



Nebraskans for Peace

Nebraska Report

There is no Peace without Justice

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2020 VOLUME 48, NO. 5

Climate Activist & 350.org Founder Bill McKibben on the 2020 Election We've Run Out of Presidential Terms to Waste

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.

— *The New Yorker*, "The Climate Crisis", August 26, 2020



Internationally renowned climate activist, journalist and 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben wrote the first popular audience book, *The End of Nature*, about the threat of global warming in 1988. In 2010, he headlined Nebraskans for Peace's "Coal=Global Warming" protest in front of the Union Pacific corporate headquarters in Omaha to spotlight Nebraska's leading role in the rail transport of this dirty and deadly fossil fuel. McKibben is pictured above with Nebraskans for Peace Omaha Coordinator Mark Welsch. 350.org is named for the safe level of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere: 350 parts per million. The level today is at 409 ppm and rising steadily.

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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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Nebraskans for Peace

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Wildfires & Severe Storms Underscore Urgency to Rein in Climate Change

by Mark Reynolds and Mark Welsch

Just last year floodwater was rushing through the homes, downtown streets and businesses of Dannebrog and many other towns and farms in Nebraska. People rushed to move their treasured items to the second floor and livestock to higher ground. The floods came too fast to move everything. Thousands of farm animals drowned. The floods ruined stored grain on farms. It flooded in places that never flooded before. Things that got wet started to grow mold and stink and had to be thrown away. Saturated walls and insulation had to be cut out and thrown away as well. Fumes of chlorine filled the air of many homes and businesses. People sprayed the remaining structural wood with bleach to stop their buildings from being filled with toxic mold.

Now, a year later, those same people smell wildfire smoke not just from the West Coast, but also from inside Nebraska where we are suffering from yet another severe drought. Many farms and ranches are bone dry. When fires start, it is hard to control them. Firefighters and volunteers have gotten hurt in Nebraska at two large fires this year.

The fall fire season hasn't even started, and already we've seen an astonishing amount of destruction. In California, 2.6 million acres have gone up in smoke, exceeding the 2 million acres burned in 2018. That year, the damage and economic loss from wildfires, according to AccuWeather, came to \$400 billion. At the end of August, nearly 4,000 homes and other structures had been consumed by wildfires this year in California. By early September, social media feeds were filled with photos of orange, smoky skies, and death tolls continue to climb across multiple western states.

The explanation for the increasing intensity and frequency of wildfires is pretty straightforward: Climate change is making forests drier and weather hotter, conditions in which a lightning strike can ignite a fire that quickly destroys thousands of

acres. Climate scientist Park Williams of Columbia University told the *New York Times*, "Behind the scenes of all of this, you've got temperatures that are about two to three degrees Fahrenheit warmer now than they would have been without global warming."

On our current trajectory, temperatures will continue to climb, bringing more fires and greater destruction. These wildfires also create a feedback loop that



Citizens' Climate Lobby

exacerbates climate change by releasing massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Unforeseen crises are also made worse by climate change. As we struggle to persevere through the coronavirus pandemic, for example, smoke from fires causes respiratory problems that can make the virus more deadly. People fleeing fires may also contend with crowded shelters that can spread the disease.

With the impact of climate change being felt here and now, we find ourselves running out of time to bring down the heat-trapping pollution that is warming our world. We must therefore use all the tools at our disposal to curtail those emissions.

One of the most effective tools is an ambitious price on carbon that will speed up the transition to a low- or zero-carbon economy. A tax or fee on carbon can have a positive impact on low- and middle-income families, too. How? By taking the

revenue from a carbon fee and distributing it evenly to all households.

Bi-partisan legislation to implement an effective carbon price while protecting the economic well-being of people has been introduced in the U.S. House as the "Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act" (H.R. 763). The carbon fee is expected to drive down carbon emissions 40 percent in the first 12 years and 90 percent by 2050. A household impact study released in August found that among households in the lowest fifth economically, 96 percent would receive "carbon dividends" that exceed their carbon costs.

To help a lot, please join our monthly calling campaign by going here: cclusa.org/mcc It will send you monthly reminders to make a call with suggestions on what to say.

Please call your members of Congress and ask them to join the 82 House members who are currently cosponsors:

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (202) 225-4806

Rep. Don Bacon (202) 225-4155

Rep. Adrian Smith (202) 225-6435

Two soon-to-be elected OPPD board members have endorsed this bill. We know this because all four candidates in two races have endorsed it. They are: Krystle Craig and Sara Howard in OPPD's Subdistrict 2 (Omaha) and Mary Spurgeon and William Forsee in Subdistrict 3 (Bellevue).

Our smoke-filled skies should serve as a warning that our climate could one day be unbearable if we fail to take the actions necessary to rein in climate change. An effective price on carbon with money given to households can put us on the path to preserving a livable world.

Mark Welsch is a volunteer with the Omaha chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby and the Omaha Coordinator for Nebraskans for Peace. Mark Reynolds is the executive director of Citizens' Climate Lobby.

The Future of Food

by *Dr. Amanda McKinney, M.D.*



Dr. Amanda McKinney, M.D., Associate Dean of Health Sciences and Executive Director of the Institute for Human and Planetary Health at Doane University, delivered a keynote address for the 2020 Nebraskans for Peace Annual Peace Conference, Saturday, September 26. Printed below is the full text of her timely speech on “The Future of Food”.

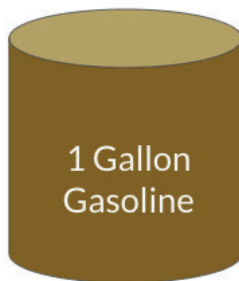
Humans have occupied the planet for around 6 million years with modern homo sapiens coming on the scene approximately 300,000 years ago. As early as 13,000 years ago, homo sapiens were the only humans remaining on Earth and approximately 1,000 years later, we fundamentally changed the way we lived and fed ourselves and began, in earnest, changing the planet in ways that will likely be our undoing as a species.

When the glaciers receded at the end of the last ice age 12,000 years ago and the big game animals migrated north, it left a dwindling food supply for our hunter-gatherer ancestors in places like the Middle East, leading to the birth of agriculture and the domestication of animals in lieu of hunting and gathering.

Jared Diamond, an American historian, geographer, and author declared in

his 1999 article of the same name that “agriculture was the worst mistake in the history of the human race”. Diamond argues that rather than being the capstone of humanity’s million-year-long progressive evolution and our “most decisive step toward a better life”, the adoption of agriculture “was in many ways a catastrophe from which we have never recovered.” The transition from a hunter-gatherer society to an agrarian one might seem an obvious improvement. However, the Neolithic Revolution transformed what was basically a conglomeration of small egalitarian bands of hunter-gatherers to one cursed with sexism, slavery, despotism, food insecurity, disease, overpopulation, resource depletion, pollution, and human-induced climate change.

Slavery was present in every agrarian society in history. The cultivation of plants and domestication of animals required far more labor than hunting and gathering. Agriculture also brought with it hierarchies with a land-owning and non-producing elite class, and slavery was modeled after the practice of domesticating animals for both food and labor. Slavery was a matter of economics. Plantations were just large, industrialized farms and slaves were an inexpensive energy source used to power economic growth.



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Rather than being the capstone of humanity's million-year-long progressive evolution and our most decisive step toward a better life, the adoption of agriculture was in many ways a catastrophe from which we have never recovered.

20 years alone with the lion's share being in Africa and Asia.

Fossil fuels have allowed for the production of food on a global scale never seen before. This caloric abundance paved the way for a human population explosion.

While human population growth remained stable over the first ten thousand years of human civilization, it began rising in the 1700s, accelerating to nearly exponential growth in the 1900s up through to the present day.

Starting in the 1900s, society expanded total and per capita food production globally, keeping pace with demand. As population grew, so did the crops and vice versa. This, and corresponding reductions in hunger, micronutrient deficiencies, childhood mortality and increases in life expectancies globally, has been viewed as one of the greatest public health achievements in human history.

