



# The Lancaster County Democrat

July 2014

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

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## Meet Our Candidates

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### Internet Neutrality Must Be Maintained

By Dave Domina, Candidate for U.S. Senate



#### Overview

Technology harbors great promise, and fuels substantial growth in the American economy. It offers great hope and provides

opportunities worldwide. The world's largest companies are relatively new technology companies. Their growth occurred because the Internet exists, and operates on a neutral basis.

Despite assuring the electorate in 2007 that he was "a strong supporter of net neutrality," President Obama and his Administration have promulgated proposed rules at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that would end net neutrality. This must not occur. The stakes are too high. It has been estimated that the Internet economy accounted for more than 4% (\$2.3 trillion) of GDP, in the G-20 countries in 2010. If the Internet were a national economy, it would be among the five largest in the world, ahead of Germany.

Net neutrality is critical to entrepreneurship. Ending neutrality on the Internet poses a grave threat, and a huge barrier to entry, for business and technology innovation.

I respectfully call upon the Administration, and FCC, to maintain strict, aggressive net neutrality rules, redefine Internet Service Providers (ISPs) as "common carriers," and give everyone access while denying "fast lanes" to anyone, including the highest bidder(s).

#### Changes and Threats

Oftentimes, the first step in the wrong direction is taken when too few people are paying attention, or

when matters are not adequately anticipated before the journey begins. This may be the case with the threat to net neutrality.

In 2002, during the first term of President George W. Bush, the FCC classified ISPs as "information services" instead of classifying them as "common carriers." A common carrier provides transportation or Cartage service for general use, like a telephone company, an airline, a trucking company, etc. The Internet carries messages for people in general, and ISPs provide service connections to the Internet. They appear to be classic common carriers but the 2002 FCC did not think so. This became critical in a 2014 court challenge.

In January 2014, a Federal Appeals Court struck down FCC rules about net neutrality. The ruling was made because ISPs were classified as "information services" and not "common carriers." The Court made it clear the FCC can classify ISPs as common carriers. If it does so, rules applicable to one carrier apply equally to all. This is the central feature that assures net neutrality.

Despite the Court's clear rationale, the Obama FCC has not moved to reclassify ISPs as common carriers. Instead, it proposes rules that would authorize ISPs to make deals with particular providers, and give "fast lanes" to the highest bidders.

#### How Serious is the Threat?

The Internet is a public square, where anyone has been free to post, speak and participate. ISPs have been the Gateway, or information carrier from the customer to the Internet. Internet openness transformed industries from groceries to finance. It allowed persons to launch businesses that would provide immediately available goods or services to a broad audience.

The United States must assure net neutrality, or it is likely other nations will act in their interests against the U.S. For example, an ISP could exclude the U.S. if the U.S. permits disparate pricing of foreigners. It cannot be argued that mere competition among ISPs will keep the Internet neutral. This has not worked in Europe and

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ISPs do not need to have disparate pricing to be highly profitable. One source calls their present profit levels “comically high.”

### What Must Be Done

Assuring the net neutrality and resisting the lobbying flirtations of large ISP providers to do otherwise must be a national priority. If websites must pay disparate fees, small companies will be denied market access. New rivals will be denied an opportunity to start up, reducing consumer choices. Many startups will be thwarted in the startup phase itself. Even investment options would narrow. Permitting giant companies to have the fastest services would raise barriers of entry eliminating innovations like Twitter, Tumblr, and WordPress.

These steps must be taken:

1. ISPs must be classified as common carriers. The Court authorized this action. The FCC should make the change promptly.
2. A loophole allowing exceptions for restrictions on mobile access should be repealed. Many startup companies depend upon access by mobile phones.
3. A second loophole should expressly be changed and closed to prohibit charging websites for direct connections to networks.
4. America’s Internet infrastructure, just like its physical infrastructure, must be recognized and protected as owned by all, accessible to all, and it is essential to economic competition, growth, and success. Already, high-speed Internet is slower in New York and San Francisco than Seoul, and it is estimated as five times as expensive as in South Korea.

This critical issue must be solved. If the FCC will not do it, congressional action is necessary. Congress can, and should, define the Internet and ISPs to be what they are — a public square, and a common carrier to get there. Contrary FSC proposed regulations should be roundly rejected.

