



*Nebraskans for Peace*

# Nebraska Report

*There is no Peace without Justice*

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## Republicans & Democrats Introduce Historic Bipartisan Climate Bills in House & Senate

*With the “Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act,” Congress takes an unprecedented bipartisan step to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while creating American jobs, unleashing innovation and improving public health.*

*by Mark Welsch, NFP Omaha Coordinator & Co-Leader of Citizens’ Climate Lobby—Omaha Chapter*

Congress has found a simple, fair and effective solution to get climate change in check. On November 27, 2018, Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL), Rep. Francis Rooney (R-FL), Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL), Rep.

Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Rep. John Delaney (D-MD) introduced the “Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act” (H.R. 7173). The Senate introduced an almost identical bipartisan bill (S. 3791). These bipartisan bills will put a price on carbon emissions and return the revenue equally to people.

This Act will drive down America’s

carbon pollution more than any prior national legislation or executive action. It will also improve health and save lives by reducing the pollution that Americans breathe, boost the economy with millions of new jobs, and is revenue neutral so our government will not grow bigger.

“To call this legislation a breakthrough is an understatement,” said Citizens’ Climate Lobby Executive Director Mark Reynolds. “This bill is easily the most significant congressional move on climate change since 2009. And with bipartisan sponsorship in both chambers of Congress, it has a real chance at passage.” (A full description of what is in the legislation is at the end of this article.)

You might ask, why should I personally make the time to work for passage of this bill?

Because you want to be part of the

*conclusion on page 3*

### inside:

We Need to Revive the Nuclear Disarmament Movement Now p. 4  
The Call to Prevent Nuclear War p. 5  
Putting Our Faith in Guns & Our Tax Dollars Down a Black Hole p. 6

What’s HOT in Global Warming? p. 8  
U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals on Bill and Melinda Gates’ Screen p. 11  
Saving Our Soil. Saving Ourselves. p. 12  
Hitting & Hugging in the Social Justice Circles p. 13  
HARD TRUTH by Sally Herrin p. 16

## Nebraska Report

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# Canada Did It, Will the U.S. Be Next?

Canada is in the process of implementing their version of Citizens' Climate Lobby's bill to stop climate change from getting worse. Our volunteers are working in countries around the world to do the same thing. Will the U.S. be next to pass a carbon reduction law? There is a good chance, because our bills were introduced in Congress in 2018.

"We're the little lobby that could," said Cathy Orlando, CCL's International Outreach Manager based in Sudbury, Ontario. "Our patience and persistence has been rewarded with an effective program that puts Canada on the path to meeting its global obligation on climate change. Today's announcement is also an affirmation of CCL's approach to engaging government with an attitude of appreciation, respect and being nonpartisan."

Former NASA scientist Dr. James Hansen is one of the top climate scientists in the world. In 1988 he warned Congress that global warming was a growing problem and that it needed to work to reduce fossil fuel use or the problem would get dangerously out of hand. Dr. Hansen is now on Citizens' Climate Lobby's board of Directors. He tells everyone that Citizens' Climate Lobby has the best plan in the world to stop global warming.

To help, you can start by calling your three members of Congress. It is really easy. No matter where you live in the U.S., you can go to a website and it will tell you the names and phone numbers of your three members of Congress and even give you a script to read! Please go here: [cclusa.org/call](http://cclusa.org/call).

Yes, most of them have answering machines so you can call after hours, on the weekend and during a snowstorm to leave them a message. If their machine cuts you off before you are done, hit "Redial" and finish leaving your message!

Getting active is rewarding. Our Omaha Chapter, with help from the Bellevue Chapter, has hosted movie nights at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. We have regular monthly meetings to hear a different guest speaker each month during our international videoconference. We also have "CCL-Lite" meetings at a local pub right after work to relax and talk about climate change and how easy it is to get involved.

If you want to learn more, contact me. I'm one of the co-leaders for the Omaha Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby. Mark Welsch, 402-453-0776, [NFPomaha1970@gmail.com](mailto:NFPomaha1970@gmail.com).

*PS: Did you know there are Climate Refugees from the Marshall Islands in Chadron, Nebraska? Watch for their story in the next Nebraska Report.*

# Bipartisan Climate Bills, conclusion

winning team that will get our Members of Congress to pass the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. You want to be able to tell your children and grandchildren that some people wrote letters to the editor and members of Congress, some called and visited with elected officials and business leaders, others helped at outreach events to find more like-minded people to help push us over the top, into the end zone for the win!

You will be able to boast with pride that you helped prevent an increasing number of record-breaking heat, drought and rainfall events and unseasonable temperature swings. Without this team effort, those things would have happened. You will be able to point to the decreasing level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and be able to say “I remember when it was over 400 PPM! Look at it now, moving toward 350 PPM... I remember the Nebraska flood of 2011, the huge drought and wild fires here in 2012 and the record-breaking temperatures in 2018. Those types of events are happening less frequently now because I was part of the team that got the bills passed into law in 2019.”

When your grandchild asks, “What did you DO in the war to stop climate change?” You can tell them you started by using the website [cclusa.org/call](http://cclusa.org/call) to sign up to volunteer and it gave you your Members of Congress’s names, phone numbers and script to read. Then you made three short phone calls to your members of Congress—and they listened!”

Yes, they are listening to us. Citizens’ Climate Lobby volunteers are regularly meeting with our members of Congress and their staff from Nebraska and throughout the U.S. to talk about these bills.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Special Report specifically mentioned carbon pricing as a way forward to effectively reduce emissions and stabilize our climate. Republicans and Democrats are now working together

for the good of the country and for humanity to do just that.

## **How the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act works**

**The fee:** The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act will put a fee on all oil, gas and coal used in the United States based on the greenhouse gas emissions they produce. It will make clean energy cheaper and more attractive than dirty, polluting energy, therefore driving down America’s emissions and slowing climate change. The fee starts low at \$15 per ton of CO2 and grows steadily, increasing \$10 per ton annually, giving businesses time to adjust and make smart investments for the future.

*To learn more about the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, visit [energyinnovationact.org](http://energyinnovationact.org). To follow along with the conversation on social media, browse the hashtag **#PriceOnPollution**.*

**The dividend:** The money from the fee will be allocated equally and given to people as a monthly rebate. Most American households will end up with more money in their pockets to spend as they see fit, which helps low- and middle-income Americans.

