



*Nebraskans for Peace*

# Nebraska Report

*There is no Peace without Justice*

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*2018 Annual Peace Conference September 22*

## Climate Change and the Coming Refugee Crisis

The political tumult we're currently witnessing over immigration will be nothing compared to the influx of climate refugees the U.S. will face in the next two decades. Climate change will spark the largest diaspora in human history. As sea levels relentlessly rise, extreme weather, disease and pests foster food shortages and people have to abandon their homes, there will

be social and economic mayhem. People will head wherever they think there's potable water and food. Seated atop the Ogallala Aquifer and renowned as America's "bread basket," Nebraska is poised to be a destination location for climate refugees—not only from Latin America, but from our own coasts, where half of our population now resides.



**Christian Parenti**

At the 2018 Annual Peace Conference, the University of Nebraska-Kearney Department of Political Science, the University of Nebraska-Omaha Grace Abbott School of Social Work, and Nebraskans for Peace will address this looming emergency with a keynote speech entitled "The Current and Future Crisis of Global Climate Refugees."

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## Nebraska Report

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Newspaper Committee:

Tim Rinne, Editor; Ron Todd-Meyer; Paul Olson

Typesetting and Layout: Michelle O'Dea

Printing: Fremont Tribune

Website: Susan Alleman

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## Nebraskans for Peace

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

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## *Nebraskans for Peace Chapter & Affiliate Contact Information*

Crete Chapter ..... Pat Wikel..... 402-826-4818  
Lincoln Chapter ..... Paul Olson ..... 402-475-1318  
Omaha Chapter ..... Mark Welsch ..... 402-453-0776  
Scottsbluff Chapter ..... Byron Peterson ..... 308-783-1412  
Southwest  
Nebraska Chapter ..... Dennis Demmel ..... 308-352-4078  
Central Nebraska  
Peace Workers ..... Del Roper ..... 308-384-3266

Contact the NFP State Office for information on the UNL, UNO, UNK, Creighton & Nebraska Wesleyan University and Hastings & Doane College Chapters

# 2018 Conference conclusion

Dr. Christian Parenti, Associate Professor of Economics at John Jay College in New York City and author of the acclaimed 2011 book *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*, will be the featured speaker. *Tropic of Chaos* was the ground-breaking work linking the implications of climate change with the social and political unrest in mid-latitude regions of the world. And as we are now seeing in places like Syria, the refugees of that unrest are spilling over national borders, overwhelming neighboring countries and provoking political crises as far away as the European Union.

The Saturday, September 22 Annual Peace Conference will—for the first time ever—be held on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Kearney (UNK). The conference will go from 10:00 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. To register for the day's events, visit the NFP website at [nfpstate@nebraskansforpeace.org](mailto:nfpstate@nebraskansforpeace.org) or call the NFP State Office at 402-475-4620.

Christian Parenti's keynote presentation will be followed by a panel discussion focused on the current immigration situation in Nebraska moderated by UNK Political Science Chair Will Avilés and featuring Christa Yoakum, Nebraska Is Home Coordinator for Nebraska Appleseed's Immigrants & Communities Program, and Gladys Godinez, Executive Director of the Trinidad Center in Lexington, Nebraska. Following the catered lunch, there will be two sets of workshops addressing a host of Peace & Justice issues treating immigration and diversity, Regenerative Agriculture, human trafficking, women's empowerment and the Trump Administration's saber rattling with Iran.

Mark your calendars now to attend this peace conference on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Kearney. It is time to prepare for the dramatic demographic shift that is set to be an inevitable part of Nebraska's future.

# With Iran Deal on Life Support, White House Looks to Finish the Job

*If sanctions and coercive diplomacy by the U.S. escalate into regime change, it wouldn't be the first time. Ask the Iraqis.*



Photo: CommonDreams

*“As most sane observers know, war with Iran would be an unmitigated disaster for the U.S., the region, and the world.”*

*The following article by Jon Rainwater, executive director of Peace Action, was posted on Common Dreams Monday, July 16, 2018. Nebraskans for Peace has been an affiliate member of Peace Action for almost a decade and is honored to be associated with the largest Peace & Justice organization in the U.S.*

Three years after the signing of the Iran nuclear agreement, an array of TV monitors in downtown Vienna still carries live images from Iranian nuclear facilities. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) still spend 3,000 calendar days a year conducting tests, gathering samples, and generally poking around Iran's nuclear related facilities. Computers still monitor thousands of tamper-proof seals on nuclear material and equip-

ment just in case the inspectors miss something. In other words, thanks to the deal, we can all still rest assured that all of Iran's potential pathways to a nuclear bomb remain blocked. But thanks to Trump, that may not be the case for long.

Since the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the Iran agreement, Europe and Iran have been scrambling to negotiate measures that would maintain Iran's economic and political incentives to stay in the agreement in the face of renewed U.S. sanctions. After all, the big carrot Iran got for agreeing to strict limits on its nuclear program was relief from crushing economic sanctions. Sanctions relief and the economic benefits associated with it was the only way Iran was able to sell the accord to its domestic

audience. Without those benefits, Iran's continued adherence to the terms of the deal is politically untenable.

With the full spectrum of U.S. sanctions set to kick in by November, the clock is running out for Iran and Europe to find a solution, and the Trump administration is playing some serious hardball.

On the sidelines of the NATO summit last week, Secretary of State Pompeo prodded allies to “cut off all funding” to Iran. Meanwhile, when asked about tensions with Iran during a NATO press event, Trump nonchalantly conceded, “I would say there might be an escalation between us and the Iranians.”

Behind these statements is a truly

*conclusion on page 10*

# The Mystery of the Republican Farmer

by Sally Herrin

Life is full of mystery. We may know why the sky is blue, but why we are here, where missing socks go and who wrote the book of love remain open questions. In light of President Trump's shock-and-awe tariff campaign and the resulting blowback for the U.S. farmers who voted for Trump and remain loyal, the question is: After so many decades of GOP devotion to the agenda of multinational grain and meat traders over the interests of the U.S. and the folks back home, why do farmers still vote Republican?

