



*Nebraskans for Peace*

# Nebraska Report

*There is no Peace without Justice*

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2020 VOLUME 48, NO. 6

## In This Season of Frenzied Overconsumption **Resolve To Live More Simply**

*( so others can simply live )*

If you're fortunate enough to be 'middle class', you've been able to hop in the car whenever you want, eat whatever you're hungry for, go shopping, spend money on recreation, and maybe even fly somewhere for a holiday.

Consumption has become such an enthroned part of our American way of life we've equated it with 'freedom'. So long as we've got the money to pay for it, we're free to move around at will, eat out, shop till we drop, trade up for a nicer car, a nicer home (in a 'nicer' neighborhood), and then 'throw away'

what's 'old' or out of fashion. This consumer drive is so ingrained in our psyches, it's now reflex. We don't give it—or its impact on the ecosystem—a second thought.

But with the coronavirus and the climate crisis, we have no choice but to start rethinking the way we live.

By limiting our mobility, sheltering at home and social distancing have not only reduced transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic—they've simultaneously reduced our ability to go out and consume. The lockdown on the global

economy has had a further dampening effect on our consumer spending, with supply shortages and price increases on everything from toiletries to groceries (particularly meat).

Like our "Greatest Generation" great-grandparents during the Depression and World War II, middle-class Americans now find themselves having to make do with a lower level of consumption—concentrating on the bare necessities needed to live, and not a lot more. Instead of being a temporary state of affairs, however, this retrenchment is the wave of the future. The prevailing threat of pandemic and climate disruption ensures that 'doing with less' will be the 'new normal' from now on... And 'Living Simply' our only viable lifestyle option.

And, it turns out, cutting our consumption won't kill us. Half of the world already lives on less than half of what we do, so we know it can be done. But making these necessary cuts—both for own health and the planet's—will require a permanent cultural shift in our perspectives and attitudes.

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*Nebraskans for Peace's state office in Lincoln is located on land that formerly belonged to the Otoe Tribe.*

## Nebraska Report

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At its heart, 'Simple Living' is about seeing ourselves as just 'plain members and citizens' of the earth's community of life: coequal with the soils, waters, plants and animals, with no special rights or entitlements. The earth, it turns out, does not 'belong' to us humans. We are not the natural world's 'conquerors'. In fact, it's we humans who belong to the earth. And by following Mohandas Gandhi's prescription for 'living simply'—taking no more than we need—we make it possible for others in the vast community of life to 'simply live'.

For all of us who've enjoyed a middle-class standard of living, this is going to unquestionably require a top-to-bottom re-tooling of how we go about our daily lives: including the acquirement of discarded skills from great-grandma's and great-grandpa's day. Here then are some steps to living a simpler life that are more in keeping with what our sorely overtaxed and overwrought ecosystem can realistically accommodate:

## ***Cutting our consumption won't kill us. Half of the world already lives on less than half of what we do, so we know it can be done.***

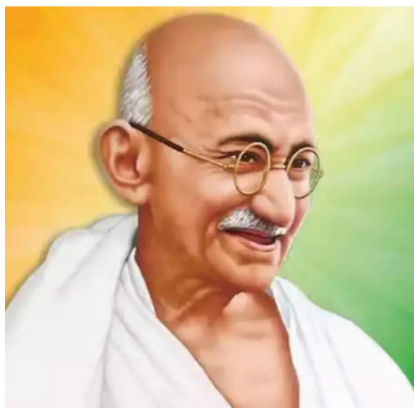
- **Reduce your private vehicle transportation (walk or bike wherever you can)...** Under the 'sheltering in place' guidelines, we're already supposed to be staying put as much as possible. But to conserve resources as well as reduce our carbon footprint, when you must use a car, try to bundle as many of your errands as you can into one trip. And then come right back home to your neighborhood where you can walk and bike to get around.
- **Pledge to eat less meat and dairy...** The average American eats a whopping 222 pounds of meat a year (compared to the average Rwandan's 22 pounds annually). Americans also—vegetarians included—yearly consume 650 pounds of dairy per capita. Eating this 'high on the food chain' three times a day is primary driver of global warming and biodiversity loss. To ensure that every person on earth gets at least some pasture-raised protein regularly, the World Resources Institute calculates that developed nations need to reduce their meat-based consumption back to the equivalent of one-and-a-half hamburgers per week. Working for social justice begins with what we choose to put in our mouths.
- **Cook at home, eating a mostly plant-based diet...** We're so programmed to build a meal around meat and/or dairy that cooking vegetarian or vegan can take some getting used to. But it's worth it (especially when you're cooking with ingredients you grew yourself). Dry beans and peas; potatoes; sweet potatoes; grains like wheat, corn, millet, sorghum and oats; milled whole grain flours and meals for baking; mushrooms; seeds and nuts; and the utter cornucopia of vegetables and

fruits out there all make for the possibility of eating well, eating local and eating low on the food chain. What better time to get into the kitchen and start exploring than when we're stuck at home sheltering in place? The internet has tons of vegetarian and vegan recipes you can try out.

- **Convert inedible lawn into garden and grow some of your own food (and if you don't have garden space, plant in containers or windowsills)...** In the built urban environment, we don't have much land available for food-growing, but what do have, we invariably squander on lawn—even though we as humans can't eat grass and in the city we can't keep the animals (cows, sheep, goats) that do. This dangerously wrong-headed mindset is part and parcel of the city dweller attitude that our sole role in the food system is to consume, to be 'eaters'... and somebody else, somewhere, somehow will grow it for us. If nothing else, the COVID-19 crisis is showing us who those nameless, faceless food workers are, how risky their work is, and how vulnerable our global food system is to shortages and scarcity. To keep stuffing our mouths, urban eaters are going to need to start pulling their weight in the food system—growing the perishable food crops (the lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, zucchini) that the city can grow better than anyone else, because what we'll harvest will be fresher and therefore more nutritious.
- **Buy locally grown food whenever you can...** If we want a more secure local food supply, then, with our dollars, we're going to have to support local producers who are out there this very minute in the sun and heat trying to grow it. Making 'low price' the ONLY criterion for what we buy is going to torpedo any effort to create a vibrant local food system. Farmers grow for markets, and without markets they don't farm. "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" whenever you can. It's a down payment on always having

something for dinner.

