



# The Lancaster County Democrat

May 2014

The Lancaster County Democratic Party is your Local Contact for Democratic Politics.

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## Join Us For the 2014 County Convention

Are you ready to set the course for the next two years of our party's future? On Sunday, June 8th, Lancaster County Democrats will gather for our 2014 County Convention. This crucial biennial event is where we elect the officers who will guide our party through the election of our next governor and U.S. senator, the election of Lincoln's next mayor in spring 2015, and even the 2016 primary that will decide our next Democratic president. While conducting important party business, the convention also gives local Democrats a great opportunity to meet the candidates who'll be leading our party to victory this November.

On June 8th, the Lancaster County Democratic Convention will be held at the IBEW Union Hall at 6200 South 14th Street in Lincoln. Registration will begin at 1:00 p.m. with business commencing at 2:00 p.m. There is no cost to participate. However, a low-dollar fundraising lunch will be served prior to the convention beginning at noon. All Lancaster County Democrats and their families are invited to attend.

Many local Democrats have already registered as delegates by submitting their names to the County Election Commissioner. However, those who failed to register by the March deadline defined in state law are still encouraged to join us and should have the opportunity to participate in all convention business. We are a party of inclusion and have a long history of seating interested Democrats as full voting delegates.

Many are working to ensure that this year's convention will be a success. The Bylaws Committee under Chair Tom Green is conducting an in-depth review of our party's governing documents with an eye on improved accountability and effectiveness. The Platform and Resolutions Committee is also beginning its work defining our party's goals and those issues that unite us as Lancaster County Democrats. A public hearing on the party's proposed platform and resolutions will be held Wednesday, May 21st at 7:00 p.m. at the County Party headquarters on 830 L St in Lincoln. Please join us and help us spread the word to anyone who shares our Democratic values.

If you have any questions about the 2014 Lancaster County Democratic convention, please contact Kyle Michaelis, chair of the Convention Planning Committee, at 402-202-9683 or [kyle@newnebraska.net](mailto:kyle@newnebraska.net).

See you at the convention on Sunday, June 8th! Join us for lunch and definitely be ready for the action to begin promptly at 2:00 p.m.

In politics we presume that everyone who knows how to get votes knows how to administer a city or a state. When we are ill . . . we do not ask for the handsomest physician, or the most eloquent one.

— Plato

## Meet Our Candidates

### **Patty Pansing Brooks, Candidate for Legislative District 28**

Dear Wonderful Lancaster County Democrats,

I am writing this note prior to the Primary Election, but you will be reading it on or just after Tuesday's election. I want to take this time to give you my heartfelt thanks for your kind, energetic and amazing work for my campaign! Your efforts have been integral to the positive nature of our campaign and the success that we have had introducing me to



Legislative District 28. It is clear to me that the work you are helping me do goes way beyond my particular candidacy and is connected to the important issues that we all know must be worked on together to strengthen the lives of our friends and neighbors, as well as the economy in our great State!

It has been a privilege for me to get to speak to thousands of LD 28's constituents about their needs and goals. This journey across the District has been fascinating and heart-wrenching. As I continue to mention, poverty is one of our looming problems. We must work on it together.

I am grateful that you are helping me fight for issues like continuing the efforts of our fearless friends in the Legislature who are working for the 54,000 uninsured Nebraskans to expand Medicaid. Your work has also helped me to explain to many people about the importance of raising the Minimum Wage in our State! Pay equity and workplace equity are also issues that create barriers to success for our wage earners. Without your help, I would not have had the broad platform to explain our common message. Thank you!

Working together we also are cognizant of the need to protect our precious natural resources, especially our liquid gold—our water, which fuels our passion for protecting our future. We are aware that our efforts to promote the development of renewable energy, especially wind energy, will help us to bring huge economic benefits to the State, potentially allowing us to lower our property taxes. These are all areas of concern to the people in LD 28 and across the State. I am grateful that you have been helping me to reach out and protect our State by protecting our land, our water, our air and fighting against climate change.

I am also aware that we are fighting together against the Death Penalty, which is archaic, fraught with error, exorbitantly costly and not a deterrent. We agree that our

State should not be in the business of killing. We need to join the rest of the industrialized nations in this respect.

Finally, I realize that your work is also due to our knowledge that women's reproductive rights have been important to the constituents with whom I am talking. We need to make sure that our citizens get to continue to make reasoned decisions about their healthcare in conjunction with the advice of their doctor and whomever else they choose to bring into the discussion. These rights continue to be undermined and we must be vigilant.

