



The Lancaster County Democrat

January 2015



Lincoln is Thriving Thanks to Democratic Leadership By Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler

Democrats are getting it done in Lincoln.

For the past eight years, Democrats have left an indelible mark on our community. Together, we have worked tirelessly to make Lincoln a great city, where you can find a good job, raise a family, live in a strong and safe neighborhood, and find opportunity like never before.

The evidence is overwhelming:

- Forbes has cited Lincoln as a Top 10 Best Place for Businesses and Careers; other national publications rank us highly as the best place for young entrepreneurs, to locate a company, and for jobs.
- Lincoln consistently receives high national rankings for our quality of life and affordability.
- Lincoln's crime rate is at its lowest in 40 years. The violent crime rate is 30% lower than the rates of similarly sized cities.
- We increased Lincoln's commitment to renewable energy and made our city more energy efficient.
- We are nationally recognized for one of the country's best trail systems.
- In November, Lincoln had the lowest unemployment rate in the nation.
- Our neighborhoods are seeing their sidewalks repaired with a \$4 million investment, a new ordinance is removing blighted properties and improving housing, and our Stronger Safer Neighborhoods program has dramatically reduced police calls in targeted areas.
- An elected official contract ban is making sure the people's interest is the only interest being served at City Hall.
- A new and expanded health clinic will soon be providing improved healthcare access for low income residents.
- Our investment in high tech infrastructure is attracting new companies, increasing competition among Internet providers, and creating greater access across the city.

How we have we done it?

Democratic leadership.

For the past eight years, I have worked closely with City Council members Jonathan Cook, Doug Emery, Carl Eskridge, Leirion Gaylor Baird, Dan Marvin, Gene Carroll, DiAnna Schimek, and the late Jayne Snyder to make Lincoln a complete community.

When my Administration took office eight years ago, the budget was structurally imbalanced, the City inhibited private sector growth, and people simply did not trust City Hall. Today, our budget is sound, our economy is growing, and the public is included in our decision making.

That's why the upcoming City elections are so important. If we want to continue and accelerate our past success, we need to return Carl Eskridge to the City Council and work diligently to elect Jane Raybould to the Southwest District seat and Mitch Paine or Meg Mikolajczyk in Northeast Lincoln.

I know we can do it. Lincoln's progress has been relentless and our success boundless. We have overcome great challenges before and will continue to do so. We just need to make sure the public knows our story.

That's where the Lancaster County Democratic Party comes in. You have made the calls, walked the streets, and tirelessly worked to make Lincoln a great city. As the 2015 Elections approach, I look forward to working with you side-by-side to make a bright future even brighter. Democrats will get it done.

As we look to the future, I hope we will take a moment to celebrate the past. Jonathan Cook has served Lincoln for 16 years. He has been a true champion for the parks, pools, libraries, and senior centers that have been so critical to our quality of life. For the last eight years, Doug Emery has brought people together with his passion and common sense, fighting to improve neighborhoods, building our economy, and overseeing the tremendously successful Pinnacle Bank Arena. They will be missed.

Meet Our Candidates

Runners, take your mark...

By Carl Eskridge, Candidate for Lincoln City Council

Lincoln Democrats, it's time. 2015 is an odd year and odd years are when Lincoln conducts its city elections. But why is that? Rather than playing second fiddle to the larger, louder, and much more costly state and national campaigns, Lincoln's off-year



city elections afford local voters the opportunity to focus on those things that matter most to local residents and businesses. In 2015, in addition to electing the mayor, four district City Council representatives, and three school board members, it is likely that Lincoln voters will also vote on a three-year ¼-cent sales tax for public safety. 2015 is a year to focus on the unique opportunities and needs of Lincoln.

Before looking forward, let's remember where we have been. Unlike most communities that were focused on surviving the challenges of the Great Recession, Lincoln chose a different path. Led by Mayor Beutler and community leaders, Lincoln voters were challenged to move our great city forward by building a new arena and expanding the very successful Haymarket District. Despite challenging economic times, in 2010 Lincoln voters dared to look to the future. Today, less than five years after making that bold decision, the foresight of local voters has been rewarded and Lincoln is receiving widespread accolades as a premier American city. It is a great place to live, to work, to learn, to do business, and to have fun. Among its many accomplishments, Lincoln has been recognized as "the happiest city" and currently enjoys the lowest unemployment rate of any city in the United States.