However, all of this has come at significant cost to the health of the planet. The impacts of people on our planet's natural systems cannot be underestimated. In addition to fossil fuel use, in order to feed ourselves, we have converted 40 percent of the Earth's land surface into agricultural lands. To keep our crops irrigated we use nearly half the accessible freshwater on the planet. Approximately 90 percent of the world's fisheries are in permanent decline from overfishing and exploitation. More than 60 percent of the Earth's rivers have been dammed and roughly half of the world's forests have been cut down, and we are crowding out most of the other remaining life on our planet. According to a comprehensive 2019 report from the "Global Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services", approximately one million species are facing extinction over the coming decades. And this is not just what is to come. It is happening now. Since 1970, human activity has reduced the numbers of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish with whom we share the planet by over 50 percent.

Earth can no longer absorb our wastes and we are using resources faster than they can be replenished. This is driving biophysical change at levels never before seen in human history. These biophysical changes have caused us to leave the safe operating space for at least 5 of the 9 planetary boundaries as defined by Johan Rockström from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and Will Steffen from the Australian National University. The exceeded boundaries include climate change, biodiversity, land use changes, and nitrogen and phosphorus flows. It is likely that we have also exceeded the safe operating space for novel entities, including things like endocrine-disrupting chemicals and other novel chemicals that humans have produced and let loose into the biosphere, although a specific boundary has yet to be defined. Each of these boundaries interacts with the others in complex and often unexpected ways. The interactions alter the quality of the air we breathe, the quality and amount of water we drink, and the quality and amount of food we can produce. These, in turn, impact human health to a dramatic degree.

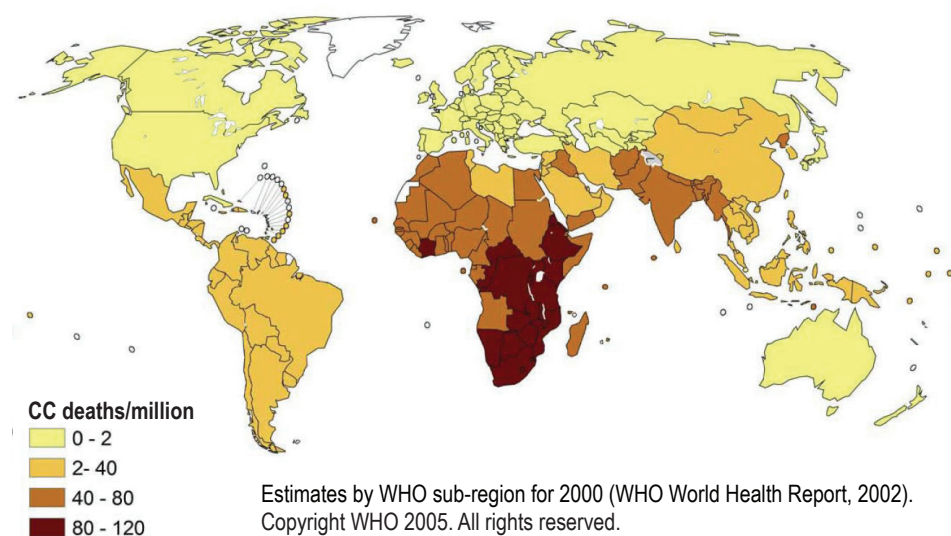
Additionally, human-induced climate change is also increasing our exposure to emerging infectious diseases and weather hazards such as heat waves, droughts, floods, wildfires and tropical storms.

Despite paying these costs to feed humanity, the human population is largely malnourished. Nearly a billion people are undernourished, going hungry—while on the opposite end of the spectrum, we have the overfed with unhealthy diets leading to malnourishment and a growing pandemic of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and cancer. The connection between obesity, undernutrition, and climate change has been coined the "Global Syndemic" by *The Lancet*, one of the top two-rated medical journals in the world. In the U.S., 70 percent of adults are overweight or obese and 60 percent of those are malnourished.

Our quest to feed humanity has us on a current trajectory that will lead us to running out of land, water, and most of the species that make up the biological diversity that provide necessary ecosystem services for food production like pol-

continued on page 12

Deaths by Climate Change



Urban School Food Alliance & National Farm to School Network

We Need to Rebuild Our Food System. Schools Can Lead.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role schools play in our food systems, as a source of food for students, an employer of essential food service workers and a market for food producers. The pandemic also exposed the deep, pervasive inequities in our food system, including the devastating impacts COVID-19 had on those historically underserved.

Our food system is permeated with troubling disparities. Even before the pandemic, access to healthy food has been a challenge most pronounced for people of color who live in low-income communities. And since the onset of the pandemic, a survey has found that nearly 41 percent of mothers with children ages 12 and under reported household food insecurity.

Food system workers, who represent 1 in 5 essential workers, are predominantly people of color who often earn less than a living wage, and have been dying at higher rates from COVID-19 due to prevalence of underlying health conditions. Concerns exist that farmers of color, who make up less than 4 percent of the nation's producers, are being overlooked in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Combined, these inequities in our food system span urban, suburban and rural communities, the direct result of inequitable and inefficient policies and practices as old as our nation itself.

When, in March, nearly all 100,000 schools across the country closed their doors, there were herculean efforts to ensure that school children—nearly 75 percent of whom receive free or reduced price meals—continued to

have access to food. Ensuring every child is fed must be part of our work to rebuild the food system. As conversations turn towards 'what's next' in responding to the pandemic, we have a tremendous opportunity to change our food system and ensure that every person along the supply chain—from grower to eater—is treated justly. To recover from the present health and economic crisis, we must relook at the critical role food plays in health, equity and prosperity in our communities.

School cafeterias are our nation's largest restaurant chain. When school is in session, cafeterias feed 30 million hungry mouths each day.

Many approaches will be needed to do this work, and we've been heartened to see multiple ideas already shared. There is one approach we think deserves more attention: school cafeterias can be a major propeller of this urgent, needed change in how we eat. Here's how:

School cafeterias are our nation's largest restaurant chain. When school is in session, cafeterias feed 30 million hungry mouths each day. More than 7 billion meals are served annually through the National School Lunch Program

and National School Breakfast Program and more than \$18.2 billion is invested in these programs annually. With schools everywhere, focusing on school food supply chains means focusing on food in every community.

School meal funding recirculates in local communities. The collective purchasing power of school food service provides an opportunity to invest in local communities - both in the food purchased for meals, and in providing stable workforce opportunities. According to the 2015 USDA Farm to School Census, schools spent nearly \$800 million annually on local food purchases, and more than 42 percent of schools report engaging in farm to school opportunities. Every dollar invested in farm to school efforts stimulates an additional \$0.60-\$2.16 of local economic activity.

School meal infrastructure helps make communities adaptable during a crisis. During this pandemic, many schools have taken on the role of feeding entire communities. The existing infrastructure of school meals and the experience and ingenuity of school nutrition professionals has allowed them to meet this critical need. Furthermore, schools' existing relationships with farmers have shown resilience during this crisis: a School Nutrition Association survey found that nearly a quarter of schools are supporting local agriculture and serving local foods in their emergency feeding programs. Simultaneously, we're seeing support of local food systems continue to rise during this pandemic.

School meals are an investment in the future. This pandemic shows we are capable of cooperation and rapid change, and it is important this continues. Every community deserves a strong and just local food system and we must continue to leverage our collective energy for equitable change as we rebuild by seeking opportunities for collaboration and action amongst schools, growers, producers, governmental agencies and community advocates. Investing in school meals is smart and a proven strategy for whole-community health, economic stimulus and resilience. School meals must be part of the conversion as we talk about the future.

For more information, visit www.farmtoschool.org or www.urbanschoolfoodalliance.org or contact Anna Mullen at anna@farmtoschool.org or press@urbanschoolfoodalliance.org.



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Legislature's Agriculture Committee Convenes Nebraska Farm To School Task Force

This article by Sarah Smith of the Department of Education appeared in the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Nebraska Regional Food Systems Initiative Fall 2020 Newsletter.

During the 106th Legislative Session, Nebraska State Senator Tom Brandt of Plymouth, Nebraska introduced Legislative Resolution 337. This resolution designates the Legislature's Agriculture Committee, of which Senator Brandt is the Vice-Chair, to conduct an interim study to explore the statewide economic and educational potential of a farm to school program in Nebraska.

This is not the first time the Legislature has had such a study. In 2009, Legislative Resolution 42 first explored the potential of a farm to school program. "It has been over ten years since we have examined the possibility of getting high-quality Nebraska grown food in our schools. As a farmer, I welcome the opportunity to get our meat, grain, dairy

products, vegetables, fruit, and other foods to our children. As a parent, I look forward to our children knowing where their food comes from and the peace of mind knowing our children are being served highly nutritious homegrown food", said Brandt.

