

***By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican***

Another year goes down in the history books as we look forward to a new year with the hope of prosperity, good fortune and continued success.

Looking back at 2012, it proved to be another positive year for Imperial, Chase County and southwest Nebraska.

Another year of strong commodity prices kept the economy of this area humming right along. It wasn't without some kind of hit as summer drought conditions took a toll on dryland corn crops.

Still, the heat helped spur another extraordinary corn harvest. Those yields, along with high corn and wheat prices, continue to keep the economy strong.

Hopefully, 2012 won't be remembered as the start to the kind of drought that captivated the region and state in the early 2000s.

Looking forward to the future, three Natural Resources Districts in the Republican and one in the Platte Basin purchased 19,000 acres in Lincoln County. Irrigation will be retired on the tract, with groundwater used to augment stream flows in both basins for compliance purposes.

On the local front, building permits eclipsed \$4 million again in 2012 in Imperial. In the county, that total added another \$3.5 million in building activity. That included nine new homes, another plus for the local economy.

Hopes for expanded rental housing brightened late in the year with developer interest expressed in building up to 10 rental homes in Imperial. The city council worked closely with the developer, offering lots in the Cornerstone Development to aid the project.

There are indeed lots of reasons to be positive going into 2013. We can only hope that our leaders in Washington D.C. share that same belief.

Perhaps Congress can move past the partisanship that brought our economy to the so-called edge of the cliff earlier this week. While an agreement was reached, the partisanship pain will continue as both sides merely delayed for several months the decisions that have to be made for the good of our country.

For the first time in more than a decade, Nebraska will be represented by an all-Republican delegation. I only pray that our senators and congressmen have the courage to buck political partisanship and do what's best for Nebraska and the country.

The new session will bring an end to the political career of Democratic Senator Ben Nelson. I know some didn't like Ben, probably because of the "D" after his name.

Nebraskans will likely remember him most for casting the deciding vote in favor of ObamaCare and the so-called Cornhusker Kickback that had been added to the bill. But Nelson did far more during his two terms in the U.S. Senate.

Nelson was instrumental in bringing both sides of the aisle together, known as the Gang of 14, who aided in the approval of President Bush's judicial nominations that had previously been blocked. He was also brought numerous federally-funded projects to Nebraska.

Compromise wasn't a dirty word to Nelson as it is to today's Congress. Like him, I fear that without centrists in the Senate like Nelson and Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, the log jam in Congress is only going to get worse.

Let's pray that our leaders can come together to move this country forward the way that we have been doing in Imperial and Chase County.

