

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 NEWSLETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING  
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**POLITICIANS AND SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING**  
*Elections, Candidate Claims and Finding the Truth*

**William Timpson, Lloyd Thomas and Bob Meroney**  
Fort Collins Rotary Club

**Jim Halderman** is a Past District Governor, district peace committee chair,  
and ombudsman for District 5450.

**Jeni Arndt**, Mayor, Fort Collins Colorado  
Peace Corps Volunteer

In these newsletters Rotarians invite contributions and ideas, suggestions, and possibilities for our efforts to educate others about addressing the pressing issues of the day with intelligence, compassion, and a commitment to the greater good of humanity and the earth, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation. We also want to encourage the critical and creative thinking that can help individuals and communities move through obstacles and difficulties in more sustainable ways, i.e., with the interconnected health of all peoples, their economies, and their environments.

*Sustainable Peacebuilding Fellowship*

Wed. Sept. 7 from 1:15-2:15 MT

Lincoln Center, 417 W. Magnolia Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521

**POLITICIANS AND SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING**  
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**Bob Meroney**

*Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University.*

**POLITICS THROUGH THE EYES OF A FORMER PEACE COPRS VOLUNTEER**

**Jeni Arndt**

*Mayor, Fort Collins, Colorado*

*All are invited. Please share this newsletter with a friend or colleague.*

## POLITICS THROUGH THE EYES OF A FORMER PEACE COPRS VOLUNTEER

**Jeni Arendt**

Mayor, Fort Collins, Colorado

Jeni can be reached at [jarndt@fcgov.com](mailto:jarndt@fcgov.com)

Fort Collins has been home since I was three weeks old. My parents moved here from Boulder, where my father was in graduate school. They chose Fort Collins because it was in 1964, a great place to raise a family. That has not changed in 56 years! After attending Moore Elementary, Blevins Junior High School, and Poudre High School, I earned an undergraduate degree in Sociology at Colorado College. Soon afterwards I earned an MA in Geography from the University of Colorado followed by an MA in Special Education from Purdue University in Indiana.

After teaching special education for a few years, I earned a Ph.D. in Literacy and Language from Purdue. When I was away—in college, in the Peace Corps (Morocco), in graduate school, living and working in Mozambique, Africa— Fort Collins was always my home. When the opportunity arose to live anywhere, my husband, Channing, and I enthusiastically returned to Fort Collins with our three children. I wanted them to attend Poudre High School. We live three blocks from where I grew up.

My work experience includes Congressional intern, ESL teacher, Peace Corps volunteer, secondary special education teacher, middle school principal, International Baccalaureate Coordinator, university faculty member and department head. In addition to working, teaching and attending school, I have been an active volunteer. Serving in the Peace Corps in Morocco was an honor.

I served on school boards in Lafayette, IN and in Mozambique. After moving back to Fort Collins, I served on the Commission of Disabilities as well as Childsafe before running for State Representative in 2014. As a State Representative I have focused on water, agriculture, small business and public education. After 3+ terms in the General Assembly I was elected Mayor of Fort Collins in April, 2021. Personally, my husband of 32 years and I have three adult children. My mom, Libby James is my rock and role model. In my free time, I run, bike, swim, read and talk to people.

### WHY FACTS MATTER....WHY FACTS DON'T MATTER!

**Robert N. Meroney, Ph.D.** is a Rotarian and an Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University. He can be reached at [Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU](mailto:Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU)

Recently there has been much debate about the relevance of facts in discussing **political, racial or religious** differences.

During recent **political discussions** some argue that "facts do not matter" since everything is either emotional or relative. The end result is more important than some nit-picking detail. Or in the "post-truth" world it is more important whether the end result is better or optimal in one's opinion than the alternative of making a decision which could jeopardize your own political preference. Despite facts, denial and dissent remain. Examples might be:

- Global warming - accept a mountain of scientific evidence, or reject the facts and facilitate an economic boom and more jobs by encouraging energy exploitation



- Vaccinations - there is overwhelming medical evidence that there is no link between childhood vaccines and autism, but still 1/3 of US parents believe it does with the result that many contained childhood diseases are reappearing at plague like levels.
- Candidate corruption - reject a candidate for proven multiple lies, bigotry, and misanthropy, or vote for him/her because you anticipate your own pet issue (say repeal of Roe vs Wade, border walls, repeal of NAFTA) may prosper.
- Terrorism - accept extensive data that shows actual US deaths by foreign terrorists are minuscule compared to other causes, or implement anti-immigrant bans, border walls, and blanket deportations that satisfy one emotionally as "protecting" one's country.
- Global free trade - accept evidence that trade pacts have by and large served the US well both economically and diplomatically, that most jobs lost are due to automation, changes in fuel sources, etc. or ignore the facts and institute insular trade rules and embargoes that satisfy the feeling that we are doing something in the face of high unemployment in manufacturing and resource skill jobs.

