**For Release Wednesday, June 19, 2019**

**Capitol View  
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt  
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**Nebraska Press Association**

**Tying Up Some Loose Ends**

Governor Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore want to recognize Nebraskans who played a role in the recovery from the bomb cyclone that struck the state in March and caused heavy rainstorms and floods, which required disaster declarations for 81 counties and 104 communities.

Nominations of “flood heroes” for their extraordinary acts of bravery will be accepted online at [www.nebraskaimpact.com/flood-heroes](http://www.nebraskaimpact.com/flood-heroes). The nominations will be reviewed and honorees selected and recognized later this year.

“During the most widespread natural disaster in state history, Nebraskans rose to the challenge to protect their families and assist their neighbors,” First Lady Shore said.  “Many worked overtime, risked their personal safety, and generously contributed their time and money to give aid to their communities.  We look forward to hearing stories of the heroes in our midst.  We also want to give them official recognition for their service to our state.”

Good for the Governor for wanting to recognize the “heroes.” How about all of you living in those 104 communities stand up and take a bow right now for being “Nebraska Strong.”

Speaking of strong, the Governor is highlighting two new metrics, which he says indicate the state’s economic strength.  Nebraska has the least state debt per capita and the second-highest workforce participation rate among U.S. states.

In a recent news release from his office, Ricketts said a June 3 Moody’s report reveals that Nebraska has the lowest total net tax-supported debt (NTSD) – only $23 -- of any state in the nation. Having a high level of NTSD places a state at risk of insolvency when debts come due.

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Additionally, Nebraska ranked second among the 50 states in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ May 17th report of state labor force participation rates.  The monthly report measures the percentage of a state’s population that is working or actively seeking employment.  Nebraska’s high labor force participation rate and low unemployment rate are evidence of a strong labor market, Ricketts said.

Hats off to the Bish brothers for planting the first industrial hemp crop in Nebraska in more than 60 years in a field near Giltner. Brothers Andrew and Jacob Bish, along with Andrew's daughter, Eliana, hand-sowed two test plots of Nebraska heirloom hemp for research, not commerce.

While the Nebraska Hemp Farming Act was signed into law by the Governor last month, the regulatory framework being built by the Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska State Patrol has not been finalized. New regulations have been enacted by the state, preempting any potential federal regulations that go into effect next year, but the state permit application process is still undefined. That means farmers who plant hemp this year, as the planting season draws to an end, are potentially in violation of state and federal law.

Andrew Bish, the chief operating officer of Bish Enterprises and the founder of Hemp Harvest Works, argues heirloom hemp — which is also known as feral hemp, wild hemp, or ditchweed — is exempted from the licensing requirements under the law. The first plot was planted in rows to study how spacing constraints affect the growth of hemp plants that will be harvested for their seeds or stalks; the second was planted in a vegetable garden-style plot to study how to best harvest flowers key to the manufacture of CBD products.

"What we're doing here isn't going to create the commodity Nebraska needs," Andrew Bish said. "But hopefully it will inspire others to have confidence in moving forward."

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Omaha Senator Justin Wayne, who sponsored the Hemp bill (LB657) urged caution so that the rules and regulations can be thoughtfully created and adopted. He said he understands the frustrations of the Bishes and others who want to start growing the crop. “We have to make sure we protect the farmer and the public, he said.

Bill Achord, president of the Nebraska Hemp Association, dismissed Wayne's concerns. Hemp is "regulated up the yin-yang now," Achord said, mostly based on long-held fears and misinformation. If they take longer to write the rules, so be it, he added.

"How are they going to regulate it more? It's a crop, all they've got to do is test it," Achord said.

The ag department and state patrol are still working on a way to best test the product as directed by Wayne's bill, said Taylor Gage, the governor's director of strategic communications.

Finally, kudos to the nine state Senators who voted “no” on the motion to adjourn the Legislature sine die on Day 84 of the scheduled 90-day session. While it seemed that the 37 who voted “yes” were ready to call it quits – or maybe just realized the wheels were coming off the wagon – the nine of you recognized your obligation to the people who elected you to not be quitters.

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