

Heineman calls for repeal of local death tax authority

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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By Ed Howard

State agricultural groups and the governor have demonstrated their willingness to shower the Humane Society of the United States with hellfire and brimstone if the well-funded animal welfare organization even looks like it's about to propose statutory or regulatory changes relating to the treatment of farm animals in the state.

Now there's a report about fast food giant McDonald's issuing new requirements for how its suppliers house hogs. Specifically, the restaurant chain wants its pork-producing partners to stop using so-called "gestation crates" for pregnant hogs.

The crates, according to proponents, help keep injuries to the animals and their handlers to a minimum. Opponents, including animal-welfare groups like HSUS, argue that the crates are inhumane in that they are too small to allow the sows room to move around.

Much of the local tempest that follows HSUS around the state becomes moot when the national organization shakes hands with a giant like McDonald's, which, in turn, tells those who supply it with bacon and sausage "this is how it is."

Breakfast from the fast-food lane may give new meaning to the term "happy meal" in the near future—at least from the standpoint of four-leggeds and two-leggeds with feathers who like to stretch a little.

McDonald's has also recently inked an agreement with the United Egg Producers that affects how much living space laying hens are given.

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Huzzah for Hassebrook!

Let's have a nonpartisan "Huzzah!" for University of Nebraska Regent Chuck Hassebrook. He's agreed to give the Democrats a candidate for the United States Senate in 2012.

In so doing, Hassebrook has saved his careworn party from who knows what kind of embarrassment and has single-handedly ensured that the two-party system continues to have a future—or at least a present—in the state.

Noting that the first time he ran for a seat on the Board of Regents, he was outspent 2 to 1, Hassebrook looks to his victory in that contest as suggesting he could win in November.

This time, however, Hassebrook will be lucky if he isn't outspent 1,000 to 1.

And the chance that President Obama will enjoy a "popular surge" that will help any Democrat in Nebraska is as likely as a pound puppy winning next year's Westminster Dog show.

Locals Eyeing Tax Win

It appears that local governments might have enough support in the Legislature to hang on to the inheritance tax that spreads more than \$40 million annually among them.

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Gov. Dave Heineman wants the Legislature to repeal the local death tax authority, while local officials and many lawmakers say it would place an additional unfair burden on local property taxes, which might have to be increased to make up the difference.

City and county governments are fond of pointing out that when the Legislature acts to reduce or eliminate revenue sources locals rely on, there is no corollary reduction in the expenses they continue to incur.

Sort of like when you lose your job but still need to feed the kids.

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