In 1770 John Adams successfully defended British soldiers accused of firing on a Boston crowd in the Boston Massacre. He argued that despite what the majority of American rebels wished to believe, their emotional views were wrong:

*"Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence," ... John Adams<sup>1,2</sup>*

Some enthusiasts are even prepared to rewrite history to fit their beliefs or their politicians' favorite beliefs or quotes. Sara Palin mangled the story of Paul Revere claiming he rang bells and fired warning shots. She also said Paul Revere warned the British about the American arms locations. Subsequently her fans tried to modify the Wikipedia page to agree with her statements.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in emotionally charged **racial situations** after the death of Michael Brown, many protesters chanted "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" because the protesters believed that the white police officer shot Brown even though he had his hands in the air. Yet credible witnesses and videos clearly showed that Brown did NOT have his hands up and was possibly charging the officer at the time of the shooting.

Again, many supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement have essentially asserted that the "facts don't matter" since this incident just characterized many other cases where they were convinced the officers were in the wrong.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, "facts" are a very fuzzy subject in many **religious discussions**. In the link published by the Crisis Magazine (a Catholic Laity news blog) the author discusses again Why Facts Matter. Some points:

- A professor at Cal State University wrote "De-factualization is causing American Schools to Become Bastions of Anti-Intellectualism." "Debates are won by those with the loudest mouths and the Machiavellian ability to manipulate the emotions of others"

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-why-facts-still-matter-david-cutler>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2007/nov/30/why-facts-matter/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newser.com/story/120321/sarah-palin-fans-rewrite-paul-reveres-wikipedia-page-to-match-her-interpretation.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/Do-facts-matter-to-Black-Lives-Matter-9517486.php>

- The heart of Christianity is a myth, which is also a fact. If one is religious, the facts of religious history as recorded are essential to an understanding of religious beliefs and opinions.<sup>5</sup>

#### THOUGHTS:

- Often expertise is now simply self-declared in the absence of any credentials or experience.
- Opinion and fact have equal weight in some minds.
- Or, alternatively, facts are just another synonym for opinions.
- Anecdotal stories are sufficient to discount statistics. (i.e., It is really cold this winter ... so much for global warming).
- Faith and belief preempt facts when there is conflict.
- Political beliefs can define (or redefine) language (i.e. the meanings of liberal, conservative, political correctness, fascism, socialism, and other terms have been so distorted that in some minds they have become swear words or obscene).

Sadly, many recent studies have shown that the "backfire effect" is extremely strong, and presentation of facts cause many people to strengthen ideologically grounded beliefs". People tend to accept arguments that confirm their views and discount facts that challenge what they want to believe. People frequently remember the assertion that they like and forget whether it is a lie. This is called "confirmation bias." In some cases, just repeating the false facts in the process of attempting to debunk them can reinforce the original opinions.<sup>6</sup>

Politicians frequently like to quote from our Founding Fathers to add weight to their opinions or statements. At least what they say they said, but often the Founder

- Never said it,
- Somebody else said it,
- It was spoken in a different context, or
- It was made up.

Always consider the evidence for difference of opinions: Our Founders were not at all in agreement on many major issues! Such as:

- Separation of church & state,
- Strong vs weak central government,
- The desirability of more than one political party,
- "We the people.." vs "We the states...."
- Criticism of the government is unpatriotic....
- The states retained the right to secede.
- Slavery should/should not be allowed in the new nation...

