governments from passing gun ordinances. Some even include provisions that allow the NRA to sue any city with ordinances on the books, or inflict punitive fines on individual city leaders who dare to try to address their community’s gun death problem.

The good news is that six blue states with low gun death rates and good old Nebraska still allow their cities to practice local democracy. States that allow cities to prevent gun violence unsurprisingly have lower gun death rates, and we at NAGV have fought hard and successfully for four calendar years to fend off repeated attempts by the NRA to wipe out our state’s local gun laws. They will try again next session and we need more voices joining ours to say no. So if you live in Nebraska (as you likely do), join us in protecting both our communities from gun violence and our local democratic control. And if you live outside the state, organize to maintain or regain your community’s rights to democratically govern and save lives.

Gun violence is a problem entrenched in our culture and no single policy change will wipe it out, but this strategy will go a long way toward weakening the industry, enforcing responsibility, and empowering change.

Amanda Gailey is President of Nebraskans Against Gun Violence, which has helped defeat the National Rifle Association’s top priority bill, firearm preemption, for four years running at the Unicameral. This year Nebraskans Against Gun Violence organized a boycott of bank accounts worth millions of dollars to prompt First National Bank of Omaha to disassociate from the NRA. After First National Bank broke ties with the NRA, corporations around the country followed suit. Amanda is also an associate professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
Miko Peled, internationally known Jewish-Israeli author of *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine* and *Injustice: The Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five*, shared his story of becoming an activist for Palestinians with three audiences in Omaha, Lincoln and Des Moines in early April 2018. He reached the listening ears of over 500 Christians, Jews and Muslims in those three locations.

Peled began his talks by introducing his audiences to a July 2004 U.S. federal agents’ raid of five Palestinian-American family homes which resulted in five dads being arrested and ultimately sent to prison with sentences ranging from 15 years to 65 years. In 2013 Peled started investigating this case, which led to his second book. He told how a terrifying picture of governmental overreach in post-9/11 America resulted in miscarriages of justice simply because the five men were labeled ‘Palestinian.’ For years Palestinians have been wrongly labeled ‘terrorists.’ Miko Peled moved from the above story to his own life story told in his first book. He began that story with a reminder to his audiences.

Peled reminded his listeners that Judaism and Zionism are not one and the same. Jewish values do not support the horrific human rights violations practiced by the Zionist State of Israel today. At the beginning of the secular Zionist movement, many Jews were not enthusiastic about it for it violated a prime tenant of Judaism that they should not head a civil government until the Jewish Messiah appeared.

While Peled’s own family is a secular Jewish one, his relatives cherished and taught him Jewish values throughout his Jerusalem childhood. He thought of Jerusalem as a mixed city because both Israelis and Palestinians lived there; but it was a city of ‘us’ and ‘the Arabs.’ He never had an Arab friend or even a close acquaintance. It was as though the two peoples lived on different planets.

Peled’s niece, Smadar, was killed just two weeks before she turned 14 in 1997 because two, young Palestinians blew themselves up in Jerusalem where she happened to be shopping. So Peled began exploring what caused that event to happen in his beloved Israel where he lived a privileged life as a 1967 War’s general’s son.

Attending a Palestinian/Arab dialogue group in southern California was his first step toward finding out. By then he was 39 and had dual citizenship in Israel and the United States, was married, was running his own karate studio in California, and had become a father. He had already earned the highly coveted red beret from his two-year service in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) as a young Israeli. He had spent most of his service time training as a medic while he himself had an ankle injury. He had been troubled by Israel’s treatment of Palestinians during his service. Finally, he went into Palestine itself—an act that is illegal under Israeli law. He was frightened.

What he found was Palestinian hospitality not animosity. He also learned...
Arab home offered to her as the wife of a 1967 war general made sense. An Arab family did not leave that home voluntarily as the Zionist story said. They fled their home in sheer terror as Jewish gangs entered Palestinian cities once the UN partitioning of Palestine was announced in November of 1947. He learned of killings of whole villages, burials in mass graves, land grabs, house nighttime raids and daylight demolitions, kidnapping of Palestinian children as young as 8 to 10 with adult imprisonment in Israeli jails under ‘administrative detention’ but no real charges that could last for years.

The temporary occupation that had followed the war in which his father was a general was by then in its 33rd year. His father, Matti Peled, tried to persuade his country to “do something about the Palestinian problem” after he had been placed in charge of Gaza right after the war in 1967. Matti saw the suffering of the refugees packed in there and found himself as part of the problem by unintentionally lying to Palestinians who had come to trust him. He suggested a small Palestinian parcel of land, but was not listened to by others at that time. He left the military to become an academic.