- **Buy only what you need and stop using 'shopping' as recreation...** With our fixation on consumerism, shopping has been turned into a recreational pastime. "Wanna go shopping? We can just browse and window shop and see if we see anything we like." But with the inevitable contraction in the economy, that frivolous behavior will be abating in favor of satisfying material



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needs. Fashion, new car models, the latest smart phone devices will be the first to go, as they are inessential, are ethically unjustifiable given the damage their production inflicts on the ecosystem, and, in any event, will be beyond most people's financial

reach. If we don't need it to live, it's superfluous consumption and just making our environmental situation worse.

- **Take the 'No Fly Pledge' and scrap your vacation travel...** Hardly anybody's flying right now, but rest assured there will be a big push to revive the airline industry. As flying is the single worst thing you can do for your carbon footprint and fewer than 1 out of 5 people on earth has ever even been on a plane, we need to give up the notion once and for all that air travel fits anywhere in the practice of Simple Living.
- **Change your recreational habits...** So we shouldn't travel, shouldn't shop for recreation, shouldn't eat (much) meat and dairy, shouldn't waste energy, water or food? Is there anything we can do to make life worth living? Sure there is. We can garden, cook tasty food, read books, write, make music, make art, take walks, exercise and play games, socialize with friends, fall in love, raise children, take care of aging loved ones... We honestly don't need superfluous consumption to be happy, when, after all, the best things in life are free.
- **AND FINALLY, Start seeing your neighborhood as your 'world' — as YOUR "Beloved Community".** In an age of pandemics and growing climate disruption, creating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the 'Beloved Community' right in our own neighborhoods (where people can live with mutual respect and cooperate with one another) will be a material necessity. Unable to get out and about like we used to, obliged to stay put where we are, we're going to have start seeing our neighborhoods as our world and a place we hold dear. Our immediate neighbors will be our social network and lifeline—and we, in turn, will be theirs... Living simply together so others can simply live.

# A Holiday Appeal To Our Supporters

**2020 will go down as the most traumatic year in NFP's 50-year-long history.**

*(And not how we envisioned celebrating our Golden Anniversary as the U.S.'s oldest statewide Peace & Justice organization.)*

Between, though, the coronavirus pandemic and the cratering of the national economy... the brazen and horrifying displays of violence against African Americans... the worst hurricane and wildfire year on the historical record... Ruth Bader Ginsburg's sudden September 18th death — and the White House's and Senate's heavy-handed, 11th-hour packing of the Supreme Court... and the most grueling and crucial Presidential Election in modern memory...

**It's seemed like this year would never end... AND IT'S NOT OVER YET.**

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris won the popular and Electoral College vote... But we still don't know how the battle over the General Election results and the presidential transition will pan out. As of this writing, President Trump has refused to formally concede — vowing to take the outcome to the Supreme Court. But even if the Court rules against him, Trump will be a lame-duck president for two more months before the January 20th inauguration... And who knows what mischief the man is capable of. ANYTHING — and we mean *ANYTHING* — can still happen.

Further, which party will wind up controlling the U.S. Senate is still up in the air. The final determination is subject to the outcome of two, special 'run-off' elections in Georgia January 5th. And even though the Biden/Harris ticket won a squeaker there in the presidential race (eking out a razor-thin 11,000-vote margin of victory out of nearly 5 million votes cast), Georgia traditionally has been a rock-solid 'red state'. Should the Republicans prevail and retain Senate control, you can be sure Mitch McConnell as Republican Majority Leader will do everything he can to thwart any initiatives coming out of the Biden/Harris White House.

**Yet even if the Democrats *DO WIN 50 seats in the Senate (with Vice-President Harris casting the tie-breaking vote), we're still not out of the woods by any stretch...***

**THE NEXT FOUR YEARS ARE GOING TO BE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL.**

*Politically... Socially... Economically... and Environmentally, we're at a turning point in human civilization.*

With the pandemic raging out of control, the racial divide in the country at fever pitch, the economy on the cusp of depression, and the climate crisis now swirling all around us...

**The NEXT FOUR YEARS are our last real window to try to get a handle on the mess we're in.**

Ten years ago (when it was still almost politically unheard of to voice such things in Nebraska), NFP invited Bill McKibben — the internationally renowned climate activist and author whose 1988 book, *The End of Nature*, was the first popular audience book on global warming — to speak in Omaha on our state's dangerous reliance on burning fossil fuels for our electricity.

A lot has thankfully changed for the better in the intervening decade... But not enough, and not nearly fast enough.

Three months ago, in the August 26, 2020 *New Yorker Magazine*, McKibben titled his weekly column on the climate crisis, "**We've Run Out of Presidential Terms to Waste**", writing:

*If Joe Biden and Kamala Harris take over the White House, in January, they're going to be dealing with an immediate and overwhelming climate crisis, not just the prospective dilemma that other Administrations have faced. It's not coming; it's here. The luxury of moving slowly, the margin for zigging and zagging to accommodate various interests, has disappeared. So, if the Democrats win, they will have to address the pandemic and the resulting economic dislocation and tackle the climate mess all at the same time... We're out of Presidential terms to waste. **If there's going to be effective American action on climate, it's going to have to come from Joe Biden.***

This is as dire as it gets, folks. There's no time to kick this can down the road any further, to pass this problem along to the next president or the next generation... **It's NOW or NEVER.**

**These are hard words to say and hard words to hear... Especially for a group like ours.**

We're 'Peace People'. We want people to be comfortable, to feel 'at-ease' and be happy.

But as Peace *ACTIVISTS* — as people committed to reducing suffering and ending injustice — we can't afford to indulge in what NFP's deceased friend and leader, Winnebago Tribe member, Frank LaMere, used to dismiss as "happy talk". Too much is at stake to lapse into 'feel-good' chatter and wishful thinking about the future... or 'trust' that things will somehow work out 'okay'.

## ***WE have to get down to work.***

Over the next four years, there's going to be a fierce need for citizen engagement from the grassroots. We're in the struggle of our lifetimes... in a struggle, really, for our very lives.

