

1988

## Nebraska Policy Choices (1988): Preface

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# POLICY CHOICES



Russell L. Smith, Editor

Center for Applied Urban Research  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



NEBRASKA POLICY CHOICES 1988, ed. Russell L. Smith  
(Omaha, NE: Center for Applied Urban Research, 1988).

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*Russell L. Smith, Director*

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# NEBRASKA POLICY CHOICES

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# NEBRASKA POLICY CHOICES

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1988

**Russell L. Smith, *Editor***

**J. David Aiken**

**David M. Ambrose**

**Jerome A. Deichert**

**Dennis Hoffman**

**Louis G. Pol**

**Christine M. Reed**

**James R. Schmidt**

**Vincent J. Webb**

**Center for Applied Urban Research  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
University of Nebraska at Omaha**

## **Nebraska Policy Choices: 1988**

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### **Center for Applied Urban Research Publication Staff**

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# FOREWORD

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Welcome to the third volume of *Nebraska Policy Choices*, a publication of the Center for Applied Urban Research. We are pleased that faculty from throughout the University of Nebraska continue to contribute chapters, and I believe you will find their analyses of policy issues to be both relevant and comprehensive.

The authors have helped us identify and examine current issues confronting policy makers in Nebraska. In addition, they have examined those forces at work to shape our future. The subjects in this volume range from human service issues to state finance and economic development issues. The diversity of the chapters illustrates the complexity of our society and the difficult decisions policy makers face today.

The irony of a publication on current policy issues is that, often, new issues develop before a chapter or book is completed. I take this opportunity to encourage our readers to help us identify emerging policy issues so that we can continue to address relevant topics.

On behalf of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service, I salute the authors, and the faculty and staff of the Center for Applied Urban Research, for sharing their time, talents, and insights.

David Hinton, Dean  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service

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## PREFACE

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The six chapters in *Nebraska Policy Choices: 1988* contain the work of eight faculty from the University of Nebraska's Omaha and Lincoln campuses. These faculty, like the twenty-five faculty who wrote chapters for the previous two annual volumes, are some of the leading experts in Nebraska in their respective areas of interest.

Publication of this year's volume culminates roughly fifteen months of planning, research, writing, and editorial activity. In fact, work on the prison overcrowding and water sales chapters has been underway since early 1987.

The process of assembling the 1988 volume began with conversations about the major issues facing Nebraska with key informants from local and state government, business, community organizations, and the University of Nebraska. Two statewide strategic planning projects — the Nebraska Unicameral's New Horizons for Nebraska and the Nebraska Press Association-Peter Kiewit Foundation's New Seeds for Nebraska — also provided much information about important Nebraska issues.

As with previous volumes in the *Nebraska Policy Choices* series, our first goal was to identify issues for which the public needed increased understanding of the dynamics and trend, and to better understand policy options for handling the issue. This reconnaissance work resulted in the identification of many important policy issues; unfortunately, this year's volume can only treat a few of the possible topics.

One of the most distinctive features of the *Nebraska Policy Choices* series is that it represents the only multi-year effort in Nebraska to bring university faculty expertise to bear on a broad range of public issues facing Nebraskans. But this strength is also a limiting factor, because while the issues suggested to us generally set the broad parameters of each annual volume's contents, other factors inevitably come into play: faculty interests and ability to meet rather tight time lines, institutional and departmental priorities, and research budgets and data limitations, to mention just a few. The topics addressed in *Nebraska Policy Choices: 1988* thus represent a blend of what key informants felt were issues which needed to be addressed and what could be realistically done within a rather limited window of time.

Regardless of where your interests lie, I hope you will be stimulated by *Nebraska Policy Choices: 1988*. The six chapters present a range of findings and policy choices. In this preface I want to highlight several of them.

Once again, I think the chapters illustrate that in-depth and objective analysis of policy issues can yield insights that promote consideration of policy choices, going beyond those that fall within the so-called conventional wisdom of the times. For example, rather than simply building prisons in response to prison overcrowding, the state can pursue additional policy

options, including the Intensive Supervision Parole alternative presented in Dennis Hoffman and Vincent Webb's chapter, "Prison Overcrowding in Nebraska: The Feasibility of Intensive Supervision Parole." They point out very clearly that this alternative can be developed in such a way that it provides punishment and rehabilitation at one-third to one-half the cost of building additional prison space. While such a strategy would apply only to a subset of all persons sentenced to Nebraska's prisons each year, millions of dollars would be saved.