In the late 1990s, the Zionist Israeli government records of the 1948 War were finally opened to Israeli historians. They verified the truth of the planned, ethnic cleansing of Palestine that Peled was learning from his new Palestinian friends and their elderly relatives along with other facts such as:

- IDF soldiers still shoot live bullets into crowds of nonviolent Palestinians protesting for ‘the right of return.’
- The majority of Palestinians have been nonviolent resisters since 1947, when they began experiencing the planned expulsion from the land to which they were indigenous. Zionist practices have been ethnically cleansing Palestine for over 70 years.
- Arab-Israeli citizens are denied over 50 “national rights” held by Jewish citizens in Israel. That means the Zionist State of Israel is not a democracy, as it claims. It fits the definition of an apartheid state—which justifies it being targeted by “Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions” like the ones that helped end White-minority-rule in South Africa in 1994.
- Christian and Muslim Palestinians, many still living in refugee camps in East Jerusalem and the West Bank territory, are under relentless, Israeli military occupation and law. The “Oslo Accord”’s area “A, B, and C divisions” have not led to a two-state solution as promised, but instead fostered increased colonization of Palestine.
- U.S. citizens are complicit in Israel’s occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians because our tax dollars support both to the tune of over $10 million every day.
- The Israeli blockade of Gaza has turned it into a virtual outdoor prison. Gaza children die daily from kidney disease at the highest rate in the world because they lack access to clean water. Gaza children die from curable cancers that Israeli children—just a mile away—are cured from because they are allowed access to hospitals forbidden to Gazans. Gaza’s own medical facilities have been destroyed in Israel’s regular sieges on Gaza, which are truly terrorist attacks.

Miko Peled left the audiences with the strong recommendation for Americans to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement. Please learn about and join the BDS movement on this Jewish website: https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions/

He also asked us to become regular callers of our elected U.S. Congress Senators and Representatives—to inform them of the injustice being done to Palestinians by Israel’s and our government. Israel systematically prosecutes as many as 700 children in military courts each year. Email your Representatives to support “Promoting Human Rights by Ending Israeli Military Detention of Palestinian Children Act,” H.R. 4391. How to reach your elected officials is here: http://nebraskansforpeace.org/contact-elected-officials.
Retired United Methodist Church minister and long-time NFP State Board member Del Roper of Grand Island regularly writes “Reflections” on Peace & Justice issues that he shares with friends and family. We count ourselves fortunate that he shared this one with us.

On April 20, I had the opportunity to hear Amy Goodman of “Democracy Now!” (Pacifica Radio) speak at the Rococo Theatre in Lincoln. She shared with us her many experiences over the past 20 years covering the movements that are gradually changing America for the better.

I consider Amy Goodman one of the most authentic, trustworthy journalists in our nation. She gives voice to the ‘voiceless’ in not only our country but many parts of the world. Among those Amy and her team have covered are several ‘whistleblowers’—including Daniel Ellsberg, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Thomas Drake.

Each of the above have been labeled a traitor and threatened with severe punishment under the Espionage Act. Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison and served seven years before being pardoned during the last days of President Obama’s term. Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee and a computer security specialist for the National Security Agency (NSA), remains in exile in Russia where he’s been for the past five years.

Charges were eventually dropped against Ellsberg and Drake. They had released highly classified, secret documents that revealed serious illegal acts conducted by our own NSA and by the U.S. military which committed war crimes resulting in the death of many innocent civilians… Not accidental deaths, but deliberate murder! Two examples: My Lai in Vietnam in 1968 and New Baghdad in Iraq in 2007.

Two of the American whistleblowers for whom I pray daily are Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley Manning). Each of these whistleblowers had sworn to uphold the U.S. Constitution. It seems evident to me that each believed they were upholding our Constitution when they ‘blew the whistle’ on behaviors they witnessed that were, in their estimation, illegal and contrary to the Constitution. Each felt a deep loyalty to their country and a commitment to moral responsibility.

Both Snowden and Manning were deeply troubled by the illegal activity they witnessed. Yet, our government, much of the media, and many U.S. citizens were quick to do everything in their power to discredit them, calling their ‘tattling’ a threat to our ‘national security.’

It’s a sad day when citizens, at great personal risk, have to defend the U.S. Constitution against its own government and our National Security Agency. I am deeply troubled that whistleblowers receive very little support from their fellow American citizens. It seems that if our president, congressional delegates, or military leaders accuse them of putting at risk our ‘national security’ all too few question such judgment.

Tragically, much evil is committed under the guise of ‘defending national security.’ It’s been claimed that the whistleblowers cause harm to our armed forces personnel and endanger our nation’s security. Yet, little if any evidence has been produced to substantiate this. So, what makes us so punitive against ‘whistleblowers’? Is it because we resent our nation’s ‘dirty linen’ being revealed to the world? Is it because we are more interested in preserving our image of being the ‘good guys’ than we are in holding our leaders to the high ideals we claim to value?

Might it be that if we continue to severely punish whistleblowers we are inadvertently undermining our democracy? It seems to me that if we truly love our country we must insist on giving an honest ‘listen’ to whistleblowers. Sure, we need to be discerning. Some may be publicity seekers—but many are deeply committed upholders of the moral order and our Constitution. I believe Daniel Ellsberg, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Thomas Drake deserve to be regarded as heroes. I have conveyed this very message to our president and congressional delegates.

Many reading this may be regular listeners (watchers) of Amy Goodman’s “Democracy Now!” If not, I encourage you to listen to the daily airing on DemocracyNow.org And, if you want to know more about this journalist that gives voice to the ‘voiceless,’ order a copy of Amy Goodman’s latest book: DEMOCRACY NOW!: Twenty Years Covering the Movements Changing America. Her dedication to the voiceless and their story gives me hope for a better future.
Easter March for Peace

A Nebraskans for Peace supporter in Sweden shared this Berlin Bulletin from U.S. expatriate and political journalist Victor Grossman. Grossman, who just turned 90, has spent his entire life (including the past 65 years in what used to be “East Germany”) working to create a more just and peaceful world. But as his ‘Bulletin’ notes, there’s still lots of work to do: in Germany, here, everywhere where twisted nationalism, injustice and war require that we continue, year after year, to stand up and speak out.

