Dear Editor:

Upon my retirement from leading the Asia Foundation last year I was pleased to be asked to join the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF). I have long admired the mission and way the Foundation innovatively and expertly helped so many of the state's communities marshal their resources to build a better future for their citizens through local philanthropy.

Through a leadership role I had on a national board representing America's various types of foundations, I was able to hear invited presentations by NCF's President & CEO, Jeff Yost.

Those presentations, along with the high regard in which NCF was so obviously held, only further confirmed my view that the "Nebraska approach" was a uniquely successful effort because it focused on community development through local leadership and philanthropy under a statewide nonprofit "umbrella" foundation.

Early in June, the NCF Board held its quarterly meeting in Burwell and Ord. I had the opportunity to witness firsthand how two small communities have harnessed the power of philanthropy and the expertise of the Nebraska Community Foundation to transform their hometowns.

Both of these communities have leveraged local charitable dollars with public and private funding to revitalize their economies and enhance their quality of life.

Before I was elected to serve in the U.S. Congress from Nebraska's 1st Congressional District (1979-2004), I used my professional training in community planning to earn a living, in part, by helping communities and counties of all sizes in Nebraska and surrounding states with their planning and development activities.

I saw that many communities, like the one in which I grew up, were small and usually lacked the

organizational structure and financial and legal knowledge to form successful community foundations or launch ongoing development programs.

Even those that had the necessary elements of progressive leadership often lacked the know-how and the igniting spark for promoting philanthropic investment in their own community or county.

Therefore, in many cases, when the older residents passed away, even a modest but important generational transfer of wealth all went elsewhere by default–out of the community, out of the state, and in some cases even out of the country, instead of back into the community where lives were lived and resources were earned over a lifetime. I saw it happening again and again because there was no ready, organized way to keep some of that wealth acquired over a lifetime in the hometown area.

So, it seems to me that the Nebraska Community Foundation model certainly is an excellent way to provide the professional expertise and organizational home for our state's generous communities and rural areas. NCF is there to serve as a partner, a mentor and the legal entity for people who are enthusiastic about putting philanthropy to work in their hometowns. This work is being done in 235 communities in 79 of Nebraska's counties.

That is why I think the Nebraska Community Foundation is so important to the state's communities and our future.

Doug Bereuter

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