Some cite the Second Amendment and *Roe v. Wade*. I don't think it's that simple. "Trump swung the farmer vote... by shrewdly mentioning a few very specific, mostly niche items—the vast majority of the country has never even heard of the 'Waters of the United States Rule,' for example," Dan Novowick wrote in *Modern Farmer*, November 23, 2016. Trump campaigned in favor of the renewable fuels standard (a hugely successful environmental policy that created a cumulative market demand for about 50 billion bushels of U.S. corn over the past ten years with an approximate farm-level corn value of \$200 billion, while lowering consumer gas prices, cleaning the air and reducing toxic gas additives), and against the estate tax (feared by farm families as land prices rise), the Affordable Care Act (farmers feared it would bankrupt them with health care payments for ag workers), the minimum wage (an increase would price farm help out of reach for many) and the poorly under-

stood water protection rule by the EPA, which critics call government over-reach.

Huge investment, by ConAgra, Monsanto, Smithfield and the like, in *FOX News* and toxic talk radio aimed specifically at rural America has born wildly profitable returns. These corporate propaganda funders aim to keep rural (and other working people) misinformed, confused, angry and afraid, taking their distress out on one another, on their children, on strangers and on themselves. Farmer suicides are up, as are 'accidental'

U.S. farmers have access to just one buyer close enough that hauling costs don't eat up all the margin. A bountiful harvest ought to be cause to celebrate, but today it's a disaster for all but the very largest operations, driving prices at the farm gate down. When farmers sell at below cost of production, which has been the case far more often than not over the past 50 years, they lose money on every acre farmed, on every bushel and every hundredweight of meat produced. A loss times more volume is just a greater loss.

***“Globalization and the... ‘race-to-the-economic-bottom’ trade policy horse is so far out the barn door and down the road that we can’t even see the dust.”***

**—American Corn Growers Foundation**

farm equipment roll-over deaths, as are farm bankruptcies. Like the Kochs and Trump, corporate ag finds it useful to disrupt civil society, to keep farmers and working people from effectively organizing in the best interest of ourselves and our country, as opposed to the interests of corporations and the money class which owns them.

U.S. ag producers, with arguably the most fertile ground in the world, pull off a magic act every single year. No work is more important, or honorable, than raising food for people to eat. Comparatively speaking though, farmers are many, while buyers are few—so unlike virtually every other industry, ag producers cannot set the price for what they produce. Most

Farmers are not stupid, but they have been down so long, many seriously do not know which way is up.

Soybeans are the largest export crop in the U.S., at \$23 billion annually. Soybean prices have dropped \$2.00/bu. since Trump declared his tariffs, down from \$10.00/bu., and China (Nebraska's #1 export market) announced it will buy no more U.S. soybeans. *CNBC* reports North Dakota, expecting a bumper crop in 2018, has sold 70 percent of its food grade soybeans to China. Now firm orders are cancelled—some orders cancelled on beans already enroute to China. Other Asian markets bought some of these beans, at huge discount. Buyers will now turn to Brazil, and even to Russia, for soybeans.

As with most all ag commodities, soybean profit margins are very thin. Cost of production is \$9.51/bu. The price as I write is \$8.44. Farmers who locked in part of their crop at a little over \$10 may not panic quite yet, but producers who did not hedge (it's a bet), and beginners with heavy land and equipment debt, are looking at serious trouble.

Trump's 25 percent tariff on imported steel will hurt the rural economy especially hard. Other industries will pass their higher costs along, but ag producers don't get to set their own prices, remember? Higher prices for farm equipment and fewer equipment sales will further deplete major small town revenue streams. Even Trump's anti-immigration policies hurt ag producers. Of the 2.2 million ag workers in this country, a whopping 53 percent are undocumented, effectively criminalizing producers who MUST hire labor or lose their crops.

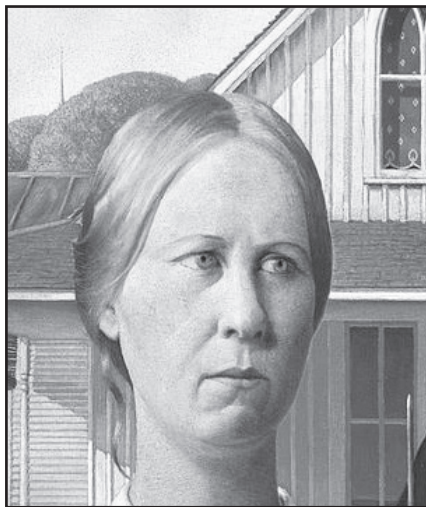
Some of these troubles predate this president, but Trump's policies just pile on. A press release from American Corn Growers Foundation notes "Globalization and the... 'race-to-the-economic-bottom' trade policy horse is so far out the barn door and down the road that we can't even see the dust." This president understands nothing of government and only wants to rule, but the clock cannot be turned back.

The U.S. may be out of the Trans Pacific Partnership and other trade agreements, but the rest of the world has resources and will gladly fill any opportunity the U.S. wants to abdicate. My guess is Putin is egging Trump on with his trade war. "You show the bastards who's the boss, Don!" Getting the U.S. out onto the ice of isolationism and protectionism is clearly a part of Putin's plan.

China today is a capitalist state, actively working to colonize the world. China owns Smithfield, formerly a U.S. corporation, the largest meat processor on earth. China has been investing heavily in Africa, in infrastructure and land—and moving in large numbers of Chinese farmers, partly to relieve population pressure back home. Many think of Africa as desertified and starving, but huge areas of tremendous fertility will

not be left fallow for long.