## Meet Our Candidates

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### Michael O’Hara, Candidate for State Treasurer



The buzz is building for a great election cycle. Jane Raybould, one of your Lancaster County Commissioners, has accepted the nomination by Chuck Hassebrook to run for Nebraska’s next Lieutenant Governor. With your help, a full slate of Nebraska Democrats will take up state-wide constitutional offices in January, yours truly included.

I’m running to become your State Treasurer. Please grant me a moment of your time so that I may introduce myself and explain why I am running.

The State Treasurer can be a little noticed office, but it provides important services to the citizens.

The Treasurer tends to get the most attention when the topic is unclaimed property. Our Republican friends often claim they are eager to return to The People their money when they urge tax cuts for the few and cuts in government services for the many. But, with unclaimed property, the State is, quite literally, holding another person’s money and doing so with a *duty* to return it. My Republican opponent, the incumbent, has not done as good a job returning The People’s money as he ought. I will do better. Some have said readers of this newsletter can be persuaded to vote for me based on two words, the name of my opponent: Don Stenberg.

The Treasurer’s main job is an important check in the systems of checks and balances to assure that legislative appropriation directives are carried out by the Governor. The Treasurer is to validate expenditures do not exceed appropriations and are only made pursuant to appropriations. The Treasurer’s job is to make sure Nebraska’s constitutional mandate of a balanced budget is enforced.

The Treasurer’s job is very different from the job of Auditor of Public Accounts. The Treasurer’s job is to pay bills when due. The Auditor’s job is to examine whether all of the checks and balances were working well and to comment upon how efficiently they performed their duty.

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*O'Hara – Continued from Page 2*

You will make my job much easier as your State Treasurer, as well as serve Nebraska well, if you help to elect Amanda McGill as our next Auditor of Public Accounts and Janet Stewart as our next Attorney General.

The Treasurer's office has been assigned some specific tasks by the Legislature. Too few Nebraska taxpayers have taken advantage of the college savings program that benefits from favorable federal and state tax treatment. Named after the IRS section, this college saving program is known as a 529 program. As your Treasurer, I will seek to expand participation in this program, both to reduce the financial burden on our middle class families and to ensure Nebraska's future. Nebraska also has a savings plan for long-term care. Given the demographics of our state, the issue of financing long-term care is critical to our future. I will seek to expand participation in this program.

Two other programs managed by the Treasurer's office get little notice, but are far more important than the notice they get. The Treasurer's office maintains a website to foster and facilitate transparency of the expenditures of state government. While the incumbent has improved the transparency over that of his predecessor's bad performance, our citizens deserve more. I will work to achieve the maximum grade for transparency.

Last, as a means of assisting the county courts and assisting families experiencing separation, the Treasurer's office provides a centralized, web-based means for making and receiving child support payments. This service reduces the stress on our families in time of need, and must be maintained at the highest levels of quality.

While little noticed, the office of Nebraska State Treasurer is important to assuring that Nebraska is the good life. I would like to serve you in that office. I believe I have the experience to bring improved efficiency to the office.

What experience do I have? I am committed to providing public service. I served six years on the Omaha Public Power District Board of Directors (1989-1994). During that time, I was often elected by my peers to serve as OPPD's Treasurer. Many of the same cash

management issues were in play for that (then) \$400 million utility with well over 2,000 employees.

I have provided two other forms of public service related to our electric utilities. I served a term on the Nebraska Power Review Board (1985-1989) which regulates all of Nebraska's publicly owned electric utilities, and contributed to its modernizing of operations and regulations.

Following my OPPD service, I served on a legislative study committee that recommended relaxing regulation of Nebraska's publicly owned electric utilities and avoided the ENRON-like deregulation disasters that afflicted other states (LR 455, 1996-1997).

Presently, I serve on the Nebraska Board of Optometry (2011-present) as well as on the Board of Directors of the internationally focused Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry (2012-present).

For my day job, since 1981, I have been a professor in the University of Nebraska at Omaha College of Business Administration. I teach and research in the areas of law and economics. I earned a J.D. from University of Nebraska's Law School in 1978 and a Ph.D. from University of Nebraska's Economics Department in 1983.

I would appreciate your support and your vote on November 4th. Donations are accepted via [www.ActBlue.com/entity/fundraisers/36440](http://www.ActBlue.com/entity/fundraisers/36440).

How can you help? You will help all candidates by boosting turnout in an off-year election if you obtain signatures for the petition to place an increase of Nebraska's minimum wage on the ballot.