It has been my great honor and privilege to serve you on the Lincoln City Council during this momentous time in our city's history. As the representative of

and northwest Lincoln, I have been a tireless advocate for families, neighborhoods, and businesses, small and large. I have worked hard for public safety, rejecting the closing of a fire station in Air Park, making our streets and neighborhoods safer, and working to provide storm shelters for some of the most vulnerable of Lincoln's citizens. I have demanded improvements to the city's infrastructure including streets, sidewalks, reliable water supplies and delivery, storm water, fiber, cable, improved parks, and modern libraries. I have maintained positive and collaborative relationships with Council colleagues, the Mayor and his staff, city and county departments, County Board members, School Board members, and state and federal officials. Last, during these four years, I have provided strong and trustworthy leadership, serving as Council Chairman during the 18 months when the Pinnacle Bank Arena and the West Haymarket became a reality.

While I take pride in the accomplishments of these last four years, I am also keenly aware of the many opportunities and challenges that lie ahead of us. We must keep the momentum that is moving our city forward as a vital and growing community. We must continue our drive to attack the infrastructure needs in core parts of the city and the challenges of serving expanding edges created by a growing city. We must renew our dedication to making our neighborhoods safer, our economic opportunities more plentiful, our citizens healthier, and to promote Lincoln as an affirming and welcoming community open to all people. The opportunities and challenges that Lincoln faces require proven leadership now more than ever. Unfortunately, it has been many years since a Council member with experience represented District 4. I hope to change that, and am seeking reelection to represent central and northwest Lincoln for another term.

I am grateful for the support of Lancaster County Democrats over the last four years and seek your assistance in electing a team to keep our great city moving ahead. Please join me on Wednesday, January 21, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Vega in West Haymarket's Railyard to kick off our 2015 campaign to keep moving Lincoln forward.

Meet Our Candidates

Megan Mikolajczyk, Candidate for Lincoln City Council



Someone recently asked me what three causes were closest to my heart. That was easy to answer. Who I am as a person, fundamentally, is shaped by these causes. I examined those causes and noticed they are really just different facets of the same problem; although the law requires it, we are not all treated equally.

My top three concerns, in order

are:

1. Protection and Advancement of women's rights. (Why not start close to home? I am, after all, a woman.)
2. Empowering economically vulnerable populations.
3. Equality for all minority groups: African Americans and other racial minorities, LGBT, religious and ethnic minorities.

Nebraska's state motto is: Equality Before the Law. In a perfect world that would mean that everyone is treated equally, but we all know that is not always the case. What does this have to do with my run for City Council?

Any individual or group who is bigger, stronger, or wealthier than another usually gets the biggest or best piece of the pie. Let's face it, the communities north of "O" Street don't often get the biggest or best piece when it comes to city improvements or new services; sometimes it feels like we only get the crumbs! I want that to change, and if given the opportunity to represent Northeast Lincoln on the Lincoln City Council, I will do all I can to make that change happen.

For example, look at the lead story in the local section of Wednesday's *Lincoln Journal Star* (LJS 1/7/2015). Hy-Vee is closing the only grocery store in University Place. There used to be three grocery stores serving University Place: a Safeway; an IGA; and Holmes Grocery, an independent store. But Hy-Vee can make more money by closing their small store at 48th & Leighton, and so one of our Northeast neighborhood will be stripped of its neighborhood grocery store. It is hard to imagine this same thing could happen in some of the other neighborhoods in Lincoln outside the district.

Many of the voters I've talked to feel the same way and are supporting me because I want to continue to advocate for Northeast Lincoln the way Doug Emery has so passionately done during his time on the Council. School Board Member Kathy Danek and State Senator Marian Price are two of those voters and supporters. These two Northeast Lincoln leaders support my campaign because they want to see Northeast

Lincoln continue to have a strong advocate succeed Councilman Emery and ensure the Northeast Lincoln neighborhoods get more than the crumbs.