**Border adjustment:** To protect U.S. manufacturers and jobs, goods imported from countries that do not have an equivalent carbon price will pay a border carbon adjustment. Goods exported from the United States to such countries will receive a refund under this policy.

## **Studies say fee & dividend is good for the environment, economy**

America is already feeling the impact of climate change. It is costing us a lot of taxpayer money. The 2018 wildfires out West cost billions of dollars to fight;

Hurricane Florence left an estimated \$22 billion in damage. Climate change is making events like these much more likely in our future. All of these impacts are costing the U.S. people billions of dollars per year.

The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act’s price on carbon would shift these runaway costs onto the fossil fuel companies. Those companies, as well as our power and transportation sectors, will be motivated to find cleaner, cheaper ways to power our country, reducing emissions and stabilizing our climate. By returning the revenue to Americans in the form of a monthly dividend, our economy will benefit too.

A 2014 study done by Regional

Economic Models, Inc., looked at a similar fee and dividend-style proposal. The REMI study found that, after 10 years, this type of policy would reduce CO2 emissions 33 percent below 1990 levels. It also found that 2.1 million jobs would be added over that time, primarily because of the economic stimulus of returning the revenue to households. A new evaluation of this exact bill, done by economist Noah Kaufman of Columbia University, indicates that the emissions reductions could be even higher: 45 percent below 2015 levels by 2030.

Please join us by simply going to [cclusa.org/Call](http://cclusa.org/Call) and make a call to your Member of Congress right now. It will give you a feeling of well-deserved pride and accomplishment when we get these bills passed into law.

# We Need to Revive the Nuclear Disarmament Movement Now

by Lawrence Wittner

*Dr. Lawrence Wittner is Professor of History Emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the Co-Chair of the Peace Action Board of Directors. An earlier version of this article was published by Foreign Policy in Focus. This article appeared on the HistoryNewsNetwork.org on December 30, 2018.*

In late November 2018, Noam Chomsky, the world-renowned public intellectual, remarked that “humanity faces two imminent existential threats: environmental catastrophe and nuclear war.”

Curiously, although a widespread environmental movement has developed to save the planet from accelerating climate change, no counterpart has emerged to take on the rising danger of nuclear disaster. This danger is clear enough, exemplified by the collapse of arms control and disarmament agreements (note the Trump Administration’s recently announced plan to withdraw the United States from the landmark INF Treaty with Russia), vast nuclear weapons ‘modernization’ programs by the United States and other nuclear powers, and reckless threats of nuclear war. Yet it has stirred remarkably little public protest within the United States and even less public debate during the recent U.S. midterm elections.

Of course, there are U.S. peace and disarmament organizations that challenge the nuclear menace. But they are fairly small and usually pursue their own, separate anti-nuclear campaigns. Such campaigns—ranging from cutting funding for a new nuclear weapon, to opposing the Trump Administration’s destruction of yet another disarmament treaty, to condemning its threats of

nuclear war—are certainly praiseworthy. But they have not galvanized a massive public uprising within the United States against the overarching danger of nuclear annihilation.

In these circumstances, what is missing is a strategy that will rouse the general public from its torpor and shift the agenda of the nuclear powers from nuclear confrontation to a nuclear weapons-free world. The Nuclear Weap-



ons Freeze Campaign, launched decades ago in another time of nuclear crisis, suggests one possible strategy. Developed at the end of the 1970s by defense analyst Randy Forsberg, the Freeze (as it became known) focused on a simple, straightforward goal: a Soviet-American agreement to stop the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons. As Forsberg predicted, this proposal to halt the nuclear arms race had great popular appeal (with polls showing U.S. public support at 72 percent) and sparked an enormous grassroots campaign. The Reagan Administration, horrified by this resistance to its plans for a nuclear buildup and victory in a nuclear war, fought ferociously against it. But to no

avail. The Freeze triumphed in virtually every state and local referendum on the ballot, captured the official support of the Democratic Party, and sailed through the House of Representatives by an overwhelming majority. Although the Reaganites managed to derail it in the Senate, the administration was on the defensive and, soon, on the run. Joined by massive anti-nuclear campaigns in Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world, the Freeze campaign forced a reversal of administration priorities and policies, leading to previously unthinkable Soviet-American nuclear disarmament treaties and an end to the Cold War.

## How might a comparable strategy be implemented today?

The campaign goal might be a halt to the nuclear arms race, exemplified by an agreement among the nuclear powers to scrap their ambitious nuclear ‘modernization’ plans. Although the Trump Administration would undoubtedly rail against this policy, the vast majority of Americans would find it thoroughly acceptable. An alternative, more ambitious goal—one that would probably also elicit widespread public approval—would be the ratification by the nuclear powers of the “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.” This UN-brokered treaty, signed in July 2017 by the vast majority of the world’s nations and scorned by the governments of the United States and other nuclear-armed countries, prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons.

The second stage of a current campaign strategy, as it was in the strategy of the Freeze, is to get as many peace groups

# BACK FROM THE BRINK

## The Call to Prevent Nuclear War

### OUR FIVE POLICY SOLUTIONS

We call on the United States to lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war by:

- 1. Renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first**

The United States still reserves the right to use nuclear weapons first. This increases the chance that a conflict could escalate to nuclear war. The United States should instead declare that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons, and would use them only in response to a nuclear attack.
- 2. Ending the sole, unchecked authority of any president to launch a nuclear attack**

The president has unchecked authority to order the use of nuclear weapons, either first or in response to a nuclear attack. To order a launch, the president could simply notify the military of his/her decision. The president would likely consult advisers, but this is not required, and no one has the authority to countermand a legal launch order. This system is risky and unjustified. There are practical ways to include multiple decision-makers in authorizing the use of nuclear weapons, and the United States should adopt such changes.
- 3. Taking U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert**

The United States still deploys several hundred nuclear warheads on missiles in underground silos, ready to launch within minutes of a presidential order. This alert status — called hair-trigger alert — increases the chance of a launch in response to a false alarm. There have been numerous close calls over the past 40 years due to both human and technical errors, and keeping missiles on high alert increases the danger of accidental war. There is no compelling rationale for maintaining this option, and the United States should remove its missiles from hair-trigger alert.
- 4. Canceling the plan to replace its entire arsenal with enhanced weapons**