Berlin Bulletin No. 144, April 6 2018

Despite the noontime rain it was a good crowd. Frankly, not a very large crowd taking part in the annual peace parade on the Saturday before Easter, not like in ‘the old days,’ as the media stressed—and automatically stresses every year, never failing this dig after its mostly brief reports. Perhaps two thousand braved the weather and stretched in a wide column, ten or twelve blocks long, which moved with a few sound trucks through Moabit in West Berlin, a district known for its large Turkish, Arabic and other immigrant group population.

Those braving the weather were a determined bunch. There were only a few teenagers but a fair number of young adults, often with children and a few babies. A majority, no doubt, were the ‘old faithful’ who take part every year. It was a friendly mix. There were East Berliners, some still sad, even bitter, that their old hopes and dreams of a peaceful Germany had been so disappointed. Others, active much of their lives in the West Berlin peace movement, recall, also with nostalgia, the 1980s, when hundreds of thousands took part in West Germany’s “Easter Marches.” Modeled after the Aldermaston marches against nuclear weapons in England, they protested the stationing of atomic missiles along the border to East Germany (where Soviet missiles were then placed). Many from both sides of the city remembered the giant march of at least half a million in 2003 to prevent Bush’s war against Iraq. That worldwide attempt had not succeeded, but was strong enough to keep Germany out of that fateful, fatal military coalition.

What were these indefatigable protesters demanding this time, here in Berlin and at rainy meetings, marches and bicycle parades during the long Easter weekend in over a hundred cities and towns all over Germany?

Good speeches and countless signs and banners, often handmade, spelled it out: basically the same issue as ever: No war! The main slogan was “Don’t arm, disarm!”

This was an urgent matter. The one cabinet member to retain her position in the new cabinet, Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, stuck to the same message: “We Europeans must be both militarily capable and politically resolute.” Germany must “assume its responsibilities,” she repeats, which translates to more and more modern armaments, her reply to convenient carping by the big brass that its weaponry is dated and ineffective; Germany needs more and better killing machines.

Concretely, this means complying with the NATO demand, loudly stressed by Donald Trump, that NATO members must increase military spending to 2 percent of their budgets by 2024—in Germany an expansion from about 37 billion euros now ($43.5) to almost double the amount. The Easter protesters pointed at urgent needs always neglected for ‘lack of funds’: infrastructure, childcare, education, care for the ill and elderly. One banner quoted figures: 19 percent of German children face problems of poverty which will haunt their entire future lives; in East Germany almost 25 percent. But, says von der Leyen, the Bundeswehr needs mighty Leopard panzers, the best automatic weapons, swiftest planes and ships, and training in landing operations and occupying hostile cities far from Germany’s safe shores.

One speaker named the one sector of infrastructure with high hopes for financial buttressing from the new government; improving road surfacing, strengthening bridges and heightening underpasses on highway routes leading eastward, where parades of tanks and heavy weapons have already done damage when clanking toward or...
Bursts of record heat have been vaporizing ice in the Bering Sea west of Alaska even in winter as blizzards rage up the East Coast—and it’s all connected by an erratic jet stream, part of a climate-change plot that has stunned scientists. “We’ve fallen off a cliff: very little sea ice remains in the Bering Sea,” said Rick Toman, Alaska-based climatologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, on April 29.

The early erosion of the Alaskan ice was restricting hunting and fishing in Native coastal villages, where people use it as a platform to pursue marine mammals, crabs, and fish. Ice also usually shields villages from the violence of coastal waves during storms. Now many homes have been washed out to sea. “Without the ice, it’s very difficult, if not impossible, to put food on the table,” Brian Brettscheider, a climate scientist with the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks told the Post.

In late February, when a storm slammed into Little Diomede Island, some waterfront homes and buildings crumbled as towering waves battered the shore. A lack of shore-fast ice on Little Diomede Island left the community with no protection from battering waves and ice debris during a winter storm on February 20, 2018.

Alaska Heat, Nebraska Ice

Air currents over the Arctic guided storms through the Bering Sea from south to north repeatedly, often drawing abnormally mild air from tropics and mid-latitudes into the region on a jet stream that then plunged southward into

The Washington Post reported May 3, 2018 that “This rapid meltdown precipitated a record-shattering decline in Bering Sea ice through the winter and into spring, which has threatened the very way of life in Alaska’s coastal villages—reliant on the ice cover for transportation and hunting. February and March ice levels were as low as far back as scientists can reconstruct, dating back more than 160 years.” By the end of April, ice coverage was down to 10 percent of usual.

“The year’s extremely low sea ice in the Bering Sea is just one of many indicators of abnormally warm conditions in the Arctic over the past several winters. In four of the past five, massive plumes of heat have swelled over the Arctic all the way to the North Pole. Such events were highly uncommon in the past.”

— Washington Post
the United States, bringing record cold, ice and snow. The Northeast suffered back-to-back blizzards. Nebraska caught the western edge of this pattern with several ice storms. The pattern persisted into April, the second-coldest on record in Omaha and Lincoln, with its hard freezes and snow.