Fact Checking Ground rules:

- Consider the source - what other statements and claims has been associated with the person or organization?
- Consider the content - what evidence confirms or denies the statements?
- What do other respected and trustworthy people you know personally say about the subject?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2016/why-facts-matter>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-facts-dont-matter-to-trumps-supporters/2016/08/04/924ece4a-5a78-11e6-831d-0324760ca856\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e99ba0358205](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-facts-dont-matter-to-trumps-supporters/2016/08/04/924ece4a-5a78-11e6-831d-0324760ca856_story.html?utm_term=.e99ba0358205)

<sup>7</sup> [https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fact-checking-wont-save-us-from-fake-news/?ex\\_cid=Weekly](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fact-checking-wont-save-us-from-fake-news/?ex_cid=Weekly)

**CONCLUSION and MY OPINION:** *Facts are not in the end malleable, optional, or revisable. It is not appropriate to cherry-pick or parse facts. There are no "alternate" facts. In balance I would argue "FACTS DO MATTER", and opinions, beliefs, political decisions, diplomacy, scientific decisions, economic decisions, etc. which ignore facts or act in defiance of facts will ultimately be disastrous or self-defeating.*

**FOURTEEN PRECEPTS OF THE “ORDER OF INTERBEING”**  
**Adapted from *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life***  
**By Thich Nhat Hanh**

*Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist, and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns. He can be reached at [ljtdat@aol.com](mailto:ljtdat@aol.com)*

I share this because I suspect if politicians, leaders or *anyone* were to follow the “precepts” below that they would find peace within themselves and create peacefulness in all their relationships...let alone become successful in any business or office they may hold.

1. *Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.*
2. *Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.*
3. *Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness.*
4. *Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, and sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.*
5. *Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.*
6. *Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them while they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as anger or hatred arises, turn your attention to your breathing in order to see and understand the nature of your anger or hatred and the nature of the persons who have caused your anger or hatred.*
7. *Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing in order to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing, both inside and around yourself. Plant the seeds of joy, peace,*

and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.

8. *Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.*

9. *Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things that you are not sure of. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.*

10. *Do not use the religious community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice, and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.*

11. *Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.*

12. *Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.*

13. *Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others but prevent others from enriching themselves from human suffering or the suffering of other beings.*

14. *Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies for the realization of the Way. Sexual expression should not happen without love and commitment. In sexual relationships, be aware of future suffering that may be caused. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.*

## **MAIREAD CORRIGAN MAGUIRE**

### **Hope is With the People**

*William Timpson, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus at Colorado State University in its School of Education and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club. He can be reached at [william.timpson@colostate.edu](mailto:william.timpson@colostate.edu)*

In the summer of 2003, I had the opportunity to visit with Mairead Corrigan Maguire at the Peace House, a Belfast building which was purchased with donations during the worst of the “troubles” and now able to serve as a base for various groups and projects working toward a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. When I asked her how she kept her own hopes alive when progress and change are so agonizingly slow, she paused, reflected, and then brightened and said, “*Come with me.*” In the room next to her office was a large space usable for groups of different sizes. On several walls were pictures of past events and supporters. One showed a large group of mostly women on a march. “*There,*” she beamed. “*Look at those faces. That’s what gives me hope.*”

Acknowledging that the more recent period of relative calm in Northern Ireland had meant a loss of urgency about change, Mairead was clear that new and different strategies are needed. While

she still drew hope from memories of the dramatic marches and achievements of the 1970's when Catholic and Protestant women led the way in confronting old fears about each other to form new connections in their work for an end to the violence, she was eager to talk about her hopes for integrated schools, for ongoing work with prison populations and various other peace initiatives.



*Murals still dominate the sides of many buildings in Northern Ireland, where paramilitary forces remind everyone of their promise to defend their own kind.*



*Mairead Maguire helped lead a grassroots movement to end 600 years of conflict and violence by promising an inclusive way forward.*

Reminiscent of what occurred in the U.S. as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement, one project was attempting to create a series of schools where Catholic and Protestant students can enroll and begin to interact daily to unlearn the prejudices that children are taught at very young ages. Walking through the Catholic community of West Belfast the next day, I could see how the huge political murals that have been painted on the sides of buildings on nearly every street corner to celebrate the “martyrs of the liberation movement” would make for a hothouse political environment for everyone living there.

Another project focused on the rehabilitation of those who made the sacrifice to fight for their country, were arrested and spent time in prison, and were now trying to reintegrate into society. Ex-convicts everywhere face challenges and difficulties not the least of which are the prejudices of their fellow citizens against anyone with a prison record. In Northern Ireland, the prejudice has been greatly amplified by a paradigm shift in attitudes toward peace.