The United States will spend over a trillion dollars in the next 30 years to replace its entire nuclear arsenal, including the bombers, missiles and submarines that deliver the weapons. This tremendous investment demonstrates that nuclear weapons are still central to U.S. military policy. The new weapons will have enhanced capabilities. Instead, the United States should simply refurbish existing weapons where possible, rather than enhancing their capabilities or building new ones.
- 5. Actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals**

It should be the highest national security goal of the U.S. government to seek the elimination of nuclear weapons, the only way to guarantee that they are never used. The United States—like Britain, China, France, and Russia — pledged under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to eliminate its nuclear arsenal. Non-nuclear-weapons states under the NPT are increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress toward meeting this obligation. One result is the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which makes it illegal to “develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess, or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” The United States should honor its obligations under the NPT and begin negotiations with the other nuclear-armed states for a time-bound, verifiable, enforceable agreement to dismantle their nuclear weapons so they can join the TPNW.

## When it comes to military spending, the United States reigns supreme

*Newsweek* reported in March 2018: “The United States has the strongest military in the world,” with over 2 million military personnel and vast numbers of the most advanced nuclear missiles, military aircraft, warships, tanks, and other modern weapons of war. Furthermore, as the *New York Times* noted, “the United States also has a global presence unlike any other nation, with about 200,000 active duty troops deployed in more than 170 countries.” This presence includes some 800 overseas U.S. military bases.

In 2017 (the last year for which global figures are available), **the U.S. government accounted for over a third of the world’s military expenditures—more than the next seven highest-spending countries combined.** Not satisfied, however, President Trump and Congress pushed through a mammoth increase in the annual U.S. military budget in August 2018, raising it to \$717 billion. Maintaining the U.S. status as ‘No. 1’ in war and war preparations comes at a very high price.

*Lawrence Wittner, “United States: First in War, Trailing in Modern Civilization,” LA Progressive, December 29, 2018*  
<https://www.laprogressive.com/first-in-war/>.

## U.S. military spending keeps rising even as the Pentagon flunks its audit

On November 15, 2018, Ernst & Young and other private firms that were hired to audit the Pentagon announced that they could not complete the job. Congress had ordered an independent audit of the Department of Defense, the government’s largest discretionary cost center—the Pentagon receives 54 cents out of every dollar in federal appropriations—after the Pentagon failed for decades to audit itself. The firms concluded, however, that the DoD’s financial records were riddled with so many bookkeeping deficiencies, irregularities, and errors that a reliable audit was simply impossible.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan tried to put the best face on things, telling reporters, “We failed the audit, but we never expected to pass it...It was an audit on a \$2.7 trillion organization, so the fact that we did the audit is substantial”... As a result of the Pentagon’s accounting shenanigans, some \$21 trillion—**yes, trillion**—worth of financial transactions cannot be accounted for.

*Dave Lindorff, “Special Report: Exposing the Pentagon’s Massive Accounting Fraud” The Nation, January 7, 2019*

# Putting Our Faith in Guns & Our Tax Dollars Down a Black Hole

by Paul A. Olson

Nebraskans for Peace has always been concerned about the federal military budget and its relationship to spending on the welfare of our people—the money they have to pursue life, liberty and happiness. In the early days of Nebraskans for Peace, the standard figure was that the Defense Department and other military expenditures took half of the discretionary federal budget, and all other needs—education, infrastructure,

scientific research, work for health and welfare—took about 50 percent of the federal budget. I remember the late UNL economist Wally Peterson saying that the 50 percent figure was a little too high (that the military probably took only about 45 percent). I also remember Merle Hansen of Rural Nebraskans for Peace (our predecessor organization) saying that the military took well over half of our federal discretionary funds. If you look at figures from various organizations such

as Veterans for Peace, Peace Action or the Congressional Budget Office, you’ll find both slightly lower and slightly higher numbers. In view of the enormous amount of money that is spent and the differences among various authorities, it seems important that a decent audit of the Defense Department be produced by independent auditors.

An audit is not an insignificant matter. I have served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations, and some of them have nearly been destroyed because their audits were not clean. Funding

agencies for the nonprofit sector require that the audits be perfect before they will fund again. Similarly, Nebraskans for Peace with its tiny \$155,000 budget has undertaken regular audits to show that it spent its money the way it said it would (wisely), and that no one dipped into the till. I think it would be appropriate to regard the American taxpayers as a funding agency running a nonprofit—that is, the Department of Defense and those sectors of the Energy Department that furnish military hardware. This nonprofit is supposedly run on the welfare for the American people. It should be audited in those terms. (Linda Ruchala, who was formerly a member of the Nebraskans for Peace board and an associate professor of accounting at UN-L, presented at several Nebraskans for Peace Annual Conferences and also wrote articles on the failure of the Defense Department to audit itself or to have independent audits. These arguments went nowhere.)

Our congressional delegation has nothing to say about the need for accountability in the Department of Defense and other military sectors. At the same time they, while subscribing to alleged Christian values, go on repeating or tacitly subscribing to their versions of Ronald Reagan’s popularization of the Cadillac-driving “welfare queen.” In his unsuccessful 1976 presidential campaign, Reagan seized on a Chicago woman charged with welfare fraud to create a stereotype of welfare recipients making themselves rich by feeding at the government trough. In fact, there is very little evidence of corruption in the programs that assist those who receive less than the minimum wage in this country. According to *Time* magazine for example, the rate of food stamp or SNAP fraud in the United States is just a little over 1 percent or less than \$1 billion a year—to feed the over 40 million people who receive benefits.

Even while the SNAP program and all other programs of benefits for people in poverty are endlessly audited and politicians perpetuate grand and sadistic myths of rampant welfare queens to punish the poor and make the wealthy set self-satisfied, the most expensive part



of our federal budget had not received an audit in decades. That is the military budget. In 1990, Congress passed the “Chief Financial Officer Act” requiring departments of the federal government to develop accounting systems that could be audited. All departments did that except for the Department of Defense. Following up recently, however, Congress mandated that the Department of Defense conduct an audit, and the DoD hired Ernst & Young and some other private firms to audit their accounts. However, the audit failed.