The Nebraska Food Council—the public policy group working to create a thriving, inclusive and accessible local food system—wholeheartedly supports Legislative Resolution 337 and the convening of a new task force on farm to school procurement and education. America's school lunch program with its thousands of cafeterias nationwide constitutes the largest 'restaurant chain' in the United States. Increasing farm to school activity is, accordingly, a vital means for strengthening the "Good Life" here in Nebraska—providing a triple win for our children, our farmers and our communities. Farm to school enhances classroom

education through hands-on learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition. Farmers gain access to increased market diversification and institutional sales. And communities are supported with the creation of jobs and a strengthened local economy.

The interim study will receive input from Nebraska's various and diverse stakeholders, including agricultural producers, school food service representatives, tribal organizations, agricultural education professionals, representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Department of Education, among others. The study's resulting report will guide stakeholders on ways to leverage Nebraska's current farm to school assets and provide strategic recommendations for expansion of farm to school activities, networks and capacity. Look for the task force report to land in time for the 2021 Legislative Session.

What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

Warm Weather in Cold Places

Summer in Siberia: Bring Your Speedo and Sunscreen

In the world of global warming, we have become accustomed to hearing about (and also sometime experiencing) hot summer days. As I write this (August 8, 2020), the highest we have clocked in Omaha this summer has been a humid 97 F. (heat index 111 F) – not unusual for eastern Nebraska. It may come as a surprise that a town north



of the Arctic Circle in eastern Siberia has bested us at 100.4.

The Siberian village is Verkhoyansk, just north of the Arctic Circle, which is also known for bone-shattering winter cold. During June and July 2020, the village experienced unusual warmth for several weeks before the afternoon temperature hit 100.4 on June 20—the first time a temperature above 100 F has been observed above the Arctic circle, according to NASA. The heat wave and accompanying drought also provoked dangerous wildfires. By late spring, 2020, wildfires were ahead of 2019's pace, adding excess carbon dioxide

to the atmosphere, compounding worldwide warming.

“This event seems very anomalous in the last hundred years or so,” said NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies Director Gavin Schmidt. “The background trends in temperature in this region are about 3 degrees Celsius [higher] since the 19th century, so the probabilities of breaking records there are increasing fast.”

as saying that such an event would not occur again in anyone's lifetime—which stands to reason because the average person, well-fed, loved, and well-exercised, might expect to live an average of about 80 years. While we are having fun with numbers, note that the same story anticipates that the same heat wave “could only be expected to recur less than once every 130 years.” This figure is said to apply under “current climate condi-

As world temperatures rise in a variable fashion, erosion of ice will increase, along with sea levels. The massive coast of the Antarctic continent has a lot of ice to lose, about three quarters of the world's total.

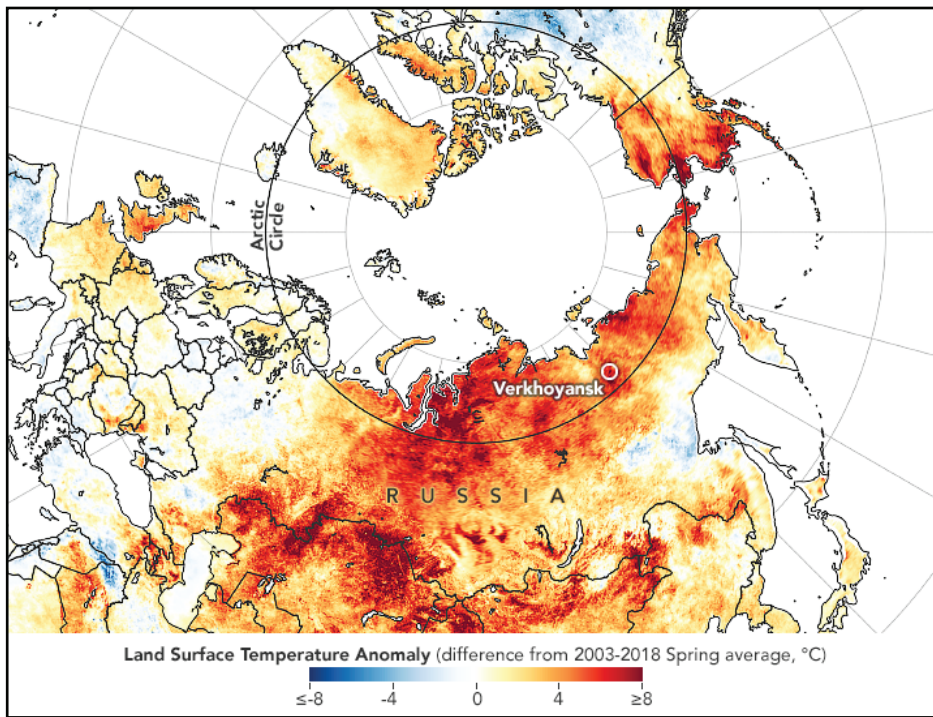
Fun With Numbers

The Siberian heat wave left scientists' mouths' gaping in astonishment. Without climate change, said Friederike Otto, acting director of the Environmental Institute at the University of Oxford, one would not expect a repeat of three-figure temperature for at least 80,000 years, without climate change. Otto may have meant “without rising temperatures due to burning of fossil fuels,” given that “climate change” is a very sloppy phrase. Climate can change for any one or more of many reasons, with temperatures rising or falling by any degree on warmth or cold.

A report in the *New York Times* (John Schwartz. “Wilting Heat, Intensified by Climate Change,” 2020, A-13) only raised the confusion quotient when it quoted Otto

tions” which is also vague. Is this meant to mean present speed of rising greenhouse gas levels? Or is that the 80 or so years mentioned later in the story? Why worry, *New York Times* reporters and copy editors. Read the *Nebraska Report* and get wise.

The climatic plot thickens when Zeke Hausfather of Breakthrough Institute estimates that a similar heat wave might recur every 10 to 20 years, given the quickening pace of global warming. At any rate, 100.4 degrees F. is a remarkably hot temperature above the Arctic Circle, but if you want an easy, accurate number, you might as well ask the polar bears, if there are any remaining in 10 to 20 years. Sloppy writing and copy editing aside (this is, after all, *The New York Times*, dudes!), the same story goes on to say that if “high greenhouse gas emissions persist, by the end of the [present?] century, this year's horror story could be “an



The map shows land surface temperature anomalies from March 19 to June 20, 2020. Red colors depict areas that were hotter than average for the same period from 2003-2018; blues were colder than average. The map is based on data from the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on NASA's Aqua satellite.

average summer in Siberia, he said.” That is 80 years from now, quite an assumption even for those of us who fan the flames of a warming atmosphere on a regular basis.

Antarctica: A Lot of Ice to Lose

A mere nine days after the 100.4-degree high above the Arctic Circle, Henry Fountain reported, also in the *New York Times* that “Surface air temperatures at the bottom of the world have risen three times faster than the global average since the 1990s. “The South Pole is warming at an incredible rate, and it is chiefly driven by the tropics,” said Kyle R. Clem, a post-doctoral researcher at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand and the lead author of the study.

The scientists in this case are cautious, since winter temperatures at the South Pole still reach minus 50 F. on a routine basis. It is no place for a beach party, even in the summer. “While climate change resulting from emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases has very likely played a role, the analysis showed that natural climate variability could account for all of the extreme swing in temperature, effectively masking any human-caused contribution,” Fountain wrote. “The Antarctic interior may be one of the few places remaining on Earth where the anthropogenic signal can-

not be easily teased out due to such extreme variability,” Dr. Clem said. “But you’re very, very unlikely to get a warming trend that strong without increasing greenhouse gases,” he added.

While loss of ice at the South Pole is still a long time away, ice is being melted along Antarctica’s coastline by encroaching sea water that erodes ice sheets and shelves from below, slowly raising sea levels. As world temperatures rise in a variable fashion, erosion of ice will increase, along with sea levels. The massive coast of the Antarctic continent has a lot of ice to lose, about three quarters of the world’s total. The first to go probably will be the West Antarctic ice sheet, which could add about 12 inches to world sea levels. Melt all the ice on Earth (which is possibly what it will take to open a hot dog stand at the South Pole), and you’ve got 150 to 200 feet worth of sea-level rise. Twirl a globe and guess which coastal cities could be wiped out at that level. I dare you.

