

January-February
2026

Vol. 61 No. 1



Newsletter of **LEPOCO**
Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

U.S. Foreign Policy Puts Europe in a Vice

The Trump administration's foreign policy has put the European Union's liberal democracies in a geopolitical vice. On the Union's eastern flank, Russia has supplemented its ongoing war of attrition against Ukraine with a new "hybrid" threat to Europe adding additional pressure — airspace incursions, assassinations, electoral disinformation, and sabotage. To the West and across the Atlantic, Europe confronts a mounting threat of a different kind. The U.S. has not only abandoned Ukraine — cutting all financial aid last March and willing to partner with Putin in dividing up Ukraine's resources. It is also eager to break down European unity and undercut its liberal democracies. The underlying basis of the growing U.S. pressure on Europe is racism.

Trump's recent National Security Strategy (NSS), an official statement of long-term U.S. foreign policy principles and aims, is remarkable in several ways but none more so than for its novel and revelatory take on Europe. There are clichés about the value of NATO and braggadocio about forcing NATO members to spend more on defense. But the heart of the new U.S. policy is the startling claim that Europe is facing "civilizational erasure." This threat of obliteration turns out to mean two things, the transnational unification embodied in the European Union and the end of nationalism based on racist ideas of ethnic purity.

According to Trump's NSS, Europe is weak, suffering from an EU-imposed "regulatory strangulation" of its economy and a growing "political crisis" due to the loss of national sovereignty. It is now a U.S. strategic priority to promote right-wing, nationalist parties that are opposed to the EU (e.g., Victor Orban's Fidez party in Hungary or Germany's neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany). Vice President J.D. Vance announced the new foreign policy last February in a speech in Munich. It stunned his European audience by attacking their liberal democracies. In 2008, the European Union adopted a decision to combat racism and xenophobia. It required member states to criminalize "public incitement to violence or hatred based on race, color, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin." Vance saw this protection of minorities as "anti-democratic" and "censorship." The aim of current U.S. strategy is, thus, to promote a policy for Europe that undermines simultaneously Europe's liberal democracies and the European Union.

A case in point, the U.S. strongly opposes the European Union's 2022 Digital Services Act (DSA). Last summer the U.S. sent a cable urging diplomats to build lobbies opposed to the DSA. The DSA covers relations between providers of internet services and EU citizens. It guarantees citizens have basic rights in their online lives — e.g., to privacy and a right to delete. The DSA also holds digital platforms accountable for what they publish. It seeks to protect citizens from things like hate speech that can incite violence and disinformation campaigns.

When the EU recently fined Elon Musk's X the paltry (for him) sum of €120 million for failing to moderate its content, the U.S. responded by imposing sanctions on people who helped design the DSA. Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused them of leading "organized efforts to coerce American platforms to censor, demonetize and suppress American viewpoints they oppose." As French president Macron pointed out, the democratically elected European Parliament and all its member states approved the DSA. Europe, he insisted, must have the right to define what is permissible in its own digital space.

(continued on page 2)

Honor

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in
the month of his birth.

Saturday, January 17, 2026

3:00 pm

"Dr. M.L. King, Jr. &
His Love for Humanity"

Lehigh Valley Friends Meetinghouse

4116 Bath Pike (Route 512)

Bethlehem

About ½ mile north of Route 22

Please join us for a program of
readings, music & action.

U.S. Foreign Policy Puts Europe...

(continued from page 1)

Beneath the attack on Europe's right to define legitimate political speech looms a more fundamental issue. The U.S. now foresees a European future in which, according to Trump's NSS, "the continent will be unrecognizable in 20 years or less." The root of Europe's existential danger is that its immigration policies mean that some NATO members will become "majority non-European" — i.e., non-white. According to Trump, European immigration policies, which are hardly liberal but still admit some seeking refuge, are the source of Europe's problems. So, the real aim of U.S. policy toward Europe is to promote nationalism based on ethnic purity, the heart of fascism. As Russia seeks to bully and intimidate Europe from the East, the U.S. seeks to undermine the European Union and promote right-wing extremism based on racism. Europe — indeed liberal democracy as a whole — finds itself truly in a vice.

- Mick Baylor

Trump & Venezuela _____

What is the price of a human life? What is the benefit to anyone who deprives another person of life, livelihood, freedom, and health. In the current political climate, every American should be asking these questions and contemplating the long-term effects of the answers that arise today.

