

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Policy Talk

Public Policy Center

February 10, 2006

Today's Policy Talk contains three items:

1. Pandemic Flu

This morning on public radio, there was an interesting story about prioritization of flu vaccine in the event of a pandemic flu outbreak in the US. The story, "Health Officials Consider Strategy for Possible Bird Flu Pandemic" can be accessed at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5199978>. What does this have to do with the Public Policy Center? Working in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Practicum Limited, the Public Policy Center conducted an evaluation of a national initiative to involve citizens and stakeholders in setting priorities for vaccine in the event of pandemic influenza. The Public Engagement Process on Pandemic Influenza involved nearly 50 stakeholders and over 250 citizens in four states. The evaluation of this process examined a new way to engage the public in important policy decisions and explored opportunities and challenges for citizen input. Results of the evaluation indicated 1) the initiative was successful in attracting a diverse group of citizens to participate, 2) the process resulted in citizens and stakeholders having sufficient knowledge to engage in informed discussion about pandemic influenza, 3) participants engaged in balanced, honest and reasoned discussion about the issues, and 4) participants were satisfied with the process. Stakeholder and citizens believed policy makers would use their input and the process would increase the public's support of the decision ultimately made. The next phase of the evaluation will examine how decision makers actually use the citizen and stakeholder input. The full report is available online at: http://www.nifi.org/news/news_detail.aspx?itemID=5265&catID=24.

2. Public Participation: Deliberative Discussions

Pandemic Flu is one of several public participation projects in which the Center is involved. The Center also has been working in partnership with MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, NET Television, and the University of Nebraska at Kearney as part of the national *By the People* effort (see <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/btp/>). Last October, there was a *By the People* deliberative discussion examining "The State of Education." The event brought 130 teachers and residents of Central Nebraska to the UNK campus to discuss education policy issues affecting the state and participate in a survey covering related topics. Nebraska Senators Vickie McDonald, Ron Raikes, Ed Schrock and Elaine Stuhr of the Unicameral's Education Committee discussed education policy matters with a small group of participants and Commissioner of Education Doug Christensen, Senator Joel Johnson, Dean of the UNK College of Education Marilyn Hadley, Jim Griess of the Nebraska State Education Association and Matt Schnell of the Nebraska Association of School Boards were part of a panel answering questions from discussion participants. Highlights of the evening include the fact that participants were generally supportive of increasing aid to public schools. A report about the event is available

online at <http://www.ppc.nebraska.edu/ByThePeople/relateddocs/BTP2005ReportFinal.pdf> , and a copy of the PBS national program (one hour) or an 11 minute excerpt from Nebraska DVD is available upon request. Earlier in the 2005, the Public Policy Center co-convened, with Leadership Lincoln, a deliberative discussion on Genetically Modified Food. The event took place in Lincoln on August 20. Forty-eight residents of Lincoln/Lancaster County discussed safety concerns about genetically modified foods and labeling and regulatory policies. A panel composed of University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty was present to answer questions from participants, and a survey was administered about a variety of topics related to genetically modified foods. For survey results and a description of the event, see http://ppc.nebraska.edu/program_areas/documents/GMFReport.pdf.

3. Minority and Justice Implementation Committee

The Nebraska Minority and Justice Implementation Committee is a joint effort of the Nebraska Supreme Court and the Nebraska State Bar Association, established to examine and address issues and perceptions of racial and ethnic bias in the court system. The Public Policy Center is a third partner in the effort, and the Center's Liz Neeley serves as the chief staff person for the project. The Committee recently released their annual Progress Report, highlighting the major activities of the Committee in 2005 and is available on-line at:

http://ppc.nebraska.edu/program_areas/documents/mjtf/2006ProgressReport.pdf .

A significant effort of the Minority and Justice Implementation Committee is to ensure that juries represent the diversity of Nebraska. On Friday January 6, 2006 Governor Heineman signed a joint proclamation with Nebraska Supreme Court Justice John Hendry and Nebraska State Bar Association President William Dittrick declaring 2006 the "Year of the Juror." The proclamation recognizes the important contribution that jurors provide to the justice system and marks the launching of a statewide campaign in 2006 to educate and encourage jury service among Nebraskans, especially among minority communities. Pictures and coverage from the event are available at <http://court.nol.org/whatsnew/yearofjuror.pdf>.

As always, please visit the Public Policy Center in person or on-line (ppc.nebraska.edu) to find out about what we are up to. Sometimes you will have to dig around. For example, this week, Anna DeGraff, an Undergraduate Research Assistant with the Center, was featured on the front page of the Lincoln Journal Star. A link to the article can be found on her staff bio page: http://ppc.nebraska.edu/about_us/staff_bios/degraff.htm.

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