

News - Local News

## Platte Institute studies taxes

by George Lauby (North Platte Bulletin) - 2/11/2008

A group of Nebraskans are comparing Nebraska's taxes to surrounding states to see if the taxload is truly out of whack, and what could be done if it is.



The group has big name leaders, including Roger Lempke, the former adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard and Pete Ricketts, who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2006. Mike Groene of North Platte is a board member.

Lempke retired in November as the National Guard commander and became executive director of the group - The Platte Institute for Economic Research.

Ricketts will serve as president of the institute's board.

The Platte Institute will promote ideas to help the state's economy grow, Lempke said. The first task is an in-depth study of Nebraska's tax structure, compared to surrounding states. Creighton University professor Ernie Goss is already at work on that.

After that study is finished, the Institute will commission a study of state expenditures to see if they are out of line.

Research projects will be done one step at a time.

"Our approach is research and ideas to promote free enterprise," Lempke said. "We hope to find and point out free-enterprise solutions to problems (instead of looking toward the government.)"

"We want Legislators, the public and the press to get both sides of an issue," Groene said the idea for the institute came in 2006, when he and Pete Ricketts shared the perception of a shortage of information about important state issues.

Lempke has 20 years of experience in the private sector, although he was the National Guard Commander for seven years. Before then he worked with the Brunswick Corporation, (now Lincoln Composites), where he became vice president for manufacturing and purchasing. Brunswick makes parts for the aerospace industry.

The Platte Institute is funded through private grants and contributions and will operate on yearly budget of \$350,000 to \$600,000, Lempke said. The website is <http://www.platteinstitute.org>.

They will issue policy statements and commentaries and plan to address educational issues, as well as health care and water.

Nebraska is one of the last states in the nation to form such an institute. State institutes share their findings through a "State Policy Network" ([www.spn.org](http://www.spn.org)).

Currently, commentaries are posted on [www.spn.org](http://www.spn.org) from similar institutes in Nevada, Oregon, California and Chicago, Ill. Topics are health care, Congressional earmarks, global warming and the world's cheapest car -- the Nano -- from India.

An example follows.

---

*From the Nevada Policy Research Institute*

### **Web-based transparency in government is coming**

By Steven Miller, Friday, July 13, 2007

Despite all the talk about America's current red-blue polarization, a new consensus between populist left and populist right on the Internet is already starting to transform the



Photo by George Lauby  
**Roger Lempke**

country.

Call it the "sunshine movement."

It first revealed its remarkable impact last year in Washington, D.C., when it tripped up two notoriously powerful and autocratic U.S. Senators, Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Robert Byrd, D-W.V.

Both had covertly attempted to block the Coburn-Obama transparency-in-government legislation by placing secret holds preventing any Senate vote. They did this despite massive public support and 40-plus Senate co-sponsors for the bipartisan legislation that Tom Coburn, R-Oklahoma, and Barack Obama, D-Illinois, had produced.

The bill simply directed that the federal government would finally establish a searchable, user-friendly website where citizens can come and learn specifically how their tax dollars are being spent.

Yet, for America's two premier Proconsuls of Pork, Byrd and Stevens, even that was too much.

What the senators hadn't counted on, however, was the Internet. Bloggers of left and right alike recoiled from the phlegmatic nonchalance in evidence in the Senate. Joining in a "porkbusters coalition," they began canvassing every Senate office.

One by one, each office was politely asked, "Was Senator So-and-So the one who placed the hold on Senate Bill 2590?" Eventually only Byrd and Stevens were left. Caught out, they soon both backed down.

***The North Platte Bulletin - Published 2/11/2008***

Copyright © 2008 northplattebulletin.com - All rights reserved.

Flatrock Publishing, Inc. - 1300 E 4th St., Suite F - North Platte, NE 69101

**The North Platte Bulletin**  
www.northplattebulletin.com

*Monday, April 21, 2008 CT*