According to the Post’s report. “This year’s extremely low sea ice in the Bering Sea is just one of many indicators of abnormally warm conditions in the Arctic over the past several winters. In four of the past five, massive plumes of heat have swelled over the Arctic all the way to the North Pole. Such events were highly uncommon in the past.”

The spread of heat around the world due to rising levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases is not linear. Heat is aggravated by many climatic conditions in addition to greenhouse gas levels, such as weather patterns, most notably the persistence of high pressure during summer months. In 2014, for example, world temperatures set a record high for the instrumental record (since the 1880s, at least), but much of the Eastern and Midwestern United States’ temperatures were below average, due to persistent weather patterns (the Polar Vortex or Arctic Oscillation) that displaced Arctic air into that area.

**Persistent Arctic Melting**

In November of 2016, the North Pole experienced melting in areas that had been frozen in late fall. According to an account in the Washington Post, “This [2016] is the second year in a row that temperatures near the North Pole have risen to freakishly warm levels. During 2015’s final days, the temperature near the Pole spiked to the melting point thanks to a massive storm that pumped warm air into the region. “It’s about 20°C [36 degrees Fahrenheit] warmer than normal over most of the Arctic Ocean, along with cold anomalies of about the same magnitude over north-central Asia,” Jennifer Francis, an Arctic specialist at Rutgers University, said. “The Arctic warmth is the result of a combination of record-low sea-ice extent for this time of year, probably very thin ice, and plenty of warm/moist air from lower latitudes being driven northward by a very wavy jet stream.” Francis’ research indicates that the jet stream is becoming more wavy and elongated as the Arctic warms faster than the equator.

By 2015, persistent distortion of the jet stream was provoking some unusual temperature readings in Alaska, such as 86 degrees F. in Fairbanks and 91 degrees in the hamlet of Eagle, Alaska during the third week of May, warmer, during the afternoons, than much of the U.S. East and South—warmer than Dallas or Houston had been all year to that date (Baked Alaska, 2015).

July 2016 was the hottest month in Earth’s history, for any month dating to the late 1800s, when detailed records were first kept. Persistent high pressure played a major role in a hellish summer across Northern Africa into the Middle East during the summer of 2016. Temperatures averaged 10 to 20 degrees above average in Baghdad, with high temperatures of 109 F. or higher from June 19 to the end of August. Jiddah, Saudi Arabia hit 126 F., an all-time high. The number of days 118 F. or higher has doubled in Baghdad within a decade. On July 21, 2016, a location in Kuwait hit 129.2 degrees D. (55 C.) and another nearby, Bara, Iraq, reached 129.0 C.), or 54.9 C., the highest ever recorded outside of Death Valley, California, which holds the world record of 134.1 F. (56.7 C.), recorded in 1913, and since disputed. Readings of 129.2 F. were recorded in Death Valley June 30, 2013, and equaled in Tirat Tsvi, Israel, June 22, 1942.

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Bruce E. Johansen, Frederick W. Kayser Professor at the University of Nebraska—Omaha, is author of Climate Change: An Encyclopedia of Science, Society, and Solutions (2017).
The following “Local View” by Ken Winston appeared in the May 7, 2018 Lincoln Journal Star. Winston is the Outreach and Policy Director of Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light, a nonpartisan interfaith organization dedicated to bringing diverse faith messages to address climate change and care of creation.

Who am I to question Warren Buffett’s investment decisions? I’m an ordinary guy with three adult children and a dog and cat, and he’s the billionaire Oracle of Omaha whose every utterance is closely tracked by investors around the globe.

But that’s precisely the point. Investment decisions by Warren Buffett and others who follow him affect the lives of ordinary men and women and their families all over the world, as well as impacting the life-giving resources of the planet that we call home. And those decisions have a major impact on whether we leave a livable planet for our children and their children.

Climate change is the most urgent issue of the 21st century, with the potential to affect every person on the planet. There is overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change is real, that humans are making it worse and we can do something about it.

You don’t need to take my word for it. Here is a Biblical-sounding prophecy from Buffett himself about climate change in 2016: “It seems highly likely to me that climate change poses a major problem for the planet. Likewise, if there is only a 1 percent chance the planet is heading toward a truly major disaster and delay means passing a point of no return, inaction now is foolhardy. Call this Noah’s Law: If an ark may be essential for survival, begin building it today, no matter how cloudless the skies appear” (emphasis added).

To date, Buffett has failed to connect his own advice with his investment policies with the urgency that his advice suggests. He said this in 2016: “So far, climate change has not produced more frequent nor more costly hurricanes nor other weather-related events.” However, it is estimated that Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria caused more than $200 billion in insurance losses and the fires on the West coast cost more than $12 billion.

These events from 2017 connect the dots with his warning and contradict his investment message: More frequent and costly hurricanes and other weather-related events are having an impact on his bottom line.

These extreme weather events have the worst impacts on the poor and vulnerable. According the Brookings Institution: “Low income and minority communities are more vulnerable to the risks of natural disasters and they also struggle most to recover.”

Why should I speak up? First, as a parent, I have a moral obligation to do everything I can to leave a habitable planet for my children. Second, like the majority of Americans, I believe in Jesus’ teaching that we have an obligation to take care of the “least of these,” the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

Although Buffett has rebuffed shareholder attempts to consider climate change in investment decisions, including presentations from leading climate scientists James Hansen and Michael Mann, his own words and deeds provide ample reason to change this direction.