Recently, the *Nation* magazine published a special report by journalist David Lindorff on the failure of the Defense Department audit. The accounting firms decided after a long struggle that the Department of Defense financial records contained so many bookkeeping errors, irregularities and problems that they simply could not audit them.

The *Nation* then conducted an investigation into the problems with the accounts and found that they contained “trillions of dollars worth of apparently nonexistent transactions” and efforts to shelter one-year funds in the five-year budget to show greater need for future budgetary expenditures by the military. The auditors found \$6.5 trillion in 2015 in “plugs”—expenditures that lacked supporting documentation for increased military spending every year (even though the United States was not fighting a war) and supplied money for off-the-books programs that Congress did not know about, such as the military venture in Niger. As the *Nation* article argues, the Pentagon bookkeeping is “so obtuse that it is impossible to trace the actual sources

and destinations of \$21 trillion.”

The Pentagon has repeatedly refused explanations of its practices, and our Nebraska people in Washington are no better. Donald Trump, without providing any persuasive justifications, asked for huge new military budgets while advocating cutting support for our citizens. Our people in Congress are telling us the most important thing they can do in Washington is to expand our military budgets. Perhaps it is not just coincidental that when we have Democratic members in Congress from Omaha, they go for huge military budgets and lots of money for StratCom in the Department of Defense. When we have Republicans in Congress they do the same thing. Senator Deb Fischer recently said that the most important thing she could do in Washington would be to expand the military budget.

This neglect of our people—our small farmers, small business operators, our citizens on minimum-wage salaries—is not accidental. All over the country the congressmembers from military districts vote for intense military budgets and ignore the rest of us (including military veterans in areas where they need real help—in healthcare, employment training, and mental health assistance). When we spend everything to fatten the wallets of big corporations and military contractors, we lose our moral compass. If we are spending so much money—as much as the next seven countries combined—and still claim we are not secure, we are losing our intellectual compass.

We need a real audit of this military-industrial complex before it ends up bankrupting us.

# What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

## Feedbacks: Making Climate Change Worse

Several climate-change feedback mechanisms compound each other, accelerating warming. Heat and drought, for instance, fuel forest fires, adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. We have watched this feedback compound for several years, most recently last summer in the U.S. West. In places such as Red-



ding, California, fires of unprecedented ferocity have ravaged urban areas as well as forests, adding a new word to our meteorological vocabulary: “firenado,” a tornado of fire with winds as strong as 150 m.p.h. Fires have been increasing worldwide, from Siberia to Sweden.

At the top of the world, melting arctic ice and diminishing albedo (solar reflectivity) is generating another dangerous feedback. Dark ocean water absorbs more heat than lighter ice and snow, causing even more heating and more melting.

Climate change is cumulative. Around the Arctic Circle, on land, permafrost is melting, adding still more carbon

dioxide and methane to the atmosphere and accelerating a natural process that feeds upon itself. To these natural processes, add the trigger of increasing human greenhouse gas emissions.

### Soil as Feedback

Scientists are still expanding the ambit of feedbacks. Reporting on a soil study published in the journal *Nature* in August 2018, *Associated Press* senior science writer Seth Borenstein described how “Even the dirt on the ground is making climate change worse... Plants capture massive amounts of carbon, pumping it into the soil where usually it stays for hundreds or thousands of years. Observations from across the globe show that as temperatures have warmed, bacteria and fungi in the soil are becoming more active. These turbo-charged microbes are feeding on dead leaves and plants, releasing more heat-trapping carbon dioxide into the air. Scientists call it a vicious cycle of warming.”

As part of this study, scientists found that the amount of carbon released since the 1990s by microbes has been rising steadily, as they analyzed sensor readings, soil measurements, plant growth data and satellite observations in what was described by Borenstein as the most comprehensive study to date of how climate change affects soil. “The world really is showing an effect here,” said lead researcher Ben Bond-Lamberty of the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

“It’s a fingerprint of climate change.”

As temperatures rise and the atmosphere warms, soil will release yet more carbon, accelerating the feedback. If something isn’t done, “we are really in trouble,” Rattan Lal of Ohio State University, who wasn’t part of the study, was quoted by Borenstein as saying. Lal said that improved soil conservation techniques—“such as avoiding plowing, off-season cover crop and leaving crop residue on the ground”—can retain carbon in the earth.

Northern Arizona University Professor Kiona Ogle wrote in *Nature*: “The rate at which carbon dioxide is lost from soil has risen faster than the rate at which it is used by land plants, because soil microbes have become more active—possibly weakening the land surface’s ability to act as a carbon sink.” According to Ogle, as temperatures have risen, there has been a parallel increase in the metabolism of organisms at the land surface—as demonstrated by enhanced rates of CO<sub>2</sub> uptake, mainly by plants through photosynthesis, and of CO<sub>2</sub> loss from plants and soil microorganisms, mostly owing to respiratory processes.” Ogle continues: “If the observed trend continues, respiration by microbes could contribute substantially to global warming by releasing CO<sub>2</sub> from organic matter that has previously been stored in soil for decades to millennia.”

*conclusion on page 14*



# U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals on Bill and Melinda Gates' Screen

by John Krejci

While perusing the November issue of *National Geographic*, I came across an interview of Bill and Melinda Gates. To be honest, I mostly just enjoy the great photography! But this short interview peaked my interest when it highlighted the fact that the Gates have championed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations. (See graphic.)

As an active member of the local chapter of the United Nations Association, I was encouraged to see the United Nations presented in such a positive light. Often our UNA chapter is engaged in an uphill struggle to counter the negative publicity. Melinda and Bill made clear they recognize the continued successes of the UN.

In 2017 the Gates Foundation launched "Gatekeepers"—"an initiative to spur action and track progress toward the SDG goals." You may know that in 2000 the UN launched the "Millennium Goals" on which the SDG are based. The 2018 status report spoke of "mind-blowing progress toward those goals." The 2000 UN Millennium Goals were responsible, in part, for the progress. Vietnam was singled out as example where the achievement level of those in school rivals that of more developed nations. The aim now is to enrich the substance of the curriculum.