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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).

Greenland Lost 586 Billion Tons of Ice in 2019

Greenland lost a record amount of ice during an extra warm 2019, with the melt massive enough to cover California in more than four feet (1.25 meters) of water, a new study said. Last summer shattered all records with 586 billion tons (532 billion metric tons) of ice melt, according to satellite measurements reported August 20. That’s more than 140 trillion gallons (532 trillion liters) of water. That’s far more than the yearly average loss of 259 billion tons (235 billion metric tons) since 2003 and easily surpasses the old record of 511 billion tons (464 billion metric tons) in 2012, said a study in *Communications Earth & Environment*. The study showed that in the 20th century, there were many years when Greenland gained ice.

“Not only is the Greenland ice sheet melting, but it’s melting at a faster and faster pace,” said study lead author Ingo Sasgen, a geoscientist at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany. Last year’s Greenland melt added 0.06 inches (1.5 millimeters) to global sea level rise. That sounds like a tiny amount but “in our world it’s huge, that’s astounding,” said study co-author Alex Gardner, a NASA ice scientist. Add in more water from melting in other ice sheets and glaciers, along with an ocean that expands as it warms—and that translates into slowly rising sea levels, coastal flooding and other problems, he said.

SOURCE: Seth Borenstein, Associated Press, August 20, 2020

Finding & Evaluating Choices for Responsible Investing

by Tyler Mainquist

Building on my previous essay which provided an overview, this one discusses options when an investor wants to avoid destructive products or industries; or when supporting companies that are working to address system problems.

The easiest way to find suitable investment choices is to consult a financial professional, since they should have additional tools (more on that below). Resources do exist for individual investors, however; most are for mutual funds and exchange traded funds (ETF) as opposed to individual companies. In all cases, please remember that investment decisions should also include your time horizon, your tolerance for risk, and the intended purpose of the money being invested.

Morningstar.com

This free website provides access to their vast database. For decades Morning-

star has been assigned a fund ‘star rating’ ranked against its peers in the same asset category (e.g., ‘large cap growth’) over the past 3 years, 5 years, etc. Morningstar now has a ‘globe rating’; a higher score indicates that a fund has more assets invested in companies that score well in the Sustainalytics ESG methodology. In both cases, they divide funds into five groups along a bell curve distribution, with the best scores receiving 5 stars or globes.

Therefore, an optimal fund to look for may be 5 stars and 5 globes. In practice, not so obvious. The free site has limited search options; more for inspecting a fund that you already know about. The Sustainalytics methodology is but one way to evaluate the data: financial reports have been standardized for easy comparisons across companies and industries; the same is not yet true for sustainability data. Finally, the globe ratings primarily apply to equity funds, which leaves out bonds, etc. It is still an excellent

resource, and Morningstar’s sustainability team has been doing great work.

FossilFreeFunds.com

This site from the nonprofit “As You Sow” was one of the first to collect and report whether a fund held oil and coal companies. They assign an overall grade from ‘A’ to ‘F’ and the display quickly shows whether a fund holds any of the worst offenders in the “Carbon Underground 200” or the “Macroclimate 30”. They have a search function to specify factors and find the highest scorers. As You Sow publishes similar sites for military weapons, the prison industrial complex, and others. Their grades are subjective, but they do show the data behind them.

Professional Resources

The last couple of years have also seen rapid development of screening tools within

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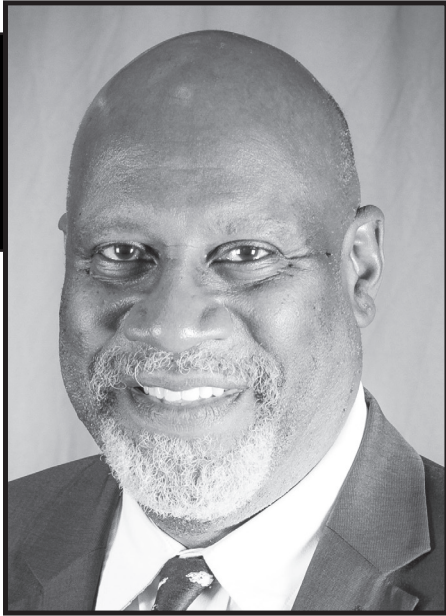
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Do Black Lives Matter in a Racist Country?



A'Jamal-Rashad Byndon

There is a heightened awareness about “Black Lives Matter” because of the recent highly publicized shootings and killings of African Americans by law enforcement officials (and the dismal level of accountability within our legal and judicial systems). Many of the pundits and apologists who defend these extra-judicial murders by law enforcement, however, frequently bring up the victims’ past as justification for the police conduct. Oftentimes, to deflect attention from the killing, you will also hear defenders referencing rates of ‘Black-on-Black’ crime and murders. For the record, most murders within racial groups are committed by their own members—White as well as Black. It is an ongoing and uphill challenge though to educate smug or fragile Whites about the reality of the ‘dual justice’ system in this country, because they have been sheltered from the lived experiences of African Americans and other people of color.

When I speak about the hypocrisy, racism and historical acts of slavery and Manifest Destiny to audiences or classrooms, I regularly hear some of the most addle-brained comments imaginable. It’s

How would you know unless you’ve experienced being a BLM victim?

just par for the course in the structurally racist and frankly white supremacist post-secondary institutions where I teach. Neither the students (nor oftentimes the faculty and administrators) have any working knowledge of the basic racial terminology or current situation. To even begin to have a meaningful conversation, a refresher course on such simple terms as racism, bias, White fragility, White privilege is necessary.

That review, however, does not even begin to deconstruct the racial ideology and mentality of the openly White supremacist ‘Proud Boys’ and Confederacy-loving folks embedded within these nearly all-White institutions. The majority of White people are protective of their privilege to the point of even denying such schemes and advantages exist.

We cannot alter the nature of racism or racist institutions until we are open to examining the history of this country and the horrific acts that were done to people of color—particularly on the scale suffered by African Americans and Native people. The reason African Americans have not fully examined the past is because of the brainwashing the White educational systems have subjected us to. Call it “Negro Amnesia”: the endlessly perpetuated illusion “that all men [and women] are created equal”. Past and current racial demographic information, of course, demonstrates the opposite. We have millionaires and wealthy White institutions that derived their wealth off the backs of slave labor. There are large insurance companies, universities (Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.) and corporations that have profited from America’s apartheid economic sys-

tem. Even White Christian churches are complicit in this ongoing bamboozlement of unsuspecting dark-skinned residents, conditioning them to accept their lot in life. And these apartheid beneficiaries are all aided by petty-bourgeois, negro elites, who operate as gatekeepers standing watch over the African American community to make sure we stay in our place.

The recent rash of murders and killings of unarmed African American civilians, however, has unleashed a raft of pent-up emotions across America’s racial fault line. While many Whites are reflexively rallying to the police and, like President Trump, flat-out denying America has a systemic ‘race problem’, others (both Black and White) have poured out into the streets at levels we haven’t seen in half a century. And along with the protests, we’re also finally seeing media coverage of just how segregated this country still is regarding social and economic opportunity three generations after the Civil Rights Movement.

A recent *New York Times* article reported that “The Black-White Wage Gap Is as Big as It Was in 1950”, with Black men today earning on average from one-third to one-half less than White men (*NYT*, June 25, 2020).

Some, though, will argue that poverty rates are narrowing because of social programs and nonprofit agencies. However—and a majority White state like Nebraska offers a classic example—these nonprofits mainly serve the needs of White people. Both their clientele and their administration are predominantly White.