I feel right at home in Northeast Lincoln. I love its small town atmosphere and strong sense of community. Northeast Lincoln is the gem of the city as far as I am concerned. That's why my husband and I have made it our home and the place we are raising our family. I am running for the City Council to continue to be the strong voice Northeast Lincoln Council members like Doug Emery and Patte Newman have consistently given to the district. Meg for Northeast Lincoln is the perfect fit for this district.

If you have questions for me regarding the campaign, issues in the City you think need to be addressed, want to find out how to volunteer, or would like to contribute to the campaign, feel free to drop me a line at 4035 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, NE 68503 or megan.mikolajczyk@gmail.com or visit the website: megforcouncil.com.



There are many ways you can help the Lancaster County Democratic Party and its candidates, so please contact Chairman John Yoakum at chair@lancastercountymocrats.org or call the County Party office at 402-476-2268.

Meet Our Candidates

Jane Raybould, Candidate for Lincoln City Council



Jane Raybould was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. She went to Pius X High School, has an undergraduate degree from Creighton University, and earned her master's degree from Georgetown University. Jane works with her family-run, employee-owned business, B&R Stores, Inc., where she is Vice President and Director of Buildings and Equipment.

In the months ahead while campaigning for City Council, Raybould plans to communicate personally with as many voters as possible. "I will spend time on the campaign listening to voters in person to hear their viewpoints on issues such as the South Beltway, City/County consolidation, and public safety," Jane Raybould said. "But at the top of my list will be reducing local property taxes by advocating for the restoration of state aid to cities and communities, as well as ending unfunded mandates. I am eager to work toward providing solutions and fixing problems."

Plan Now to Attend the Annual Patriots' Dinner.

The Lancaster County Democratic Party 2015 Patriots' Dinner will be held Saturday, February 21st at the Center for People Need, 3901 N. 27th Street in Lincoln.

Table prices remain \$600 for a table of 8. This also includes 4 passes to the Mayor's Reception which starts at 5:00 p.m. Social hour will start at 6:00 p.m.; dinner is at 7:00 p.m. Individual tickets are \$85 for the dinner and the Mayor's Reception or \$60 for the dinner only. Dinner entertainment will include a silent auction, a dessert auction and recognition of great Democrats for the work they did in the 2014 election cycle.

Nebraska Democrats can take some pride in November's election results. We helped to increase the minimum wage and elected Brad Ashford to Congress. In Lincoln, Legislative candidates Patty Pansing Brooks and Matt Hansen crushed their GOP opponents. Two Democrats won Legislative District 46 in the primary when James Michael Bowers and Adam Morfeld combined to win 87 percent of the vote. Morfeld prevailed in the general election.

These bright spots show the strength of our Lancaster County Democratic Party. The ongoing financial support of donors like you to the LCDP is one reason for that strength. Without your donations to the LCDP we would not have been able to call nearly 5,000 early voters and distribute 14,000 slate cards. We still need your support for upcoming challenges including the 2015 Lincoln city elections.

We need to re-elect Mayor Chris Beutler and maintain our Democratic majority on the Lincoln City Council and Lincoln Public School Board. The GOP would like nothing more than to flip Lincoln from blue to red.

Lancaster County has three open Legislative seats in 2016. We need to start working now to ensure a moderate and progressive coalition that can pass positive legislation and provide checks and balances for Governor Pete Ricketts and his allies in the Legislature.

Please buy a table for the 2015 Patriots' Dinner by February 13th. Thank you in advance for your support. You can pay by visiting our Act Blue site at www.actbluePatriots2015.com or you can pay by check.

Meet Our Elected Officials

Making Sausage, NRD Style Karen Amen, LPSNRD Subdistrict 10 Board Member

Most people interested in politics and government have heard that quote attributed to Otto von Bismarck: “*Laws are like sausages; it is better not to see them being made.*”



Well, I’m a descendent of a family known for its neighborhood grocery store, where making sausage was a weekly event done under the careful supervision of my Uncle Rudy. I tend to agree with a *New York Times* reporter named Robert Pear whose article titled *If Only Laws Were Like Sausages* appeared in the Dec 4, 2010 issue of the *Times*. Pear goes on to explain, “In other words, the legislative process, though messy and sometimes unappetizing, can produce healthy, wholesome results.”