Again, thank you for your wholehearted work on behalf of my campaign. If I make it into the General election, please know that I will continue to need your help! No matter what, I am fortunate to count so very many of you as my new friends and my life has been blessed to walk this journey with all of you to fight for our Nebraska friends and neighbors.

With gratitude for your amazing efforts,

Patty

**These candidates were not on the Primary ballot but will appear on the General Election ballot. Learn more about them in future newsletters.**

#### **County Board of Commissioners**

District 1 – Jane Raybould

District 5 – Patte Newman

**County Defender** – Joe Nigro

**County Clerk** – Dan Nolte

#### **SCC Board of Governors**

District 4 – James Garver

District 5 – Korey Reiman

#### **Lower Platte NRD**

Sub District 7 – Richard Bolte

Sub District 8 – Tom Green

At Large – David Landis

#### **Mayor of Hickman**

Doug Hanson

#### **Hickman City Council**

Jack Scott

#### **Norris School District 145**

Ward 2 – Patty Benzinger

Ward 4 – Jim Craig

**Palmyra School District At Large** – Susan Steward

## Meet Our Candidates

### Dave Domina, Candidate for U.S. Senate



In the election process, and in my campaign for the senate, massive volunteer support, tremendous encouragement from contributors, and excitement about the campaign building daily makes the effort worthwhile. Talking about this growth is fun.

The political process should be about ideas. The ideas should be borne from principles and designed to address issues. The objective is to find solutions, improve things for people, and move to the next issue. Here are some ideas.

#### Location Preference, Jobs, Compensation, Infrastructure

The federal minimum wage must be raised. Climate change must be addressed. Fossil fuel reliance must be eliminated eventually and diminished rapidly. Jobs must return to American shores. Can all these things at least partially be done at once? I think so.

It makes sense to have a jobs program for areas where unemployment is highest to rebuild infrastructure in the same community where unemployment is high. A local employment preference for nearby residents would reduce travel costs, diminish use of fossil fuels, and reduce unemployment. It would also repopulate rural communities with younger working families. These things, in turn, would diminish reliance on federal assistance programs, reduce taxpayer costs, increase taxable income, and expand tax revenues.

**Step One: Increase the minimum wage.** It must be increased to \$10.10 per hour at the federal level. This conclusion is supported by extensive research and by virtually all meaningful economic studies. Certainly, all compared studies, involving examination of settings where the minimum wage was raised in one state but not in an adjacent state, prove that increasing the minimum wage does not diminish employment. It expands it. Raising the minimum wage will help women and children the most. It will allow them to exit from a poverty level that qualifies them for federal financial support.<sup>1</sup>

**Step Two: Restore Jobs. Tax Fairly.** Incentives to ship jobs overseas must be eliminated.<sup>2</sup> A fair tax structure must be used to accomplish this objective. Anticompetitive corporate consolidation and mergers must be stopped. The big banks must be broken up. They are so big they are unsafe. “Too big to fail” means that we all fail. This risk must be eliminated.

**Step Three: Quality Jobs.** Every job must be a quality job. And, those quality jobs must be brought to neighborhoods where underemployment exists. The jobs must match with construction methods that are environmentally responsible.

**Step Four: Local Employment in “Green” Jobs Must be Incentivized.** In almost every location where underemployment is rampant, infrastructure reconstruction needs are greatest. Underemployed, poor communities have streets with more potholes, sewers with more leaks and water systems with more problems.

Infrastructure reconstruction in areas where unemployment is high should be undertaken.<sup>3</sup> It should include incentives to hire locally from the project area, require employment from the community, and reward contractors and workers both for carbon footprint reduction.<sup>4</sup>

#### Outcomes and Objectives

This program can achieve these things for communities across Nebraska where unemployment is high, population is aged, and infrastructure reconstruction needs are great:

1. The necessary infrastructure reconstruction can occur.
2. The minimum wage can be raised. Fair wages can be paid.
3. Reduced unemployment in the community can be achieved. Dependency on government assistance programs can be reduced.
4. Taxable income can be increased and tax revenues can be expanded simultaneously as the project proceeds.
5. The community with the highest need for employment is served, permanently improved, and the permanent improvements serve as permanent assets to attract other employers after the construction is finished.