## Meet Our Candidates

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### Patte Newman, Candidate for District 5, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners

Two items about the relationship between State and County government caught the attention of editorial boards and reporters of Nebraska newspapers in the past couple of years. Both are worthy of further comment here. With the exciting announcement of the Hassebrook/Raybould gubernatorial ticket, Jane's four year experience on the Lancaster County Board could be a win for *all* counties in Nebraska.



The State of Nebraska defines the duties, obligations and responsibilities of County Government per statute. Reimbursement of the mandated services is sometimes appropriated, but not always in sufficient amounts to meet costs by county departments. Just as the state is unhappy when federal law creates unfunded mandates, County Government cannot easily adjust to new burdens imposed by the state.

**Item # 1:** In March of this year, state legislators struggled to find ways to address overcrowding in the state prison system. A Department of Correctional Services spokesperson insisted that no formal requests to transfer state prisoners to county custody had occurred, but that some counties were interested in housing inmates if space was available and they were reimbursed. Several Nebraska county officials said "not so fast."

As early as January 31, 2008, the *Grand Island Independent* pointed out that the appropriations cap of \$3.9 million left Hall County with \$243,000 in unpaid state inmate costs at their county jail. Originally in 1998, \$6.8 million was earmarked to fund this reimbursement, but in 2002 the funding was cut to \$3.9 million. Reimbursement of \$35 per day (well below actual costs in many counties including Lancaster which is estimated at \$89/day) stopped when the appropriation funding was depleted early each year. While this amount was a pittance in the Nebraska state budget, the amount was a significant burden to Hall County which is currently turning paved roads back to gravel to save on maintenance costs.

Mike Thurber, Corrections Director for Lancaster County, stated in a March 14, 2014 *Lincoln*

*Journal Star (LJS)* article that the State of Nebraska owed Lancaster County over \$3 million when the Legislature repealed the \$35 per day reimbursement.

Not only was the money owed never paid, but the cost of continuing to house prisoners in county jail until they are sentenced to state prison is now at around \$8 million. For jails with excess capacity, there are questions as to whether county corrections facilities can safely house prison inmates needing maximum-security and additional guards. More importantly, the *LJS* editorial staff headline from March 18 referred to State promises, "Can you trust 'em?"

A Nebraska Association of County Officials news story (3-24-14) also emphasized that there is a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Douglas and Lancaster County officials over the possibility of allotting empty jail cells to house prison inmates. The Douglas County Board chairwoman, Mary Ann Borgeson, was quoted as saying, ". . . they say they want to contract with us and say they will pay for it. But that can change in a heartbeat."

The editorial staff of the *Omaha World Herald* (6-26-14) also took note of the impact on county budgets when unfunded mandates are enacted and costs shift back to the shoulders of county officials. Professionals who have worked in county government for decades are finally admitting that it is becoming a major problem.

On top of the changes and loss of state aid to counties and reimbursement for housing state prisoners, sadly, the budgeting dilemma does not end there. This brings us to . . .

**Item #2:** Governor Heineman's tunnel vision quest to end inheritance taxes in Nebraska sent many county officials marching to the statehouse.

To understand the problems facing county officials, we need to look at how county governments get revenue. There is no income tax and currently in Lancaster County all sales tax goes to either the city or the state. There are some fees charged for services and a lodging tax is allowed but that revenue raised is restricted for improvements relating to promoting tourism. Property tax and inheritance tax make up the bulk of county revenue. In one year, the Lancaster County Treasurer collected sales tax of \$29 million for the state through the motor vehicle division, but was only allowed to keep \$1800 as a collection fee. Statewide, the amount of inheritance taxes distributed to 93 counties averages \$43 million. Some argue that those taxes can cause the family to lose the farm or business.

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In reality, spouses are exempt from paying “death taxes” when they inherit money or property. Parents, siblings or children pay 1% after a total of \$40,000. As the relationship becomes more remote, the percentage owed increases and the exempt total goes down. However, a breakdown of who (relatives or business partners?) is paying what (percentage) from where (in state or out of state?) does not seem to be well documented by the State of Nebraska.

