

Governor, Where Did the Aquifer Go?

By **Greg Awtry Publisher York News-Times**

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Sometime between August 2011 and June 2012 Nebraskans lost something of critical importance to our state.

Well, maybe not Nebraskans but apparently Gov. Dave Heineman has lost something, misplaced it or forgotten all about it.

That's odd, because last summer Heineman was so concerned about it he wrote a letter to President Obama pleading with the president to save it. Now, 10 months later it seems to have disappeared.

What is "it," where is "it" and what happened to "it?"

'It' is the Ogallala Aquifer. I believe it's still there, beneath the feet of most Nebraskans. It must be.

I still see irrigation pivots watering our state's golden cash crop. I turn on my tap water and crystal clear Ogallala Aquifer water runs into the sink.

According to Gov. Heineman we have 92,685 registered irrigation wells supplying over 8.5 million acres of harvested cropland and pasture. Yes, the aquifer must still be there!

Last August, Gov. Heineman wrote the president saying, "I am opposed to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline route because it is directly over the Ogallala Aquifer."

In the same letter he also said, "I believe that the pipeline should not cross a substantial portion of the Ogallala Aquifer."

Heineman told the president the original Keystone XL pipeline route crosses 254 miles directly over the aquifer, and he ends his letter to the president saying, "Do not allow TransCanada to build a pipeline over the Ogallala Aquifer and risk the potential damage to Nebraska's water."

And now "it" is gone! At least the Ogallala Aquifer is gone.

Gone from Heineman's recent column printed in the York News-Times on June 9, 2012, updating Nebraskans on the TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline proceedings.

After referring to the aquifer five times in his letter to the president, Heineman's recent column drops all references to the aquifer as if it doesn't exist!

Governor, where did it go?

What happened between last August and now that would make your overwhelming concern about our precious aquifer disappear?

Many of you probably think that after all the statewide and national hoopla, TransCanada has relented and proposed a new route that would avoid the aquifer. You would be wrong.

The "new" route would still enter and exit our state in the same places as before. All TransCanada did was to toss Nebraska a bone, and like an over-hungry guard dog we leaped at it, and are now distracted from the real issue, exactly as they planned.

TransCanada adjusted its proposed route about 30 miles in northern Nebraska to avoid an area of the Sandhills where the water is abnormally close to the surface. That's it.

They did nothing about the over 200 miles where the pipeline carrying this noxious cancer-causing benzene-laced diluted bitumen (tar-sand oil) is still planned to cross our aquifer, or “lifeblood to Nebraska’s agricultural industry” as Heineman referred to it when he was so concerned about “it” last August.

As the governor stated last week, Nebraska will conduct its own study. We’ll pay for it too, over \$2 million dollars. I have no objection to that; after all it’s our water we are (or used to be) trying to protect.

The governor also states that the study will cover only the portion of the route through Nebraska that TransCanada has changed. Remember now, that is just the little jog around a couple Sandhills.

The concerns about the vast crossing of the Ogallala Aquifer have disappeared. No more studies, no more evaluations, apparently no more concerns from our state regarding the majority of the aquifer.

Folks, it sadly appears this is a done deal.

Dot a few I’s, cross a couple T’s, shake hands and sit back until the heat of the election passes in November and the president (whoever it will be) can sign a document allowing a foreign corporation to use eminent domain to slice open Nebraskan’s land from stem to stern, to pipe another country’s oil to a port city where it can be refined and either exported to other countries or sold on the open market.

Last August, Gov. Heineman was spot on, writing the president, pleading with him to deny the TransCanada Keystone XL permit because it crossed “a substantial portion of the Ogallala Aquifer.”

Folks, the “new” route still crosses “a substantial portion of the Ogallala Aquifer.” I think it (the aquifer) is still there.

I believe you too think it is still there. I believe you want to protect it now and forever just as I do. But now it’s gone, at least gone from the drastically different point of view our governor had just a few months ago.

To Gov. Heineman’s credit he is asking Nebraskans to weigh in ... again. I already have, and will do so again and again.

I invite you to do the same, but I want to remind you that TransCanada can build its pipeline AND avoid the majority of the aquifer eliminating potential risk to our “lifeblood,” but they won’t because it would cost them more money.

The jobs would still be there. The tax revenue would still be there. But more important than either of these two things, our precious and life-sustaining Ogallala Aquifer would still be there.

Risk Nebraska’s future for a few jobs and some extra tax money? I don’t think so.

TransCanada, go ahead and build your pipeline, it is the best way to transport this oil.

I know Nebraska is in your way, but for our sake, and for the sake of generations of Nebraskans who unknowingly are counting on us to do the right thing, go around the aquifer.

And governor, I urge you to rediscover the Ogallala Aquifer, to protect it at all costs, to demand as you did last August when you said to President Obama, “I am opposed to the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline route because it is directly over the Ogallala Aquifer.”

Nebraskans, now and forever, are counting on you to do the right thing.