The article stresses the importance of a positive approach—looking at progress and successes. Melinda points out that "optimism is important because it is a form of seeing what's possible and then helping make that a reality." In this age of doom and gloom, this is a refreshing perspective.

If one follows the daily news, it is clear that 'bad news' makes the headlines: wars, bombings, school shootings, fires, floods, storms, violent crimes—you get the picture. They make news because they happen suddenly—often without notice. Recall the old saying: "If it bleeds, it leads!" On the other hand, good things happen gradually, over



time, incrementally. In the past 30 years, poverty has decreased dramatically, hunger has lessened, clean water has been provided to 800 million people. Perhaps this is a reason climate change has been so slow to garner political traction—it also is incremental.

Melinda gives further examples: Rwanda has been successful in providing equality for health services. Ethiopia's agricultural production has been growing at 5 percent a year. And, as we mentioned, Vietnam has made great strides in education—the 15-year-olds are doing as well on international tests as people from the United Kingdom or the U.S.! She states that when a country gets health, education and agriculture together, it will soon become self-sustaining.

On the challenging side, they are confronting the continuing problems of HIV-AIDS and lack of adequate contraception. These are barriers to development. Women need to space their children so they can raise a healthier family. Of the 200 million women in Africa who want contraception, only 40 million have been given access. That is progress, but there is still a long way to go.

Optimism is threaded through the report.

When the focus is constantly on negative things, a false impression is given. One might even become hopeless. Bill Gates says that is a mistake. We need to learn from what has gone well in the past. As we've gotten vaccines out, marvelous things are happening. Literacy rates all over the world, including Africa, have gone up very dramatically.

The Gates conclude that it is important to set goals, like the UN'S Sustainable Development Goals, to give us an objective perspective on what we can achieve. It is encouraging that Bill and Melinda Gates have the SDGs on their screens while our chapter continues to promote them.

The local chapter of the United Nations Association has existed for over 50 years and continues to advocate the UN and its goals. If you are interested in promoting the United Nations locally, we meet on the 4th Monday of the month, at 11:30 a.m. at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, 84th & South Streets for a light lunch, short meeting and guest speaker. For more information contact Bob Haller or Marcella Shortt at 402-488-4258. Or email: [mshortt@inebraska.com](mailto:mshortt@inebraska.com)

# Saving Our Soil. Saving Ourselves.

by Marilyn McNabb

The “Elder Climate Legacy Initiative” are Nebraskans with a concern for the future of our state’s essential natural resources: water, soil and a stable climate. [www.elderclimatelegacy.org](http://www.elderclimatelegacy.org) Some of them also have special knowledge of the biology and economics of the state’s agriculture. They are showing us a new and important way to address climate change: through advocacy for the health of Nebraska’s soil. Working with current and former members of the Unicameral, they have shaped a bill to advance soil health.

Drawing on his 20-plus years of working for the USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (the federal government’s soil experts), first-year Senator Tim Gragert from the northeastern most counties understood the significance of the Elder Climate Legacy’s Initiative’s work. He introduced LB 243, titled “Create the Healthy Soils Task Force.” On the first day, five other Senators added their names to the bill: Tom Brandt, Myron Dorn, John McCollister, Patty Pansing Brooks and Lynne Walz.

LB 243 sets up a task force to “develop a comprehensive healthy soils initiative for the State of Nebraska.” Also, the task force is to develop an action plan “to coordinate efforts to carry out such healthy soils initiative using standards for organic matter, biological activity, biological diversity and soil structure as measures to assess improved soil health.” The task force is to set goals and determine what resources are required and what are available. It is to create a timeline to improve soil health in Nebraska within five years after the completion of the action plan. The bill suggests some of the elements of a plan: research, education, technical assistance,

demonstration projects, and financial incentives. It calls for attention to the contribution of livestock to soil health.

Represented on the task force are the state Director of Agriculture, members of Natural Resource Districts, representatives from production agriculture, agribusiness, and one from an environmental organization, as well as the Legislature’s committee chairs of Natural Resources and Agriculture. The Governor appoints the representatives.

The need for the task force is explained in the bill: “Appropriate planning and coordination is needed to speed up and coordinate the adoption of practices that rebuild and protect soil carbon to increase water-holding capacity and enhance the vitality of the subsurface microbiome for landowners to capitalize on the economic and production benefits of soil health, while simultaneously enhancing water quality, capturing carbon, building resilience to drought and pests, reducing greenhouses gas emissions, expanding pollinator and other wildlife habitat, and protecting fragile ecosystems for a more sustainable future.” It also notes that “a number of states have initiated formal soil health programs...” The bill’s philosophy is to find voluntary rather than regulatory actions.

In supporting materials, the Elders point out that the percentage of organic matter in the soil can be a valuable measure of soil health. Currently, under the predominant practice of corn/soybean rotation, the percentage of organic matter may well be under 2 to 2.5 percent while levels in healthier and more productive soil will be 4 to 5 percent or more.

Also noted is that one of the primary mitigation efforts needed is to restore some balance to nature’s carbon cycle. The cycle involves plant life pulling CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere through photosyn-

thesis and sequestering (storing) it in agriculture lands, forests and wetlands in the form of organic matter. For performing this important public service, there could and should be incentive payments.

In the remarkable collection of strategies to heal earth’s climate titled *Drawdown*, editor Paul Hawken delivers a surprise. He writes, “Think of the causes of global warming, and fossil fuel energy probably comes to mind. Less conspicuous are the consequences of breakfast, lunch and dinner... If you add up... food-related emissions—from farming to deforestation to food waste—what we eat turns out to be the number one cause of global warming.” However, he concludes, “Instead of releasing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, food production can capture carbon as a means to increase fertility, soil health, water availability, yields and ultimately nutrition and food security.” (p. 37)

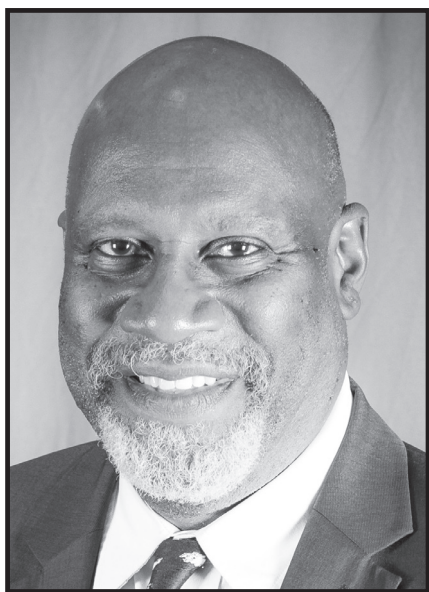
That’s the challenge. And in Nebraska, LB 243 may well be an important first step in taking that challenge on.