The state sets *spending limits and a mill levy limit* on county government. At a Revenue Committee hearing in November 2012, while discussing inheritance tax, representatives from Banner, Douglas, Keith, Lancaster and Sheridan Counties spoke about the importance of inheritance tax revenue for their budgets. Emphasis was placed on the unintended consequences of shifting that tax burden and the cost to counties slashing services if the revenue was not replaced in some manner. According to an OpenSky Policy Institute report, ten counties rely on inheritance taxes for more than 10% of their general fund budget (22.33% in Blaine County). Nineteen Nebraska counties were at or near the state-imposed property levy limit of 50 cents per \$100 of property value in 2011 with thirty-nine counties nearing the 90% mark. Counties are also required by state law to limit revenue growth to 2.5% (or 3.5% allowed with approval of 3/4 of the board members). Ninety percent of counties increased the limit in 2012. OpenSky estimated that if inheritance taxes were repealed forty-six of Nebraska’s counties would need a public vote to override the 3.5% lid.

The Lancaster County Board of Commissioners sent a letter to Governor Heineman to educate him on the need for inheritance tax (\$8.2 million in 2012) to keep property taxes low. They said they would have to eliminate 15% of the county’s workforce in many public and community health programs because of the deficit created without this revenue. Although the County levee was at 28.43, with elimination of the inheritance tax there would be a need to increase property taxes to provide necessary services since cash reserves of \$6 million are insufficient to cover operating needs.

When State Senator Kathy Campbell (Lincoln’s very dedicated and conscientious former County Commissioner) fought for Medicaid expansion in 2014, it was, no doubt, with the knowledge of the responsibilities of county government to provide general assistance for indigent citizens.

**The lesson learned:** It is imperative that all county officials statewide continue to communicate regularly and passionately with their state representatives to ensure the needs of county government are not ignored.

Reform of the foster care and child welfare systems are welcome, prison reform is welcome, and any tax relief is always welcome. Unfortunately, passing the tax burden from one level of government is not. Unfunded mandates for juvenile, district and county courts, general assistance, veteran’s programs, administering elections and maintaining roads need to be addressed. Ideas like increasing the percentage counties can retain for collection fees from motor vehicle taxes or document stamp taxes might be options for holding that line, without affecting county services. Further consolidation of services has been discussed.

Simple sound bites from politicians should never be *unquestioned*. Good policy must be backed by solid historic data, communication and discussion with multiple voices and, at all levels of government, to result in educated decision making. County residents already concerned with high property taxes should not have to bear the brunt of state cuts or state mandates.

County officials statewide should be encouraged that the Chuck Hassebrook and Jane Raybould team understands the need for a good, trusting relationship between state and county governments and the need to work together to continue the good life in Nebraska for all of us. (Nice!)

## Meet Our Candidates

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### LPSNRD Budget Season: Bottom Up, Top Down, and All Around

By Karen Amen, Board Member, Subdistrict 10,  
Lower Platte South NRD



It's not uncommon for our eyes to glaze over when we start analyzing the fine points of an organization's budget. It's tempting to say: "I know what needs to be accomplished; someone else can make the numbers work." But whether it's an individual's earning and spending plan or a private sector company's cash flow plan or a government agency's taxes raised and projects funded plan, the meaning of the dollars involved is the same. Each dollar coming in or going out represents something of value to the people involved.

When Lower Platte South begins its annual budgeting process, both Board and staff feel a genuine sense of responsibility for making the best possible use of the dollars we receive. Skeptics might say, "Sure, that sounds good, but in reality, it's all a matter of who has the most influence or who fights the hardest for their share of the pie." Well, in my six years of going through our agency's budgeting process, I never cease to be amazed at how thoughtful and collaborative we are. In this article, I'll describe our process and then invite you to join us. For specific budget numbers and a pie chart of how we spend our money, please go to <http://lpsnrd.org/AboutUs/budget.htm>.

I like to think of our budget process as being bottom up. It begins at the subcommittee level, with a review of our twelve statutory purposes and of our Long Range Implementation Plan. We examine each line item, talking about the potential expenditure and where it fits into our purposes and priorities. Then, we develop and approve a draft budget for our committees for the coming year.

I like to think of our budget process as being top down. The Board Finance and Planning Committee combines the results from each subcommittee and puts everything together into a draft total budget. They decide whether it's a doable and reasonable whole and whether the

required tax levy will be within the range permitted by law. If cuts need to be made, they will determine how best to do so. If certain vital projects need bolstering, they'll address how best to do that.

