



NORTHWEST NEBRASKA

DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

CHADRON AND CRAWFORD

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from the Director's Desk

It's the time of year when we begin to wish spring would arrive. And the time of year we wish the Legislature would be more cooperative with each other. With only one body in which to debate issues, there are fewer people involved, but the result is often the same. Issues polarize segments of the citizenry, and it is difficult to reach compromise. But that is what must happen in order to move forward in the very few days left in the session. The Nebraska Economic Developers Association met in Lincoln in late January to discuss and select bills we wanted to support, oppose and monitor. It was all framed by some basic realities:



Property taxes are too high. Nebraska current incentive program will end July 1. The economy is sluggish and Nebraska competes on a national and global basis for businesses. School funding is difficult to predict. Workforce issues range from not enough workers to not enough trained workers. In a nutshell, that is what's left to work out in the remaining three weeks or so.

We must find a way for our agricultural producers to be able to make a living on the ranch/farm. They are

responsible for feeding and clothing the world. If their livelihood is threatened by unfair reliance on their tax paying ability, something needs to be adjusted. That's the Legislature's job, and I think they will pass something that addresses the issue this year.

I've had people ask why we, in the 43rd District should support business incentives when we did not utilize the previous incentive program. To me, it's a pretty simple answer. Because incentives grow the entire economy of the state, of which we are a part. We simply cannot afford to not be in the game with other states (who incidentally spend much more recruiting business than Nebraska does). While Dawes County may not have had a project that directly used incentives in the past, we can very well benefit from raw products purchased (think agriculture) and additional salaries being spent by Nebraskans throughout the state. When the state economy as a whole does better, we do better. When Nebraskans can afford to take their family on a vacation in Western Nebraska, we benefit. Increased income equals increased taxes paid. Chadron and Crawford benefit from that. Take a minute to tell Senator Brewer you expect his attention to the District to include a certain amount of cooperation, compromise and looking at the big picture. He listens to his constituents.



Nebraska Economic Developers Association legislative meeting.

Transportation – Heartland Expressway and the Ports to Plains Alliance

The Heartland Expressway Association (HEA) board of directors recently heard updates from various Nebraska representatives regarding the next building and planning phases of the route. Up next is the 14 mile stretch of US385 from the Bayard turn off (L62a) north to the 4 lane section coming from Alliance. This section will be let for bids in August, and actual road construction will begin in 2021. The next section, from the Bayard turnout to the 4 lane section at Minatare (approx. 18 miles) will be designed after that, likely between 2021 and 2023.

When that section is finished, we will have 4 lane divided highway from I80 at Kimball to Alliance. In the meantime, as regular scheduled maintenance is considered between Alliance and Chadron, NDOT will look for opportunities to implement some of the design plans for improvements along the route. As stated in 2016, the state will look to add passing lanes, widen shoulders and generally improve the status of US 385 to ‘Super 2’ standards.

Recent meetings with the multi-state Ports to Plains organization, of which HEA is a member, have featured discussions in the other states of upgrades in their portions of the high priority corridors. There have been considerable conversations about the ‘future Interstate designation’ of the corridor. The corridor, which extends from Mexico to Canada through 8 different states consists of 3 such high priority corridors, giving it the first criteria to be considered for such status. Make no mistake, the traffic on the corridor in Texas is considerably different than in Nebraska, but the eventual increase in our traffic will be impacted by what happens south of us. Nebraska needs to be included in those conversations, and in the research being done now to make the best decisions we can in the future.

While NDOT and HEA (at least the portion through Western Nebraska) is not at a point where we think

Sales Tax increase

You may have read that the state of Nebraska collected more than \$100 million more in sales tax revenue for November & December of 2019 over 2018. That is largely due to passage of legislation requiring all Internet sales companies doing more than \$100,000 annually in Nebraska to collect & remit sales tax. It is also good news for communities collecting sales tax. For Chadron, we showed a 12% increase in December of 2019 over 2018. That is more than \$20,000 more in our revenue stream to fund budget items for the City of Chadron. That’s huge when more and more of the budget must be paid with sales tax. It also helps level the playing field between bricks and mortar retail and internet competitors.



Interstate standards are warranted, there may come a time when it makes sense, and our participation at the Ports to Plains level will provide the necessary contacts and best practices needed. Your Executive Director serves as Chairman of the Board of the HEA, and attended the most recent Ports to Plains Board meeting in San Angelo, TX. The main

topic of discussion was Texas’ efforts (through TXDOT) to formally study their route options to eventually extend a short piece of Interstate (I27) to bring some of the traffic coming across the border at Laredo north along the Ports to Plains route instead of I35. These discussions also included folks from New Mexico, Colorado and North Dakota. We will stay engaged in the conversation and be prepared to discuss further with NDOT when that is needed.

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