"Child Day Care Policy Issues in Nebraska," by Christine Reed, also illustrates the benefits of careful analysis. For example, Nebraska policy makers have recently been focusing on strengthening regulatory standards for day care centers. Yet Reed's analysis indicates that a majority of Nebraska preschoolers of working parents are in day care homes, not in day care centers. Policy changes oriented primarily, or even solely, to centers may miss the mark. This information leads Reed to suggest policy choices that go beyond what is routinely discussed.

Another theme common to this year's volume is the interconnectedness of public issues today. James Schmidt's chapter, "Farm Income and Government Payments to Agriculture in Nebraska," clearly points out how Nebraska's economy continues to be very much intertwined with agriculture. In fact, it is so interconnected that recent increases in direct government farm payments have helped the state post reasonable, although not spectacular, rates of personal income growth. At the same time, Schmidt's research highlights how the state's economy, particularly in agriculturally dependent counties, is vulnerable to shifts in federally controlled agricultural policy. The implications of this interconnectedness range from the need for broad-based economic diversification throughout the state to the need for targeted rural development and local government fiscal assistance in counties most reliant on agriculture.

Jerome Deichert's chapter, "Rural-Urban Linkages: An Assessment of State Government Revenue and Expenditure Patterns," also highlights issues of interconnectedness by looking at patterns of Nebraska state government's revenue and expenditure actions. Deichert's research demonstrates that revenue and expenditure programs affect metropolitan and rural areas differently. Furthermore, some of these actions produce outcomes that are counter to current perceptions. For example, it is often assumed that the state's rural counties get short-changed when it comes to state expenditures. Deichert's analysis indicates that this is mistaken, and that rural counties (those without a city of at least 2,500 population) get proportionately more than would be expected, given their share of Nebraska's population and personal income. State government revenues are thus being redistributed among the counties and areas of the state.

Finally, several of the chapters highlight how certain assumptions underlying state policy actions can be challenged and are in need of redefinition and fine tuning. This can lead to consideration of additional policy options. David Aiken's chapter, "Selling Nebraska's Water: Water Sales, Transfers and Exports," contends that recent water export legislation in Nebraska was possibly hasty and based on an overly narrow interpretation of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Nebraska v. Spohase*. He argues that the Spohase decision allows states the latitude to establish a limited preference for instate water uses. As a result, it is not clear that Nebraska must establish a water export framework that facilitates the selling of water. Second, Aiken argues that it is questionable whether Nebraska has surplus water which should be used to fund additional water resource development, particularly if the development is for additional irrigation. By challenging these assumptions, Aiken is able to set forth additional policy choices for Nebraskans to consider.

"The Importance of Interstate Highways to Economic Development in Nebraska," by David Ambrose and Louis Pol, challenges current thinking in Nebraska about interstate highways and economic development. In particular, Ambrose and Pol argue that recent decisions to develop additional four-lane or interstate-like highways in Nebraska may fail to yield the benefits which are expected. Using longitudinal county-level data, Ambrose and Pol find that the link between interstate highways and indicators of economic development are generally weak, and that the link is strongest in counties which are large enough to take advantage of interstate-induced growth impulses. Their advice is that policy makers should act slowly and carefully before spending money on additional four-lane highways in Nebraska, particularly in the name of economic development.

In closing, I want to thank the many individuals who made this year's volume of *Nebraska Policy Choices* possible. Over 25 individuals in business, community and professional organizations, government, and the academic community took time from their busy schedules to visit with me about important public issues facing Nebraskans. Additional persons acted as technical reviewers of early chapter drafts (a list of reviewers is included at the end of the volume). While the chapter authors didn't always agree with what the reviewers had to say, the outcome in every case was a much better chapter. To these volunteer advisers goes a hearty thank you!