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The Future of Food, continued

lination and pest management. Shifting this trajectory is truly daunting and will require changes in policy and practice across at least four dimensions:

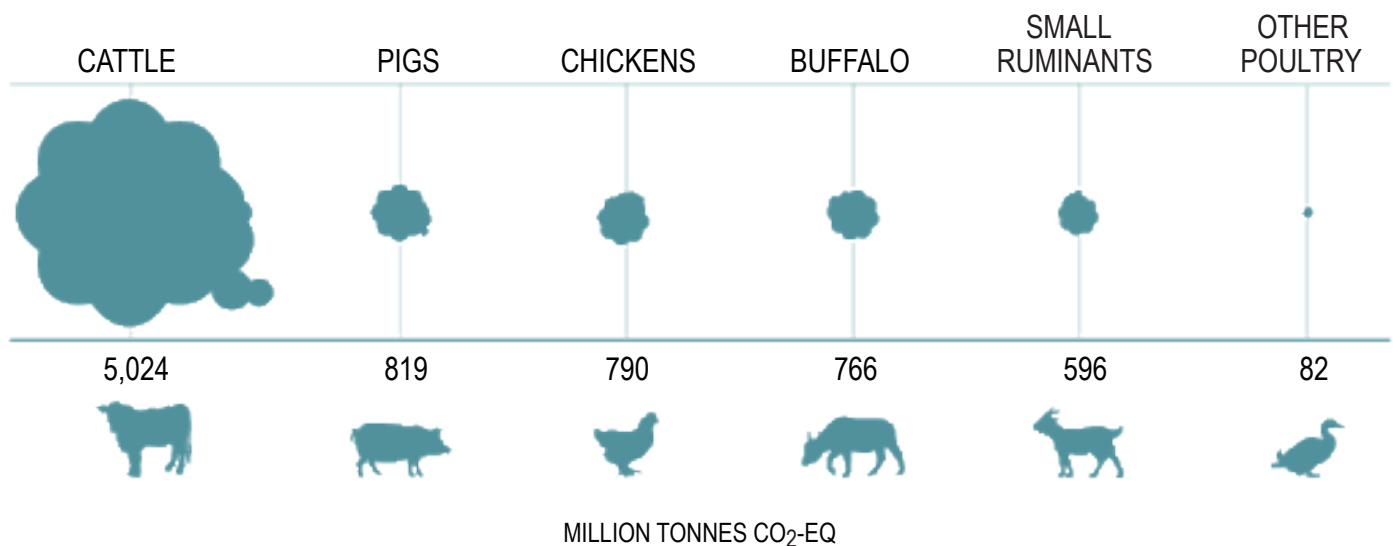
- #1: Stemming population growth
- #2: Changes in the wasting of food
- #3: Changes in Food Consumption Patterns
- #4: Changes in Food Production

the third-highest greenhouse gas emissions in the world after China and the U.S. This means that all the water, land and agrochemicals used to produce that wasted food are also wasted.

The causes vary between lower- and higher-income countries, with losses occurring at the post-harvest and processing levels in low-income countries and losses at the retail and consumer levels in wealthier countries. In developed nations, to reduce these losses, campaigns by grocers

Changes in Food Consumption Patterns

Among the scientific community, there is strong consensus that we need to change what we eat in order to address our environmental issues. The production of meat—particularly beef, lamb and pork—has a significantly larger environmental footprint than any other food system component. This is because livestock require large amounts of land to grow their



Stemming Population Growth

Providing opportunities to educate and improve the health and lives of women and children, and expanding access to family planning for those who desire it, could reduce the number of births per year by approximately 40 million—around half the annual total globally, either through prevention or delay. By providing the opportunity for women and families to have fewer but healthier children, food demand as well as the pressures on other resources would decrease.

Changes in the Wasting of Food

Approximately one-third of the food produced every year is lost or wasted. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, if food waste were a country, it would have

are being undertaken to reduce the amount of food that is thrown out because it is ‘past its date’. An app called “Too Good To Go” notifies consumers when grocers heavily discount food before throwing it away. This allows consumers the opportunity to purchase healthy food at a fraction of the price while simultaneously providing grocers with income on products that would have otherwise been a total loss. To reduce waste in lower-income countries, improvements are needed in food storage and supply chains. In addition to less waste and a lower environmental footprint, these changes will provide retailers with more food to sell. Higher supply translates to lower costs to the consumer and more nutritious food in the mouths of more people.

feed and they are inefficient at converting the calories they eat into calories for human consumption. For every six calories that a cow consumes, only one calorie is available for human consumption. Lastly, ruminants produce enormous amounts of greenhouse gases, particularly methane.

The “EAT *Lancet* Commission on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems”, published a report in 2019 titled “Food in the Anthropocene”. According to the authors, a dietary shift away from meat, beef in particular, and toward a plant-based diet would dramatically reduce the ecological and environmental footprint of our food system.

Our current industrial system of producing meat is problematic for multiple reasons. Concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) congregate animals in conditions that many consider inhumane.

Keep Space for Peace Week October 3-10, 2020

International Week of Protest to Stop the Militarization of Space



In the midst of a global pandemic the U.S. and others have undertaken the creation of the 'Space Forces' making 'Space the world's newest war-fighting domain.'

The U.S. Space Force is a new branch of the Armed Forces for which the White House has allocated \$15 billion in this year's budget. Trump was heavily lobbied by aerospace corporations to establish this new military service, so they could secure lucrative government contracts.

This show of aggression by the U.S. is generating responses from others who are now forming their own

military space forces—to either oppose or support the U.S. This presents a serious challenge to the concept, expressed in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, that "the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all [human]mankind."

Instead of creating a new arms race in space we should re-invest in and improve social programs and protect the natural environment of our fragile planet Earth—particularly by responding to the growing Climate Crisis.

Let's work together to preserve the heavens as a peaceful domain.

Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space

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The Future of Food, continued

In order to prevent disease in their squalid conditions and from their unnatural diets, and to promote growth and weight gain, antibiotics are fed to these animals. This has led to a global pandemic of antibiotic resistance, possibly moving us into a 'post-antibiotic era' where routine infections may once again kill. This is on top of the significant water, soil and air pollution that CAFOs cause.

The “EAT Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems”, published a report in 2019 titled “Food in the Anthropocene”...

It cannot go without saying that while the current pandemic virus was not born in a CAFO but rather a 'wet market', it's well documented that confined poultry operations, especially, are a breeding ground of novel flu viruses. The "Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production", a comprehensive, independent assessment of the meat industry between 2005 and 2008, reported that these operations represent an unacceptable level of threat to public health. It's not a matter of if, but when, we will experience another pandemic and the next one will likely be a swine or avian flu and probably one that is more deadly than the current coronavirus. The crowding of swine and poultry in CAFOs increases both transmission and the likelihood of mutation that can make it not only transmissible to humans but pathogenic.

It's also important to note that chronic disease has also played a role in the deadliness of our current pandemic, as 94 percent of those persons who have died from COVID-19 had some underlying health condition.

If we were to adopt the dietary shifts recommended by the EAT *Lancet* Commission, we would also realize substantial reductions in noncommunicable diseases including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancers. The commission reported that adoption of their "planetary health diet" would prevent around 20 percent or 11 million deaths annually.

For wealthier populations, it is a clear win-win for both human and planetary health with reduced meat consumption. In poorer populations, with less diverse diets and already very low meat consumption, increasing dietary diversity and nutrient-rich foods is critical and animal source foods can represent an important source of nutrients. However, it should be a public health priority for both populations to reduce the consumption of highly processed foods with added sugars, salt and fats.

Changing dietary patterns is complex. People's identities are often linked to what they eat as it is often part of a family or cultural heritage. Likewise, group or tribal identities surrounding beliefs about animal welfare, health, environmental issues, etc. factor into decisions about food choice. However, there is a growing awareness of both the environmental and health issues associated with meat.

FMI is a Food Industry Association that in 2019 conducted a "U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends" report. They found that 33 percent of households now have at least one member that follows a vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian or flexitarian diet which is defined as eating mostly a vegetarian diet, but occasionally eating meat and poultry. This has created a boon for companies making plant-based meat alternatives. "The Power of Meat 2019" report, also from FMI, revealed that consumers are purchasing \$878 million worth of these products annually with sales increasing by 19.2 percent in 2019.

However, consumers alone will not be enough to make the kinds of changes needed. Governments will have to step in and subsidize foods that promote human and planetary health rather than continue to subsidize animal and processed foods

that contribute to the degradation of human and planetary health. This will have to mean the end of the powerful lobbies for the beef, dairy, sugar and ultra-processed food and beverage industries whose entire goal is to influence and curtail national dietary guidelines that are supposed to be crafted for the improvement of nutrition, health and environmental sustainability.

