



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF NEBRASKA

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“Immediate and sustained emissions reductions are the only known option to alter [worldwide warming trends]”. Carla A. Wise, *“Awake on Earth”*, 2016

The Second Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas, published this summer confirmed that avian species have continued to shift south-to-north into Nebraska. Three Southern species were confirmed breeding in Nebraska for the first time and ten more species have expanded their range northward in the state over the past 25 years. These changes reflect a warming climate.

Changes in climate also lead to more frequent crop failures, heat waves and floods. Every ton of coal and gallon of petroleum or diesel we burn contributes to this effect.

Burning fossil fuels to produce electricity in the U.S. has been on the decline, but not in Nebraska. The two coal-burning units in Omaha that were slated to be closed are instead being converted to gas, and not one coal plant in NPPD has been shut down. While we have many viable wind and solar projects waiting to be developed, our Public Power Districts are continuing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for plant maintenance and “upgrades” at Gerald Gentleman Station (GGS) and others and incurring more debt in the process. Closing Omaha Units 1 and 2 and one unit at GGS would show that our Public Power Districts are listening to the 75-80% of Nebraskans who recently responded in a UN-L poll that they want more wind and solar energy.

Legislative action that supports renewable energy development is commendable, and your efforts last session to support wind, solar and PACE financing for renewable energy are greatly appreciated. In a market of decreased electricity demand within the State, however, limitations on continued production of greenhouse gases will be necessary to ensure that more wind, solar, biomass, hydrogen, and geothermal energy is produced in Nebraska. Renewable energy represents economic opportunity for rural landowners, jobs for our workforce, and savings for homeowners, farmers, ranchers, businesses and communities who install solar PV, but this will only happen if coal production is curbed.

That said, energy production is only one-third of the emissions equation. Investment in low-emission transportation infrastructure, i.e. solar or fast-charging stations for electric vehicles at rest areas along major highways, electric buses or light rail between Omaha and Lincoln. This technology is not for some time in the future, it is available now if you choose to act.

The third highest contributor to greenhouse emissions is industry and agriculture. State support for best practices in diesel technology, sequestration cover crops, biogas digesters, manure management, and restoration of wetlands and natural habitats all have a part to play in limiting the impact of agriculture on both air quality and the environment. Further development of local food systems such as farm to school lunch programs benefit communities and reduce emissions.

This three-pronged approach, coupled with renewed focus on energy conservation and efficiency is one way to move Nebraska away from a 4-6 degree F increase in average temperature that would be a disaster to our citizens, our agricultural economy and our natural resources.

These measures will not be without cost, though some would actually contribute to economic growth. However, not taking steps to curb emissions is a risk most Nebraskans are unwilling to take. The EPA estimates that the U.S. lost \$357 billion due to extreme weather events and fire over the last 10 years. In 2013, this Legislature passed an emergency Wildfires Act in response to 500,000 acres of forest and grassland burned at a cost of \$12 million. The Omaha World Herald reported that the 2011 Missouri flooding cost Nebraska \$400 million. UN-L Department of Ag Economics noted that the 2012 drought and subsequent decline in forage through 2014 exceeded \$887 million in loss to livestock producers. We are only beginning to experience the economic effects of regional warming and drought stress caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

Curbing coal emissions, developing renewable energy, investing in transportation technology, and promoting best ecological agricultural practices is not a guarantee that Nebraska will escape catastrophic weather events in the future. But the alternative to reducing emissions is worsening regional warming, drought stressors and more frequent flooding. Nebraska has already seen an overall warming of 1.5 degree F since 1895 and the frost-free season increased by more than one week. We do not want to wait to see what an additional 4 degrees F does before we take action.

“Action now is preferable and more cost effective than reaction later.” - *Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska*, 2014

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