Trump has no plan to address some of the biggest trade problems—the broken U.S. trade advisory system whereby the foxes get to make henhouse policy or the high relative value of U.S. currency, the problem of currency manipulation and the fact that the U.S. is the only major country with no VAT (value added tax)—a trifecta of disadvantage that robs U.S. agriculture of as much as 50 percent of the value of commodities.

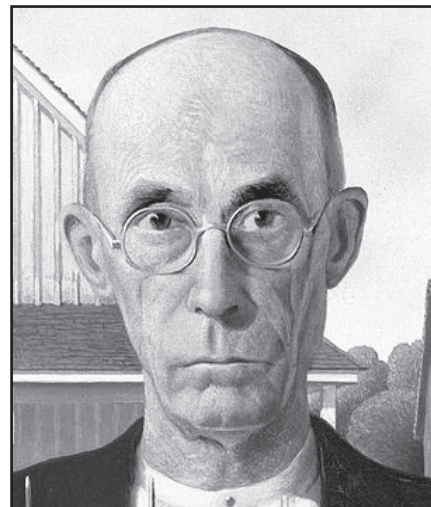


The tariff trade war will generate more new soybean and grain production infrastructure and marketing investment in South America and elsewhere. Russia is raising its rail transport subsidies this year. China's high-speed rail technology is better than ours, and a Chinese railroad from the interior to the ports would open the millions of acres in South America that can be brought into production (with huge cost to the planet in environmental damage) equal to all the grain- and oilseed-production acres of the United States.

Mitigating the negative economic impact of the administration's trade war is the administration's responsibility. The tariff-imposed trade war on U.S. grain sales and exports is forcing farmers to store grain rather than follow an orderly marketing strategy. USDA is obligated to mitigate the economic damage to farmers.

USDA-CCC should make grain storage payments to farmers for on-farm

stored grain equal to annual commercial storage rates. Paying farmers the commercial storage rate is the logical way to compensate farmers, given that they will likely be forced to store grain for an extended period of time as a result of Trump's tariff-imposed U.S. export trade restrictions, foreign import grain buyer retaliation and the future foreign grain production resulting from the U.S. trade war that will stimulate foreign export competition for years.



Today, the administration announced a \$12 billion emergency relief package for the nation's farmers, to include direct assistance, a food purchase and distribution program and a trade promotion program. However, the National Farmers Union said today that U.S. farmers lost \$13 billion last month alone to trade disruptions.

This quick—and woefully inadequate—fix is a cynical attempt to get farmers to shut up about the damage from Trump's trade war. It is hush money, a check in the mail before the mid-term elections which might well prove a disaster for the GOP.

Dear Farmers, please pay attention to the Farm Bill for actual evidence—for real long term relief—that the GOP has your back. If you reward their betrayal with your vote yet again, how will they learn? Aren't you sick of getting bit by your own dogs?

# Formation of “Nebraska Food Council” Leads to Statewide Food Assessment

LYONS, NEBRASKA – In Nebraska, residents spend nearly \$5 billion annually on food. Approximately 90 percent of that money leaves the state, according to a 2015 Center for Rural Affairs report.

The study prompted Center staff to take a deeper look into food systems in their home state. Staff hosted a public panel and discussion alongside expert Mark Winne, a community food systems and food policy council expert. The conversation centered on what makes strong, regional food systems and how food policy councils inform the public and policymakers.

“Food and economic security in rural communities is directly related to community development,” said Sandra Renner, project specialist at Center for Rural Affairs. “We found, in many rural areas, food purchased at grocery stores is imported, and dollars spent for this food ultimately end up out of state.”

As a result of the dialogue, partners from across the state formed the “Nebraska Food Council.” Members include:

- Robert Bernt, Clear Creek Organics, Spalding;
- Katie Jantzen, West End Farm, Plymouth;
- Vern Jantzen, Nebraska Farmers Union, Plymouth;

- Brent Lubbert, Big Muddy Urban Farm, Omaha;
- Shawn Koch, ASC Lockers, West Point;
- Denny Hogeland, KDK Meats, Bridgeport;
- Beth Kearnes Krause, Nebraska Food Cooperative, Julian;
- Nazim Khan, executive chef, Bryan Medical Center, Lincoln;
- Nathan Morgan, The Big Garden, Omaha;
- Jessica Davies, Panhandle Public Health, Hemingford;
- Ashley Frevert, Community Action of Nebraska, Lincoln;
- Chuck Francis, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln;
- Vanessa Wielenga, University of Nebraska Extension, Lincoln; and
- Terrell McKinney, Nebraska Appleseed, Omaha
- Ruth Chantry/Evrett Lunquist, Common Good Farm, Raymond.

“Members of the council hope to provide opportunities for local food system leadership to the general council membership, local councils, and members of the ad hoc committees,” said Renner. “The council focuses on issues like equitable food access, land

access, capital needs for beginners, developing markets, and distribution networks.”

The partners will also concentrate on engaging underserved voices in the food system, supporting food councils across the state.

The first project is a statewide food system assessment conducted in partnership with Megan McGuffey, a Ph.D candidate studying food and farm issues at University of Nebraska -Omaha. Results will be released this fall.

For more information, or to get involved, contact Sandra Renner at [sandrar@cfra.org](mailto:sandrar@cfra.org) or 402.687.2100 ext. 1009 or visit [cfra.org/growing-healthy-food-systems](http://cfra.org/growing-healthy-food-systems). Upcoming workshops for local food system leaders will be posted at [cfra.org/events](http://cfra.org/events).

The Nebraska Food Council is supported by a steering committee, Center for Rural Affairs, and Nebraskans for Peace, and is funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Food Systems planning grant.