## How does the USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service define soil health?

Soil health, also referred to as soil quality, is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans. This definition speaks to the importance of managing soils so they are sustainable for future generations...

Only ‘living’ things can have health, so viewing soil as a living ecosystem reflects a fundamental shift in the way we care for our nation’s soils. Soil isn’t an inert growing medium, but rather is teeming with billions of bacteria, fungi and other microbes that are the foundation of an elegant symbiotic ecosystem.

# Hitting & Hugging in the Social Justice Circles



by A'Jamal-Rashad Byndon

Years ago, Dr. Theresa Barron-McKeagney, former Director of the UNO Grace Abbott School of Social Work, shared with me that the University of Nebraska system used to host a conference to provide a safe place to discuss the research and educational conditions affecting administrators, scholars and students of color within the university system. That annual event was eliminated more than 15 years ago. Based on my research, there are no state publicly funded educational institutions that host or facilitate any safe place for members from communities of color and low-income areas in the state to advance their issues.

During my tenure as a six-year board member of the Chicano Awareness Center (now called Latino Center of the Midlands), I came to learn about the issues affecting Latinos in our community. Moreover, I came to understand how Omaha has maintained its apartheid nature by way of the 'divide

## How do we improve? And 'frank talk' does not break real friendship.

and rule' mentality of those in positions of authority.

Over the course of my 25 years working at Catholic Charities, I witnessed the gradual balkanization of racial politics and services at its respective community centers as they progressively focused on their Catholic participants. In essence, they did not work to bring the majority South Omaha Catholic Latinos together with the Protestant North Omaha African Americans. The North Omaha Office, called St. Martin de Porres, served a high percentage of African Americans, and it was the cornerstone of providing food pantries and services to low-income families in the city. At one-point Catholic Charities was reported as having the largest number of families getting food from pantries in Omaha. Those numbers dropped as the organization started to work on food stamps increases, direct financial social services assistance to the poor and other poverty-related public policy issues. Also, as the administration became more Catholic-centric and less focused on helping those with the greatest needs, the priorities changed.

Now the readers are asking how does this relate to the topic or focus of social justice?

In recent months, we have become aware of mind-boggling management 'mistakes' made with the Omaha Public Schools pension fund. The \$771 million funding shortfall is forcing the district that educates more of Nebraska's poor children than any other to slash spending to meet

mandated obligations to its retirees. A few weeks ago, a similar story appeared in the news that the Department of Health and Human Services would have to terminate a contract with a computer firm creating a new data system to handle Nebraska Medicaid enrollment and eligibility because they could not deliver on a major contract. The cost of that loss was over 12 million dollars.

What people of color have done historically for this country is to act as the miner's canary. The mismanagement and malfeasance we—and the programs and institutions claiming to serve us—are subjected to are the early warning system for society at large. If we are locked out of institutions and not allowed to exercise our constitutional rights and speak truth to power, these conditions will not only continue—they will spread on up the social ladder.

Over the past ten years, there have been numerous examples of mistakes, irregularities, ineptitude and even malfeasance inside governmental institutions here in the state. (I haven't even touched on the scandal inside our corrections system.) But if we are serious about the process of seeking accountability in government and the public services that help the residents in our state—and particularly those with the greatest needs for dealing with poverty—then we are going to need to integrate the historically oppressed into these old boys' and girls' clubs.

Many months ago, I wrote to the director of the Latino Center of the Midlands.

*continued on page 12*

# Hitting & Hugging, continued

No response. I also wrote to the Director of Charles Drew Health Center. Again, no response. These were not email messages, but correspondences sent via the U.S. postal system. These are only a few examples of the nonresponse of the nonprofit managerial class and directors purporting to serve racial and low-income groups. To add insult to injury, I served as the Board Chair of Charles Drew Health Center.

Now, these local examples are an indicator—a canary in the coal mine—of what goes on in state government. I served on the advisory committee of the “Minority Health Council” that is funded by the state. During my three-year tenure on this council, I came to see during the meetings that the white members of the council appropriated what little authority the body actually had—refusing in their white fragility to seriously address any issues of social justice, race or racism. It didn’t even help that we had a representative of one of the state’s advocacy commissions on the Council. That commission, I came to learn, had but modest accomplishments to show for its efforts, and its aspirations were equally so. (One only need look at its latest strategic plan.)

Some of this underachievement is clearly a result of inadequate support from state government. If you haven’t got much in the way of resources, you can’t do much in the way of programming—you’re hamstrung. And without question, many of these groups and entities are trying to operate in a political environment hostile to their goals. During my time on the Minority Health Council, it was actually reported that the Governor’s Office, in a public meeting, had directed the Council NOT to inform the community of various federal initiatives related to health services for low-income Nebraskans.

Not everything related to the operation of these entities though can be chalked up to outside pressure and political reality. At some point, there has to be some personal accountability on the part of those in

authority. We can’t have state agencies that are charged with doing the people’s work not getting it done—not if we’re going to have a government that actually works and serves us.

Some would argue there are white state agencies and organizations doing even less work. But again, when we have government officials who squander 12 million dollars on computer consultants who don’t deliver, put OPS’s pension fund in a \$771 million hole, and engineer a crisis in our corrections system, don’t we demand that these people answer for their actions? We do. And we should. That kind of incompetence is not acceptable and will not get us the governance we need.