Case in point: the senseless taking of human lives in the Caribbean allegedly perpetrated to protect the United States from drug smuggling. With the new year, we saw the attack of American forces, unauthorized by Congress, that toppled a dictator in Venezuela. Lauding the achievement, President Donald Trump offered a strong suggestion that neither interrupting drug flow nor getting rid of Maduro were the reasons for the action. With deal making in mind, the president highlighted the unlawful takeover of the Venezuelan government and its vast oil reserves.

Longterm, what could this mean? First, the world is watching and deploring the action, a violation of international and domestic law. The consequences for future atrocities hangs over us if no punishment is levied for killing people on boats, even survivors clinging to boat wreckage. The United States has not always been blameless, but could this escapade speak to future generations as the way to go internationally?

The Monroe Doctrine, renamed by Trump as the "Donroe Doctrine," a questionable policy from inception, has been used by the U.S. to justify aggression in the western hemisphere. With this new iteration, the doctrine has been weaponized as never before. What tragedies will ensue? There may be some countries in the Western Hemisphere that will cheer for the removal of Maduro, but will they continue to be the partners needed for peace and trade?

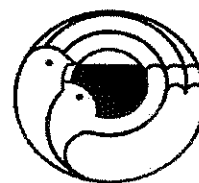
If Congress continues to be shut out from decisions like the attacks on Venezuela, will Congress become even more helpless against the current administration's demands? Criticism of the lockstep loyalty of the president's political party to his wishes promises a continuation of the degradation of the checks and balances built into our Constitution.

In reporting on Fox News, the president called Democratic critics who voiced opposition to the actions in Venezuela "weak, stupid people." Respect for the government and elected officials will continue to erode as insults and abusive language continue to be mainstreamed, unchallenged by many in media and social commentary.

Will disregard for human life, demonstrated by current encouragement of the death penalty and indiscriminate ICE attacks, be further ensconced in the American conscience? At the same time, racism has come out from under its cover. It was recently revealed that monuments in a Dutch cemetery to black soldiers killed in World War II fighting have been removed. The struggles against racism and other prejudices against persons and communities regarded as inferior or "not like us" have been long and difficult. The disregard for the sailors bombed to death on the high seas speaks to a dismaying future.

The outrage of both the national and international communities to the events in Venezuela offers the antidote to what could be in the offing for the United States and its desire to be a country devoted to peace, freedom, and prosperity for all people.

- Janet Ney



Newsletter of LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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The *LEPOCO Newsletter* is published six times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

Annual dues are:

Regular Member	\$35
Limited Income Member	\$10
Household Membership	\$45
Supporting Member	\$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Kellyn Slingerland, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Monica McAghon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

Popcorn & Politics

Friday, January 23rd, 2026, 6:30 pm

"The Penguin Lessons"

A Popcorn & Politics Film projected on the big screen
at the LEPOCO Peace Center, 53 East Lehigh St., 1-LL, Bethlehem (18018).

A disillusioned Englishman who goes to work in a school in a divided Argentina in 1976 finds his life transformed when he rescues an orphaned penguin from the beach.

Directed by Peter Cattaneo. 1 hour 50 minutes. 2024.

Screen play by Jeff Pope, based on "The Penguin Lessons," a memoir by Tom Mitchell.

Filmed in Spain, Argentina and Uruguay.

Please bring a snack or beverage to share.



Save the Date:

LEPOCO Annual Gathering

Saturday, April 11, 2026

4:00 pm

Featured Speaker:

Mohsen Mahdawi

Palestine Advocate

Arrested in Columbia University Protests

Stop ICE Now!

Renee Nicole Good was murdered by ICE agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Wednesday, January 7. The protests that followed called for ICE to be closed and ICE agents to be removed from U.S. cities. The protests all over the U.S. included a gathering of hundreds at the Episcopal Cathedral Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on January 9. The gathering received good coverage in the local media.

POTUS's response to Renee Good's murder was to send more ICE agents to Minneapolis. The same day that Renee Good was murdered ICE agents swarmed a high school in Minneapolis handcuffing staff and firing chemical irritants at students. On January 8, ICE agents shot and wounded two people in Portland, Oregon. On New Year's Eve, in Los Angeles, Keith Porter shot his gun in the air in celebration only to then be murdered by an ICE agent who was his neighbor.

Speakers at the gathering on January 9 urged people to support the work of the L.V. Emergency Response Network that is sponsoring a town hall meeting on Wednesday, January 21, at 7:00 pm at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, 321 Wyandotte St., south Bethlehem to discuss immigration-related concerns.

An Art Exhibition

On Saturday, February 7th, 2026,
at 4 pm,

Carol Baylor, LEPOCO member,
will present an art project she has
been working on since
the spring of 2024.