As a United States Senator, I will work to accomplish these goals.

<sup>2</sup> *Stop Exporting American Jobs* (Wall Street J 2014)

<http://blogs.wsj.com/experts/2013/11/27/stop-exporting-american-jobs/>

<sup>3</sup> The American Society of Civil Engineers gave the United States a grade of D for quality of its infrastructure. It estimates \$2.2 trillion must be invested in five years to achieve mere adequacy. Much of this reinvestment must be made where unemployment is high. Australia has a program with some similarities. <http://www.energyandresources.vic.gov.au/energy/safety-and-emergencies/powerline-bushfire-safety-program/assistance-fund>

<sup>4</sup> There are many ideas for incentives to reduce carbon emissions. For an explanation of one and not an endorsement of any, see, <http://centeronbudget.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3167>

<sup>1</sup> *The Kids Count Data Book* (Anne E. Casey Fdn., 2013).

## Meet Our Candidates

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### Patte Newman – Why I’m running for District 5 Lancaster County Board – Part 2



I was appointed by Mayor Don Wesely to the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission in 1999 and served four years. Experiencing the extent of planning and zoning regulations that apply to every development project occurring in Lancaster County was eye opening for a

layperson previously unaware of these requirements.

When I ran for Lincoln City Council and won in 2003, I felt that Planning Commission experience was extremely valuable when looking at setting new policies. In a perfect world, any regulation should be weighed against costs of implementation, with not only short term but long term cost-benefit analysis considered. It was obvious various voices in a community must come together when looking at reasonable and reasoned policies.

I was fortunate to also be appointed to Mayor Wesely’s Floodplain Task Force, which met from 2001 to 2003. This was followed by service in 2004 and 2005 on the 23-member Stevens Creek Watershed Basin Plan Advisory Committee. Both groups emphasized the importance of using new scientific modeling to update floodplain maps and encouraging best management practices to address problem areas. Landowners and future potential landowners must be apprised of where flood prone areas are and how this impacts property values. Updated maps were submitted to FEMA and floodplain standards encouraging no-net rise and compensatory storage requirements were drawn up and approved by the appropriate ruling bodies.

At that time, the previously approved Antelope Valley project was in its infancy, with a virtual blank slate for redevelopment and roadways to improve an enormous area east of downtown Lincoln. The high cost of human-engineered modifications of the floodplain, to remove or protect affected properties, was a major discussion point for elected officials.

So, why does this matter?

The decision to open up development in the Stevens Creek watershed was made relatively recently. This watershed drains nearly 55 square miles between Highways 2 and 6 with some challenging topography. It includes prime farmland, acreages and historic properties with a challenge of potential conflicts between rural and urban environments.

The Stevens Creek Advisory Committee met for six months and held numerous stakeholder meetings. Thousands of questionnaires were mailed out to encourage input on proposed recommendations to achieve the goals and objectives to reduce future flooding potential, maintain stream stability and preserve water quality as the area develops. This type of consensus on long term projects, with input from all stakeholders working together, will benefit all of us in Lancaster County. The Stevens Creek Watershed Master Plan provides solid recommendations on site-specific best management practices to help mitigate the impact of urbanization on stream stability and water quality and to minimize consequences of a catastrophic storm event. Lincoln and Lancaster County can avoid a repeat of some of the obstacles experienced with the extremely expensive Antelope Valley project by ensuring these recommendations are followed. That is a responsibility that falls to the elected officials of Lincoln and Lancaster County.

In addition, building out 84th Street to five lanes some twenty years ago before the City of Lincoln growth showed a demonstrated need was an extremely progressive decision. Delays in the South Beltway have made it clear that an East Beltway may not happen in our lifetime. Creating a north/south paved corridor needs to happen now to serve East Lancaster County.

Whether it involves roads or floodplain issues, sustainable development means doing it correctly in the first place and avoiding expensive corrections, resulting in a huge benefit to all of us as taxpayers.

For more information on my priorities, experience and concerns, please go to [newmanforcountyboard.com](http://newmanforcountyboard.com) or contact me at [pattnewman2014@gmail.com](mailto:pattnewman2014@gmail.com).



## Meet Our Candidates

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**My name is Tom Green and I am running for the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District Board (LPSNRD), Subdistrict 8.**



First a bit about myself. I am a lifelong Nebraskan who grew up in Omaha and graduated from Millard North High School. I moved to Lincoln in 1997 to attend the University, and In May of 2001 I graduated majoring in Political Science and Philosophy with a minor in History.