<https://www.cfra.org/newsrelease/180605/formation-nebraska-food-council-leads-statewide-food-assessment>

*Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, non-profit organization working to strengthen small businesses, family farms and ranches, and rural communities through action oriented programs addressing social, economic, and environmental issues.*



## ABOUT: NEBRASKA FOOD COUNCIL

### VISION:

“ The Nebraska Food Council envisions a thriving, inclusive and accessible local food system that strengthens our economy and environment while fostering food security for all Nebraskans through collaboration with diverse agencies, organizations, individuals and communities in the state. ”

### MISSION:

- » Gather information from across the state to understand Nebraska's regional and local food systems;
- » Identify key food and agriculture policy issues and opportunities;
- » Educate and advise policymakers and consumers;
- » Organizing support for change and new initiatives;
- » Coordinate networks and connect partners; and
- » Build capacity of membership by providing educational opportunities.



# What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

## Global Warming Ravages India's Poor

If you want a glimpse into the climatic future, visit India, where the onset of the annual monsoon after 115-degree summers now inculcates cyclonic storms that arrive with massive thunderstorms bearing damaging winds driving walls of blowing dust after months of intense drought, killing farmers with volleys of lightning bolts.



The effects of rising temperatures are much more visceral in India than here. Our wealth insulates in solid dwellings and offices with air conditioning. It is hot here, but not 110-115 degrees day after day, as in Andhra Pradesh, in South India. Even though we live in a rural area, very few of us are farmers. Unlike India, no one I know has been nailed recently by a lightning strike. Also: the atmosphere has been playing tricks on us with a frequent cooling influence from the Arctic

Oscillation, keeping us from suffering the full effects of rising temperatures.

Almost three years ago (December 14-16, 2015) I was invited to speak in Andhra Pradesh for a plenary address at a Global Seminar on “Celebrating the Ancient/Contemporary Wisdom of Fourth World,” hosted by the Department of English at Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, India. I spoke on “What

spondents from Baffin Island to Europe to India, I ask about the weather, climate changes and their effect on people, plants and animals. I also receive a steady stream of scientific reports, journal articles, and bulletins from NASA and other places. One recent bulletin from NASA distilled a number of media reports and on-scene observations about increases in extreme weather in India.

*“.. Across India, Dalits are vulnerable people. As landless and homeless people they become the first victims to the fury of nature. The natural calamities raise the question of the existence of God. The lives of Dalits are battered by [these] beliefs and disbeliefs.”*

— Prof. Raja Sekhar, Acharya Nagarjuna University

Has Been Will Be: Native American Contributions to Democracy, Feminism, Gender Fluidity and Environmentalism.” The conference, with about 800 participants and 285 papers presented, is part of an effort by Dalit in India (who are usually called “untouchables”—a slur—in English) to forge links with indigenous peoples worldwide.

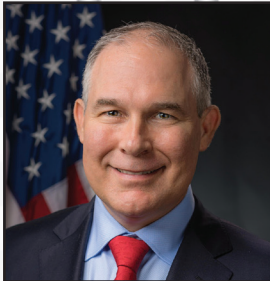
I have remained in communication with Professor Raja Sekhar, head organizer of the conference who is Dalit and native (Telugu). As I do with all corre-

### Devastation in India

India has been hit by a streak of unusually intense thunderstorms, dust storms and lightning so far in 2018. The events collapsed homes, destroyed crops and claimed the lives of over a hundred people with even more casualties, calling for assistance by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In late April, the state of Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India was struck by about 40,000 lightning bolts in 13 hours... striking people and



# The Real High Crimes and Misdemeanors



by Professor Bruce Johansen

During the next few months we are going to hear a lot about high crimes and misdemeanors of the impeachable kind—especially if the Democrats recapture the House and Senate. The sordid, the corrupt, the inept, and the borderline insane have become so ordinary that one wonders sometimes what our public life would be like without Russian election meddling, assaults on women by holders of high office, and so forth. What would we do if we suddenly tuned into the evening news and found it overtaken by ordinary civility, sensitivity, self-control, decency and competence.

## Treason Against Our Habitat

We gorge on a diet of dysfunction with only occasional reference to the real issues, however. In 50 years, history will recognize that the real high crimes were hardly mentioned. It may be said that we amused ourselves to death. In fact, our Constitution has no words that recognize treason against our habitat as a transgression. Our legal system is barely beginning to catch up with the geophysical facts that entail high crimes against the Earth and future generations of human beings, other animals and plants.

Our generation lives in what is, environmentally speaking, the most crucial time in the planet's history, when our actions (or lack thereof) will determine whether we will be able to establish, and then maintain, a habitable Earth with a sustainable energy supply. Until now, humanity has never faced such a task. To do so requires a departure from fossil fuels—quickly. Thermal inertia—the amount of time required for the atmosphere and the ocean to reach equilibrium (50-150 years) between income and outgoing radiation, makes this race more urgent—and at a time when much of our political leadership does not even recognize that a threat exists. The threat has become background noise, easily ignored until the wildfire burns down your house.

In the long run, these are the most egregious crimes—

Scott Pruitt's EPA, including the foolish embrace of coal, is Exhibit A. We are deciding now whether we will condemn future generations to a hell on Earth. Scott Pruitt—what a crime against nature! What a convincing argument for a constitutional amendment making the rape of Mother Earth a criminal act, a form of treason. Lock him up. Yeah—him. "EPA" used to stand for Environmental Protection Agency. Now it stands for "Earth Plundering Assholes."

And lock up Trump, too, of course. Or, better yet, strip him of everything he owns, spend it on aid to refugees and climate research, and then issue him a potato sack and enough spare change to call Vladimir Putin. Then dump him at La Guardia International Airport with one-way exit visa. That, or dump him in New Delhi, India, on a May afternoon without air conditioning or a gas mask, downwind of a coal-fired power plant. Last I checked, it was 112 F. there and viciously smoggy. India today sounds like a paradise designed by Pruitt and Co.

## Our Legacy?

The Paris Climate accord is an attempt to rise above nationalism. Our leadership has withdrawn from it. If carbon dioxide had a sense of humor, it would be laughing at Trump. It doesn't. It merely does a masterful job of holding heat, 24 hours a day, every day.