“So far, climate change has not produced more frequent nor more costly hurricanes nor other weather-related events.”

—Warren Buffett

Buffett’s charitable work, along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is intended to address the needs of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens. Climate change would undo this effort, making life much worse for the very people these foundations seek to help.

Buffett has consistently championed the long-view of investing. Renewable energy continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and electric vehicles are the way of the future, while fossil fuel companies are losing value. Berkshire Hathaway is profiting from clean energy investments, with Mid-American planning to go 100 percent renewable in Iowa and building the largest wind farm in Nebraska.

These steps in the right direction show that Buffett can make money for his investors while caring for the planet.

Warren Buffett is right about climate change, about taking care of vulnerable people, about investing for the long term. He should listen to his better angels and support a plan to invest in clean energy and divest from fossil fuels. That’s a plan we can all live with.
**Our Farmers Grow Feed, Not Food**

This “Midlands Voices” guest editorial by NFP President Ron Meyer appeared in the April 12, 2018 Omaha World-Herald.

The writer, of Lincoln, is a retired farmer, Vietnam combat veteran and member of Nebraskans for Peace and Nebraska Farmers Union.

As someone who farmed most of his lifetime, I believe it has become increasingly apparent that current U.S. agricultural and trade policy is not conducive to growing edible food for people.

The idea that the United States feeds the world is a myth. Currently, most U.S. farmers go to the grocery store to buy most of the food they eat. A growing amount of the food we eat is grown outside of the United States. A March 13 article in the *New York Times* states the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service found that in 2016, 53.1 percent of the fresh fruit eaten in the United States was imported. This is up from 23 percent in 1975. Fresh vegetable imports were 31 percent of consumption, up from 5.8 percent in 1975.

Here in Nebraska, sometimes referred to as the heart of the nation’s breadbasket, $4.4 billion is spent annually for food, yet only 10 percent of those dollars are spent on products grown and processed in the state. This statistic is from a 2010 study researched by the Crossroads Resource Center in Minneapolis.

It turns out that we in Nebraska primarily grow feed and not food. Government payments and subsidized crop insurance under current farm policy encourage farmers to grow corn and soybeans that are largely not edible for human consumption. Current prices for these commodity crops barely cover the cost of production, even with the government subsidies. One consequence of these subsidies is that they have incentivized farmers to use more marginal land to plant these crops. This practice results in the use of more chemicals and fertilizer runoff, which contaminates our waters and causes more soil erosion. Wouldn’t diversification of agricultural production that includes edible staples and crops that are consumed locally be healthier for people and the environment, as well as the economy?

Some farm and commodity groups promote current policies in the name of free trade in the global marketplace. There are legitimate reasons for global trade, but questions need to be raised as to whether these policies are practical, especially with the changes being made with trade and tariffs being proposed under the “America First” strategy. Won’t these changes alienate our global trading partners with trade wars and put our international food supply at risk?

Climate change and the increasing potential for natural disasters and...
Red Pill: Lessons for the Left

by Sally Herrin

‘Red pill’ is favored ‘alt right’ code (as in the ‘alternative’ white supremacist, anti-government far right) for waking from the dreamy lie that was liberal democracy.

Like Marx who thought revolution led to the end of history, many economists were persuaded by the global reach of western culture after World War II of a general progression towards liberal democracy for the nations of the world.

The ‘red pill’ is famously the central moral choice in “The Matrix” movie franchise. The ‘blue pill’ lets you sleep, contented as larvae, and be used in vile ways, while the red pill wakes you to a dangerous reality, other people and the chance to fight.

Bizarrely, the alt right seems to have broken their red pill in two, though, and only eaten half. What the one hand of liberal democracy has given, the other hand—capitalism—has taken away. But you don’t hear the alt right repudiating capitalism, the other half of that red pill.

Today we turn not to the sins of the right, though, but instead to lessons for the left. U.S. Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) said, “All the wardens of high culture [comedians, scholars and newscasters] in this country, they love to make fun of Donald Trump, to mock him, to ridicule him…his hair, the color of his skin, the way he talks…What I don’t think they realize is that out here…in the heartland…when we hear that kind of ridicule, we hear them making fun of the way we look, and the way we talk, and the way we think.”

This sounds a bit like pot-and-kettle trash talk (Yo. You’re black!), after all the mockery and ridicule heaped on President Obama, not to mention women on the left—Clinton, Pelosi and Warren—and before them all: Al Gore.

But the serious nature of the culture war in this country means we need to grow past playground-level social skills. Just because the other side behaves badly does not mean the rest of us get a pass. I’m not calling the nation’s comics to lay off. Frankly, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert and the comic renaissance they’ve sparked have offered the greatest antidote this country has to FOX and toxic talk radio—preserving and protecting sanity and a sense of humor for many Americans.

But being angry at Trump supporters for being afraid isn’t going to solve anything and sure won’t elect progressive candidates this fall.

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The moneyed class never forgave FDR nor forgot his class treachery. Today the 1%, not content with dismantling or weakening every New Deal law or institution created to housebreak capitalism, has set in motion—in the hearts and minds of walking wounded American workers stranded by the new global economy—the one thing Roosevelt warned that we really must fear: fear itself.

