

***By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher***

When Nebraska passed a safe haven law last legislative session, no one ever dreamed of the other problems the law would expose with the care and treatment of young people.

Nebraska was the last of the 50 states to adopt a safe haven law—a law intended to prevent the death of newborns through abandonment or just outright murder by a frightened new parent.

What differed in Nebraska's law from most was that there was no age limit on the children who could be dropped off at a local hospital. What followed was an onslaught of children being dropped off at hospitals under the safe haven law.

□□ But, ironically, the children being dropped off weren't infants—they were young kids and young adults whose parents felt they had no where else to turn for help.

□□ What this exposed was the gaping hole in getting the necessary services to parents and youth in need.

□□ Some parents said they couldn't get help through the state's assistance agencies or if they could, the time frame was months out. They felt they were out of choices.

A state official in Nebraska's Health and Human Services' children and family service department said parents were unnecessarily abandoning children and that help is available. Hello?

Nebraska's HHS has become such a behemoth bureaucracy that they've lost the focus of helping people in favor of seeing how much they can cut costs.

There's even a proposal circulating in HHS to push applications for social services online. Frankly, a good number of the people in need of those services probably don't own a computer and would favor help with their heating bill over owning a computer to make application for that help.

Nebraska's well-intentioned efforts to help newborns has uncovered a sore that's a much bigger problem—a problem that's far more expensive and one that can no longer be shoved under the carpet.

The problems with insufficient services to help our youth must be solved. It won't be easy and it's not going to be cheap but it has to be done and we're going to have to pay for it—one way or the other.