

NRDs have a state mandate

Board members charged with protecting natural resources and must do so while balancing all interests

It's not uncommon, or unwise, for an elected official to maintain that he will make decisions and cast votes based on the best interests of his constituents.

But not all elected positions are alike. That's a particularly relevant point when it comes to those men and women who are elected to serve on the boards of directors of natural resources districts in Nebraska. It's because NRDs were created by the Nebraska Legislature back in 1969 with state-mandated purposes to protect Nebraska's natural resources — not just for one group of users, but for all. That balancing act of competing needs and uses of water is a challenging one for any NRD board. But it's one that all NRD

board members must keep foremost in mind — because it's not a choice, it's a state mandate.

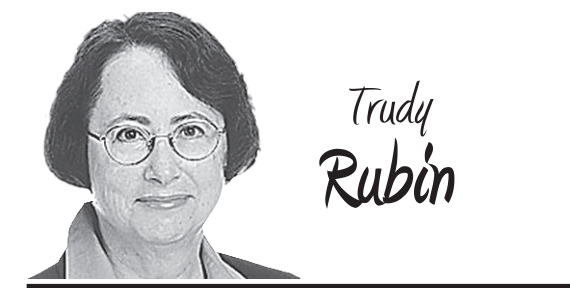
The late Sen. Maurice Kremer of Aurora introduced and the Legislature enacted Legislative Bill 1357 in 1969 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 natural resources districts by July 1972. The original boundaries of the 24 NRDs were based on Nebraska's major river basins, which allows for better management practices to be applied to similar topography. In 1989, the Middle Missouri NRD and the Papio NRD were merged into one to create the current 23-NRD system.

OUR VIEW

It's important for all Nebraskans to recognize that NRDs were created to solve flood control, soil erosion, irrigation run-off, and groundwater quantity and quality issues. NRDs are specifically charged under state law with 12 areas of responsibility including flood control, soil erosion and groundwater management. More recently, in 2004, state senators passed LB962, which led to the state's NRDs and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources working together on protection of natural resources through efforts such as integrated management plans. In this year's elections, several NRD

board positions across the state will be up for grabs in contested races. In others, there may be only one candidate. Regardless of the particulars, the candidates — as well as existing board members — need to know that they are not fulfilling their state-mandated duties if they are only looking out for the best interests of one group of constituents, whether that be recreation advocates, farmers who irrigates or urban interests. If they don't like that mandate, the place to seek changes is in the Nebraska Legislature. Barring that, there's an obligation on the part of all NRD board members to protect natural resources and do so while balancing all of the competing interests.

FROM THE LEFT



Trudy Rubin

Brake gone on Trump's bad instincts

Rex Tillerson's biggest mistake was that he didn't retire with dignity on his own terms before his boss unceremoniously sacked him and named CIA chief Mike Pompeo as his successor. The crude way it was done — Tillerson only learned of his firing via a presidential tweet — confirms that President Trump loves to reprise his role as star of "The Apprentice."

But, of course, the bigger issue is what the switch will mean for an erratic foreign policy at a time when Trump faces critical decisions about the Iran nuclear deal, Russian aggression, and a possible summit with North Korea's leader.

Tillerson's close relationship with Defense Secretary James Mattis appeared to act as a brake on some of Trump's most bellicose instincts. The big question now: Has that brake been removed?

Of course, the president often displayed disdain for his then-secretary of state, contradicting him and not consulting him on key decisions. Foreign governments understood that Tillerson didn't have the president's ear, and the secretary's exit was long expected. Not to mention that Tillerson had gone far toward wrecking his own department, working in isolation while failing to defend its budget or top staff, who have left in droves.

Any deal with North Korea is going to have to revolve around limiting its nuclear program.

But Tillerson persevered in presenting the president with differing opinions. "We disagreed on things," Trump said of the former oil executive. "With Mike Pompeo, we have a very similar thought process."

That "similar thought process" means former GOP congressman Pompeo will probably become a "yes man" to the president. Nowhere is that more worrying than on the nuclear agreement with Iran, at a time when the president is mulling whether to yank the United States out of the deal.

Tillerson, for example, was willing to call out Russia for election interference and other aggressive behavior. He attributed the poisoning of an ex-Russian spy in Britain to Russia and said it would "certainly trigger a response."