Most of all, I like to think of our budget process as being all around. As a locally based governmental agency, we are extremely responsive to local issues. Individuals, neighborhood organizations, municipalities, small towns, regions, and other governmental entities are welcome to come to us with their suggestions and requests. We appreciate hearing from everyone. That's where you, the reader, come in. We're in the midst of our process right now and are eager for your thoughts. Please visit our home page, <http://lpsnrd.org/index.htm>. Think about what you'd like to tell us, and then either by phone, email or in person, let us know how you'd like us to spend your valuable dollars.

"Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear."

[*Special Message to the Congress on the Internal Security of the United States, August 8, 1950*] — Harry S. Truman

## Meet Our Candidates



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

I am running for the LPSNRD board in order to:

- Protect Lincoln's water,
- Expand our trails,
- Provide stewardship for the environment.

The first priority for the NRD is to insure that there is adequate groundwater for all of our constituents. Water is necessary for life and one of the most important natural resources. Events such as the drought of 2012 and recent discussions regarding the city of Lincoln expanding its well fields exemplifies how we need to have plans in place to protect our water. If elected, I will fight to make sure that the board is looking at proactive solutions to get ahead of any water issues before it becomes a crisis.

I will advocate for expanding and improving our network of trails. Lincoln already has a great trail system but we need to make sure it continues and serves the needs of our citizens. Our trail network can be used to encourage economic development.

I will work together with our city and county officials to use our trail system as a tool for attracting new businesses and high paying jobs.

We need to think of trails as more than an amenity and, instead, as a transportation network for the 21st century.

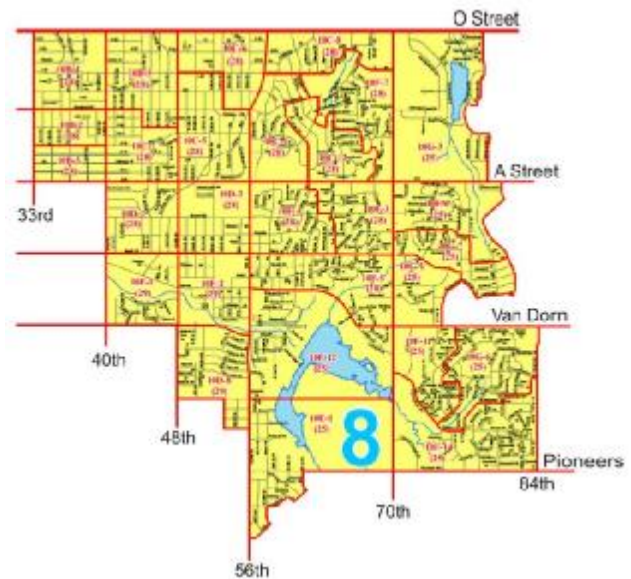
I will also be, foremost, a steward of our environment. We must look at the effects of the decisions we make on our water, air, and surroundings. It is always better to prevent a disaster than clean one up afterwards. I will

have this mindset when I make decisions on the NRD board.

In order to be elected and work for these goals I will need your help. Of course, I would appreciate any monetary donation you could offer. You can donate online at [www.greenformrd.com](http://www.greenformrd.com).

I also need your vote. A map of the district is below as well as on my webpage. If you live in the district, please let me know, and if you know anyone who lives in the district, tell them to vote for Tom Green for LPSNRD board.

I would also appreciate any names and addresses of people in my district who may be able to volunteer or take a yard sign when they are available. E-mail me at [GreenForNRD@gmail.com](mailto:GreenForNRD@gmail.com).



## Issues

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### Learning the (College) Ropes By Maggie Mae Squires

These are trying times for prospective college degree holders: The American Dream has become an American nightmare. July 1, 2014 interest rates for student loans increase,



again. (In early May, the U.S. Treasury completed an auction of the 10-year note, selling \$24 billion at a yield of 2.61%. This is 0.8% higher than the 1.81% yield produced at the same auction this time last year. This is the yield upon which federal student loan interest rates are based, so the federal student loan interest rates will also rise by 0.8%.) Direct unsubsidized loans for undergraduates jump from 3.86% to 4.66%. The Direct PLUS loans, available to parents or graduate students, climbs from 6.41% to 7.21%.

Bipartisan Congressional action quelled outrage when the undergraduate Stafford loan rate doubled from 3.4% to 6.8% on July 1, 2013. Congressional legislation passed later in July tied the undergraduate Stafford rate to 2.05% plus the 10-year yield. (So, 2.05% plus the May 2014 10-year yield of 2.61%, results in the new rate of 4.66% for direct unsubsidized loans for undergraduates.) Realizing the 10-year yield will continue to increase, the legislation also capped federal student loan rates at 8.25% for undergraduate Stafford loans, 9.5% for graduate Stafford loans and 10.5% for direct PLUS loans.