Nebraskans have an aversion to confrontation. We act like if we avoid contentious topics—don’t talk about racism, classism, elitism, but also ineffectiveness, incompetence, cowardice—they’ll disappear. But how can we affect the health conditions of Nebraskans when we keep bringing in so-called experts from other states who have no social capital with residents of our state? How can we affect their community health conditions when we are holding an annual conference in Kearney and many of the affected group members can’t afford to attend the conference to hear their babble? It would be more advantageous for the state workers to get out of their state offices and visit members in the communities to impact change. Look at the travel logs and work plans of these various groups—like the Office of Minority Health—and ask if they provide any semblance of accountability and engagement in helping build bridges to other people of color?

It sounds like I am picking on people of color. But as the martyred South African Anti-Apartheid activist Steve Biko once said, when one puts on the uniform of brutality against the will and needs of the people, then those individuals have lost their rights to be considered part of our struggle for justice.

Years ago, Nebraska Civil Rights activist, Dr. Donna Polk, proposed to one of the white state senators that we create an African American Commission that would provide the services similar to the Indian and Latino American Commission (LAC). That white senator drafted a bill and ran it by Senator Ernie Chambers who said he didn’t support the proposal and the idea was subsequently dropped. At the time, I was baffled by Senator Chambers not wanting the help of a governmental commission in public policy advocacy and legislation. Fast forward and, based upon my contacts and observations, I have come to see the merits of his arguments. These advocacy bodies, which are under the thumb of the Governor’s Office, lack both the authority and the resources to achieve their stated goals. If you don’t have a viable travel budget, how can you possibly serve a constituency in a state as vast as Nebraska?

When are we going to hold schools and other publicly funded institutions accountable? How many local nonprofits that purport to serve low-income and people of color are meeting basic standards? If we lack any significant contacts or opportunity to work with the affected group, how can we really address their needs or community issues? I serve on the board of the ACLU. I am familiar with the Nebraska Appleseed Center, Voices for Children and a host of other liberal white organizations. Nebraska Appleseed Center has been in existence for over 20 years. They recently hired their first African American male. How does that work when you fight for equality and diversity and your board of directors and staff members looks like a white citizen council from Mississippi? I served on the board of Nebraska for Peace for many years and left the organization because they lacked diversity on the board. I only returned when there was another person on color on the board. We support social justice organizations, but we must avoid having only ‘one of a kind’ on their boards of directors. At times, as an

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## Nuclear Disarmament, conclusion

as possible to endorse the campaign and put their human and financial resources behind it. Working together in a joint effort seems feasible today. Some of the largest of the current organizations—such as the American Friends Service Committee, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Peace Action, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Veterans for Peace—are already thoroughly committed to building a nuclear weapons-free world.

The third stage of an effective strategy is winning the battle for public opinion. In the case of the Freeze, this entailed not only distributing crucial information to members of the general public, but introducing Freeze resolutions at local gatherings or national conventions of religious denominations, unions, professional associations, and the vast panoply of voluntary organizations, where they

almost invariably passed.

A final stage involves turning the objective into government policy. The Freeze campaign found that many politicians were quite willing to adopt its program. Similarly, at present, some key Democrats, including the chair of the incoming House Armed Services Committee and likely Democratic presidential candidates, are already attacking the Trump Administration's nuclear 'modernization' program, its withdrawal from disarmament treaties, and its eagerness to launch a nuclear war. Consequently, if a major public campaign gets rolling, substantial changes in public policy are within reach.

To be fully effective, such a campaign requires international solidarity—not only to bring domestic pressure to

bear on diverse nations, but overseas pressure as well. The Freeze movement worked closely with nuclear disarmament movements around the world, and this international alliance produced striking results in both East and West. Today, a new international alliance, enhanced by the current strong dissatisfaction of non-nuclear nations with the escalation of the nuclear arms race and the related dangers of nuclear war, could help foster significant changes in public policy.

Of course, this proposal suggests only one of numerous possible ways to develop a broad nuclear disarmament campaign. But there should be little doubt about the necessity for organizing that public mobilization. The alternative is allowing the world to continue its slide toward nuclear catastrophe.

# WHAT'S HOT, CONCLUSION

## A Hotter Future, Guaranteed

The amount of carbon dioxide in the soil surpasses that of the atmosphere by a factor of two or more, providing an indication of this feedback's scale, according to Lamberty and the co-authors' study. Scientists to date have no firm estimate of this feedback's impact on the atmosphere and temperatures as a whole.

Whatever this effect may be, we can add it to the impact of other feedbacks, such as albedo and forest fires. Add to this impact the effects of thermal inertia (describing natural delays by which carbon emissions become heat) and we have a recipe for a much hotter future, guaranteed.

### FURTHER READING

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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).*

# Hitting & Hugging, conclusion

NFP board member, I must fight from inside of the octopus.

If we are going to seriously change the quality of life for low-income residents in Nebraska, we are going to need ongoing contacts with critics of our services by those respective groups and individuals. When I was at the advocacy organization, PromiseShip, they were required to do an annual community-wide survey. Each year they made the necessary tweak to their survey questions. However, the real question after they reported to the legislative committee was: What did they then do with those responses? Can they point to programmatic changes? When did they share their responses with the respective groups or individuals who provided the answers to their

surveys? How can you complete an annual survey and allow it to sit on someone's desk for two months? When did we really look at the conditions in that organization and others, such as the Department of Corrections and other state agencies? Who is in the driver seat? When you look at the respective state advisory councils, do they represent our state in terms of the racial and sexual make-up of the residents? When we look at where agencies and services are located, can low-income families travel to those so-called services without great hardship?

These are the basic questions that could be proposed in a real town hall or listening sessions with various stakeholders, if we are really to make change.

## Your Foundation Speaks

by *Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President*

For next year, 2020, Nebraskans for Peace (NFP) will be celebrating 50 years as the voice of peace and justice in Nebraska—50 years as the longest-surviving statewide P&J organization in the U.S. Now is the time to consider how we fund NFP for the next 50 years. Hopefully Nebraska Peace Foundation (NPF) will be able to provide the funds necessary for all of NFP's educational work.

We will need to build up our permanent endowment. Currently we provide about \$37,000 interest and dividend income annually to support NFP. This amount will need to double to fully support NFP's educational work.

Please consider designating NPF as the beneficiary or contingent beneficiary of your IRA account. You will still be able to own and control your IRA during your lifetime but upon your death the remaining funds will transfer tax free to NPF. Ask your financial advisor or tax consultant to check this out for your situation.