- To effect the kind of dramatic changes needed to prevent the climate from careening utterly out of control (including cutting global carbon emissions ***IN HALF*** by 2030)...
- To rebuild the world economy to meet the requirements of economic and environmental justice for all...
- To stop the assault on the rights and the very personhood of people of color and guarantee them freedom from harassment and harm as well as freedom of opportunity... and
- To contain the ravages of the coronavirus, which will rage on indiscriminate of wealth, race, creed, gender, age or ability, unless we rally together to curb it...

## ***We're going to need a vibrant Peace Movement as never before.***

### **WE'RE GOING TO NEED A WELL-FUNDED & WELL-EQUIPPED NEBRASKANS FOR PEACE.**

***This is our annual end-of-the-year fundraising appeal, when we seek to raise at least \$30,000 to get us through to the first several months of the New Year.***

The money goes to cover staff wages and taxes; phone, computer and internet expenses; production costs for the *Nebraska Report* newspaper; and outreach work on our **Three Priority Issues: Anti-War & International Law; Civil Rights & Economic Justice; and Environment, Food Security & Conflict Resolution.**

2020 though — particularly with the coronavirus pandemic — has severely hampered our fund-raising efforts. Social distancing limited our outreach and, for the first time in our history, we couldn't hold our Annual Peace Conference in person. The virtual conference we held September 26th drew a larger than usual audience... but *cost far more* and *raised far less* in donation income.

**As we close out this tumultuous year, we have pretty much spent down our savings and are nearly out of operating funds.**

In an effort to economize, we've been experimenting with publishing as much as we can online (rather than in a hard-copy, mailed form). We were in part pressured to make this shift when we were notified last spring that the printing cost for the *Nebraska Report* was going to DOUBLE — which, along with the increase in postage rates, would have added an additional \$4,000 to our annual publication and mailing expenses. Although we were admittedly queasy about this change-over, we hoped that the new all-electronic format (which permitted us to use full-color on every page) would enable us to increase the *Nebraska Report's* outreach while also saving us money.

*What we've discovered, however, is that our readership has dramatically dropped.* A majority of our members aren't even opening the online version — let alone reading it on their computer or phone. So we have concluded we have no choice but to return to a printed, mailed newspaper, if we're to get our message out and have people actually read what we publish.

***As things now stand, we will need an average of \$13,300 a month to meet all of our financial obligations and keep NFP on the job of working for Peace & Justice. (\* All of the staff have pledged to continue to work at their wage rate of \$15 per hour.)***

**With the fate of the Earth hanging in the balance, the last thing we want to be doing now is further whittling down NFP's already skeletal budget.**

We personally understand the economic contraction that the pandemic has inflicted on the economy and on households across America. Almost everyone has been affected somewhat. That being said: If your household is one that has weathered this economic downturn with minimal pain and inconvenience, we urge you to make the biggest donation you possibly can. If you have the financial wherewithal, give deeply to help make up for those who cannot donate.

Our entire planetary ecosystem is at an existential tipping point. Organizations like Nebraskans for Peace the world over are our best hope from keeping us from going over the edge. But...

**To have a good shot at saving the ecosystem requires that we first save NFP.**

Help keep us at work for the next four years, won't you? **Help us raise the \$30,000 we need to start the new year. Everything we care about rides on what we do between now and 2024.**

*This Holiday Season... Give the Gift of Peace with a Gift to Nebraskans for Peace.* The contribution form is on page 12.

Best wishes... and 'Thank You' for your faithful support. You're why we've endured 50 years...

**Ron Todd-Meyer, Nebraskans for Peace President**

**Tim Rinne, NFP State Coordinator**

# What is “Responsible Investing”?

by Tyler Mainquist

There are many terms being used to describe investment options that aim to deliver a competitive financial return while also seeking specific non-financial results. The historical keyword was “SRI” which meant “Socially Responsible Investing.” The acronym has been repurposed to “Sustainable, Responsible and Impact” investing, and you may see each of those words used on their own as well. For the last year, the most popular term has been “ESG” which stands for “Environmental, Social and Governance.” This column will help explain what the investment companies are trying to convey with these phrases, and future entries will help provide additional details, benefits, challenges and examples.

I place “Responsible Investing” above other terms in the hierarchy of descriptors. It captures an investor’s desire to use their financial resources in a way that reflects their

sense of responsibility to their community, whether that is local or global. There are many subsets.

“Sustainable Investing” most commonly refers to environmental sustainability: ensuring that the companies owned in a portfolio have minimal detrimental impact on the natural world, or are actively working to improve it. Addressing global climate change via decreased fossil fuel extraction/consumption is a key goal, as evidenced by the Divestment campaign from Bill McKibben, 350.org and others. Additional environmental drivers include decreasing pollution, reducing deforestation, and encouraging restorative agriculture practices. Some firms refer to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to inform their investment choices.

Beyond the environment, many investors want to financially support companies that have policies, products or services that align with their own values, and con-

sequently avoid companies that oppose them. This is sometimes known as ‘values-based investing’; or ‘faith-based investing’ if values come directly from one’s faith life; or even “Biblically Responsible Investing” (BRI) if investors trace their stated values to the Bible. This aspect is where “socially responsible investing” really got its start: from the Quakers investing their community resources according to their values, and later when investors pressured companies to stop supporting apartheid in South Africa—the original divestment campaign. Today, common social goals include supporting companies which operate with appropriate ethics, including policies to help ensure human rights throughout their workforce, supply chain, and board of directors. Most also avoid weapon manufacturers, tobacco companies, and the private prison industry.

“Impact Investing” seeks a measurable,

*conclusion on page 12*



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# FRATELLI TUTTI

## TO ALL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Pope Francis' Encyclical Analyzing and Responding to Social Ills Facing Us All

by John Krejci

I must admit I rarely read papal documents beginning to end. First, they are often dry and overly pedantic! Besides I, rather righteously, think 'been there, heard that'. In my defense, I have had 26 [sic!] years of Catholic education—fortunately most of it was progressive and avantgarde. I experienced the modernization of Catholic thinking in Rome in 1963: The Second Vatican Council. However, as for most of us long-time Nebraskans for Peace members, my early life was sheltered and narrow. Mine was an urban ethnic community—not unlike small-town Nebraska, a farm or other sheltered environment. But as is true for many of us, we grow and expand our horizons and become more aware of the shortcomings, injustices and needs of our communities, our country and the world.