Federal student loan interest rates are fixed for the life of the loan. But now these rates reset every July 1 for new borrowers. Thanks to Congress, federal student loan interest rates are tied to the performance of the financial markets. If the market continues to do well, rates will cap at their highest in no time.

Resident costs per year at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln are estimated to be near \$18,000, *which* does not include books *and* supplies or any other miscellaneous expenses. Non-resident costs are estimated to be \$31,000 per year. At a private institution, such as Doane College, the cost is even more, topping \$35,000 per year.

I won't do the math (I was a philosophy major, physics minor), but imagine the stress and pressure to perform

well in school knowing that when you finish, you will have acquired enough debt so that you will be paying off what it would cost to buy a decent sized home in Lincoln, Nebraska. The only difference is the interest rate is up to three times higher than if you had bought a house.

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D- Massachusetts) introduced a bill that would have allowed refinancing of student loans at 3.86% and would have covered costs by increasing taxes on wealthier families. This bill was turned down by the Senate on June 11. However, on June 9, President Barack Obama signed an executive order allowing millions of student loan borrowers to cap their payments at 10% of their monthly income. All the while, unpaid student debt has doubled since 2007 to nearly \$1.3 trillion; that's right, trillion.

While our struggling middle-class students oftentimes must declare bankruptcy after earning their degree, Finland enjoys university education funded by the State through the Ministry of Education with few programs carrying any tuition fees. Norwegian state universities and colleges do not charge tuition fees for international students (but will pay \$50-100 semester fee) including undergraduate, Masters and Ph.D programs. Sweden charges a very minimal tuition fee on undergraduate and masters programs while Ph.D programs remain tuition-free. Austria and Germany also charge very little in tuition fees.

There is a generation of students and parents who should be very carefully studying who they vote for and elect to their local, state and federal governments. And I can't help but agree with the President, "If you're a big oil company, they [congressional Republicans] will go to bat for you, if you're a student, good luck."

Today, education is necessary to compete. We live in a time where a bachelor's degree is the norm, while more and more of us complete our Masters and PhDs. Yet secretarial positions are filled by lawyers and there are stacks of resumes on the desk of every manager who has a position to be filled. It is no longer common or easy to find a dream job right after graduation. Is the humdrum of the 8-5ers too much to ask?

Now I don't know about you, but student loan interest rates are high, too high. You would be unlikely to convince me that I should attend college without knowing exactly what it is I want to do for the rest of my life. The costs are phenomenal.



## Issues

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### **Addressing the Long-Term Care Needs of Nebraska's Aging Population through Home and Community Based Services**

**By Dr. Christopher Kelly, Department of Gerontology, University of Nebraska at Omaha**

The aging of Nebraska is a foregone conclusion. As in every state, the baby boom generation represents the largest birth cohort within Nebraska's population, and during the period from 2011-2029, Nebraskans of this generation are reaching the age of 65, growing the state's older population to nearly 420,000 by 2030. As in several states, the proportion of older Nebraskans within the state's population will also grow, because other demographic changes such as birth rates and immigration are not projected to keep pace with the aging of Nebraska.

Some of the impacts of an aging Nebraska are already well-known. The state's baby boomers are becoming eligible for Social Security and Medicare and will produce unprecedented strains on these programs, particularly over the next two decades. Additionally, since Medicare does not meet all the health care expenses of older Americans, particularly long-term care costs, older Nebraskans will pay higher out-of-pocket costs for these services and will increasingly rely upon Medicaid when they can no longer meet these expenses. The specter of future Medicaid long-term care costs to Nebraska looms quite large, with these expenses to the State already totaling nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in FY 2013.

Nonetheless, the continued upward spiraling of Medicaid long-term care costs to Nebraska is *not* a foregone conclusion. Today, the highest per diem costs for long-term care to Nebraska's Medicaid program derive from care provided by skilled nursing facilities. Nursing home care in Nebraska averages more than \$75,000 in annual costs per resident. However, nursing home placement, while necessary for some individuals who require skilled nursing assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is not needed by *everyone* who receives long-term care. The most effective way to save costs to the Nebraska Medicaid program is to delay or prevent unnecessary nursing home placement.