Trump knows how to trade on fear and he does. Immigrants are animals (worse, says Sarah Huckabee Sanders) and the places they come from are open latrines. Countries with tough gun laws are awash with blood and knives. China and the heaviest taxes in the world are to blame for the loss of American jobs. The rise of anyone not white and Christian is a threat. For the right-wing base, all this free-floating fear justifies harsh and even cruel immigration policies, the denial of climate change, the wholesale arming of the U.S. population (pretty much unrecognizable as the Founders’ “well-regulated militia”) and John Bolton’s coming ‘regime change’ in Iran.

Meanwhile Trump’s opposition faces fear of our own—fear of the damage Trump can do to government itself, fear of irreversible damage to climate, water and land as the mission of the EPA goes under the bus, fear of reckless adventurism promised by military build-up, fear of damage to democracy and to civil society, fear even of nuclear war. People like to say that hope is just as contagious as fear. Don’t you believe it. Creating fear is easy. Hope takes a lot of hard work.

Trump’s election was our red pill, or it better be. Eight years of relative grace under President Obama allowed many of us to believe in a brave new world. A man of color was elected twice—and he saved the country from the Great Recession! The U.S. signed the Paris Climate Accord. A new era of identity politics brought the evolution of fluid gender and #Black Lives Matter. Sure, a retrograde Congress hauled desperately on the brakes, trying to stop the soul train, but we had history and the angels on our side, as we believed.

In fact, the election of Obama, like the election of Trump, was a sign that people in this country are desperate to shake things up. Three decades of Reagan, Bush and Clinton administrations left a lot of folks out in the cold.

For 30 years post WWII, throughout Western Europe and North America, per capita output grew faster than ever before or since, under the economic policies—restraining capitalist speculation and other abuses which had tipped the world into chaos and war—of the UN’s “Bretton Woods” accord. Real income rose rapidly for Europeans, American unemployment was down by two thirds, and income inequality dwindled across the developed world. But in 1973, to counter inflation, Nixon effectively ended the post-war social contract by decoupling the American dollar from gold.

Arab nations had benefited from the high dollar, to which many other currencies were and are pegged. The oil sheikhs, already seething over U.S. complicity in the Yom Kippur War, embargoed oil sales to the U.S. The price of crude oil quadrupled. In the panic that ensued, laissez faire and free
trade economics got a toe-hold again, and the rollback of restraints on business began that got us where we are today. By the early nineties, per capita income in the developed world was down by half what it had been from 1950-1973, and income inequality worldwide had come roaring back. Between 1970 and 2010, the real median earnings of U.S. working men in their prime were DOWN by four percent, and U.S. women’s earnings, which had been rising, also declined.

Job loss in this country has been largely trade-induced—nearly two and half million jobs lost to China in the first decade of this century, and 16 percent lower wage growth for U.S. workers who fail to finish high school. ‘Increased purchasing power’ sounded like a blessing, but cheap merchandise proved to be a blue pill overwhelming our closets and landfills, and—as a substitute for economic security (i.e., jobs)—this mess of potage has been a very bad bargain indeed. The left needs to get real right now, because we are riding a populist moment—people are angry and they are not going to take it anymore.

So, enough already, with the shock and dismay. Let the whizz-bang that is Trump spew sparks and smoke. Stop talking about personalities. Voters like candidates with gumption and unapologetic big ideas. Let’s start with a national minimum wage, parental leave and Medicare for all. An expanded program of national service would lift many boats—rebuild U.S. infrastructure and keep people off welfare and opioids and out of jail. Such a program could offer participants earned benefits for every year served, a year of education or training or the equivalent in a small business grant.

Bread-and-butter issues bring working people together. The American people want a new social contract and will have one, come what may. Will we follow Russia, Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela into oligarchy and fascism, or look to the left towards Northern Europe and communitarian democracy?

(Thanks to Caleb Crain, whose book review “Masters of Doom: Is capitalism a threat to democracy?” New Yorker, 5.14.2018 was a red pill for me.)

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Rinne, conclusion

overnight.” It turns out that the global trade network moving the staple crops the world most uses for food (corn, wheat, rice, soybeans, etc.) is dependent on 14 “chokepoint” junctures, such as the Panama Canal and the Turkish Straits.

“Disruption at any of these chokepoints,” the article stated, “would mean trouble, but if several jammed at once, it could be disastrous.” Thirteen of the 14 choke points have seen some sort of disruption or closure in the past 15 years.

And what if a natural disaster were to strike?

We all recall what chaos ensued when the delivery trucks were unable to get into New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, and we are still seeing distribution problems in Puerto Rico six months after Hurricane Maria.

But environmental calamities also pose risks to production agriculture. The failure of the Russian wheat harvest in 2010—and ensuing export embargo—has been widely credited with being the spark that ignited the “Arab Spring” revolutions.

In our now-globally interconnected food production and distribution system, what impacts one major food-producing nation can ripple across the globe. And it needn’t just be a natural disaster. Political upheaval in a country—or a trade war—can also disrupt the international supply chain.

Depending exclusively on this global system to feed us seems pretty risky—particularly when our next meal could be at stake. It’s an argument, actually, for ‘localizing’ our food system where economically feasible.