After graduation I worked as an Administrative Aide to State Senators Chris Beutler, Nancy Thompson, and Don Preister from 2001 until 2005. My experience in the Legislature encouraged me to attend the University of Nebraska College Of Law where I graduated with distinction in May of 2008. I work as Legislative Aide for state senator Ken Haar. I am married to my wonderful wife Jennifer, who works as a Chemist at Novartis, and we have two lovely children, Abby and Warren.

By the time this article prints the primary will have been completed. I automatically advanced through the primary, my name did not even appear on the ballot. I will be asking for your vote in November. Rather than take this time to tell you about why you should vote for me, which will come in a later article, let me use this to help spread the word about the LPSNRD.

Natural Resource Districts are, like our Unicameral, unique to Nebraska. They were first organized in 1972 around river basins. NRDs are charged under state law with the following responsibilities:

1. Development, management, use and conservation of groundwater and surface water;
2. Soil conservation;
3. Erosion prevention and control;

4. Flood prevention and control;
5. Pollution control;
6. Water supply for any beneficial uses;
7. Prevention of damages from flood water and sediment;
8. Development and management of recreational and park facilities;
9. Forestry and range management;
10. Development and management of fish and wildlife habitat;
11. Drainage improvement
12. Solid waste disposal.

You can find this information and more at <http://www.nrdnet.org/>.

I also encourage you to check out the web page of the LPSNRD <http://www.lpsnrd.org/>. It contains information about the work that the NRD serves the vast majority of Lancaster County. The LPSNRD manages flood control, is in charge of recreational trails such as the MoPac, and works on wildlife management; among a great number of other important projects.

I hope that this article has given you some more information about me and about the office I am running for. Sometimes with all the information and ads about the Governor and U.S. Senate races, the offices farther down the ballot do not get as much notice. In my campaign I hope to spread the word about the essential functions that the LPSNRD does, and how it is important to elect persons like myself to these boards to continue the great work.

I will have future articles about my specific campaign, but in the meantime you can check out my webpage at <http://www.greenforprd.com/> or on Face book at <https://www.facebook.com/Greenforprd>.

## Meet Our Candidates

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### Mary Harding Launches Bid for Reelection to Nebraska Public Power District



Mary Harding, a two-term veteran on the board of Nebraska Public Power District, is seeking a third term on the board of Nebraska's largest generating utility.

“Almost ten years ago, I proposed NPPD's current goal of providing 10% of our electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar. Today, although on track to achieve that goal, we are falling behind our neighbors in developing this asset for Nebraska. I'm asking the voters to return me to office so that we can develop our native natural resources efficiently,” Harding said.

Mary Harding was first elected to the board of Nebraska Public Power District in 2002. Since then she served as Corporate Secretary for 7 years, and is currently Chair of the board's Budget Committee.

Harding believes that strengthening the rural economy is key to Nebraska's success, and that NPPD can play a pivotal role in economic development across the region. “Wind development creates local jobs for young families, provides new sources of farm income and significant property tax relief,” she said. “As I talk to voters, the number one question I am asked is ‘Why aren't we building more wind?’”

Rural electrification was based on bringing new economic opportunities to the countryside. “We need to return to our roots, and do more to enrich the economy of the state,” Harding said. “Failing to seize this opportunity deprives our ratepayers of the return on investment they deserve from a public power state.”

Mary is a seventh generation Nebraskan, with three Homestead Act Pioneers in her family. She is a graduate of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Mary and her husband Richard have four children, a daughter-in-law and two granddaughters who are the heart of their lives. She and her husband enjoy camping and canoeing whenever possible.

Harding previously served on the Board of Governors for Southeast Community College from 1990 to 1996. As Assistant to the Dean of the College of Business Administration at UNL, she managed alumni and

external relations, and led the \$10 million effort to modernize college facilities.

Harding served as executive director of the Nebraska Environmental Trust in the administrations of Governor Ben Nelson (D), and Governor Mike Johanns (R), from its inception in 1993 until 2006. For her work there, she was recognized by Ducks Unlimited International for outstanding contributions to conservation in Nebraska. She works now with her husband in their family business, residential real estate.

Learn more about Mary at <https://www.facebook.com/mary4nppd>.