Where many on both sides once saw armed struggle as the only way forward, more now could see that violence had failed as a means to a better end and only seemed to beget more violence in response. According to Mairead Corrigan Maguire, while some progress was being made in refocusing ex-prisoners toward peace in the Catholic community, far too many were being shunned in the Protestant community as now part of the problem.

That trip to West Belfast on the day following my interview with Mairead also left me with the indelible impression of being in an occupied area. At the entrance to the Catholic ghetto were buildings nearly wrapped in a steel cage bristling at the top with barbed wire. A surveillance tower, with television cameras pointing in every direction, rose a hundred feet in the air.

The same kind of security measures dominated sections of the walled city of Londonderry where the infamous “Bloody Sunday” incident of 1972 saw British paratroopers open fire on a civil rights march, killing thirteen and wounding many more. Again, the visible signs of occupation mixed

with the painted murals of martyrs to create a climate which points toward armed struggle as the dominant paradigm for change.

At the end of our conversation, Mairead repeated her principles for finding a way forward toward a sustainable peace: an affirmation of pacifism as an extension of her own religious faith; a belief in the power of grassroots citizen efforts; and good, concrete positive works toward change. She was also quick to note that *“if Northern Ireland can overcome 800 years of conflict and violence, surely others can do the same.”*

The lessons here for us is that the democratic political process can move communities seemingly mired in intractable violence toward peaceful and inclusive ways forward. However, citizen engagement and commitments to sustainable peacebuilding efforts are as essential as supporting politicians who want to help lead in that direction.

### **ASSERTIVE INTEGRITY LEADERSHIP** **The Tool for Global Security**

*Jim Halderman is a Past District Governor, district peace committee chair, and ombudsman for District 5450. He can be reached at [jimspeaker@comcast.net](mailto:jimspeaker@comcast.net).*

After many years teaching anger management, I decided it was time to rewrite my program incorporating several new techniques. First, however, I thought about what I felt important to such a class, with what skills would I like people to leave the class. I came up with seven goals as follows:

- 1) Build tools to deal with challenges, perceived and real
- 2) Develop skills to deal with negativity from self and others
- 3) Develop skills to control emotions
- 4) Positive communication skills to share your desires and opinions
- 5) Feel better about yourself and bring more joy to your life
- 6) Better health and understand why and how
- 7) Build peace internally and externally by calming the heart and mind

It may seem a stretch to be speaking about an individual anger management class when writing about world peace or global security. How can something that might change the attitude and skills of one individual bring peace to the world? How can one individual stop an army with the skill of controlling their emotion? Why would we believe someone with an anger issue, that takes a class on self-esteem, ostensibly be prepared for a global challenge?

The common denominator of every government, every association, and every legal organization is people. All members of any governing body are individuals, entering into positions of authority with all previous life’s traumas, emotions, knowledge and skills. All individuals are sentient beings, meaning we have feelings, emotions, and judgments we have developed combined with an eternity of evolutionary intuitions.

As Will Rogers explained to us: “Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.” Many have accumulated a great deal of knowledge, and we attempt and hope to select some for our leadership positions. I consider knowledge, though, as a circle with what we know on the inside and what we don’t know on the outside. Thus, the more we know, the more we know that we don’t know. The point being, knowledge is a great start, though influenced by our perceptions, and limited by our focus.

I believe **assertive integrity** should be expected and demanded of our leaders, taught in our

:



schools, and used throughout our communications. By **assertive** I am referring to a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others.

Assertive communication is embedded in high self-esteem. The assertive individuals value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual and physical needs, and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others. While **integrity**, for me, refers to the adherence to moral and ethical principles, soundness of moral character, and the courage to live and speak those values. We cannot accept politicians we know fall short of these values, even though they may support our one agenda item. Long term, democracy itself is weakened.

Will Rogers also, as every late-night talk show host today, makes fun of our politicians. We laugh while thinking they are just being politicians, that's typical. We accept it as humorous, typical, just the way it is, maybe with a little frustration. We cannot expect the world to change if we do not expect more of ourselves first and then more from our leaders. We accept "white lies" as a way of saving face to a potentially embarrassing question. But when do those white lies begin to turn gray, even black?