For example, there’s no reason to be relying on the drought-plagued California Central Valley to produce all our lettuce when a fresher (and therefore more nutritious) product can be grown right here year-round. The same goes for virtually all the vegetables and fruits listed above—not to mention all the seasonally available crops like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and pears.

For sure, whatever we grow here could also be wiped out by drought, pests and disease. But growing some of our own food—and keeping those food dollars in the state—doubles our chances when it comes to always getting dinner.

And with a bushel of corn barely at the cost of production, promoting a specialty crops industry that could feed Nebraskans should be the next big policy idea for our state—from the university to the Capitol to our chambers of commerce.

Meyer, conclusion

manmade disasters such as war will also make for a less reliable food supply. Last July, the Washington Post published an article entitled, “How the climate crisis could become a food crisis overnight.” It turns out that the global trade network moving the staple crops the world most uses for food (corn, wheat, rice and soybeans) is dependent on 14 chokepoints (such as the Panama Canal and the Turkish Straits on the Black Sea). “Disruption at any of these chokepoints would mean trouble, but if several jammed at once, it would be disastrous,” the article stated. What if our global food system—which, on average, ships every bite we eat over 1,500 miles to our mouths—broke down and we faced significant food shortages and sky-high prices?

Depending exclusively on this global system to feed us is risky and could be dangerous. Having visited people in the developing world who often grow for the export market while their own families go hungry, I think it may be time to re-examine and relocalize as much of our food production as possible. It could make communities around the globe healthier—for people, for the environment and perhaps for our only home, planet Earth.
Easter March for Peace, continued

going military maneuvers of German, American and other NATO troops near the Russian borders. Is this, too, déjà vu all over again?

One sign recalled Bertolt Brecht’s warning words after World War II: “Great Carthage waged three wars. It was still powerful after the first, still habitable after the second. It was nowhere to be found after the third.”

The speaker from the LINKE party recalled hesitant attempts by Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel to repair German-Russian relations and reduce confrontation in weapons and sanctions. He was ousted. His successor Heiko Maas, though also a Social Democrat (SPD), seems to approve the plans of his Christian Democratic colleague Ursula von der Leyen.

Maas also joined the now-fumbling British campaign to heat up relations with Russia after the increasingly opaque poisoning episode, adding the name and face of Vladimir Putin to the long tradition of simplified distortion, caricaturing and demonization of those one plans to attack. Both speakers and banners pointed out that media near-unanimity in this was hardly motivated by Russian violation of human rights, election manipulation or actions outside its national borders. If it were, Saudi Arabia’s bloody flogging and executions against opponents and its genocidal war against Yemen, with U.S. assistance and beginning well before Trump, would have been castigated in angry UN speeches, not been smilingly accepted. But Minister Haas, with his new armchair seat hardly warm, has already OK’d the sale of eight military patrol boats to Saudi Arabia. A tactless description of him as a “NATO-male hustler” by the often outspoken orator of the LINKE has given opponents a chance to denounce the entire peace demonstration! It has perhaps also led to new thinking.

Over and over, two places were named on Saturday, always with the demand: “Close them down”! Ramstein Air Base in the Rhineland area is headquarters for the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, for Air Forces Africa and for the NATO Allied Air Command. Of the 600 or 700 U.S. bases in 70-80 countries outside America, it is the largest—and the base where messages from safe sites in the USA arrive, to be passed along to drones bringing death and destruction to a half dozen countries in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and other countries in Africa and western Asia. Its presence is illegal under German law, and protests against this drone center, often organized by people joining in the Easter Marches, have led to growing pressure on the German government. Can they succeed?

The other name is Büchel, not far away. It is here, also in defiance of German laws by the governments of Merkel, Trump and their many predecessors, where twenty B61 nuclear bombs are stored—the only such site in Europe—alongside German and American bomb-ers always ready to carry them eastwards.

It was menaces like these which motivated the Easter March protests. Far too few took part; to blame in part were nasty weather, nasty media, the competing march of modern social media which can bring large numbers together but may also lead to effortless, individualized observation of world events, all contained in one’s own hand. But the lack of large numbers also resulted from the failure of the Left to enthuse and mobilize large numbers of people.

And yet a deep desire for peace, reconciliation, a rejection of more deaths in Afghanistan, Mali, or other places where they don’t belong, is still present with many in Germany, and is still a political factor. Even when people don’t join marches, most aspiring politicians must take their feelings seriously.

This sentiment was expressed most vividly in the main speech Saturday, by a pastor, Rev. Eugen Drewermann. He based his speech on an old anti-war poem from 1778 by the poet Matthias Claudius, a writer, also a pastor, who called out: “It’s war! It’s war!... What use to me are crown and land, gold and honor?... It’s war—and I want to bear no guilt for it!” His long speech, with the eloquence learned by some preachers, approached for me the level of Dr. King. Sharply but poetically he exposed those who want war and why they do and how they must be fought.

Also a very emotional appeal was in the little “Children’s Hymn,” again by Bertolt Brecht, and vainly considered after World War II and after German unification as a substitute for the still official anthem “Deutschland über alles,” whose original words called for German frontiers far beyond the present ones. Brecht’s song rejected all such bellicose dreams and pressures for expansion based on presumed Germanic superiority—and still all too present today. It’s singing, by so many in the crowd, brought tears to more than a few eyes. It too was a call for peace!
Paul Olson, conclusion

into Swedish industrial cities or emigration. He stole from the dogs at the manor house to feed his parents; despised the officers in the Swedish army forcing troops on long marches while waving whips above their heads; and returned to Sweden, probably in the early 20th century, to bring his father to Wausa so that he would not die in the old country. The revolution toward social democracy that has made Sweden a decent place to live had barely begun.