Republicans approve of the American farmer, but they are willing to help him go broke. They stand four-square for the American home--but not for housing. They are strong for labor--but they are stronger for restricting labor's rights. They favor minimum wage--the smaller the minimum wage the better. They endorse educational opportunity for all--but they won't spend money for teachers or for schools. They think modern medical care and hospitals are fine--for people who can afford them. They consider electrical power a great blessing--but only when the private power companies get their rake-off. They think American standard of living is a fine thing--so long as it doesn't spread to all the people. And they admire of Government of the United States so much that they would like to buy it.

— Harry S. Truman

## Opinion

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### Why Women Must Vote, Run and Serve By Christa Yoakum

Women must vote and engage in the democratic process to maintain and to promote women's issues. What are women's issues? Women's issues are policies that support education, food safety and accessibility, affordable housing and fair housing access, health care, equal pay, domestic violence protections, and family planning.

In this important 2014 election there are many qualified and dedicated women running for office from statewide offices to local school boards and from the State Legislature to area Natural Resource District Board of Directors. As conservatives weaken or destroy policies that support families, it is as important as ever to have women involved in decision making. How can women support these candidates? Engage more women voters!

The U.S. still ranks 90th worldwide in the percentage of women serving in Congress. When the 113th Congress convened in January 2013, 82 percent of its members were men. Seventy-five percent of statewide elected officials and state legislators are men. Men occupy the governor's mansion in 44 of the 50 states, and they run City Hall in 87 of the 100 largest cities across the country. There was an increase of women holding office in the 1980s and 1990s but the last several election cycles indicate a plateau at the state legislative level and only slight increases at the federal level.

Much has been written about why women are less likely to run for office than men but women have too much at stake in bad policy decisions and can only bring a perspective of collaboration and consensus to important decision making. Until more women hold elective office there is one place the field is level: the polling place! Women are over half the eligible voters and every vote counts.

Conservatives are outspoken in their opposition to family planning, equal pay and women's place in the workforce. The only way women can prevent this harsh sexist reality is for them to exercise their right to vote while they still can. No doubt, readers here will vote. What else can you do? Midterm elections don't have all the excitement and media attention of presidential elections and women do not vote as significantly. Women's votes are important not only to elect the women candidates but also to elect men who hold the same values. By voting *every* election women exercise not only their right to vote but their political capital to

ensure that future policies do include principles that support women and families.

We cannot wait for Hillary! This election, take a woman to the polls. Engage those you meet, those who work in service areas and could use an increase in pay. Engage those persons who are disinterested in politics and ask why. Chances are it is because they see decisions being made without their interests considered. Engage that mom who sees her path out of poverty challenged by student debt, high cost of child care, soaring food costs, and low wages. Walk her through the process of voting if she is not experienced. It feels good to empower a voter!

There cannot be true democracy unless women's voices are heard. There cannot be true democracy unless women are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own lives. There cannot be true democracy unless all citizens are able to participate fully in the lives of their country. [July 11, 1997]

- Hillary Clinton

Some leaders are born women.  
— Geraldine Ferraro

## Opinion

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### The End of an Era for Lancaster County

By Anthony Circo

At 5:36 p.m. on Thursday, April 17th, Senator Brad Ashford took the last action of Nebraska's 103rd Legislature. His motion to adjourn sine die was the end of the line for 17 term-limited senators. Among them were five Democrats who represented Lancaster County: Senators Danielle Conrad, Bill Avery, Amanda McGill, Norm Wallman, and Russ Karpisek.

We lose quite a bit as they move on from the Legislature.

Term limits will silence five votes for Medicaid expansion, LGBT equality, sustainable budgets, progressive taxation, and fair wages.

Gone is the experience and knowledge of Professor Avery, who brought wit and decorum to the debate when they were desperately needed.

Senator McGill's voice for women and children will no longer be heard in the Legislature.

Senator Karpisek's pragmatism and plain talk will not be available to cut through the ideological bloviating of the far Right.

Senator Wallman's easy-going charm and personality will be absent, leaving the halls of the capitol empty of necessary congeniality.

And we will desperately miss the fearlessness of Sen. Conrad, who never backed down from a progressive fight, no matter who the bully of the day was.

The skills they brought to the legislature have blunted tax cuts for the wealthy, killed Voter ID, rebuilt a child welfare system devastated by privatization, funded job training programs and addressed the Developmental Disabilities waiting list. An impressive record in a largely conservative state.