So what will be our legacy? Can we even imagine what will be said of our political generation in 50 or 100 years? A generation who watched a minority government pull a fascist coup from the hollowed-out shell of the Constitution; "conservatives" preserving nothing but their own wealth and privilege with a love affair for an energy paradigm straight out of the Nineteenth Century? Ignorant, semi-literate, and punch-drunk on power? Deliver us from this nightmare.

Tweet me a break! The next two years are going to tell us a lot about the odds on survival for the rest of humankind's tenancy on this planet. As has been said in other contexts for several years: if you're not angry, you haven't been paying attention.

## Political Contacts

The White House  
Washington, DC 20500  
Comment Line: 202-456-1111  
202-456-1414; Fax 202-456-2993  
[www.whitehouse.gov/contact/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/)

Sen. Deb Fischer  
383 Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
202-224-6551  
202-228-1325 (FAX)  
402-391-3411 (Omaha)  
402-441-4600 (Lincoln)  
[www.fischer.senate.gov](http://www.fischer.senate.gov)

Sen. Ben Sasse  
B40E Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-4224  
402-476-1400 (Lincoln)  
[www.sasse.senate.gov](http://www.sasse.senate.gov)

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, District 1  
1517 Longworth House Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
202-225-4806  
402-438-1598 (Lincoln)  
<http://fortenberry.house.gov/>

Rep. Don Bacon  
1516 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-4155  
<https://bacon.house.gov/>

Rep. Adrian Smith, District 3  
2241 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-6435  
Fax: (202) 225-0207  
888-ADRIAN7 (Toll Free)  
<http://www.adriansmith.house.gov/>

Capitol Hill 202-224-3121  
State Capitol 402-471-2311  
State Senator, District #  
State Capitol; PO Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Governor Pete Ricketts  
PO Box 94848  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4848  
402-471-2244; Fax 402-471-6031  
[gov.state.ne.us](http://gov.state.ne.us)

# Iran Deal, conclusion

draconian brand of diplomacy. The administration has been pressuring other countries to entirely cut off imports of Iranian oil, breaking with past practices of granting exemptions for countries that significantly reduce imports. It's also trying to block an Iranian bid to withdraw 300 million euros of its own funds from European banks, which Iran is looking to withdraw out of fear that U.S. sanctions could freeze its assets, as they have in the past.

If the administration's goal is to ensure the death of the Iran deal, it's doing a masterful job.

If the administration's goal is to ensure the death of the Iran deal, it's doing a masterful job. But why work to kill the deal when simply withdrawing would have won Trump points with his base and fulfilled his campaign pledge to pull out of it? The answer is likely tied to the ascendance of Mike Pompeo and national security advisor John Bolton, two of the most avid anti-Iran hawks of our time, to Trump's inner circle of advisors. Both advocated for bombing Iran during the Iran deal negotiations, and both have called for regime change in Iran. John Bolton even gave a speech in 2017 suggesting the overthrow of the Iranian government could be achieved as soon as 2019.

If sanctions and coercive diplomacy by the U.S. escalate into regime change, it wouldn't be the first time. Ask the Iraqis. Some analysts have suggested that if the U.S. succeeds in effectively shutting down Iran's oil export industry, Iran may retaliate by shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, a 21-mile stretch of water in the Persian Gulf that 20 percent of the world's oil currently passes through. If Iran does go to that extreme, as Iranian President Hassan Rouhani implied it might, that could give Trump enough pretext for a military response, which could very easily escalate into a full-scale conflict.

But even if Iran keeps its cool in

the Strait, absent some improbable success on the part of Europe to salvage enough economic incentive for Iran to remain in the agreement, Iran will almost certainly begin enriching uranium at higher levels than permitted under the deal, and that too could be twisted into a pretext for war.

As most sane observers know, war with Iran would be an unmitigated disaster for the U.S., the region, and the world. Iran is believed to have the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, which would allow it to inflict immense damage on U.S.

***Whatever the Trump Administration's true motivations may be, its actions are bringing us closer to war with Iran by the day.***

military forces in the region. Some reports suggest such a war could lead to thousands of American casualties in the first stage alone. Iran's cyber warfare program is also believed to be one of the most advanced in the world, which could allow it to inflict significant damage on the U.S. mainland in the event of a war. That's not to mention the destabilizing effect it would have on the region, and the risk of escalation into a global conflict should other major powers decide to intervene.

Whatever the Trump Administration's true motivations may be, its actions are bringing us closer to war with Iran by the day. Conscientious observers in Congress, the media, and the general public should speak up now against this drift towards war, so that we might avoid yet another disastrous, needless war of choice in the Middle East.

# A'Jamal Byndon Brings 'Fearlessness, Tact' To New Role as County's Minority Contact



—Photo by Lorraine Boyd

*A'Jamal Byndon is Douglas County's new Disproportionate Minority Contact*

*The following article by Andy Roberts appeared in the July 6, 2018 edition of The Daily Record.*

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The office is not glamorous—a simple cubicle on the fourth floor of the Omaha Douglas Civic Center—but you're probably never going to find A'Jamal Byndon there anyway.

He's more likely to meet you somewhere for a cup of coffee, because, sadly, even in 2018, the work he does remains sensitive.

The long-time advocate for social justice and those in need was named earlier this year as Douglas County's first Disproportionate Minority Contact and Compliance Coordinator. It seems he's been preparing for this latest battle against racism all his life.

Douglas County Commissioner Chris Rodgers released a statement when Byndon was hired and pointed to his long-time dedication to fairness in the juvenile justice system.

"I'm glad to have him on our team

to help solve this issue," Rodgers said. "He brings a fearlessness and a tact to this that I respect and I look forward to working with him."

The second of 14 children, Byndon and an older brother were born in Hastings, Nebraska. He grew up in Omaha where the other dozen siblings were born. The oldest and youngest, both male, died as relatively young adults. Byndon has been married 39 years and the couple has four adult children.