Twenty-five years ago North Korea shot down one of our helicopters that had flown into their territory. The pilot, Bobby Hall, lived and was later returned to us. Upon research of how it happened credit was given to the fact that during training a plane or helicopter may fly out of bounds a little with no consequence. It was no big deal as it is all our territory and not hurting anyone. But what was a small infraction without consequence during training, became an international incident with the co-pilot losing his life and the loss of a helicopter. An athlete, a musician, must continually practice maintaining the skills for when the big opportunity may come. They cannot wait for the event then prepare – the same with integrity – it must be practiced continually.

The basic structure of our government was designed intentionally with many checks and balances, designed to allow the greatest level of services, while maintaining the maximum level of freedoms. Checks and balances are a recognition of the imperfection of the single individual, the acknowledgment of the emotional element, the disparity in erudition. A founding father, James Madison, was well aware of this when he said: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." He recognized we are not angels, and we have free will. Checks and balances are essential for a fair and just democracy.

We currently have in our government many designed systems for checks and balance. Globally we have the IMF, UN, ICJ, WHO, WTO, UNESCO, and many more attempting to bring working relationships amongst a diverse community of international players. What is lacking is a basic sense of **assertive integrity**. We have been, for too long, accepting our leaders who will stretch the rules on our behalf. I am greatly troubled by leaders that stand firm on a position until the opposing party is in office then completely reverse their position. No rule or law is any better than the integrity of the individual carrying it out.

**Assertive Integrity leadership** stands strong for their belief while listening, with empathy, to the other side. The best way to build walls, at any level (in communication), is through name calling, not listening, or understanding the challenges of another, looking for the win/lose, believing in the zero/sum game. When leadership consistently remains in integrity, trust is developed. Individuals, countries, and world leaders follow those we trust. Germany, New Zealand, and South Korea had the least challenges to Covid-19 as the people trusted – then followed – the requests of their leaders. I am less worried about directly negating the excesses in militarization as it will fade once

we begin to move towards more assertive integrity leadership as a core. Once trust in governance is regained, all will benefit and rise with international goodwill and understanding.

Richard Florida, in his book *The Creative Class*, speaks of the growth value through diversity. Though at the time of writing he was on the faculty of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg and talking of US cities, it's true for anywhere. He speaks about the most successful communities had the greatest respect for diversity. The successful communities were strong in the arts, gay societies, and all culturally diverse populations. Great diversity is the garden of fresh ideas, new ways of doing and thinking. When we learn respect for all, listen with intent to learn, and learn the skills to change aggression to assertion, we will begin to grow, our community will begin to grow, as will our country and so on. Plant the seed, water, feed, and watch it grow.

So, am I trying to stop tanks with kind words? Perhaps I am. Assertiveness is not passivity; it is taking action. A country's budget is representative of its morals, its values. It reflects who we are as a people. A good place to begin is by demanding a budget that moves our values to greater education, public health, and green technology. Another good place to begin is to call out/vote out our leaders who show lack of integrity. Make integrity a part of a required platform. We can do this once we begin to demand integrity of ourselves, then our leaders, and then ask our leaders to demand that of the world community.

When we begin to operate with **assertiveness**, and demand the same from our leadership, it will create inclusiveness and multiplicity of ideas. It will treat all others with respect. It will take responsibility when changes are needed. It will consider the needs of all – equally. Operating with integrity creates trust. Trust develops true leadership that others are willing to support and follow. **Assertive Integrity Leadership** looks for win/win benefits in every situation. **Assertive Integrity Leadership** is adaptable to its citizen's needs, is resilient to changing demands, and looks to raise the level of all its peoples, from wherever they may be.

The greater the respect from the world the less militarization is necessary – at a greatly reduced sum. Even our former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in a 2007 speech to Kansas State University, said that “soft power” (diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development) are just as important as “hard power” in achieving our national interests and dealing with terrorism. He went on to say the more you spend on diplomacy, the less you spend on military.

Yes, I believe we as individuals, our leaders, our world, imbedded in **Assertive Integrity Leadership** will stop tanks.

Author's comments, of any nature, appreciated)

## PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>. You can find some of our past issues at the Rotary District 5440 website: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>.