"Fratelli Tutti" speaks to those issues and injustices that have been and continue to be perpetrated by individuals, rival groups and nations. But Pope Francis does not stop at analysis and critique; he boldly puts forth recommendations to address and eradicate them. His basis is LOVE. The Good Samaritan parable serves a model for action. Joshua McElwee, brilliant Rome correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter* begins his analysis with these words:

*Laying out a comprehensive vision after the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis imagines societies that are more caring, more focused on helping those in need and fundamentally less attached to the principles of market capitalism... (He) says the continuing global health crisis makes it all the more urgent that*

*we rethink our styles of life.*

*Among other things the pope puts up for discussion: trickle-down, the world's unfair distribution of wealth, continued use of the 'just war' theory and the death penalty, and populist leaders who appeal to people's 'basest and most selfish inclinations'.*

"Fratelli Tutti" urges dialogue and cooperation among many peoples, traditions, and cultures—working together to address and mitigate these evils.

One might rightly ask: Why should I listen to a religious leader who heads a flawed institution that has been guilty for two millennia of Anti-Semitism, the Crusades, the Inquisition, cooperation with colonial exploitation—not to mention the still unresolved sins of sex abuse of children and oppression of women? Aside from the obvious defense that all institutions are imperfect and sinful, I will note the metaphor that even stopped clocks are correct twice a day!

Pope Francis is a Third World person and a Jesuit. He is cut from a different cloth—a breath of fresh air. Some say an advocate of "Liberation Theology". He has moved the dialogue of previous popes from the culture wars of abortion, birth control and narrow sexual morality to a focus on social justice.

Francis first catalogues the "dark clouds" hanging over our planet. (Recall that his first Encyclical letter addressed the dangers of climate change and our obligation to change our way of life and deal with it.)

As mentioned previously, his biblical basis is rooted in the commandment

of love, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He urges this kind of care for one another, especially the stranger, the alien and the oppressed.

As also previously mentioned, Francis rejects the 'just war' theory, the death penalty, trickle-down economics, exploitation of the poor, migrants, selfish populism and narrow nationalism. He counsels dialogue and cooperation among nations. He gives a shout out to the United Nations, noting that it too needs reform. The ideas offered by "Fratelli Tutti" are very much in line with the goals and ideals of Nebraskans for Peace. Frankly, the U.S. bishops need to thoughtfully read the encyclical more so than members of NFP!

The Pope is not speaking directly to the United States, but the application of the principles are obvious. He cautions that conquering the COVID-19 virus and not changing our selfish individualistic, consumerist way is not acceptable.

Fundamental societal change is necessary. Although during this pandemic, we are less active at meetings or on streets... and due to age and other limitations, we may participate less in Black Lives Matter rallies or anti-death penalty vigils, or lobby less for police reform or against a new prison... we can still read, write, use social media, Zoom meetings and our quiet time sheltering or in quarantine to reflect on and ponder these issues. We should not forget to be loving and caring for our families.

St. Francis of Assisi confronted the corruption of the 13th-century church. Pope Francis is asking us to love our neighbor in the 21st century. And despite all—never give up hope.

# What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

## Donald Trump and Earth's Existential Crises

Goodbye, Donald J. Trump. Goodbye, and to hell with you, literally. “Lock him up!”

I'm not saying this just because he is a coarse, small intellect... An ugly man utterly lacking decency and respect for the Earth and all of the plants and animals to which it gives sustenance. That's part of it. The real story here, though, is that we are now up to our eyeballs in existential crises. And riding in a car with Donald Trump and his cronies is like speeding at 200

to this problem about 25 years ago, most of this was theory with warnings from forward-thinking scientists such as James Hansen of NASA. Now, it's obvious: witness wildfires choking Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Sydney, and many other places, just in the last year. To Trump, global warming is still a joke, a “hoax” (one short word in his meager vocabulary he employs for many things that he doesn't understand). Poetic justice requires an F-5 tornado to roll over Mar-a-Lago. I

just about everything on which daily life depends. I'll offer an illustration, courtesy of NASA's wonderful eyes in the sky (see adjacent graphic). This is a map of South America with precipitation patterns highlighted. Please notice that precipitating winds are coming out of the west, upslope along the Andes, giving the west coast an abundance of rain and snow. The west-to-east wind pattern then descends along the mountains (let's mess with Donald's mind and use a scientific term: “adiabatic



*One of these existential crises, of course, is climate change—usually the subject of this column. If you have been traveling with me for any length of time, you know why raising the levels of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, etc.) in our atmosphere is a slow-motion death sentence.*

miles an hour on a crowded freeway in the wrong direction.

One of these existential crises, of course, is climate change—usually the subject of this column. If you have been traveling with me for any length of time, you know why raising the levels of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, etc.) in our atmosphere is a slow-motion death sentence. When I first started paying attention

would offer Trump a major hurricane, but that would also wipe out many other houses north and south of Mar-a-Lago. A tight F-5 tornado on a direct path, descending and ascending at the right times, might teach Dum Dum Donald a little climate science.

### **The Pervasive Nature of Climate Change**

A changing climate messes with

flow”), drying and warming, producing desert conditions and fires. Meanwhile, the west coast, usually a desert, gets flooded out. *Hey!* an informed observer might say, *this airflow is running backward.* And indeed it is. Global warming messes with atmospheric air flow. This one does not reverse itself all the time, but often enough (influenced by El Nino and La Nina) to have a major effect on South America's weather.

By now, I'm sure that my imaginary Donald Trump would be squirm-



ing with boredom, so just suffice to say that global warming is getting worse, and given thermal inertia, it would continue to get worse for 50 to 100 years even if we completely stopped using fossil fuels right now. Everyone who experienced seven hurricanes mauling the Gulf of Mexico Coast in one summer this year may want to keep listening, but let's save that one, and get along to our second existential crisis.