His social activism may have been inherited.

"Through my mother, obviously," Byndon acknowledged. She was Lerlean Johnson, one of seven women who sued the Omaha Public Schools and, "Got rid of that Apartheid busing system... they did not allow people to go across town."

He now says: "That was my baptism," adding his mother also served on multiple agencies that addressed social justice issues.

Byndon attended UNL for his undergraduate degree (a B.S. in Social Science with a major in Political Science) with plans of teaching government. Instead, "I went to the Peace Corps and after that I went to UNO for my master's degree" in Urban Education. Two additional degrees followed those for a total of four—including an Educational Specialist Degree, and Certification in Gerontology.

The Peace Corps experience, in Botswana, was an eye opener, to put it mildly. "I was working in the Ministry of Agriculture," he recalled. "I was with a team of other workers."

That landlocked country, in the southern part of Africa, presents many challenges. It is roughly 70 percent desert.

"To get to the Kalahari (Desert) it was like a four-hour drive," he said. It was group social work in a rural African setting.

"It was a great experience," Byndon remembers, and much of his time was spent with four other workers. He compared the job to working for an extension service in the United States. He also met his wife in the multi-racial country.

"You become quickly immersed in how to navigate racial issues."

Byndon has learned those lessons well, with a lifetime of experiences to school him.

"A lot of that I learned almost through osmosis in the house," Byndon offered.

He also attended Iowa Mennonite School and lived with a white family on an Iowa pig farm. The school was trying to integrate and offered scholarships.

"That's how I got to learn and be in a rural community in Iowa," he recalled. Living around Mennonites and the Amish was a cultural transformation that helped him in many ways.

But: "I could only handle it for one year."

His work was only beginning. Byndon has worked for numerous social services agencies and was one of seven founding members of "Omaha Table Talk." That was a local effort to foster a better understanding of racial issues and experiences.

"Table Talk was a major success," Byndon stated. Modeled after the "Dallas Dinners," the project started out by having the dinners hosted in homes and grew with support from the Catholic Charities board. The number of participants doubled from 100 to 200 and it continues to expand as other agencies have taken ownership, with "Inclusive Communities" now running it in a somewhat different version.

"At the height of the program at UNO we had 650 people... all on one

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# WHAT'S HOT, CONCLUSION

livestock. On May 2, 2018, a cluster of strong thunderstorms, accompanied by strong winds and lightning, swept through the Rajasthan region in the north, knocking over large structures and harming those in the way. The potent thunderstorms whipped up one of the deadliest dust storms in decades. One week later, the same region was hit by more deadly thunderstorms that brought lightning, 110-kilometer (65 mile) -per-hour winds and violent dust storms.

In recent years, extreme weather events such as heat waves, thunderstorms, and floods have been increasing in India, according to Ajay Singh, a climate change researcher with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. "Overall, the impact of global warming on the climate of India is clearly visible in the form of increased frequency and intensity of most of the extreme weather events," said Singh.

Even with the increasing trend, the intensity of events so far this year is anomalous, said Singh. The unusual thunder and dust storms could have a combination of causes, including extra moisture from a cyclonic circulation over West Bengal colliding with destructive dusty winds. High temperatures in the area also made the atmosphere unstable, fueling thunderstorms and strong winds.

The unusually high number of lightning strikes was caused by cold winds from the Arabian Sea colliding with warmer winds from northern India, leading to the formation of more clouds than usual. The spike in lightning this April was abnormal, but India has long been prone to lightning strikes, which are believed to cause more fatalities than any other natural hazard in the country.

## Questioning the Existence of God

I sent the NASA report to Prof.

Sekhar. His response was instructive: "Thank you very much for the concern. The fury of the nature is only on down-trodden/Dalits/Natives. But this time, the thunderstorms/lightning have destroyed the lives of the poor. Across India, Dalits are vulnerable people. As landless and homeless people they become the first victims to the fury of nature. The natural calamities raise the question of the existence of God. The lives of Dalits are battered by [these] beliefs and disbeliefs."

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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).*

## Your Foundation Speaks

by *Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President*

The Board of Directors of the Foundation recently has chosen to invest in the common stock of NextEra Energy and NextEra Energy Partners.

NextEra Energy is one of the top investors in wind energy in the U.S. and Canada. They own and operate over 10,000 wind turbines which together could power the City of Chicago 100%. Included in the 10,000 are three wind farms which they own and operate in Nebraska. They also operate a community solar farm east of Fort Calhoun near Omaha.

So we are not only trying to be 'fossil free' in our investments, but also pro-active in supporting investments in renewable energy. These investments are possible since individuals have made donations to Nebraska Peace Foundation which were to be invested in the permanent NPF endowment.



# The United Nations Rapporteur on U.S. Poverty

by Bob Haller  
Nebraska Division, UNA-USA

On June 21, 2018, Philip Ashton, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, delivered his report to the “Human Rights Council.” It is a damning report on the U.S. failure to address the problems of poverty and income equality. Based on travels around the country in the fall of 2017 and released last December 17, it has received scant attention from American media and what attention it has received has sometimes been dismissive. Bloomberg News, for instance, called it a “Rant” and offering a positive spin on U.S. poverty programs and tax policy. But the report deserves more attention because of its unique perspective on U.S. policy—the “human rights dimension” that is the instrument of the analyses which make up the bulk of the report.

In introducing this dimension, Ashton notes that the U.S., though recognizing the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and having ratified the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” (and insisting on pointing to other countries’ human rights deficiencies), has never accepted the existence of economic and social rights—except, he notes, the right to education guaranteed in state constitutions. A clear consequence of not recognizing these rights is the long list of ways in which the U.S. is far behind other members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, essentially the comparably wealthy nations of the world), in its success in protecting its people from obesity, incarceration, infant mortality, sickness and early death, child poverty and youth poverty, or protecting itself from spending twice the per capita money on health care than any other OECD member... Besides having the highest level of income inequality and lowest percentage of voters in elections among these same nations. Ashton does not hesitate to cite last fall’s tax cuts as among the signs that the current U.S. administration and Congress have no intention of

responding to these statistical deficiencies.