Changes in Food Production

Because agriculture is responsible for such a significant proportion of pollution and climate change-inducing greenhouse gas emissions, there is also strong consensus in that we have an ecological and ethical obligation to reduce the environ-

...According to the authors, a dietary shift away from meat, beef in particular, and toward a plant-based diet would dramatically reduce the ecological and environmental footprint of our food system.

mental footprint of agriculture.

Where we have not reached a consensus is how to feed a growing population while decoupling environmental degradation from food production. We cannot afford to grow more food through 'extensification' (converting additional forest or other land to agricultural lands). The alternative is to increase yields on the lands already being used, or 'intensification'. Current intensification relies on the use of petrochemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides and GMOs, which is recognized as also unsustainable.

The current push is to shift to, what is considered to be, sustainable inten-

Your Foundation Speaks

by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President

The Nebraska Peace Foundation maintains a permanent endowment for the NFP Scholarship Fund. Interest from this endowment is used for the NFP college scholarships given to the best essay writers.

However, as we all know, college tuition has increased greatly in past years, but we are limited to about \$500 for the amount we give for scholarships. We would like to build up the permanent endowment so that our scholarships might be for \$1,000 or possibly more.

If you would like to help add to our permanent endowment, please make your check payable to Nebraska Peace Foundation with Scholarship Fund listed in the item line in the lower left hand corner of the check. Mail your check to: Nebraska Peace Foundation, P. O. Box 83466, Lincoln, NE 68501.



Tyler Mainquist, conclusion

the financial industry. The largest firms have proprietary systems for their brokers. Additional tools are being rolled out for independent advisors because of the demand/supply of sustainability criteria. Calvert recently released their "Transparency Tool" which provides us with key financial and sustainability data on one report, with the ability to compare several funds at once. Their dataset includes more asset classes and more funds than the public sites. Change Finance not only has a sustainable ETF, they created a report to summarize the sustainability of an overall portfolio. And a startup called YourStake uses data analytics to show the potential impact of choices, such as how many (virtual) cars your specific investments can take off the road, or the volume of penalties paid by companies in your portfolio compared to average.

A drawback of the public sites is that the scores do not reflect the 'intent' of a fund. While an indication of current holdings is better than nothing, unless its prospectus constrains it, a well-scoring fund could invest in a dirty polluter if it met its other criteria. Thankfully, both the Morningstar and FossilFreeFunds sites display whether a fund has a sustainability mandate. Similarly, a fund may obtain a small investment in a company so that they have the right to interact with management, help educate

them, and if necessary bring actions to try to change their behavior. In this case, the goal is not owning a company for its financial potential; yet that stake would still negatively impact the fund's grade. Some fund companies specialize in such shareholder activism; others prefer to totally exclude offending companies.

As advised previously, potential investors should "Know What You [want to] Own." Feel free to contact me with questions, or watch for additional information in the future. I can be reached at tmainquist@aicinvest.com (preferred), or call 402-423-4022, or text 402-227-8314.

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The Future of Food, conclusion

sification through the use of precision agriculture where all the same inputs are used but used to a lesser degree. Precision agriculture utilizes technologies such as geographic information systems (GIS), automated machine guidance, infield and remote sensing, mobile computing, and global positioning systems (GPS) to identify where and when individual plants need various inputs such as fertilizer, water and pesticides. Critics of precision agriculture point out that the expense, the reliance on machines and the lack of farmer education in these modalities will only disenfranchise farmers further and put more control and money in the hands

and pockets of agribusiness and corporate entities.

Rather, I believe, the solutions lie in ‘agroecological’ approaches that more closely mimic natural ecosystems as a way to feed ourselves while simultaneously addressing our environmental issues.

Organic Agriculture

At the Rodale Institute, research has been done to show that through ‘regenerative’ organic agriculture more than 40 percent of current annual CO2 emissions could be sequestered—and, if at the same time, all global pasture was managed utilizing a regenerative model with more

effective manure management, an additional 71 percent could be sequestered. This would put us over the 100 percent mark and contribute to a drawing down of excess greenhouse gases, helping to reverse the greenhouse effect.

Perennial Polycultures

Likewise, the Land Institute in Salina Kansas is working on developing perennial grains, oil seeds and legumes that can be planted in a polyculture. This work is critical in that the potential for carbon sequestration and prevention of soil erosion and soil building is enormous. And they are having much success with their perennial wheatgrass, “Kernza”.

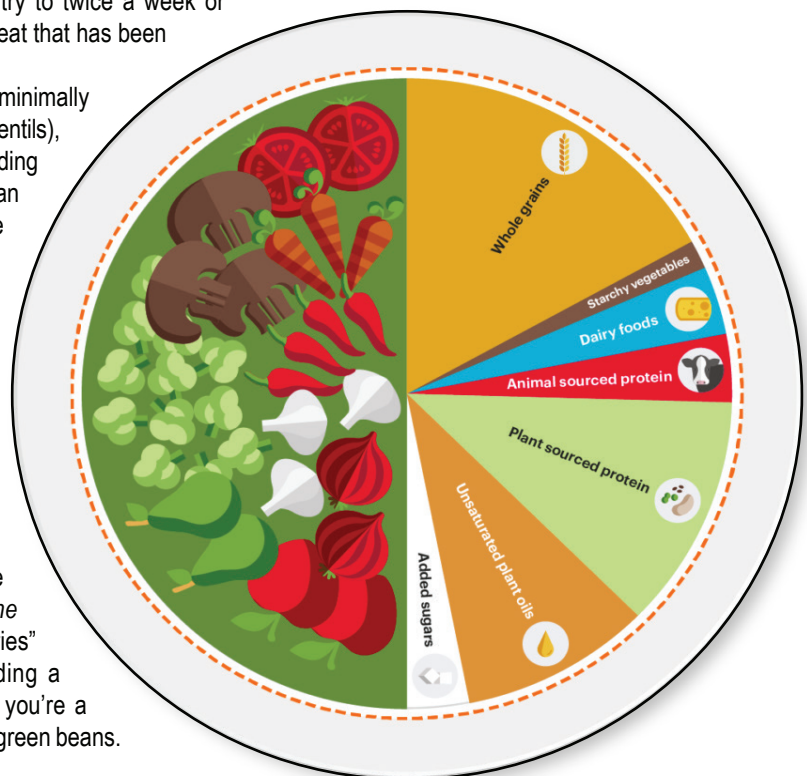
So what’s a climate friendly diet in Nebraska look like?

In order to achieve a diet that is best suited to both human and planetary health, consider reducing the frequency and amount of meat consumption. The mantra of “Less meat, Better meat” is advisable. If you cannot eliminate meat entirely, try to consume no more than 3 ounces of red meat (roughly the equivalent of 1 hamburger) once a week or less, and limit poultry to twice a week or less—and consider the source. Try to only consume meat that has been regeneratively and humanely raised.

To replace the meat in your diet, add more whole, minimally processed plant foods: legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils), potatoes (both sweet and white), and whole grains (including whole grain flours and meals). Find dietary staples that can be sourced locally from growers practicing sustainable or regenerative agriculture or permaculture. Farmers Markets and outlets like Open Harvest and Lone Tree Foods in Lincoln, Grain Place Foods in Marquette, Nebraska and the Nebraska Food Co-op make it easier to source locally grown food.

And lastly, grow and preserve some of your own perishable vegetables and fruits. Start with a goal of growing 3 percent of the calories you and your family consume. That may not sound like much, given that each of us eats over 2,000 calories daily, but when you tally up all the calories an entire family consumes, it adds up quickly. (Check out *The Grow Network* or the DVD, “Grow Your Own Groceries” by Marjorie Wildcraft to learn more.) Consider finding a growing partner and sharing your harvests. Perhaps you’re a master tomato grower while your friend grows amazing green beans. Swap jars of preserved produce.

— Dr. Amanda McKinney, M.D.



“Permaculture” is a term used to describe an intentional system of agriculture that reflects the interrelationships and sustainability of natural ecosystems. It has been described as a way to create a ‘permanent culture’ surrounding food systems, but also around shelter, energy and technology. Permaculture is an attempt to optimally utilize land and resources in a circular way so that all wastes or outputs are used as inputs—eliminating waste and creating a truly sustainable system that can be utilized generations into the future for subsistence. Several disciplines are implemented in the practice of permaculture including organic farming, agroforestry, integrated farming, sustainable development, and applied ecology.