But their accomplishments go beyond the laws that were enacted or defeated in the last 8 years. Their time, energy, wisdom and inspiration may be more important than the things they did in the Unicameral. They helped build our organization to be the most organized county party in the state.

All eras have a beginning and an end. As we say goodbye to five Senators who have done so much for our State and our Party, attention inevitably turns to an

undetermined future. Much of how that future looks will be determined in the next few months. A new legislative playing field will be set with at least 17 new State Senators and a new Governor. Fresh faces will bring new ideas and agendas. Who will fill those shoes? Whose agenda will be addressed?

The driving purpose of the County Party is to elect Democrats. These five progressives are not coming back, so the responsibility for continuing their legacy lies on your shoulders. What will you do with it?



Sen. Bill Avery



Sen. Amanda McGill



Sen. Russ Karpisek



Sen. Norm Wallman



Sen. Danielle Conrad



## Opinion

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Recently President Obama toasted former President George H. W. Bush saying, “We are a kinder, gentler nation because of you.” What a great bipartisan gesture! But are we a kinder, gentler people than we were, say 50 years ago? I want to believe we are because deep down I believe we live in the greatest (not perfect) country in the world. But, deep down, I have my doubts.

So what can we do to live up to former President Bush’s motto of becoming a kinder, gentler nation? It starts with each one of us. It starts with a daily choice to see the good in people, to see the glass half full, and a belief that being positive and compassionate is always better than the alternative.

We must be willing to acknowledge there are usually two sides to any story or issue. Just because someone disagrees with us doesn’t make him or her our hated enemy. We need to find it in our hearts and minds to be willing to listen to our opponents and then be willing to do what is right for America no matter what political party we belong to.

When I grew up politicians could disagree in public, but behind closed doors come up with a compromise. That doesn’t seem to be the case today. Many of today’s politicians seem more interested in the character assassination of their opponents than in solving the challenges our country faces.

How can we break the gridlock and get something positive done in Washington when our leaders are so polarized and hateful toward each other? When was the last time you heard a positive, kinder, gentler political ad?

Can we become kinder, gentler souls? Yes! It is a choice. I know that writing this article has challenged me to become a more caring and compassionate person. I hope it will do the same for you.

God bless you all and God bless America.

Jim D. Miller

## The Watchful Citizen

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In case you haven’t discovered the County Party TV show on community access TV, check us out! The show airs on Time-Warner Cable Channel 13, at 10:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, 6:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, and 12:30 p.m. on Saturdays. We have an interview style format. Guests are Democrats chosen by party leaders, sometimes because they’re politically well-known but occasionally just ordinary citizens who have a message to give their audience.

And check our video archive on Youtube:  
[www.youtube.com/LancasterCountyDems](http://www.youtube.com/LancasterCountyDems)

If one candidate is appealing to your fears, and the other one’s appealing to your hopes, you’d better vote for the person who wants you to think and hope!

— Bill Clinton

Do you have stories to share about the Lancaster County Democratic Party? If you do, please contact History Committee Co-Chairs Jean Sanders at [jsanders@neb.rr.com](mailto:jsanders@neb.rr.com) or Marlene Cupp at [rc34712@windstream.net](mailto:rc34712@windstream.net).

You are also invited to be part of the next History Committee meeting at the County Party office, 830 L Street, Tuesday, May 27, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.

## Opinion

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### Creative Schools

By Bob Haller

Sometimes it takes an outside visitor to raise issues important to us in Lancaster County. Yong Zhao, a professor at the University of Oregon, came to the Thompson Forum at the Lied Center in February to remind us of how the call to “reform” can distract us from seeing what we do well.

A quick summary of Yon Zhao’s basic argument is as follows:

- Our country has headed down a mistaken path with *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*, the *Common Core*, the goal of producing students trained to be employees. Such “reforms” do great harm to our educational system of local control and focus, diversity of educational method, universal access, and opportunity to start over, a system that has made our nation the world leader in opportunity, entrepreneurial activity, intellectual accomplishment and innovation.

- The route to genuine reform would enhance these aspects of American education and add to them teacher autonomy and individualized student programs. The object of education will then be to encourage the American entrepreneurial style and to free our children from having to move back into their parents’ basements because they will be trained, not to find jobs, but to make them.