Called "Art-Trauma-Education-
Steadfastness," it is a collection of
small, fabric collage banners.

The works depict stories of
Palestinians and the emotional
impact they had on the artist.

In a time of numbed silence,
can art stimulate a discussion?

The event will be held at the
LEPOCO Peace Center,
53 East Lehigh St., Lower Level,
Bethlehem (18018).

The Struggle Shared

"The first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance and loving kindness."

- Mahatma K. Gandhi

REMEMBER THE VICTIMS BUT NOT WITH MORE KILLING is the slogan of Death Penalty Action, an organization devoted to ending the death penalty. With the encouragement of the Trump administration, the use of the death penalty has nearly doubled in the past year despite the American public's opposition to state executions. Signing up for emails from Death Penalty Action provides information as well as opportunities to register opposition through petitions and letter writing to government officials.

Charles Thompson is scheduled to be executed in Texas on January 28, 2026; Kendrick Simpson is scheduled to be executed in Oklahoma on February 12, 2026.

Many states, including Missouri, Florida, Georgia, and Texas, have ongoing coalitions to end the death penalty. Another organization working on behalf of prisoners, not just death row inmates, is The Innocence Project which works to overturn wrongful convictions. Witness to Innocence provides support for exonerates in a variety of ways, one of which is financial assistance to ex-prisoners who are not compensated for the years wasted on death row.

Pennsylvania still has the death penalty, but executions have been halted for over two decades. Nevertheless, 94 people are on death row in our state prisons.

THE SHOOTING AT BROWN UNIVERSITY, an event too often replicated in the United States, was a tragic reminder of the need to safeguard everyone from gun violence. Guns Down America noted that Mia Tretta, a Brown student, has now survived two mass shootings, one in high school and the recent one in college. Just days prior to the Brown event, she had performed "Imagine,"

at the 13th Annual Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence (video available on Instagram). Subsequently, Guns Down America issued a call for everyone to get involved in the campaign to end gun violence: "They've tried to silence us with their money and fear mongering, but the majority of people support gun reform and industry accountability."

USAID CUTS ARE HAVING DEVASTATING EFFECTS AROUND THE WORLD.

Freedom United, an organization working against modern slavery in many forms, deplors the fate of Rohingya children who live in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Because of the funding loss, schools and training facilities for children have been shut down leaving the children with no schooling.

Reports are circulating of deaths in many parts of the world, as a result of U.S. action curtailing vital assistance to people in need. Although the administration in D.C. claims that there have been no deaths, "UNICEF confirms that violations against children in the camps have surged this year. Between January and mid-November, reported cases of child abduction and kidnapping more than quadrupled compared to the same period last year. Advocates fear most of those children will never be heard from again."

Documentation exists that the cost to the American taxpayer for humanitarian aid to other countries, is greatly exaggerated. USAID, for instance, represented just 1% of the national budget. Helping people is a lot less expensive than arming the nation to kill people.

MOST AMERICANS HAVE HEARD THE STORIES ABOUT FRAUD perpetrated by people who receive the Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program, commonly known as SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. The stigma of having to pay with food stamps, for all to see, was not only demeaning but it also gave rise to fellow shoppers' making judgments about what was in the shopping cart of a family struggling to pay for food. So, some years ago, the Department of Agriculture introduced Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, a less noticeable, more dignified way to buy groceries. Sure enough, fraud perpetrated by hackers, not SNAP benefit recipients, skyrocketed. The dollars stolen from SNAP recipients was in the billions yearly. Unlike bank credit cards, which honor requests for reimbursement for losses, EBT cards did not provide that kind of relief. So, Congress enacted legislation to reimburse SNAP recipients who suffered from the attacks of hackers who stole their benefits. The program started in October 2022 and was extended twice to last through September of 2028. Then came Elon Musk and his chainsaw. The legislation which Congress passed as a result of Musk's interference excluded the program to provide funds to a SNAP recipient who was cheated. Families go hungry for a lot of reasons; the inability to claim compensation for fraudulent losses should not be one of them.