According to the Nebraska-based environmental consulting firm “GC Resolve”, “Regenerative farming and ranching practices include minimizing tillage, multi-species cover cropping, multiple crop rotations, implementation of livestock back onto the soil accompanied by holistic grazing practices, agro-forestry with tree intercropping, silvopasture on grazing lands, and degraded rangeland restoration.” Nebraska happens to be a hub of Regenerative Agriculture and these practices have the potential to build soil, restore soil health and sequester carbon.

Urban Agriculture

Today, cities consume more than two-thirds of the world’s energy and account for more than 70 percent of global CO2 emissions. As a result, they can play a leading role in global decarbonization. By growing more food on-site in cities, carbon emissions are reduced through reduced ‘food miles’—shipping food across the country and the globe—and reuse of urban organic waste. Urban farming also improves local food security and nutrition while simultaneously improving the urban climate.

There seems to be a general sense that urban agriculture can benefit the environment, in terms of waste reduction, biodiversity, etc.; however, there has been limited research to directly substantiate this claim. What research does exist seems to indicate that the environmental benefits of urban agriculture outweigh the costs. Benefits include:

- Use of private yards, vacant lots, rooftops and even balconies and window sills to grow some of our own food, which will increase not only our local food security, but our awareness and appreciation of the precarious nature of food production and its central role in our lives.
- Reducing stormwater runoff through

rainwater capture and vegetative stormwater absorption, improving the quality of local surface and groundwater sources while minimizing the use of drinking water for irrigation.

- Reducing the Urban Heat Island Effect and improving air quality.
- Increased biodiversity by bringing plants, insects and small animals back into the cities.
- Local food production which reduces emissions from food transport (food miles) and reduces food waste while improving access to healthy food.

An argument about which of these methods is a more relevant solution is moot. We will need all of these solutions going forward.

I typically end my presentations with anthropologist Margaret Mead’s famous quote: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” I concur, but I will offer a clarification here in that I think that in order for us to get out of this mess we’ve gotten ourselves into, we will need quite a *large* group of thoughtful, committed citizens. Either way, I will be one of them and I hope you will join me.

You Can Reduce Rates Charged by Payday Lenders

Payday Lending companies now charge Nebraskans an average 387 percent Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for small amount, short term loans. In this current election you can help reduce that APR to no more than 36 percent.

How?

1. On your ballot vote **FOR Initiative Measure 428**
2. Ask your friends and family to vote **FOR Initiative Measure 428**
3. Help spread the word

If 428 passes, Nebraska will join 16 other states and Washington, DC where the rate cap for payday loans is already 36 percent.

For more info: <https://otoc.org/paydaylending/>



Seven Things to Know about the Casino Proposals

They empower an unelected commission to put casinos and online gambling across Nebraska

First, casinos will be everywhere. Limiting casinos to “licensed racetrack enclosures” is not limiting gambling at all. To allow otherwise illegal off-track betting parlors in Lincoln and Omaha, our pro-gambling Nebraska Racing Commission requires only one actual live horserace per year. With Props 429, 430, and 431 it would be easy to have one-race tracks hosting 24/7 casinos 365 days per year in every county across the state.

Second, these proposals put an unelected commission in charge of online gambling, casinos, and other forms of gambling currently prohibited by our constitution. Instead, the proposals put all future gambling decisions in Nebraska into the hands of seven unelected pro-gambling commissioners: primarily the same folks who put off-track betting parlors in Lincoln and Omaha. The commission would be empowered to decide on slot machines, casino table games, sports betting—and even online gambling—with no oversight from the Legislature or the public and no restrictions from the constitution.

Third, the ‘keep money in Nebraska’ economic claim is not just false, it’s absurd. The gambling proposals won’t keep money in Nebraska; they will suck more money out—and their promoters know it. Yes, gambling money leaves Nebraska now. But adding more casinos won’t change that fact. Instead, casinos in Nebraska will create a huge new expansion in gambling across the state. Research commissioned by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce showed that opening just one Omaha casino with 1,300 slot machines and 53 table games would increase gambling in the Omaha metro area by 66 percent overall while having little effect on the revenues of the Council Bluffs casinos. That’s just one casino. Imagine the increase in gambling with dozens of casinos across Nebraska. The gambling promoters aren’t after the money that’s leaving our state, they’re after a huge expansion of gambling that casinos in our backyards across Nebraska would create.

Fourth, when gambling expands, it undermines local businesses by pulling money away from the local economy. The Omaha Chamber study concludes that one Omaha casino would annually cost the non-Omaha

economy in Nebraska \$30 million in sales, \$7.6 million in wages and salaries, and 740 jobs. And we know what happens when a casino opens in rural communities: “The operation of a casino in a mid-size city, far from contributing to economic development, creates a measurable drain on the economy of the city,” concludes research of Nebraska Wesleyan University Economist Lori Fairchild (and this author). A vote for the gambling proposals is a vote to put an economic drain in Grand Island, Columbus, Fremont, Alliance, Seward, Norfolk, or any of dozens of other Nebraska casino communities. The economic realities are not new. In 1996, 40 Nebraska economists declared, “We, the undersigned Nebraska economists, are opposed to the expansion of gambling in Nebraska because the additional direct and indirect costs are likely to far outweigh the additional direct and indirect benefits for the state as a whole.”

Fifth, more gambling means more people getting hurt by gambling. Maybe you remember this story from an earlier edition of the *Nebraska Report*: “Hello. I am a compulsive and problem gambler trying to recover. I was once a successful bank operations manager and a happily married wife and mother. Because of my gambling I have lost my job, severely strained my marriage, and neglected my children. I am also facing the chance that I will be going to prison and paying back money that I embezzled from my employer.” Iowa saw a jump in such gambling addicts from 1.7 percent to 5.4 percent of their population after casinos spread there. In Nebraska that’s 100,000 of our neighbors, many of whom are not gambling now. Addicts account for roughly half of casino revenues, according to research summarized in the Institute for American Values report, “Why Casinos Matter.” Google it.

Sixth, the financial costs of gambling addiction are expensive. With 14,143 slot machines confined to 17 locations, “the government of Wisconsin and its local communities must spend \$63,382,145 a year in additional social and criminal justice costs

because of behaviors of its citizens that are associated with the presence of casinos,” according to a Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report. That’s \$63 million in additional costs, completely separate from the dollars flowing in and out of the slot machines, for things like increased criminal, law enforcement, legal, and incarceration costs; illness and lost work productivity; money lost to theft and bad debt; etc. The Omaha casino noted above would cause crime rates in Omaha to jump by 7.9 percent. That’s not cheap. And casinos won’t pay, taxpayers will. Creighton Economist Ernie Goss has found that tax rates in casino states are higher than in non-casino states. So the promised pittance in property tax relief is just a shell game, exchanging one tax for another and leaving taxpayers no better off than before—while casino operators get rich.

Seventh, gambling undermines good governance. Regulators like the Nebraska Racing Commission morph into cheerleaders for gambling. The state of Iowa stopped their addiction-rate research and replaced it with research to expand their casino markets, or, in other words, to maximize the gambling losses of their citizens. That’s why Tom Osborne noted, “Every single Congressman that I’ve talked to, when they’ve had expanded gambling move in, has told me it’s the worst thing that has ever happened.”

Please vote no on Props 429, 430, and 431—and please encourage others to do likewise.

Long-time NFP member Jonathan Krutz, MBA, serves on the Gambling with the Good Life Board and is completing a doctorate in Public Policy and Administration.



HARD TRUTH, conclusion

strict diet of online browsing can be healthy and may even be a citizen's responsibility. I myself read my two state newspapers and the *New York Times*, but when doubt rises I go to the *Associated Press* (a cooperative) or *Reuters*, actual news agencies far older than I am.

Facebook is no more a reliable source of news than *FOX*, and it's at least equally dangerous if that's how people use it. Which they do. *Facebook* made a point of trying to purge the QAnon conspiracy from its pages and has failed, according to a *New York Times* story this week

And that is some very weak ass shit indeed.

Trump admits he "played down" the coronavirus—didn't want to create panic he explains—in the process leading the right straight over the moral, ethical and existential cliff. Masking and distance "prove" Democrats are afraid of the virus, the GOP story goes—so "Democrats are weak."