Let me note that we are fortunate our state and our county have been less affected by the current reform movement than many parts of the country. We are not cursed with “charter” schools, with a concerted effort to kill collective bargaining and tenure for teachers, and with the impulse to add still more testing to the school regimen at the expense of actual learning. We have not adopted the Common Core; and a *Wikipedia* article claims that Nebraska is the only state not to have standardized testing.

In our own city, we have been blest with good board members and good administrators, as well as with a top-flight set of teachers who can work together and with students, their parents, and the community. That is why we have the special schools for Arts and Humanities, C, the International Baccalaureate, a thriving program of musical and dramatic performance, and are just starting the Entrepreneur joint program with Southeast Community College.

Nebraska once had a program of testing that fitted the tests precisely to the local curriculum and prevented distraction from this curriculum for test preparation. But in 2008, the Legislature mandated the use of uniform tests for all school districts and transitioned from the STARS system to the use of standardized tests. That move cost the State an excellent Commissioner of Education and some faculty pioneers at UNL in the field of accountability and testing.

As the *Huffington Post* and other important national sources are now highlighting the parental opting out from standardized tests, is it perhaps the time to ask whether our county and state should push for even more freedom from those testing requirements which are perhaps stifling the creativity and prosperity of our country?

I recognize, first, that *Race to the Top* is an Obama program, and that we should hesitate before putting ourselves in opposition, but Democrats sometimes disagree with each other, and what I am suggesting is not a Republican program.

I don’t wish to stand by and see the children in our schools and their teachers spend their precious time preparing for standardized tests when it takes so much intellectual energy and creative thinking to understand our world and to be trained to make a contribution to the life of the community and nation.

For further information read:

Yong Zhao, *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization*. ASCD 2009

Yong Zhao, *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*. neasp/Corwin 2012

## **Seven Reasons Why You Should Give Money to the Lancaster County Democratic Party**

**By Jon Rehm, LCDP Fundraising Chair**

I have had the privilege of serving as the fundraising chair of the Lancaster County Democratic Party for the last two years. I had volunteered and worked on campaigns for over 20 years prior to taking this volunteer job. Through this job I have learned why the LCDP is a unique entity in the political arena and why it is worthy of your financial support. Here is why I think donors, especially small dollar donors, should give money to the LCDP.

### **The LCDP supports the entire Democratic ticket.**

By contributing to the LCDP you support the entire Democratic ticket. Natural Resource District Boards, Public Power District Boards, community college boards and other supposedly minor offices still have the ability to affect voters directly and substantially. It is important to elect Democrats to those offices. Furthermore, service on those boards develops our candidates as leaders and candidates. The LCDP is one of the few organizations that helps those candidates. Even relatively modest resources of time or money spent on those races can often have a great impact on the outcome of those races.

These overlooked offices also provide candidates for higher offices. An example of this is State Senator Norm Wallman who served on the Norris School Board before being elected to the Legislature in 2006. In Nebraska, Democrats are a minority party and the word Democrat is practically a dirty word in some parts of Lincoln and Lancaster County. However most so-called down ballot races are non-partisan which makes it easier for our candidates to get elected on their merits rather than on their party affiliation.

### **Investing in the LCDP now will help us build a bright future for Nebraska Democrats in the next decades.**

The rising Millennial Generation is much more liberal than older generations and is more liberal than either the Baby Boomers or Gen-Xers were at similar ages. Nebraska is becoming much more racially and ethnically diverse and population is shifting towards the Omaha and Lincoln area. All three of those trends bode well for the future of the Democratic Party in Nebraska, but we will need a strong organization and strong candidates to win races. If the backlash against President Obama proves anything, it proves that conservatives will use almost any tactic to keep hold on to power. If the latest NE GOP primaries prove anything, it is that Nebraska GOP politicians are nasty and vicious even by Republican standards. The opposition will not cede an inch to us, so we need to be ready for a protracted fight.

Today's NRD board member, state legislator or school board member could be our Governor, Senator or Congressperson in 15 years. If we as Nebraska Democrats give into pessimism now, we will be short-changing our future. Again the LCDP is one of the few institutions that actively recruits and supports those down ballot candidates and future statewide leaders. That is why we need your dollars.