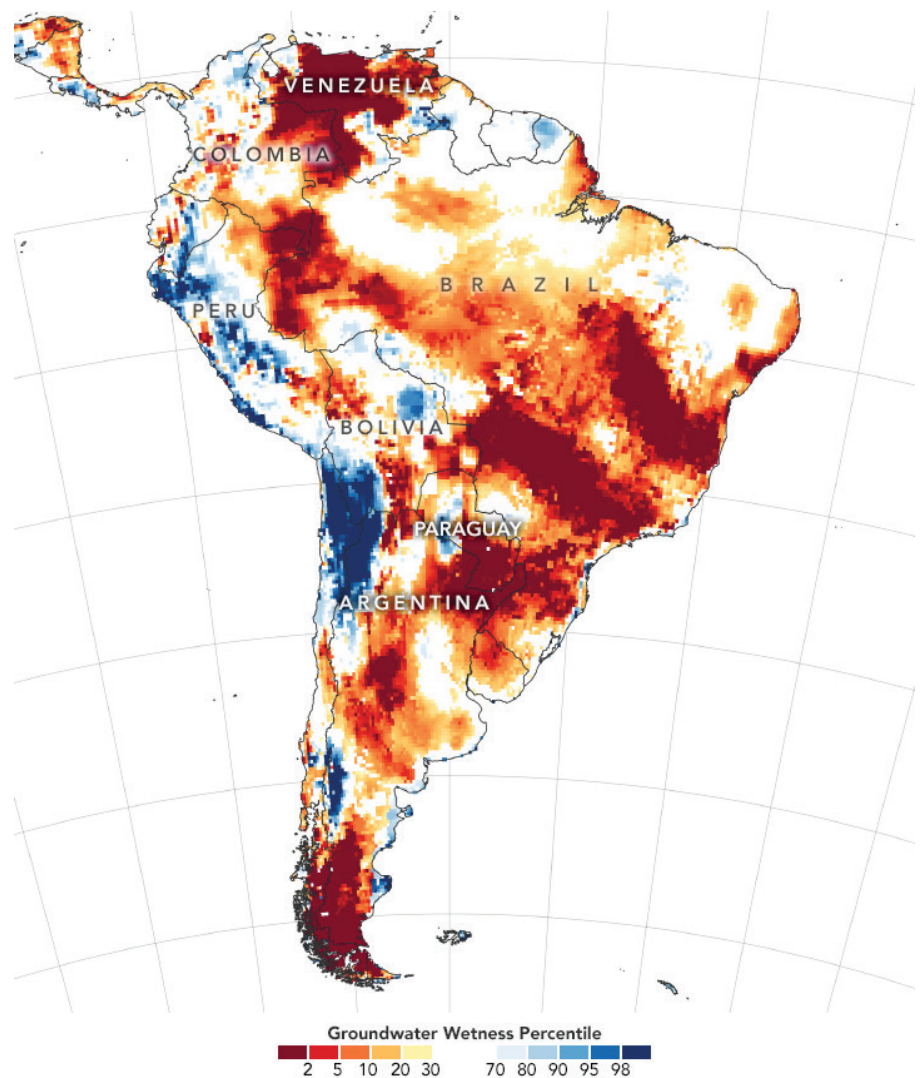
## Coronavirus as Existential Threat

Donald, I hope that you have your facemask and hand sanitizer handy. Because none of us, not even you, Mr. Commander-in-Chief, can bully our way out of the coronavirus. This is a wily disease, the end result of tens of millions of years of evolution (no one knows how long, really). It can mutate around whatever cure we may attempt, as a species, to throw at it. It may allow some of us to get away with a slight case of the sniffles, and kill others in breathless agony. It doesn't care who you are, or whether you voted for Biden or Trump. All it wants from us is suitable habitat—that is, a route into our lungs.

As evidence of its enduring nature, coronavirus can mutate into forms that afflict other mammals, such as mink, (the reason that Denmark recently killed its entire stock of valuable mink that were destined for expensive coats), or maybe domesticated pets—our beloved dogs and cats—then mutate again and re-infect human beings in a form that allows it immunity from vaccines adapted to the pre-mutation form of the virus. One lick from super-spreader Fido, and you may end up on a ventilator, gasping for breath.

This is all speculation right now, but it is well-informed speculation, so it's not a guess. It is a good reason why we should not regard this virus with the kind of diffidence that Trump has assigned to it. Like with global warming, he assumes that human beings are the masters of the Earth, and that our current status as 'king of the hill' is permanent, no matter how foolish or self-aggrandizing we may be.

It's perhaps time again to remind ourselves of some tough truths.



## Tough Truths

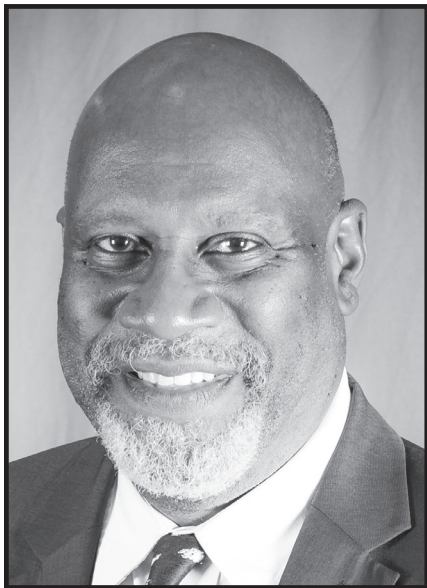
The late Carl Sagan, one of our most insightful scientific and public intellectuals, had an interesting theory about highly developed civilizations. Given the number of stars and planets in the vast reaches of the universe, he said, there must be other highly developed forms of life. Distance may keep us from making physical contact, but Sagan said that another reason we may never be on speaking terms with other intelligent species (judging from our own example) could be their penchant for destroying themselves after reaching technological complexity.

On Earth, the damaging side-

effects of our own ingenuity may finish us off barely two centuries after we have discovered the wonders of fossil fuels, atomic energy, plastics, deficit financing. That's less than one percent of human beings' tenure on Earth. Only during the last half-century have we discovered that our civilization may not be sustainable without major changes in our way of life. Because he is so stupefyingly ignorant of nature's rules of existence, Trump and his cronies are dangerous to all of us. Don't let your guard down. These blood-suckers will be back.

