

Of state aid, local control, tax dollars and a dog named Spots

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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Capitol View

By Ed Howard

It is what you might call a universal headline.

At some point, you can find it in pretty much any newspaper in America and most of the world.

“Flood aid procedures frustrate ...” read a Nebraska newspaper this week.

Change “flood” to whatever’s appropriate. School aid. Fire aid. State aid. Food.

That “aid procedures” are frustrating people somewhere has come to be an understanding of modern life.

Where’s Mine?!

It’s not surprising that the Legislature would choose the Department of Roads for an audit by a committee of lawmakers.

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Only Bo Pelini's decisions are subject to more second-guessing.

Nebraskans love to gripe about the department, no matter what. But the griping is inevitably enhanced when it centers on some local project which, the second-guessers are certain, is long overdue and far worthier than others around the state.

Local Revenue

During most of its history, when rural numbers and philosophy ruled the Legislature, the phrase "local control!" was virtually a war cry. This applied most especially when it came to the organization of school districts — which, in turn, had/has everything to do with school financing and thus property taxes.

Local governments these days are scowling at state government as a result of what they believe are good fiscal reasons.

On the one hand, the amount of state tax dollars being returned to local subdivisions of government in the form of state aid has been dwindling in recent years.

Against this backdrop, there are now proposals to do away with the county death tax and to require that local occupation taxes be approved by voters.

Both of these initiatives represent potential losses to local governments worth millions of dollars — amounts local governments are ill-prepared to replace.

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Man's best friend Really!

To a very great extent, these days, government is all about privatization. Contracting out. Keeping staff rosters as short as possible.

It comes as a bit of a surprise then to learn that UNL types are thinking about undertaking an unusual "hire" who would lead the ongoing search-and-destroy mission aimed at the campus bedbug population.

To date, the effort has been in the capable . . . well . . . paws of one rat terrier named Spots, who is billed as a "bedbug detecting dog."

Spots, however, is an independent contractor, and given the magnitude of the task ahead, it appears that some at UNL think it might be wise for them to get their own bedbug detecting dog.

One has to wonder what spending category in the UNL administrative budget would contain the entry "dog."

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