Pear then goes on to describe his visit to the Simply Sausage factory 10 miles outside D.C. The Company’s owner, Stanley Feder, states, “I’m so insulted when people say that lawmaking is like sausage making.” He demonstrates how at his factory, sausage making is tightly controlled. Inedible and unsavory raw ingredients are thrown out and only the highest quality ingredients are retained. Feder (and, I assume, the reporter) do not see the process of making legislation as being that pristine.

How, you might ask, does this topic have anything to do with the NRD’s? The answer is simple. I am writing this article on Wednesday, January 7th, just as members of the Unicameral are swearing in the newest class, choosing committee chairs, and getting ready to introduce their favorite bills over the next nine days. Once those bills are all in, the “sausage making” begins and the state’s 23 NRDs will be right in the midst of it.

Here’s how the process happens at Lower Platte South. Our staff and executive committee examine any and all bills that might impact our work. They bring those bills to the attention of the full LPSNRD Board and we make a first-cut decision on whether to support, oppose, monitor or remain neutral on each bill. Then, at the end of January, we and all the other NRD directors across the state will gather at the Embassy Suites for our annual

legislative conference, under the umbrella of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD).

At this conference, the body as a whole reviews all bills and the tentative positions in further detail and then, once again, the individual NRDs caucus to examine, one more time, their position on each bill and to propose amendments, as desired. Finally, the whole NARD group comes together again on the second day and each NRD publicly votes on each bill based on the results of their individual caucuses.

It is that “group as a whole” vote and decision that determines the official position of the NARD when communicating with and testifying before the Legislature. As convoluted as it may sound in print, the process actually works remarkably well. Yes, there can be varying viewpoints, there can be differing opinions based on the different geographic realities of the state, and there can be reflections of individual Board members’ political affiliations. But for the most part, I’ve been very favorably impressed with how this process works for making decisions about the best way to manage Nebraska’s natural resources.

Oh, and one final note. Each of you reading this article can impact the legislative process by going directly to your own state senator, of course. But if you want to learn more details about natural resources issues or express your opinion on a particular natural resource bill, please feel welcome to call your personal NRD representative to talk about any pending legislation. I personally would consider that a high quality ingredient for legislative sausage.

The Watchful Citizen

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 are currently scheduling a show on the Affordable Care Act. Other shows will highlight interviews of candidates for the 2015 Lincoln city elections, and information about the 2015 Patriots’ Dinner.

And check our video archive on Youtube:
<http://www.youtube.com/LancasterCountyDems>.

County Party History

County Party Memories

By Tom Green



My history with the Lancaster County Democratic Party starts in the late 1990s. Before I get into that, a little history about me. A native of Omaha, I got involved in Democratic politics there by volunteering for James Martin Davis's congressional campaign. From that campaign I got involved with the Young Democrats and even worked for a summer for the State Democratic Party as 2nd Congressional District Field Coordinator. Funny enough, my boss, the state chair, was Ken Haar whom I now have the honor of working for in the Legislature. That's what got me started in this whole political thing, but what brought me to Lincoln was—like a lot of young people—college.

During my undergraduate career, I joined both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Young Democrats and the Lancaster County Democratic Party. Mike Donlan was the County Chair. I have always felt welcomed by the LCDP. As a young man who was not from Lincoln, I was treated with respect and given opportunities and responsibilities. I am proud to say I am a Lancaster County Democrat because if you show up and do the work then you are quick to move up in the organization.

When I first joined the LCDP I also joined and took part in the Issues Committee. Carol Yoakum was the chair and we often met at her house. We had a good group of people and discussed issues from the death penalty, concealed carry, to bike racks on busses, and sidewalk repair. When the committee took a position on an issue and the Central Committee agreed, we would send a letter to the appropriate elected officials. As the Issues Committee continued to work hard, the letters

started to become time consuming for the county party secretary, so we created a position of corresponding secretary to handle our communications. Of course, I was elected (perhaps drafted is more accurate) as corresponding secretary.