Now, ironically, I am part of another country saying ”No” to the Andrew Olsons of the world—people suffering from violence far worse than the Swedish army’s, people starving or suffering from war and climate change, people asking only for a chance to live and promised no Omaha land to farm. They sit now on the Tijuana border; 12.6 million leave a Syria afflicted with climate change and awash with our weapons after we encouraged their country’s destabilization—we have accepted only a few thousand of them since 2011; in the Trump period only a few dozen. The 2018 world has 65 million refugees according to the Guardian: South Sudan, 4 million; Iraq, 5.6 million; Iran, 180,000; Ukraine, 2.4 million; Libya, 640,000; Somalia, 2.7 million; Syria, 12.6 million; Pakistan, 1.3 million; Central African Republic, 969,000; Myanmar, 923,000; Congo, 3.5 million; Venezuela, 52,000; Yemen, 3 million; Burundi, 743,000; Columbia, 7.7 million; Nigeria 3.2 million; North Sudan, 2.9 million; Afghanistan, 5.2 million; and the rest of the world the remainder. These figures do not include Palestinian refugees of whom there are about 4 million exiled by the government of Israel. Thankfully Nebraska churches and places like the Center for People in Need have done a good job with refugees. If you look at the list above, however, you will see that many of these countries have been destabilized by American or Russian interference and installation of proxy regimes, and that many of the rest contain refugees because of the introduction of American or Russian arms. Other refugees have been forced into exile because of violence promoted by drug lords to feed America’s and Western Europe’s appetite for the quick fix. For the refugees who come to us now, there is no Omaha land to be stolen to give them a livelihood.

Climate change will increasingly make this flow of people a flood. As General Stephen Cheney of the policy board of the State Department has said, “There are direct links to climate change in the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, and the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa.” The Guardian notes that, “In 2015, a UK foreign office report made a stark assessment of the dangers posed by unchecked global warming, including very large risks to global food security, increased risk of terrorism as states fail, and unprecedented migration that would overwhelm international assistance.” A recent World Bank report indicates the likelihood of 140 million internal refugees in the counties of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America unless we cut greenhouse gases globally and plan better for changing climates. These refugees will move from the countryside to the city where they will need to learn urban gardening, community formation, and water conservation if they are not to start civil wars, like the Syrian one, across their regions. They will require us to develop commodity crops that can take drier and hotter climates.

Meanwhile, our fossil fuel corporations and our politicians say, with Madame Pompadour, “After us, the flood.” They deny climate change. They say, “Drill, baby, drill.” They eliminate lowered fuel emission standards. They live extravagantly and wastefully, fools in their golden fashion togs and say, “No entrance; starve.” They will tell us that there is no evidence of anthropogenic climate alteration when there is and when frugality should be a universal civic and religious virtue, whatever their view of the science. These are the golden boys who will stand at the gates of our country in their goldish fashion togs and say, “No entrance; starve.” They will tell us that they have made America a great nation again as we have allowed them to make us all into moral midgets.

Call To Action To Stop Climate Change

On Wednesday June 6, 2018 join the national Congressional Call-in Day (and call monthly thereafter). Call all three of your Members of Congress to ask them to take action to stop climate change from getting worse. There is a script and their phone numbers at cclusa.org/call

By doing this you will help the over 1100 Citizens’ Climate Lobby volunteers who will be meeting in all Members of Congress offices on June 12th. Quite a few CCL people from Nebraska will be there—and we need your help!

Contact Mark Welsch if you have any questions NFPOmaha1970@Gmail.com 402-453-0776. Your MOC contact info is here: http://nebraskansforpeace.org/contact-elected-officials.

MAY/JUNE 2018 NE REPORT, P. 15
Speaking Our Peace
by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Grandpa Andrew, the Omaha Reservation and the Coming Million-Person Floods

At some time in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Andrew Olson, my grandfather, then in his late 20s, came to America and settled on Logan Creek in Thurston County. Born in the early 1850s in South Sweden, he had spent his childhood as a manor house boy, feeding the dogs; later, as a farmer on the tiny potato patch plot that was all land reform left to him and his parents; then as a draftee in the Swedish army; and as a drayman in the forests of South Sweden. He came to Rosalie, named after Rosalie La Flesche, offspring of Joseph La Flesche (last traditional chief of the Omaha tribe). Rosalie married a white man named Farley from Bancroft, and handled Omaha tribal finances. Grandpa called the Farleys Yankees because he thought that they were establishment/rich.

Grandpa farmed land essentially stolen from the Omaha though he did not know that. In the early 1880s he returned to Sweden to Gnesta, near Stockholm, to bring his beloved to America, married, and, in the early 1890s, moved to a farm near Wausa so he could be close to a Lutheran Church.

Grandpa hated Sweden. To further its Industrial Revolution, it had redistributed land so that smaller farmers were left with only a potato patch, this land redistribution designed to create larger, efficient farms and force cotters...