After noting these statistics, Ashton spends the rest of his reports using the “human rights dimension” as a tool for his analysis. Noting that the U.S. has ratified the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” and has the Bill of Rights in its Constitution, Ashton measures U.S. policies against standards implicit in these documents, to demonstrate that the U.S. is deficient with respect to its claimed commitments to human rights. This perspective leads to an interesting set of analyses.

Ashton notes that “American exception-

receive SNAP or Medicaid—they must work to receive these benefits—while offering unconditional tax cuts for wealthy corporations, and mortgage subsidies for wealthy homeowners, recipients of benefits whether or not they hide their assets from taxation, or even when they have become wealthy through speculation, without contributing in any way to the betterment of society in general. In addition, the two narratives ignore the conditions, including race, job availability, community resources, parental wealth, and other factors that account for differences in economic success.

***The U.S., though recognizing the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and having ratified the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,” has never accepted the existence of economic and social rights—except the right to education guaranteed in state constitutions.***

alism” came up in many of his local travels, and that it was common to hear the characterization of the poor as resisting work and wanting to spend their days watching TV and playing with their devices, being wasters and scammers who could easily find work and realize the American Dream through hard work. The wealthy, on the other hand, are “industrious, entrepreneurial, patriotic, and the drivers of economic success.” These characterizations show that spending on the poor is a waste of resources, and government is not obligated to provide healthcare or to relieve childhood deprivation. But tax cuts for the wealthy? A reward for the virtuous.

One result of this dual narrative is the effort to impose conditions on those who

Thus Ashton suggests that a society proposing to eliminate poverty would be characterized by “democratic decision-making, full employment policies, social protection for the vulnerable, a fair and effective justice system, gender and racial equality and respect for human dignity, responsible fiscal policies, and environmental justice.” And he describes the many ways in which U.S. policies ignore or undermine these objectives.

He cites, for instance, the low rate of voting in the U.S. made worse by the political efforts to take people off the voter roles and actions which discourage potential voters, such as gerrymandering, the location of polling stations and ID requirements, and

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# A'Jamal Byndon, conclusion

night in Omaha, having dinner and a conversation on race.”

At least a third were people of color, but Byndon pointed out it continues to be difficult for white people living in enclaves to meet people of color.

“If everyone of us had at least seven different friends from different racial groups we wouldn't have some of the problems we have in society,” he stated.

In Byndon's new job, he will collect and analyze data to help in identifying factors that contribute to “Disproportionate Minority Contact” (DMC) – basically, far more young people of color who are in the legal system than should be, based on their representation as a percentage of society.

Byndon pointed out that when you visit the Douglas County Youth Center, you will see the majority of the young people there are African American, while blacks are only 12 percent of the population.

“I'm not talking about a few points out. I'm talking about almost double,” he emphasized. Too many judges, he feels, have not had a course on racial diversity.

“We should have diversity throughout our state,” Byndon stressed.

The county plan also calls for him to work with a range of juvenile justice stakeholders and community members

to find news intervention and prevention strategies. He also will work with law enforcement and judges to ensure proportional treatment for juveniles in the system.

Conversation, he consistently mentions, is the key to improving the racial divisions within our society. Byndon was invited to Omaha Police Headquarters for the first time about a month ago, despite having hosted forums for multiple police chiefs.

“Conversation is a two-way street,” he said. “If they come in my house, why can't I go in their house.”

That was a start, and he believes there is a willingness in the community to make some moves that will bring about needed changes.

“There's enough good people in the city to reverse the prison population,” Byndon said. “We've just got some serious issues with our prison system and law enforcement in Nebraska.”

Among those, he feels police shouldn't be giving tickets to students in schools.

“Where are the parents in this conversation?”

That, again, is only part of the solution.

“We also need to get out of our

silos,” he suggested, referring to a need to bring services to the people who need them. He feels social workers need to get out on the streets with too many staying in their academic setting.

“They just don't have the skill set.”

Again, he feels people need to talk about the issues.

“I would go with conversations, I would go with mandatory training for anyone who's going to be working with the public,” Byndon stated. That goes beyond bus trips for future social workers who need to do more than tour the areas they may be serving.

“There should be somebody on every staff to teach people how to treat people,” he suggested.

He suggested progress can be made by looking at the baseline numbers and providing some formal training in that for law enforcement, including judges.

“Sometimes you have to look at yourself to do better,” Byndon offered, suggesting there is something to be learned from what's happening in other cities and states.

It's all part of his never-ending battle against racism—one he started fighting in his home.

“We've got to call it for what it is. Somebody's got to be the town crier,” he said. “I've been doing it all my life.”

# Human Rights, conclusion

suggests in addition that the poor, who never see a politician in their neighborhoods, and find their benefits cut, come to the belief that elected officials do not work for their benefit. And with regard to jobs for those with few marketable skills, these seldom pay well enough to eliminate the need for a safety net and are subject to elimination because of automation and new technologies and business decisions. At the same time, the circumstances of indigenous peoples, children in poverty and adults with dental needs

are cited as examples of deficient social protection. The U.S. resorts to criminalization to 'solve' problems and thus fills prisons and effectively punishes the poor with high bails, suspended drivers licenses and incarceration awaiting trial.

You have to read the report to appreciate its detailed consideration of these policy failures, but first note the coincidence that the U.S. gave up its seat on the “Human Rights Council” when it received this report—coincidentally, shortly after the U.S. was also cited for its policies of separating children from their

parents at the border. American Exceptionalism requires us to resent any criticism for our refusal to protect social and economic rights. How we can secure our rights to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' without, for instance, medical care, food, housing, accommodation for our disabilities, and recognition of gender and cultural identity is not at all clear. It would show “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind” to at least consider how we might provide a better example of a nation dedicated to human rights before we exercise our right to criticize other nations for their deficiencies.

