Maybe the U.S. Department of State will see it as something of a state's rights issue and give the Nebraska Legislature a break when it comes to giving the go-ahead on the controversial Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Maybe not.

A new, independent study by a highly-qualified prof at the University of Nebraska says would-be pipeline builders flagrantly and grossly underestimated damages that could result if the pipeline leaked. Particularly if it leaked into the Ogallala Aquifer.

Several lawmakers wrote to the State Department a few months ago, asking that any building permit decision be delayed until after the 2012 Unicameral session.

Such a delay would give Nebraska policymakers a chance to take action. After all, a report from the feds says individual states have authority to determine the route of any oil pipeline.

The pipeline would transmit a corrosive sand tar oil mixture from Alberta, Canada to the American Gulf Coast.

**Increased tax revenues could soften budget cuts**

The state's net income from taxes has been better than expected of late.

Sen. Lavon Heidemann of Elk Creek says maybe, but only maybe, those higher tax receipts

could be used to soften some of the budget cuts made by the 2011 Legislature. Heidemann chairs the Appropriations Committee.

Lawmakers came into the session facing a possible budget gap of up to $1 billion. Legislators made the spending reductions needed to close that gap.

Heidemann and Gov. Dave Heinemann each took care to note that the national economy is still in flux. Thus, any thoughts of using higher-than-anticipated revenues for budget modifications are optimistic, and dependent upon a great many factors.

**Told you so!**

It was noted in this space months ago that policymakers would hear the roar of the electorate if they came within striking distance of allowing Social Security payments to be delayed.

It was a no-brainer forecast.

Constituents and Wall Street weren't going to let it happen.

We aren't passing judgment on the wisdom of the "close it down" position; just saying it wasn't going to happen.

A question of interest: Were some Congressional officeholders unaware of those guaranteed reactions? That would put them among those who think tickets will be available at the box office when Ohio State plays Nebraska. Seriously.

One other thing. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell has said he could go for a deal that would “authorize the president” to approve increasing the national debt ceiling.

That gambit is understandable, and obviously in hopes of laying any political fallout on the doorstep of Democrats and President Obama when the debt ceiling is raised.

Guaranteed counter: Those against increasing the debt ceiling – and those who favor it - will argue that voting for the presidential option was literally the same as voting to increase the ceiling.

Now, how will Nebraska U.S. Sens. Ben Nelson and Mike Johanns vote on whatever actions are proposed to the Senate? Nelson is a Democrat. Johanns is a Republican.

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