The problem for the right is that the facts, the irreducible FACTS—the kind that come home to roost like vultures on 200,000

bodybags—are pretty much entirely on the other side. Turns out masking and distance and precaution are wisdom and compassion and foresight, all virtues the last time I looked, and marks of the truly strong.

Weak is violating the Hatch Act—which would have prevented anyone but a weak ass bully and scowflaw from holding a partisan convention at the White House. If a Democrat had made such a move over the past fifty years, can you imagine the GOP reaction?

Weak is sending in federal troops AGAINST the wishes of local officials to gas and club mostly nonviolent protestors in places where the national tragedy of systemic racism is being addressed honestly—and, granted, painfully—as part of a national dialogue long overdue.

Strong is showing up for this reckoning on systemic racism in our caste society, which will prove a watershed moment for the country's soul. Countries like Japan and Germany, which reckoned honestly with horrific chapters of national life, are both economic powerhouses and getting greener—not perfect societies, but not in

freefall like the U.S. is today.

Weak is saying "science doesn't know" what has brought on West Coast wildfires that have destroyed six times more acres than burned last year.

Weak is claiming that burning cities is a Biden future, when the fact is that America is burning NOW. These fires in the cities and old forests are Trump's fires. Shout a lie from a rooftop. Go on. Try. Changes nothing.

Strong is co-sponsoring the Violence against Women Act. Strong is declaring your support for gay marriage in 2012, before your boss Barack Obama was ready to sign on. Strong is making the list of the least wealthy government officials, at 577 out of 581. Strong is overcoming a humiliating stutter as a child. Strong is raising your surviving children after your wife and baby die in a car crash three weeks after your election to the Senate at age 29. These are facts.

Strong is a great teacher and scholar suffering cancer and hanging on at 87, in her resolute effort to spare the country this last violence from Trump, ANOTHER seat on the Supreme Court. And that's a fact.

Do Black Lives Matter, conclusion

Last but not least is the comparison of the wealth of African Americans and Whites. Research by the Brookings Institution provides clear evidence that the cumulation of wealth passes from generation to generation. "At \$171,000, the net worth of a typical White family is nearly ten times greater than that of a Black family (\$17,150) in 2016. Gaps in wealth between Black and White households reveal the effects of accumulated inequality and discrimination, as well as differences in power and opportunity that can be traced back to this nation's inception. The Black-White wealth gap reflects a society that has not and does not afford equality of opportunities to all its citizens" (Brookings Blog 2/27/2020). Slavery and Jim Crow laws were the biggest debilitating factors that kept African Americans in caste or slave-like conditions—in contrast to an open or free society for most Whites. Even poor White immigrants from European countries could acquire wealth in the U.S. because they were not bound by the apartheid conditions

African Americans faced.

All this though becomes even more egregious when one examines the prison and jail rates for African Americans in Nebraska.

In 2017, Black people were incarcerated at 8.2 times the rate of White people, and Native people were incarcerated at 6.9 times the rate of Whites. African Americans constituted 21 percent of the jail population and 29 percent of the prison population, yet only 5 percent of the state population (Vera Institute: 2017). You could not make this stuff up. But in our apartheid criminal justice departments, they are not studying such structural injustices. Instead, they have classes on "Gangs", which is a code word for how to stereotype and make brutal arrests of African Americans in the community.

If we are to truly reverse the bleak conditions for African Americans, local, state, and federal governments in the U.S. must be willing to pay restitution for the

trillions of dollars of wealth that was reaped from the slavery practiced against African nations, African ancestors, and the African Americans relegated to the sidelines waiting for their opportunity to have what White Americans have. We must support H.R. 40, the "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act", and then do all we can to change this country's racial climate.

It's apparent that all lives do not matter... Only those who have the power to have institutions enforce their apartheid laws governing petty victimless crimes. If we are going to change the unwritten state motto of Nebraska, "Good for 'Lifers', it's not for everyone", we must allow the victims of American democracy to sit at the tables of policymaking, establish sentencing guidelines to constrain White racist judges, and get their prison or jail sentences reduced to those of White criminals convicted of the same crimes.

HARD TRUTH

by Sally Herrin

A Fact Is Strong

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a fact is, “a thing that is known or proved to be true.”

A fact is strong. You can ignore it, or you can deny it, you can talk trash about it or point in the other direction and talk about something or ANYTHING else—nothing you say can change a fact.

A fact is strong. Wishful thinking on the other hand—that is some weak ass shit.

A FACT is where the rubber meets the road. A fact is the rent coming due. Trump and his Merry Band of Dumpster Divers can SAY the President has defeated the pandemic almost single-handed, but the FACT is the U.S. leads the developed world in ongoing contagion and deaths, which could well reach a quarter million—Merry Christmas from the White House—this year with no end in sight.

A strong president would have had a coherent science-based plan to mitigate the pandemic in February. More than one country has been slow off the mark, but a strong president would own up to his failure and do better. Trump has fiddled away most of a year while the country burns like Nero’s Rome—and THAT is some weak ass shit.

The President and his party have taken care to gather the finest marketing minds on the planet, but the GOP could have saved the money. In the words of any given seven year old, “No, DUH.” Everybody on the planet already knows Americans love a strong guy. But not just ANY strong guy. America loves a strong guy who ACTS tough and APPEARS strong. Strong guys, actual strong guys who don’t shout so much and posture—guys like Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama in my lifetime—not so much.

This was not always the case—think FDR. Think Eisenhower. Those were strong guys who delivered, who got the job done.

They were popular heroes and real strong guys, not hairdos with capped teeth who PLAYED tough guys on The Magic Screen.

Affordable health care is strong. Voting eight times against protections for pre-existing medical conditions is some weak ass shit.

A minimum wage of \$25 is strong (\$30 is stronger and closer to the FACTS of life as we in the U.S. know it). A vote against the minimum wage is weak. Four votes is seriously weak. A one time check that almost covered a month’s rent and utilities is some weak ass shit for sure.

Going to China to try to help your state’s farmers find markets for their underpriced overproduced corn is strong, and that is a fact. Airing a Trump-style ad on TV accusing one’s opponent of communist sympathies for such a trade mission—ESPECIALLY when you have been on the same errand your own self—now that is some weak ass shit.

It isn’t just the fault of the President and the GOP majorities in the Senate and the House. Their whole electoral base is complicit in this weak ass shit through a process that used to be called the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’.

Back in the day, when such things mattered, philosophers seeking the best for human society have differed over the matter of depictions of what isn’t and what is. The matter continues to trouble our species—think Charlie Hebdo, and Islamic art generally which though symbolic is not free as to what exactly it can depict.

So-called Western Culture has been more permissive, leaping over Socrates, who wanted to forbid poets because they were liars by trade and would mislead the youth, and accepting the logic of Sydney who said the poet does not lie because a work of art is always by its nature a fiction

which “nothing doth affirm.”

But for the work of art to do its work, the perception of the truth that what one is observing IS an illusion, created to entertain and to influence, must be turned off for the duration. A film or novel moves us to the extent that we ‘forget’ that what we are watching or reading is not actually at the moment of engagement REAL.

Art created a need in our past for the willing suspension of disbelief—the opium-eating poet Coleridge gets credit for coining the phrase—an idea rendered quaint by the way we live now. So surrounded, so inundated to the point of drowning in electronically sourced information are so very many of Earth’s seven-and-some-billion hominids, that the problem is no longer how to generate in a reader or audience the willing suspension of disbelief.

The problem now is how easily people DO suspend disbelief. If an assertion supports or confirms a personal bias, we are likely to believe. If our ideas about ourselves are bound up with the image projected by certain so-called influencers, we believe.

George Orwell got it too right in 1949 in his novel *1984*, when he envisioned a future society’s system of control as TV-style screens in every working class person’s living room. He can be forgiven, I think, that he didn’t anticipate the microtechnology that would graft our slave masters (so-called smart phones) onto our hands like the cancers they are. Nor did Orwell foresee the endless appetite for ‘infotainment’ that won’t let the affected hominids willingly avert their eyes.

We give up our consciousness for many hours every day, many of us, to advertisers and their investors who may or may not (generally not) have our—and the planet’s—best interests in mind. A very