# Paul Olson, conclusion

this pen. I have done a job given me. A few hours before my wife Betty died in 1999, she called me to her bedside and asked me to care about Nebraskans for Peace's welfare (I have tried to follow her mandate). She also requested that people not mourn her loss: "I have had a good family, great friends, and the opportunity to give myself wholly and unreservedly to the things in which I have believe, something few people are privileged to do." That opportunity has also come to me.

I recall how I awakened to the need for a peace organization. In the '30s, my father had admired the organizational skills of "Mohandas K. Gandhi." Later I came to an awareness of World War II, read the accounts and saw the pictures of fired human bodies at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and heard the voices predicting doom for our civilization after World War II. As a teenager, I was influenced by Tolstoy's late peace writings and by Albert Schweitzer's and Albert Einstein's treatises on war and human survival. But I did not yet fully understand the need for organization. However, as the evils of racism, the Vietnam struggle and colonialism pressed in on me, I came to understand increasingly what Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela were talking about. I heard the '60s Nebraska jeremiads of Tom Rehorn, Reuben Snake, Dutch Hoppe, Sam Franco, Merle Hansen, Leonard Springer, Louis LaRose, the gentler yearnings for peace and justice of Marita Heller, Dwight Dell, Wes and June Webb, and my students such as Mike Randall, Suzi Prenger and Sam Zeleski. They knew the need for organization. Before me came those who organized in support of a different way for our state and land—Marge and Dan Schlitt, Bud and Phyllis Narveson, the Omaha peace groups, Jay and Barbara Schmidt. They, and hundreds more, formed the germs of organizations that told me the pursuit of peace in an organized form is possible here.

When Black Elk was an old man, he went with John Neihardt to what was then known as Harney Peak for a prayerful revisiting of his adolescent great vision. There he cried to Wakan Tanka, the great mysterious One, "I, to whom so great a vision was given in my youth—you see me now a pitiful old man who has done nothing, for the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead." A pitiful old man myself now, I must say that, as a youth, I was never granted a vision of time before and after—of destruction and dissolution and possible cultural rebirth—such as Black Elk received. As a child and teenager, I did have hope for a more equitable future society, for a modicum of world peace, and for a good faith operation of the United Nations and international law. I did not believe—as many people of the Left do—in 'progress' toward some far off divine event; I knew that we would have to work our tails off not to lose what we had.

But I did not believe, when NFP was founded in 1970, that the tragic paradoxes of our '70s life would still be visited on us in the 2000s.

I did not believe:

- That 73 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki we would have a world crying, "Peace, nuclear peace!" and no great powers meaning it; that the modernization of nuclear weapons, the arming of space, and the heating of our climate would be our 'golden' future;
- That the same forces—perhaps some of the same people—who destroyed many Americans on the roasting spit of McCarthyism for putative collaboration with the Russians in the Soviet Union would now be praising Russia and dictators all over the world, indeed working for and with them;
- That, in a time of no major war and universal automation "Census figures

[would] show that the official [U.S.] poverty rate was 14.5 percent in 2013, while during the 1970s the range was between 11.7 and 12.6 percent." 14.5 was the rate in 2017 also.

- That 73 years after World War II white nationalist groups, some of them public Nazis, would elect a president and a large portion of our national Congress and that racism, here and abroad, would again become fashionable, though encoded in new terms.
- That the United Nations would be so eviscerated by the great powers that the mandates of the General Assembly would be ignored and the U.S. ignore its own UN human rights tradition.

Though I was given a grand intellectual vision of a world somewhat just and somewhat at peace, that world has not been realized. I have done too little to realize it. The nation's hoop is broken and scattered—not only the Lakota hoop but the U.S. hoop; there is no center any longer, and Black Elk's sacred tree is cut down. Justice William O. Douglas wisely remarked, "As nightfall does not come all at once, neither does oppression; in both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged; and it is in such twilight that we all must be most aware of change in the air—however slight—lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness."

That is our condition.

In it, we may not be able to create the far-off event that lightens everything.

We can be aware of darkening in the air and struggle.

**Thank you, Paul,  
for 'Speaking  
Our Peace.'**

*Nebraskans for Peace*  
*P.O. Box 83466*  
*Lincoln, NE 68501-3466*

*Phone:402-475-4620/Fax:475-4624*  
*nfpstate@nebraskansforpeace.org*  
*www.nebraskansforpeace.org*

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# Speaking Our Peace

*by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus*

## CODA

Sometimes it is good to say, ‘Goodbye.’ This piece says farewell to a decade and a half, and more, of trying to speak peace. The ride has been good. Consider the friends I have made, the ego boosts I have received, the meaning created for me through writing against Nebraska’s economic dependence on future nuclear holocaust. Consider how I have loved editorializing against our love of racism and prejudice: at Whiteclay, in Fremont immigration ordinances, in our hatred of Ernie Chambers and Barack Obama, in our day-to-day meanness across the

lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, appearance and all forms of difference.

I have tried. I have written in defiance of University of Nebraska sponsorship of Afghan textbooks encouraging Central Asian terrorism, in contempt of bullying in our local schools and our national policymaking, in depreciation of intellectuals like Ayn Rand and Leo Strauss that give hate respectability. I have praised the beauty emerging from suffering to create the good—whether in the life and death of Father Stanley Rother, the decades-long crusade of

Frank LaMere against Indian-killing in Western Nebraska, or the trials of Nebraska poor people robbed of a decent life by military industrial greed. I have praised the famous Nebraska men from William Jennings Bryan and George Norris to Crazy Horse and my Wahoo neighbor, August Albert, who stood for justice against the odds.

I am 86. Olsons usually die between 85 and 95, and the time has come for more skillful, younger hands to guide

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