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**Capitol View**

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**Sorry You’re Hungry Kids, the Governor Doesn’t Believe in Welfare**

The hole keeps getting deeper.

Remember when I suggested someone should give the governor a shovel so he could dig a deeper hole for himself?

That was when he had refused to read a published report on high levels of nitrates on his pig farms because it was written by "someone from Communist China." He subsequently refused to apologize to the reporter with a Chinese surname who is a graduate of an American university and has been working for news organizations in the United States for several years.

Then came Governor Jim Pillen's mandate that all state employees should work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in an office so they can be face-to-face with the public.

No data. Just his firm belief that everybody ought to be in the office from 8 to 5. Never mind agency policies that allowed remote work pre-dating the Covid pandemic. You remember Covid, that respiratory outbreak that killed friends and neighbors and forced employers to offer work from home options and popularized a Zoom connection that has become a household word.

Will the Governor who commutes every day, at our expense, from his home in Columbus to the Capitol mind his own mandate? Really? You need to ask?

Will the courts decide that the employee union will prevail and make the Pillen mandate subject to contract negotiations?

But his latest dig with the shovel likely really deepens the hole. In response to an opportunity to receive federal money for a program that will feed Nebraska kids during the

summer if they currently participate in a school lunch program, Pillen said "no" to the funds because "I don't believe in welfare."

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The $18 million would be distributed to 150,000 Nebraska children – those kids who Pillen says he loves and wants to protect – who are currently receiving free school lunches because of food insecurity.

It would cost the state $300,000 to administer. That’s a healthy return on investment. It’s money already due Nebraska and will go to another state if we don’t use it.

There's the data supporting the need. Not counting the fact that 15 state senators have signed a petition supporting the program. Advocacy groups have also offered positive words about it while cautioning that food insecurity is a growing concern.

But Pillen, the Prince of the Pejorative, has cast "welfare" in the worst light, appealing to the sense and sensibility of an age where it was us versus "those people."

Anybody remember when then Governor Bob Kerrey appointed a single mom with two kids and a law degree to run the Department of Welfare which he renamed the Department of Health and Human Services?

Will somebody point out to the current governor that many of the 1,200 employees of Pillen Farms are likely to have children eligible for the program?

But Pillen says we don't need it because we will take care of those kids who are out there in the community at church camps and in 4-H instead of at home on welfare.

Is it a generational thing, this misunderstanding of how the programs work and what the recipients need? I'm sure that a list of eligible kids compared with a list of those likely to join 4-H would have very few matches.

It's called food insecurity Governor. Perhaps your staffer who doesn't filter the stupid comments you make could spend some time researching the topic of food insecurity and brief you on it.

That might change some of your pig-headed thinking, oh Prince of the Pejorative.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years*.