

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

When it comes to water management in Nebraska, the best guidance comes at the local level. And no, it doesn't come from the 49 state senators (most of whom represent urban districts) who often think they know what's best for us.

Water issues in this great state have and will always be a high profile topic. As the old adage goes, "Whiskey's for drinkin'—water's for fightin'."

In our generation, the most prevalent disagreements over water use has occurred between states. In 1986, Nebraska sued Wyoming, saying they were over-using their share of water from the North Platte River. That case was settled in 2001.

In 1998, Kansas sued Nebraska and Colorado, saying they weren't getting their share of water from the Republican River. The case was settled in 2003 but Kansas has continued to bring ongoing litigation against Nebraska and Colorado.

Within the Republican Basin in Nebraska, surface water irrigators remain at odds with groundwater irrigators, blaming their lack of water supply most specifically on development in the Upper Republican.

The Upper Republican Natural Resources District began managing the region's groundwater resource in the early 1970s. The URNRD provided a blueprint for the rest of the state on how to best manage water resources at the local level.

In this legislative session, state senators still continue to think they know what's best for us.

In fact, it was an Omaha senator, Sen. Steve Lathrop, who proposed major changes in water policy with the introduction of LB 1074.

The bill faced significant opposition at the grassroots level and a new version of LB 1074 has emerged. But once again, the bill poses a threat to local control.

In the new version, if after 30 years NRDs don't meet goals and objectives set forth in a basin-wide plan, the Department of Natural Resources can take over water management in the basin.

Any legislation trumping local control remains unacceptable and people need to get involved at some level to ensure this doesn't stand.

We have proven we know how to best manage our water re-sources through allocations, metering, rules and regulations and now augmentation projects funded by irrigators through occupation tax dollars to keep the basin and the state in compliance with Kansas.

We must remain vigilant, especially when the Legislature is in session, to ensure local control remains intact and is never sacrificed.