**For Release Wednesday, March 27, 2019**

**Capitol View**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

**Statehouse Correspondent**

**The Nebraska Press Association**

**Nebraska Strong! Here’s Another Challenge**

Blizzards on one end of the state, floods on the other. Nebraska, now more than ever, it’s not for everyone!

Nebraska has 79,056 miles of rivers, more than any other state, and it seems like every one of them flooded. Disasters have been declared in 80 percent of the state and thousands of Nebraskans were forced to find high ground with friends, relatives or in shelters.

On March 12, Governor Pete Ricketts declared a state of emergency to deal with two very different, yet equally devastating weather disasters. All hell was yet to break loose, but it did a few days later. A week later Vice President Mike Pence visited Nebraska, one of those mostly square states out west, to view the damage.

What he found is Nebraska Strong. If you must ask: we do it on our own, without fanfare; we don’t draw attention from the national media; we are a flyover state and we accept that, maybe even embrace it.

Ricketts spent several days before Pence’s arrival touring flooded areas, viewing the devastation from the air and meeting with concerned officials and applauding volunteers on the ground. He did his best to expedite the federal disaster aid paperwork required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“We are going to be far over what we need to be to declare that. We’ve got bridges out and levies broken, lots of roads, utilities, everything,” said Ricketts.

But, he added, it’s Nebraskan’s optimism that’s truly helping everyone get through this tragedy.

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"The spirit of Nebraska, there have been so many people impacted and they just have a spirit of how they're going to get through this."

Touring flood damage is somewhere in the When You Become Governor handbook. It’s also a given that reporters will accompany the governor at some point, usually as a pool reporter tasked with sharing information with the rest of the media. I did such a trip with then-Governor Kay Orr in a military helicopter years ago. It’s not glamorous work, but necessary.

Some years earlier I flew in a fixed wing aircraft with a different governor and a couple state senators and military personnel to see a massive blizzard that buried the Sandhills and scenic northwest Nebraska.

But neither of those incidents held a candle to what Nebraska is enduring right now. The flooding has even impacted high and dry Lincoln, the Capital City miles from any massive rivers. The city has been under mandatory water restrictions because the pumps in the Platte River well fields near Ashland, have been flooded. Lincoln’s water comes from the aquifer beneath the river, but pumps that aren’t pumping are problematic.

Getting places has also been difficult. Not only because roads have buckled, bridges have been destroyed, but flooding has persisted. I visited with a woman and her three young children from Wahoo in a Lincoln church on Sunday. She said she couldn’t get to her church in Wahoo and opted to make the 37-mile drive (one way) to Lincoln instead.

Yup, Nebraska, you can’t get there from here. At one point, 79 highways and 1,568 miles of roadways were closed. Residents of one north central Nebraska county had to go to South Dakota as part of a detour caused by flooding and infrastructure damage. Grandparents had to miss grandkids’ dance recitals and birthday parties. The stories were repeated statewide.

While flooding took its toll on livestock, blizzards compounded calving for farmers and ranchers in central and western Nebraska. The state Department of Agriculture said they have been overwhelmed with the outpouring of support

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for producers. They are working to coordinate with people who have offered hay, feed stuffs, fencing materials and equipment.

The grim task of estimating the damages to infrastructure, real and personal property continues with an initial estimate of $1.3 billion likely to increase. Other costs will come. But Ricketts and others are certain that Nebraska will remain strong.

As someone who survived the big blizzards of 1949 and 1975 (and a lot of others in-between), I share that optimism. This has been a long hard winter and March has been a particularly bad actor, but I have seen the tiny green shoots of crocus and peonies sticking their heads up through the mulch.

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***J.L. Schmidt has been*** *covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 20 years.*