Assisted living has long been marketed as a residential alternative to nursing homes; however, these settings are limited in their capacity to meet the current

and future long-term care needs of older Nebraskans. Assisted living facilities are not required to provide the professional staffing commensurate to residents with clinical diagnoses such as dementia; in addition, most do not provide personal care assistance to residents with activities of daily living (ADLs), such as bathing, dressing, feeding, and toileting. Further, the supply of assisted living facilities in Nebraska is limited (especially in rural areas). Finally, assisted living is expensive to families (most facilities do not accept Medicaid).

For these reasons, the most effective way to lower long-term care costs, and to delay or prevent nursing home placement, is through home and community-based services (HCBS). These services cost roughly a quarter, per day, of expenses in skilled nursing facilities. For many older Nebraskans, HCBS are already available. In Nebraska's three metropolitan counties, home health agencies and personal care providers represent two of the fastest growing industries in the private sector. However, the affordability and the availability of private and for-profit HCBS providers for low-income and/or rural elders are limited. The best option for lowering long-term care costs for all Nebraskans is to expand lower-cost HCBS in the public sector. This includes working in continued partnership with public programs delivering HCBS to older Nebraskans, particularly the state's eight Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), which receive federal funding to deliver services such as nutrition, transportation, and care management under the Older Americans Act.

While the demand for health care and long-term care services among older Nebraskans will continue to increase over the next two decades, this increased demand does not necessarily require a corresponding increase in costs to the State. The key lies in the ability of Nebraska lawmakers, working with providers in both the public and private sectors, to help delay or prevent unnecessary nursing home placement through the expansion of more affordable alternatives, specifically, HCBS. The Aging Nebraskans Task Force, created this year under LB 690, and chaired by Senator Kate Bolz, offers a means through which this can happen. By expanding these HCBS options, especially to Nebraska's underserved low-income and rural populations, we can ensure that our State meets its long-term care challenges in a way that provides more choices for our seniors and is economically sustainable.

## Labor's Perspective

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By John Kretschmar

When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Harris v. Quinn*, unions again became a topic of lively discussion. Unlike Nebraska, Illinois, where the case is centered, is one of more than 20 “union shop” states that require government employees, who are represented by labor unions, to pay their fair share of the cost of essential union functions like collective bargaining, and contract administration.

The plaintiffs in this case were represented by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation. The union had done its job in increasing caregiver pay and benefits as well as improving the quality of home care for the disabled. Employee turnover declined, and training and supervision improved after the union was established.

The plaintiffs argued that they are entitled to receive all the benefits that flow from having a union without having to pay their fair share for that coverage. They wanted the Supreme Court to overturn a 1977 decision. In that older case, the court ruled that no employee can be forced to support the union's political agenda; however, “union shop” states can require covered employees to pay their fair share of essential union responsibilities.

This is, of course, what happens all the time in so-called right to work states like Nebraska. Unions have long decried the injustice of covered employees not paying their fair share. What those non-payers don't fully appreciate is that the fewer members the union has, the weaker it appears in the eyes of employers. Applying the need for union solidarity to an historic event we all learned as children, how well would the American Revolution have gone if only eight of the original 13 colonies had decided to unite to gain independence from England? Chances are we'd never have succeeded; we'd be drinking tea instead of coffee; and we'd have a much finer appreciation for the game of soccer.

Just as solidarity was critical in gaining the power needed to win the Revolutionary War and gain an independent voice in charting our future quality of life, so union density in the workplace and across the nation is critical to reducing income inequality and once again insuring that everyday wage earners have a fair shot at the American Dream.

## 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 they are just ordinary citizens who have a message to give their audience.

Recent guests have included Karen Amen from the NRD and Mary Harding from NPPD. We are also planning to edit some of the candidates' speeches from our County Convention that was held on June 8th. We plan to air those as time permits.

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

“One voice can change a room, and if one voice can change a room, then it can change a city, and if it can change a city, it can change a state, and if it change a state, it can change a nation, and if it can change a nation, it can change the world.  
Your voice can change the world.”

— Barack Obama

## Candidates Hit the Campaign Trail



Chuck Hassebrook and Jane Raybould



Dennis Crawford



Better Wages for Nebraska



John Yoakum, Korey Reiman, and other volunteers



The Bottle Tops: Fundraiser for Mary Harding for NPPD



Amanda McGill works the Waverly Parade



*Lancaster County  
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