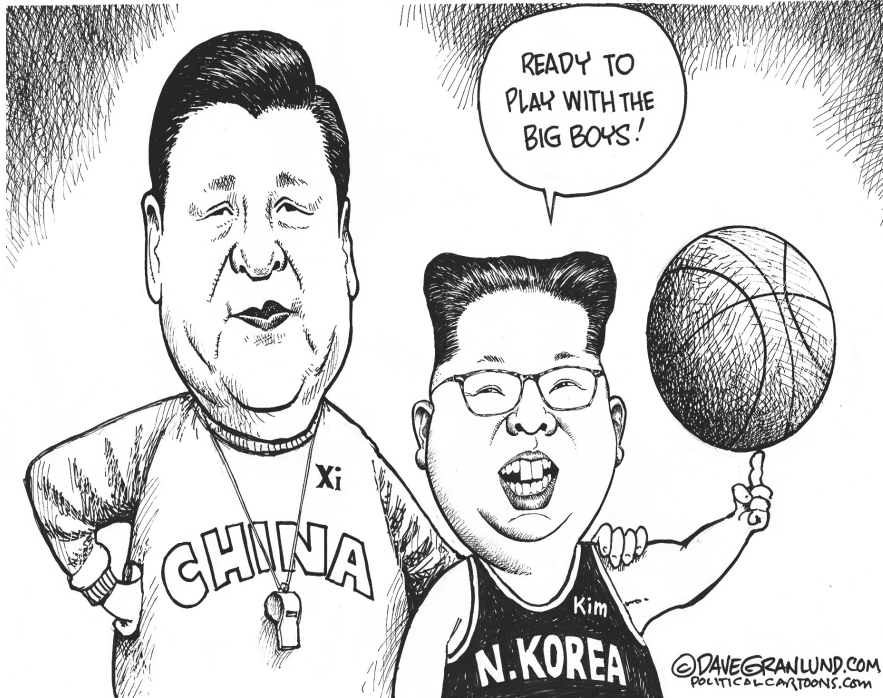
Pompeo has concurred that "Russians" (not Vladimir Putin) attempted to interfere in the 2016 election and will likely do so again in 2018. But he has consistently downplayed the importance of the attacks. "It's true, yeah, of course," he said, but added, "And I don't think they have any intention of backing off."

If Pompeo continues to display such diffidence about Russia's cyber attacks, he will bolster Trump's refusal to order a strong U.S. government response.

And finally, North Korea. Tillerson long advocated back-channel diplomacy with Pyongyang and was publicly chastised by Trump for so doing. The one-on-one meeting with Kim Jong Un, even if it comes off, won't produce a magic deal, but will require long follow-up talks — which Trump says he opposes.

Moreover, Kim is not going to give up his nuclear program, so any deal would have to revolve around limiting his program and ending nuclear and missile testing — a stronger version of the Iran deal. Both Trump and Pompeo insist this would be a nonstarter.

So the arrival of Pompeo will likely bolster Trump's most hawkish instincts on Iran and North Korea as well as his strange reluctance to combat Russian machinations. And it will probably undercut Mattis' leavening influence.



YOUR VIEW

In response

STANTON — I am going to offer a formal response to the Stanton County Emergency Management Office's recent letter to the Daily News. Let's break it down piece by piece:

— Training and certification: It is funny how, in the last two months, multiple individuals were pulled off emergency management duties due to just that — a lack of training. Why would this be the case if they were all properly trained since day one? One does not join a rescue squad and automatically be expected to perform EMT roles without full training and certification. Also, it is no fault of the volunteer if training is sought but not provided.

Furthermore, where are the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency certifications for the active administrative staff? Why was this not mentioned in the letter? Without the proper training or certifications, all of us are placed at a liability.

— Insurance: All emergency management staff, when operating on county business, are covered under the county's insurance (a common practice all over the state). This, in effect, means that in the event of an accident, etc., the county would be on the hook for all or part of that bill. Therein lies the need again for proper training and certifications. Without them, the taxpayer is on the hook.

— Fuel: This is not a problem unique to emergency management, but to almost all the departments within the county. However, I will focus on emergency management here. No one can reasonably expect that an individual who drives 20 miles on county business be reimbursed for 200 miles worth of fuel. In fire-rescue for instance, we have run-sheets on which all mileage must be documented along with fuel dispensed. The numbers have to add up, especially in the event of an audit. So where are the run sheets? Where is the accountability for the mileage driven on county business versus the fuel used?

— Vehicles and equipment: The two county emergency vehicles are public trust vehicles. As such, they are to be available to other agencies as needed in addition to emergency duties. There is no reason that they cannot be stationed at the Stanton County courthouse and Woodland Park SID building (both of which are public facilities).

One also needs to note that it is implied that the vehicles are "housed" at

their current locations. But both are outside so there is no benefit of indoor storage. Now let's look at other equipment conveniently not mentioned. Why is a computer system and software package, designed for weather tracking and monitoring, and worth thousands (and paid for with public money) set up in the basement of the sitting emergency manager's private residence?

For that matter, why is unissued radio equipment, safety gear, and supplies also kept in that and other private residences (note that I am specifically citing unissued equipment, not equipment directly assigned to a particular person)?

State law mandates that each county have an emergency management program and with that, an emergency operations center (EOC). We have a listed EOC located in the Stanton courthouse, which is not being used. Why then is our taxpayer-funded weather monitoring equipment and other gear subject to the personal whims and availability of one person?

— Trust: This is probably the most important aspect of operating in any field of public service. It is also the most fragile and easily shaken in the face of impropriety.