### **Sustaining donors provide stability and independence for the Lancaster County Democratic Party.**

One of my main priorities has been to build our sustaining donor program. Most of our sustaining donors spread their donations monthly on a credit card via Act Blue. The average sustaining donor to the LCDP averages about \$20 per month or \$.66 per day. That is \$240 per year. The fact that amount can be broken down into monthly installment payments lets donors make more meaningful donations. The fact that we increased our sustaining donor base last fall was one reason we were able to move into our new offices and still be in a good financial position for the 2014 elections. A strong sustaining donor base also lets the LCDP budget for campaigns without having to worry about being able to keep the lights on after an election ends. Each election brings a different cast of candidates and supporters with different interests. Sustaining donors are a constant source of support for the Lancaster Democratic Party and they give this organization some independence from individual candidates and major interest groups.

**Strong parties attract strong candidates.** Running for office is expensive and time consuming. Having a strong Lancaster County Democratic Party means that candidates do not have to completely reinvent the wheel in putting together an organization in Lancaster County. This makes it easier to recruit better candidates. But again, the LCDP needs the money to maintain a strong organization.

Some people say that we talk too much about raising money in politics. Furthermore, some say that fundraising is elitist and gives undue influence to wealthy donors. I think the influence that small and medium sustaining donors have in the LCDP belies that fact. I also think there are other examples about how LCDP fundraising compliments this party's long-standing devotion to grassroots politics.

### **Giving to the LCDP unleashes one of the best weapons in politics: the local campaign volunteer.**

Notre Dame Professor and Lincoln High Graduate David Nickerson was the Obama campaign's expert on voter turnout. His research shows that trained, local volunteers are more effective in turning out the vote than paid workers. There are many good Democratic volunteers in Lincoln and Lancaster County, but we need financial

resources to utilize our human resources effectively. We need office space, phones, computers and campaign literature for get out the vote campaigns. It is often helpful to have paid staff during election time to help recruit and coordinate volunteers. Donations make it possible for us to use local volunteers effectively.

**The LCDP lets smaller donors see and control how their money is spent.** One reason why people believe that parties are doomed is because Super PACs are willing to open the books to major donors in a way that national party campaigns and campaigns are unwilling to do.

Like Super PACs, the LCDP is transparent to donors. Unlike a Super PAC you only need to pay a \$30 membership fee to participate in our monthly Central Committee meeting. Not only do you get to see how we spend our money, but as a central committee member you get your say in how that money is spent. Do you think the Koch brothers would let retirees, young professionals and blue collar workers of moderate and even low income make decisions about campaign strategy and tactics? Of course not. That's not the case in the Lancaster County Democratic Party.

Of some would argue that "average people" should leave campaign tactics and strategy to larger donors and professionals. Maybe so, but I don't think the Lancaster County Democratic Party is made up of average people. In a typical meeting of the Lancaster County Democratic Central Committee you will have collectively decades, if not centuries, of campaign experience sitting in a room. We know how to get candidates elected because we have done it before. Yes, there are all sorts of technological innovations that make campaigns more effective, but voter turnout still requires recruiting volunteers to dial phones and knock on doors. Contributing to the LCDP allows us to turn out local voters in a cost-effective manner.

**LCDP events are often priced so that average voters can meet with their elected officials.** The LCDP holds a Spring Soup Supper and a Fall Spaghetti Feed. The price of these events is \$5 for an individual and \$15 for a family. We regularly get attendance from state senators, school board members, city council members and county officials. We provide a forum for average persons to share their concerns with the elected officials who have the most impact upon their lives. Do we also hold more expensive and exclusive events? Yes, because it is necessary. But even at the Patriots' Dinners we still often find ways for people to attend our event if they cannot afford a full-priced admission ticket of \$60.

In short, I think donating to the LCDP is one of the most effective uses of political dollars for Democrats in

Lancaster County because the LCDP helps build the party for the long-term and it gives donors, especially small donors, a great amount of oversight and control over how those dollars are spent.

### **Care to Join the County Party at a Community Event?**

We often send representatives to City or County events, usually at cost of ticket or proportionate share of table cost. If you would like to be contacted for future events, let us know; or if you know of an event that the County Party may want to consider attending as a group, contact us. Below are pictures from one such event, the Mayor's Interfaith Prayer Breakfast held at the Cornhusker Hotel on May 1, 2014.







*Lancaster County  
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Your membership helps support party activities including GOTV efforts, candidate support services, political forums and the *Lancaster County Democrat*.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$15 Student/Limited Income

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I would also like to volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_ Prepare Mailings \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Banking \_\_\_\_\_ GOTV