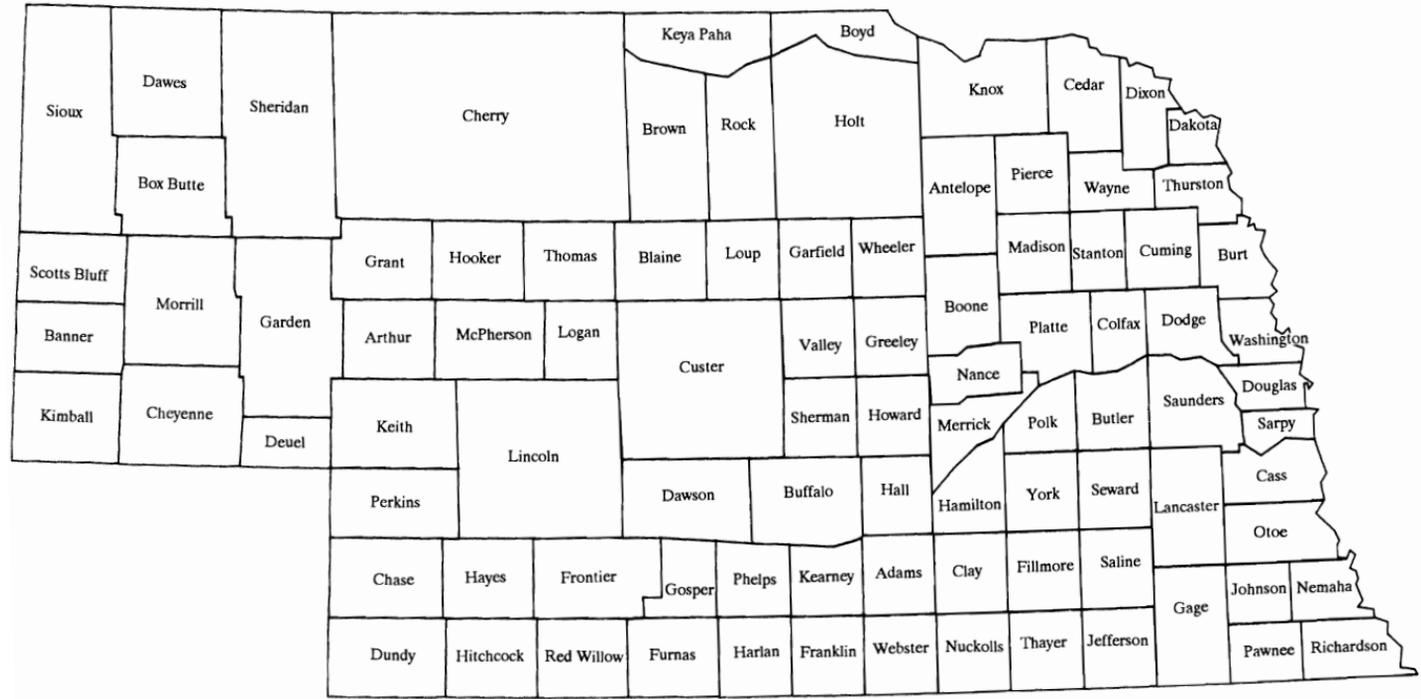
Special thanks must also go to the staff of the Center for Applied Urban Research, who worked many hours to see the 1988 volume translated from rough ideas into what is now a polished product. They are Margaret McDonald Rasmussen — the person who handled most of the editorial tasks — and Gloria Ruggiero and Sharon deLaubenfels, who assisted in editing the chapters; Joyce Carson, who performed the bulk of the word processing and layout; Tim Himberger, who helped with maps and figures; and Betty

Mayhew and June Turner, who helped with the numerous administrative and support tasks that are inevitably a part of the annual volume process. No better group of staff persons exists anywhere.

Finally, Chancellor Del Weber, Vice Chancellor Otto Bauer, Dean David Hinton, President Ronald Roskens, and the University of Nebraska Board of Regents have continued to encourage this project. Their leadership and interest, particularly that of Dean David Hinton, are greatly appreciated.

Russell L. Smith  
Omaha, Nebraska  
November, 1988

# Reference Map of Nebraska



# Reference Map of Iowa