In closing, emergency management and other facets of our county are only as effective as those who are at the helm leading the way.

We are fortunate to have volunteers willing to step up to the plate to help in times of need. I personally commend them.

However, when those same volunteers ask for training, meetings, or seek guidance only to be ignored for the sake of convenience, it makes one question some of the core motivations of those within positions of authority.

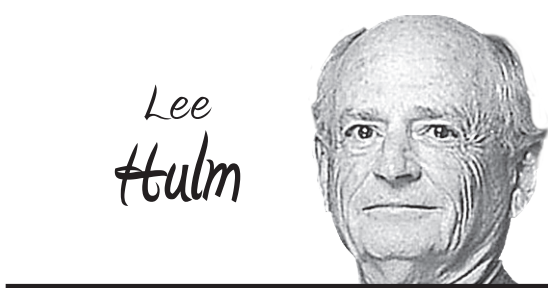
The same holds true for those who disregard protocols. Without accountability, there is no trust. Change, it seems, does not happen unless the powers that be are held accountable. The many years of complacency in Stanton County have proven just that.

ZYGMUNT ORLOWSKI

INSPIRATION

Micah 7:18: Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

FROM THE RIGHT



Lee Hultin

U.S. seeing collapse in morality

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week society pumps violence into the heads of youngsters and then feigns surprise when they act out their fantasies in devilish ways. Blood and gore is pervasive — limbs blown away, heads chopped off, bodies exploding, etc. The language in rap music and stand-up comedy is steeped in turbulence and ridicule. And social media? Well, mayhem lurks.

All of which should be sufficient to bring the Florida school massacre into clear focus. NOT! Rather than looking within for the cause and coming to grips with the fault in ourselves, it's easier to blame an object or entity that serves to assuage our personal guilt. Not even remotely inclined are we to clean out the clutter in our own closet.

What we're witnessing is a collapse in morality — brought about by an "anything goes" mentality espoused by liberals opposed to traditional values. Prayer in schools is taboo. The pledge of allegiance and ten commandments have largely been legislated out. The national anthem is under attack (see the NFL). Important reminders of both our deeds and our sins are being removed.

Discipline in schools is nonexistent — hence an education system metamorphosed into a more "humanistic" style of learning (abetted by parties using the legal system) where smiley faces are the norm and basic essentials have gotten lost. Competence in reading and writing plays second fiddle to a curriculum overburdened with obligatory offerings like sex and drug education.

The collusive schools of psychology, sociology and law have convinced the masses that everyone is a victim of something; ergo, no one is truly responsible. "It's not my fault" and "I'm no worse than anybody else" serve as beacons for guiding behavior. The altruistic golden rule, once a fashionable concept emphasized in classrooms and churches and homes, has become passé.

In its place has emerged a potentially lethal concoction — that of a society having apparently decided not to impose upon youngsters a system of moral values. Cell phones have replaced parenting. At least seven hours per day on average, kids (millennials, too) are "locked-in" — texting who knows what, sharing personal photos and emotions, surfing enticing websites, conducting affairs, etc.

The national mainstream media, immersed in enmity for the president and those who elected him, sows hate ad nauseam. Committed to a divisive adversary ritual, they pedal deceit (fake news), avoid or suppress information, cast suspicion on motives, destroy reputations and relationships, and expose embarrassing personal histories — always pitting one against another.

To whose ultimate satisfaction, I might ask? The student? The teacher? The school? The parent? The police? The family? The community? The country? (Or the media that thrives on division?)

Finally, this! How is it humanly possible that four armed officers — hearing the unmistakable staccato of gunfire — chose to stay outside the Parkland school rather than go inside and confront the shooter? Is "political correctness" complicit? A consequence of "softer friendlier; less aggressive, more compassionate" law enforcement policy leftover from the previous administration? You guessed it!

The collusive schools of psychology, sociology and law have convinced us that we all are a victim.

What do you think?

The Daily News welcomes letters submitted by readers. They may be limited as to length and edited for clarity. The Daily News reserves the right to not publish any letter.

Readers also are invited to join the Daily News' Community Conversation group on Facebook to engage in discussion on topics of interest.

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NICELY DONE

The hospitals in Ainsworth and Valentine are among those that recently were named as being among the top 100 critical access hospitals in the U.S. by an industry organization. Not everyone may be familiar with the "critical access" term, but it refers generally to smaller, rural hospitals that provide initial care to those in need. No pun intended, but a critical access hospital is critical to rural areas where distances to larger facilities can be great. Congratulations to all the hospitals that made this list for the important role they play.

GO AHEAD & SMILE

Fog is a natural weather phenomenon that usually occurs around an airport while surrounding areas are clear.

NORFOLK DAILY NEWS

ESTABLISHED MAY 1, 1887

W. Huse and Son, Publishers, 1888-1892
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Gene Huse, President and Publisher, 1913-1961
Jerry Huse, President William Huse, Publisher

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