# HARD TRUTH, conclusion

rotting misery with feathers.

The biggest surprise was Ricketts' announcement that his proposed budget will fully fund TEEOSA: the state aid to schools formula which has NEVER been fully funded since voters upheld LB1059 (vetoed by Kay Orr) in 1990. This OUGHT to be a good thing. Instead this is how Ricketts sets up a WWE-style gauntlet cage match between K-12 education, the University, Medicaid expansion, and the Departments of Human Services and Corrections, all of which are already bleeding out the ears.

Ricketts also proposes to gut the Labor Department, making it a safety division under the State Fire Marshal, and to collapse the Department of Environmental Quality and the Energy Office together, all in the name of "making state government more customer-focused." And there it is. Ricketts doesn't understand Nebraskans as citizens—only as taxpayers or customers.

Recently, Ricketts refused to sign the proclamation for the "One Book One Nebraska" 2019 selection: *This Blessed Earth*, a story of a year in the life of a struggling farm family, by Ted Genoways. Ricketts said, "The book... was written by a political activist...who is out of touch and it was not going to be something that united Nebraska." (*Lincoln Journal Star*, 1/7/18) Ricketts admitted that he has not read the book.

I've only read the first couple of pages so far, but Genoways is spot on. A young farmer is trying to reinvent an old grain bin so he can store his harvest which he can't sell at a fair price and can't afford to store at the only elevator in town. If anything, Genoways cuts far too close to the bone for Ricketts' taste, telling the hard truths the 1% want Nebraskans to ignore.

What a petty, feckless man! Son of privilege who thinks he hit a triple, when really he was born on third. Small-minded, deeply dishonest, Trump wannabe, kissing cousin to Sam Walton and the Kochs. The worst governor of Nebraska

in my 40 years in Lincoln, Ricketts sucked the joy out of being a Cubs fan and the World Series victory in 2016.

That said, do I feel better? Do you? Not nearly enough, in my case, and I reckon it's the same for you. I think now we must take inspiration from 'Our Lady of Compassionate Reason,' Michelle Obama, who declared, "When they go low, we go high." The best response to the churlishness of Dishonorable Pete is to take action coming from love: On Centennial Mall, visible from the Governor's Office and analogous to the Pinnacle Bank Arena (Temple to Entertainment and Sports), let us build a beautiful new 'Temple to the Book.'

For most of this century, the master plan for Lincoln has included a new central library to replace Bennett Martin Library, long past its sell-by date. I spoke with City Attorney Jeff Kirkpatrick, who served ten years on the Library Board, to get a feel for where this project stands. (Kirkpatrick is running in the mayoral primary election in May; his main Democratic opponent, Leirion Gaylor-Baird, also supports libraries.) Kirkpatrick said a best guess for a price tag is between 50 and 60 million dollars, less than a fifth the cost of PBA. This figure would include upgrades for the other branches as well. Kirkpatrick added that construction of the most recent library branches came in under budget, that a town the size of Lincoln might be expected to come up with something between three and six million dollars in private support, and little known facts that Bennett Martin itself was a gift and its two expansions did not cost Lincoln taxpayers a dime. As of September 2018, supporters were hoping to put a library bond issue on an upcoming ballot.

This is all to the good, but even more so are the benefits a state-of-the-arts library downtown would create for the whole city. A broad consensus of stakeholders sees the Pershing Au-

ditorium block as the best site, serving Lincoln's least affluent neighborhoods and therefore the poorest children. A new library with multi-use public areas, including green space, would grace Centennial Mall roughly halfway between the University and the Capitol. E-readers notwithstanding, people continue to go en masse to libraries—and a new library would anchor the area just south of O Street, between 16th and 14th, guaranteeing the foot traffic so key to prosperity. There is talk of making the old Lincoln Telephone building a residential space, and that kind of development, convenient to public transportation and the N Street bike trail, would promote the sort of lively, diversified activity that makes a city great.

Across the country and around the world, libraries for the future are being built by visionary cities today. The new library in Birmingham, UK, has a magnificent theater-in-the-round. In the U.S., cities like Columbia (MO), San Antonio, Cincinnati, Dayton, Ft. Wayne, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City and Ft. Lauderdale all have exceptional libraries which function as community centers and much more, "...providing...an essential service: empowering people with knowledge and tools that can help them grow so they can transform their lives and the lives of those around them. Libraries are safe spaces, a portal to the world, and a place where free speech in a free society is celebrated." ("Great Libraries Make Great Cities," [www.therivardreport.com](http://www.therivardreport.com), 6.7.13)

Kirkpatrick makes the point that libraries are a great answer to the digital divide—lack of internet access for people without computers or smartphones. "Everybody is welcome. Libraries are free."

Citizens are many. Politicians are few, but they won't act if we don't insist. City elections are coming. Now is the time. In Pete Ricketts' face, let us do the right thing. Let's build heaven in hell's despite.

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# HARD TRUTH

*by Sally Herrin*

## Going High

The Dishonorable Pete Ricketts never disappoints me. I expect a Ricketts “State of the State” address to be ham-handed and self-serving—and for my sins, I enjoy a pessimist’s gloomy satisfaction at being right. The financial condition of Nebraska is second-best in the nation; wage growth is strong; *Forbes* reckons Nebraska is fifth among the states for doing business; and our unemployment rate is sixth-lowest in the U.S. The Governor’s bad news is that ag producer

income is down by 60 percent statewide since 2013. Thanks largely to Trump tariffs, U.S. farm income tanked by 49 percent in 2018.

When Ricketts acknowledges agriculture is the number one industry in the state, he means ag input sales and grain and meat traders (like ConAgra and Chinese-owned Smithfield, the largest ag processor on Earth)—the corporations that bracket the growing of food, energy and fiber by actual farmers who are go-

ing broke. The good news for agriculture is the value-added movement, Ricketts said. Did he cite ethanol or soy diesel production or the farm-to-table system? Nope. ‘Value-added’ to Ricketts means the coming of Costco chickens to Seward County. Clearly, Ricketts has never visited the contract chicken belt across the South, nor studied the exploitation of humans and avians, nor smelled the stench of this insidious economic model and its byproducts: pollution, bankruptcies and