*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).*

# Racism Is a Problem Only Whites Can Solve



**A'Jamal-Rashad Byndon,  
Community Advocate for  
Real Justice**

Weysan Dun, a retired Special Agent of the FBI, authored a guest editorial in the *Omaha World-Herald* (11-1-2020) under the title “Citing facts and acknowledging crime data is not White supremacy”. The op-ed opens with his acknowledging that there is “frustration and anger” in Black communities over being “ignored and marginalized”, with each advance toward equality seemingly “followed by a setback or new manifestation of inequality”. He goes on to state: “The larger community must not only recognize the pain caused by the continuing inequality faced by Blacks, but also must make a concerted effort to alleviate the disparities of resources and seek solutions.”

Having paid the obligatory ‘lip ser-

vice’ to the “setbacks” and the “disparities” suffered by the Black community, though, Mr. Dun promptly proceeds to next deliver an all-too-familiar public scolding of “the more strident voices advocating on behalf of the Black community”—making clear his displeasure with those who dwell on the frustration and anger and whose “continued focus on divisive rhetoric and criticism, rather than finding commonalities of experience and solutions, is counter-productive.” He then cites a host of statistics focused on above-average law enforcement service calls and crime rates in the African American community. Resting his case, Dun concludes that, “Hurling accusations of racism or ‘victim blaming’ whenever someone cites such facts does not contribute to solving these societal challenges; rather, it deepens societal divides, obfuscates the problem and ignores reality.” The focus of our activism, he says, should be “on finding solutions and common goals rather than dwelling on historic injustices and making hyperbolic accusations.”

Let’s back up a second and take a hard look at what Mr. Dun is saying to the Black community.

We live in a country that has practiced over 400 years of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, education and economic discrimination, disenfranchisement, income and wealth disparity, disproportionate conviction and incarceration, and hate crime violence against African Americans, much of which continues up to this very day. And now, after centuries of this historical trauma, we’re being told that we don’t have the right to be angry, upset

or mad about this treatment? (Not to mention that our ancestors and their descendants were cheated out of billions of dollars of created wealth that went to enrich a white elite.)

To hear from a non-Black, career-law enforcement official that important opportunities for “finding solutions and

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common goals” with Whites are being lost when strident voices advocating on behalf of the Black community focus on divisive rhetoric and America’s racist past is, frankly, silly.

And Dun’s high-handed recitation of crime statistics among African Americans reeks exactly of the “victim blaming” he claims to refute. Crime in the African American community is understood by many as a sociological manifestation of poverty... And after four centuries of systemic oppression and exploitation, whose fault is it that Black America is poor?

Much of what so aggravates me

# Keeping Up with COVID-19

*Submitted by NFP COVID-19 Committee (Tom Genung, Kathy Niece & Mark Welsch)*

Colder weather is here now and folks throughout Nebraska are looking forward to the upcoming holiday season as they enjoy a typical autumn.

Hmm. That is what we would like to write but this is not a typical autumn

***When this worldwide problem started hitting close to home in early April as outbreaks of the virus reached meatpacking plants and their communities, Nebraskans for Peace formed a small COVID-19 committee to monitor, advocate for and act on behalf of those affected most adversely by the coronavirus.***

because this is not a typical year. School, Husker football, family visits and travel have all been disrupted due to a global pandemic, COVID-19, that has killed over 1.3 million people worldwide, including 250,000 in the United States and nearly 800 in Nebraska as of this writing.

When this worldwide problem started hitting close to home in early April as outbreaks of the virus reached meatpacking plants and their communities, Nebraskans for Peace formed a small COVID-19 committee to monitor, advocate for and act on behalf of those affected most adversely by the coronavirus. Initially we urged and successfully got some Nebraska health departments to track and report more details about the cases, such as ethnicity. It soon became clear that People of Color (POC) were—and still are—being hit the hardest by COVID-19.

The world's understanding of the disease was constantly changing but our committee was able to monitor and respond since we met weekly by Zoom.

On March 19, 2020, Governor Pete Ricketts directed restaurants and bars in Cass, Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington counties to close their dining/seating areas and move to takeout, carry-out, or delivery only. This action came after the Douglas

County Public Health Department reported its second case of COVID-19 that officials could not trace to its origin (commonly known as a “community spread” case). Ricketts has issued changing directives depending on the severity of spread, and available beds in hospitals, in the state. He has also steadfastly refused to issue any sort of mandate to require residents to wear a face mask, even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated recommendations about their importance.

Lincoln and Lancaster County, despite threats of a lawsuit by Ricketts, issued a mask mandate to slow the spread of the virus. The Omaha City Council and Mayor similarly responded by passing ordinances that require the wearing of

*conclusion on page 14*

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## Responsible Investing, conclusion

positive outcome beyond just financial return. This may occur because the asset management firm targets companies whose products or services provide a direct social benefit, or because they use a portion of the assets for community projects. Other options—called 'impact notes'—function more like a bond where investors are quoted a known return for a fixed term of years, and the proceeds are used to finance specific projects that are expected to eventually pay for themselves. Recent impact investments have been created using crowdfunding techniques, outside of the traditional financial system, meaning less regulation but also less oversight.

The greatest growth within Responsible Investing has come from firms using ESG factors when deciding which companies to include in their fund. The firms have recognized that 1) a company's environmental, social and governance attributes represent

valuable insight into potential earnings risk in the future; but also 2) investor demand for Responsible Investing is growing rapidly, and if they want a piece of the action then an easy way to is relabel an existing fund to have "ESG" in the name, even if the fund's holdings have not changed. On one hand, considering ESG data is better than nothing, but a product name does not tell a complete story.

Another valuable aspect of investing responsibly is to be (or to utilize) an engaged asset owner. Shareholders in a publicly traded company have the privilege/responsibility of voting on proposals, whether initiated by the company's own board or by other shareholders. Some asset managers—particularly those on the Sustainable and Impact side of responsible investing—maintain staff to engage with company management, to help them understand and improve their performance on ESG factors. Some even focus on

writing and submitting shareholder proposals to encourage companies to move in a different direction. That is distinct from other firms who may create "ESG" funds, but whose own management opposes proposals that would seem to align with the funds' goals.