THE BRITISH SINGER GORDON SUMNER, KNOWN AS STING, wrote a song, "Fragile," in tribute to Ben Linder, an American civil engineer who was killed by the Contras in 1987 while working on a hydroelectric project in Nicaragua. In a 1994 interview with the Miami Herald, Sting said that the song's meaning "...changes yearly. When I sing it now I think of Bosnia and Yugoslavia." Today, there are so many places around the world that Sting might find fitting for his words: "That nothing comes from violence and nothing ever could
"For all those born beneath an angry star
"Lest we forget how fragile we are"

- Janet Ney

Bits & Pieces

☪ David Gibson of Philadelphia Peace Action reported in November that Philadelphia City Council passed a resolution calling on the Board of Pensions and Retirement to consider divestment from nuclear weapons. The resolution urges the City to weigh the threat that nuclear weapons pose to all of humanity and the environment in light of the Trump administration's decision to restart the testing of nuclear weapons and their proposal to build a nuclear-powered submarine in Philadelphia. It calls on the Board of Pensions and Retirement to invest in what the residents need such as safe and healthy homes, affordable transit, working utilities and childcare, rather than weapons that threaten life on our planet.

☪ Rick Dow participated in the One Night Without a Home event held by the Lehigh Conference of Churches in November. The event was part of their 4th Annual Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week.

☪ LEPOCO has lost two long-time supporters in recent weeks.

Juanita Gomez-Reyes died late in 2025. She was 85. She has participated in and supported LEPOCO events for many years. She was introduced to LEPOCO by Monica McAghon. They became friends after Juanita was a student in a class taught by Monica at Northampton Community College. Juanita worked as a dental hygienist and as a bilingual absentee specialist for the Allentown School District.

Alwyn Eades died on New Years Eve. He was 86. A Morning Call obituary reports on his acclaimed career working in the field of electron microscopy. He

worked at universities in Chile, the UK, and the U.S. He came to Lehigh University in 1998.

Alwyn's main participation in LEPOCO in recent years has been with the monthly Book Group meetings. His insightful comments near the end of the group's monthly meetings would often give extra clarity to the discussion. When the LEPOCO office was on the Southside he would stop in to buy holiday cards to send to his relatives in the UK.

☪ The No Kings weekly vigils continue at noon on Mondays outside Rep. Ryan Mackenzie's offices on Cedar Crest Blvd. in Allentown and at 2151 Emrick Blvd., in Bethlehem Township.

☪ The Morning Call and seven other newspapers owned or managed by MediaNews Group have filed a civil lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft, accusing the tech giants of violating copyright law by stealing the news publishers' content to build and operate the large language models that power their artificial intelligence applications. They are seeking in excess of \$10 billion in damages. *Source: The Morning Call, 11/28/25.*

☪ The National Priorities Project reports that 2.4 million people could go hungry in 2026 because of new rules for SNAP from Trump's Big Bad Bill. And yet Congress voted to add another \$8 billion on top of an already-enormous war budget, bringing the total Pentagon budget to more than \$1 trillion.

☪ Bill McKibben calls it the equivalent of tearing down the East Wing of the White House. The Trump administration has decided to shut down the National Center for Atmospheric Research. McKibben says NCAR's most significant work has been in understanding the dimensions of the ongoing climate crisis.

AWAKE

We need the ability to stay awake
To be alert to Martin's message.

He cautioned us to live in the
World House.

It is his World House. He
Embraces each of us to become
A member of the world community.

We are a family separated in ideas,
culture,
And interests who can never live
apart.

We must learn to
live together.

Martin and LEPOCO invite us to
join them in fulfilling their dream of
a World House.

This poem by Mimi Lang was written
for and read at a Martin Luther King
program at the Lehigh Valley Quaker
Meetinghouse.



Support LEPOCO!

- Enclosed is a donation to LEPOCO of \$_____.
- I will support LEPOCO with a pledge of \$_____ per month/quarter.
- I am especially interested in the following issues: _____

Name

Phone #

E-mail address

Address

City/Town

State Zip

Send to LEPOCO Peace Center,
53 E. Lehigh St. (L.L.), Bethlehem,
PA 18018

Or donate through PayPal at
www.lepoco.org.



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Weekly Peace Vigils (Thursdays)

January 15, 22, 29 &

February 5, 12, 19, 26

3:30 – 4:30 pm

3rd & Wyandotte Sts., (south) Bethlehem

Stop Trump's wars and threats – Venezuela, etc.

End Israel's attacks on Gaza.

End all the wars. Witness for peace.

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more information.

Popcorn & Politics

Friday, January 23

6:30 pm

Film: "Penguin Lessons"

(see page 3 for more info.)

Banner Talk

by Carol Baylor

Saturday, Feb. 7, 4:00 pm

"Stories of Palestinians:

Art-Trauma-Education-

Steadfastness"

(see page 3 for more info.)

LEPOCO Annual Gathering

Saturday, April 11, 2026

More details soon!

*Young People
Making Peace
Summer Day Camp
July 27-31, 2026*