The overall lesson: "Know What You Own." Feel free to contact me with questions, or watch for additional information in the future. I can be reached at [tmainquist@aicinvest.com](mailto:tmainquist@aicinvest.com) (preferred), or call 402-423-4022, or text 402-227-8314.

*Tyler Mainquist offers products and services using the following business names: Central Financial Services (CFS) – insurance and financial services Ameritas Investment Company, LLC (AIC), Member FINRA/SIPC– securities and investments | Ameritas Advisory Services (AAS) – investment advisory services. AIC and AAS are not affiliated with CFS or Nebraskans for Peace*

# Racism, conclusion

*... Ending racism is up to White people. And with nearly half of the American electorate having just voted to give Donald Trump a second term, it doesn't appear that they're ready to do it any time soon.*

about Weysan Dun's opinion piece is that, ultimately, with his proposed solutions he is placing the onus of 'getting White society to change' onto backs of Blacks. To do what he's proposing, Black people are somehow supposed to rise above their historical trauma, their lower economic station, and their reduced educational and career opportunities... We're supposed forget the institutional racism and higher conviction and incarceration rates in the criminal justice system... We're supposed to overlook the presidential dog-whistles to White supremacists, the horrors of George Floyd's eight-minute-long murder, and the generalized feeling that we "can't breathe"... And we're supposed to swallow our hurt and anger, resist the use of critical and divisive language that might alienate fragile White egos, and meet privileged White people half-way...

Well, that's not going to happen, because racism in America (and everything that comes with it in terms of wealth and power and privilege) isn't something Black people created and benefit from. It's a White 'Apartheid'-system problem. Whites are perpetrat-

ing racism on Blacks and other people of color—not the other way around.

That being the case, Mr. Dun's words—"Those who genuinely wish to help alleviate inequality in our society would accomplish more by working, volunteering, donating and investing in underserved communities. All will benefit if the focus of activism is on finding solutions and common goals rather than dwelling on historic injustices and making hyperbolic accusations"—ring pretty hollow to this African American's ears.

We cannot ignore the historic holocaust of slavery... of the genocide of African Americans and the Native population of this continent as having no relevance to the current socioeconomic conditions in Nebraska and the United States at large. That hideous

heritage has forever marked the Black (and I'll wager the Native) psyche. We are sick of the racism and dearly want it to stop. But we can't stop it. It's not in our power.

Only White people can end the problem of racism. Our job as people of color is to figure out how to deal with a racist society that, wherever we go, whatever we do, never gives us any quarter. Ending racism is up to White people. And with nearly half of the American electorate having just voted to give Donald Trump a second term, it doesn't appear that they're ready to do it any time soon.

*A'Jamal Byndon is Chair of the board of MORE, an organization working to address race equity and anti-racism in our Omaha. He can be reached at 5529 North 111th Street, 402-578-6729.*

## Your Foundation Speaks

*by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President*

I want to report that, in spite of the coronavirus pandemic, our investments in alternative energy and alternative energy infrastructure are doing very well. For the first time our permanent endowment has over \$1 million invested.

Our investments include Brookfield Renewable Partners and Brookfield Renewable Corporation, Hannon Armstrong Sustainable Infrastructure Capital and NextEra Energy and NextEra Energy Partners. Dividends, estimated to be nearly \$40,000 annually from our investments, go directly to support Nebraskans for Peace.

Please consider what you can do and make a donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation so we can add more renewable energy stocks to our portfolio.



# COVID-19, conclusion

masks in businesses. As of this writing, both locations require wearing masks in all businesses except bars and restaurants. Other communities are considering similar indoor mask requirements as the virus begins to soar with activities moving indoors.

The state positivity rate on November 16, 2020 put Nebraska among the top five in the nation per capita. It is above 17% with 3,440 new cases reported in just one day. Hospitals are nearing capacity. In fact, every metric indicates that the spread of COVID-19 in Nebraska is much worse than it was at its highest point in the spring, the first week of May. Average daily cases are up 427%. Number of people hospitalized is up 449%. Total deaths are up 286%.

Since April, we have stood up for the workers in the meatpacking plants, urging our elected officials to implement regulations to protect the safety and dignity of these workers, but with no significant changes. Is this because these “Essential Workers” are primarily POC? Why are there rules for bars, restaurants, barber shops, offices but not for where this virus was spreading the most quickly and could again? Why are football players tested daily but not meatpacking workers? Why

is testing not as readily available or accessible in some communities of color? Our committee will continue to pursue answers.

Medical professionals and local health departments have been encouraging residents to continue following CDC recommendations and wear facemasks, maintain a physical distance of six feet, and wash hands often. People, however, seem to have grown weary of COVID-19. Many who were initially following the recommendations have let their guard down.

Dr. Dan Johnson, division chief of critical care at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, has been among the most persistent in sounding the alarm through both traditional and social media. “Every family in Nebraska will be affected either by a death or serious illness,” he warns about COVID-19. Thus he calls for public health officials to enact more restrictions and encourages all Nebraskans to follow guidelines. Dr. Johnson says that people should avoid being indoors right now with people not in their own household until we slow the spread and not overwhelm our healthcare system.

What can you do? First and foremost,

follow the guidelines from our medical professionals and health department, including quarantining the FULL 14 days when exposed. It’s important to note that you CANNOT test out of Quarantine.

Then you can:

- Call your friends/neighbors to encourage them to help slow the spread (stay home when possible, wear a mask when out, don’t travel this holiday season).
- Call Governor Pete Ricketts (402-471-2244) and ask him to issue an Executive Order that will protect those who work in meatpacking plants. Tell him to protect all of us by requiring everyone to wear a mask when in public.
- Contact your local officials to encourage them to pass and enforce ordinances to require wearing of masks inside businesses.
- Contact your state senator to ask for legislation that allows local health directors to require employee testing, implement mask mandates, reduce occupancy rates, and/or close businesses where COVID-19 is spreading.

Doing what we can when we can will help us all get through this.

## HARD TRUTH, conclusion

election. To have done otherwise might have tipped the balance towards Trump, and I for one am grateful for this act of restraint. The decision may have been made as a public relations move, to counter widespread and entirely justified disgust and outrage at the industry’s exorbitant profits, but at this moment I don’t much care. I’m way past demanding a pure motive too, when somebody does the right thing.

**Hard Truth 2: Little can change in Nebraska so long as Citizens United is the law and the Ricketts family has money to spend.**

Altogether, Pete Ricketts and his parents made an investment of \$928,000 in Nebraska elections in 2020, some of it to fight extended gambling and in legislative races to secure the Republican majority which extends and protects Ricketts’ powerful hold in our nominally non-partisan Unicameral. There are rich people, and there are really

rich people. Pete Ricketts’ brother is Trump’s lead fundraiser. Just so we’re clear.

When a governor effectively buys legislative seats, no good can come to the people of the state. This kind of patronage is bad for the relationship of the senators to the governor, and it is bad for the relationship of the senators to one another, creating as it does a two-tiered system of those who take their marching orders from their patron—Senators Brewer, Erd-

man, Bosselman, Groene, Albrecht and the like—and the rest who are resolutely NOT the governor's to do with as he likes, who often find themselves hamstrung.

It remains to be seen whether the so-called grand compromise—how Nebraska will pay for public education—passed this last session will survive the pandemic. Will state revenues be enough? Will TEEOSA (the school funding formula) be revisited? One thing is sure. Pete Ricketts will never allow a structural solution to the problem of over-reliance on property tax to fund K-12 education, because he wants an income tax cut.

**Hard Truth 3: Just as white supremacists won't give up their dominance without a fight, so the folks who make money off fossil fuels are targeting renewable energy production every chance they get.**

Along with cash from the surviving Koch brother (Ricketts' soulmate and partner in "Americans for Prosperity"), the governor's money also poured like manna overflowing to fund campaigns in public power races, in order to defeat candidates who champion renewable energy. Nevertheless, Mary Harding retained her seat on the NPPD board as did Amanda Bogner (OPPD) and, with newly-elected directors including Aaron Troester (NPPD) and term limited state senator Sarah Howard and Mary Spurgeon (both OPPD), all stand ready to fight the good fight against the entrenched power of the fossil fuel industry.

But facts are facts (see "Hard Truth" Sept./Oct. 2020 *Nebraska Report*), and just as climate change is busily expressing itself everywhere these days in drouths and flooding, storms and rampant loss of habitat (including human), new diseases and climate refugees, renewable sustainable energy development can only be messed with and delayed, not stopped. Wind, solar, geo and biofuels energy produc-

tion is bringing new income, not just industry jobs but also land rent, to the farmers, ranchers and landowners of Greater Nebraska, Governor Pete and his posse notwithstanding. Funny how Pete and posse are always saying, Nebraska is open for business and We are taking advantage, but when this chance—renewable energy development—comes along to build a rural tax base while we counter global warming, THIS they can't support?

To leave you with hope, I offer here some good news for Nebraskans in every zip code—the farm to table movement may offer a safe harbor in the pandemic storm now and beyond, through a federal farm to schools initiative. A coalition of producers, school lunch staff, farm organizations, a food bank, UNL Extension and the Nebraska Departments of Education and Agriculture, is working in Nebraska to facilitate farmer to school relationships as an alternative to industrial food product supply lines. Readers of the *Nebraska Report* understand what is at stake here, as the farm to school project has been the subject of articles for some time now. This is a tremendous opportunity for forward-leaning farmers and ranchers to sell what they raise into the nation's largest restaurant chain—the school lunch program—and the dollars these ag producers earn will circulate again and again in their home communities. Developing a domestic market for food for humans sustainably produced in this country is the very best way to help producers diversify their operations.

**Hard Truth 4: If you love me you will leave me alone for the holidays.**

Nebraskans are smart, a general practitioner from God's country told me on a Zoom meeting. Then he said Nebraskans have the highest rate of vaccination of all 50 states. The highest. So says the CDC. So if Nebraskans are so

smart, can we practice pandemic safety?

As I write, daily new cases in the U.S. are approaching 200,000 a day. Nebraska Governor Posse Pete Ricketts is saying "steps may be taken", frowning his considerable brow to indicate his grave concern, but no statewide mandates to counter covid will come down from this governor. Luckily, you don't have to wait for a mandate from a governor to stay home. And unless you really mess up badly, the governor cannot prevent you FROM staying at home. So stay home.

I know you love your family and friends, so protect them. When you CAN stay home, do. You may be tempted to say, I've had a rough year and the bastards can't take the holidays from me. I'm gonna sit down like a human being and have a meal with my relations. Don't do it. Don't unleash a holocaust of contagion into our communities.

There are a hundred no contact ways you can let the people you love feel that love. My neighbor brings me noodle soup. Friends bring their dogs by and we chat at a generous distance, me on my deck, guests in my yard. My best friend from high school talks to me on the phone for an hour and a half. Neighbor kids bin my garbage and recycling and bring me origami and painted stones. My son splurges on streaming for me and texts me the titles of great movies, history, science and travel and cooks tours to watch. A friend drops off tomato soup from tomatoes she grew and roses in a plastic cup. My prayer group is on Zoom once a week, and a lovelier bunch of folks I've never known.

Want people to know you love them? Write all the really important people in your life a letter. On paper. Put those letters in envelopes, affix each with a Forever stamp and mail them off on Thanksgiving.

That's love.

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# HARD TRUTH

*by Sally Herrin*

## **The better angels of America seem to have awakened and the Worst — Four More Years — has been averted. This time.**

**Hard Truth 1: Our national nightmare is far from over.** Countries which once get cozy with a right-wing demagogue are often in for a bumpy ride over the following decades. Being as we are now over our touching but misguided belief in 'American exceptionalism' (RIGHT?), that means us. Trump can do a lot of mischief between now and mid-January, and I am

sure he intends to do all he can to further part out the resources of the country to hand over to unfettered capitalism.

Do not expect too much from a Biden Administration, O best Beloved... nor yet too little. All the rest of my years on Earth will not see undone all the harms the Trump years have wrecked upon our democracy, but there is hope now and

much that can and must be done—beginning with sound pandemic policy, including so-called stimulus money to aid disaster-stricken Americans, and restarting—indeed, doubling down upon—U.S. participation in the Paris Climate Accords.

Before it all blows by, please take note of Big Pharma's role in national events. Pfizer withheld news of its vaccine until after the