Over time I have worked with many of our county chairs from the aforementioned Mike Donlan to Justin Carlson, Kevin Bernandt, Becki Gaston-Wise, and now John Yoakum. All have had their own style and I have learned a lot from all of them. I now have served as the Bylaws Chair for the past several years. I enjoy my service for the County Party and look forward to continuing our work of electing Democrats to office in Lincoln and Lancaster County.

This is how I got started about 15 years ago in the Lancaster County Democratic Party. The people are great, the cause is just, and the successes are sweet. I look forward to further service and enjoyed this look back at how I got started.

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 or Marlene Cupp at rc34712@windstream.net.

Documentaries for Democrats

By Patte Newman



For anyone restless while homebound on a cold January night, here are a few suggestions to search for on Netflix or in the Lincoln City Library documentary DVD section. Even if you normally prefer adventure, thrillers, or movies like *The Wolf of Wall Street*—some of these might have

a bit of it all.

At the top of the list, in the aftermath of voter approved minimum wage hikes in Nebraska and other states nationwide, it seems timely to look at what has happened with incomes over the past several decades. With the drop in union numbers, a shrinking middle class and income disparity, does the “income gap” matter?

According to *Inequality for All* (produced by Robert Reich, former Labor Secretary under Clinton and now author, university professor and lifelong economist), it does. Reich illustrates disturbing historic similarities to the late 1920s and details why this matters.

Reich starts this documentary reflecting on the years of prosperity in the late 1950s, and that sense of opportunity for believers of the American Dream; specifically, that anyone could achieve their goals with hard work. Record numbers earned a college education after WWII, in part thanks to the GI Bill. The U.S. had the best-educated workforce of any country in the world. Thirty-five percent of workers belonged to unions that worked to ensure decent wages, benefits and pensions for their members. Companies hired more people, workers earned more and the economy expanded. There was a strong, vibrant middle class spending money that was recirculating in that booming economy. From 1930, GDP growth and productivity increased. Hourly earnings rose until the late 1970s when they flattened. Then, the income gap started growing.

Labor unions lost numbers with Reagan’s firing of air traffic controllers and his major assault on unions. The share of national income of the middle class started to decline. Financial markets increased and regulations declined. Wages of working Americans dropped, manufacturing jobs moved abroad or technology took over. Corporate business models encouraging lower retail prices (and quality?) of goods drove jobs overseas; warehouse and internet sales increased along with

technological advances and replaced mom and pop shops on America’s main streets. Less local money circulated in small towns with brick and mortar storefronts and more workers lost their jobs.

Medium income in 1978 was around \$48,000; the medium income of the top 1% was \$394,000. In 2010, those numbers were estimated at \$34,000 and \$1.1 million. Incomes for cashiers, bank tellers, preschool teachers and meat packers are less in today’s dollar than in 1970. At the same time the U.S. cut the top income tax rates from 91% under Eisenhower to 77% under Nixon. Reagan dropped them to 38%.

When the middle class has more expendable income, they spend more money. When people earning millions have spare change they tend to invest it to get the highest return. For two years before the crash, more money was pumped into financial investments in global markets, hedge funds, stocks, housing, and gold. That speculative bubble burst in 2008.

Traditionally, tax rates have been the highest when income inequality rates are lower. When tax revenue drops, aid to states drops and some states cut support of higher education. The investment in people and education dropped. Median wages and purchasing power continued to decline. The 30 years of flat wages forced the nation into a downward vicious cycle where workers buy less, companies downsize, tax revenues decrease, government cuts programs, unemployment increases and education drops.

That crash of 2008 put wealth inequality on the radar with everyone wanting to blame someone else. The Tea Party protested the bailouts and big government. The Occupy movement protested Wall Street and plutocracy.

Reich contends that widening income inequality tracks with a high degree of polarization. He fears that concentrated wealth can undermine our democracy. The use of money to influence policy is not new, but the quantity of money is. The highly touted “free market” system should not be stacked with government policy-makers setting rules to favor only a select few, with corporate bailouts, and unfair tax breaks allowing those to entrench their wealth at the expense of others.

Reich praises President Bill Clinton for his jobs program, an administration that held the claim of the best economy in history and one in which poverty declined. He states that a nation that creates good jobs with good wages and great opportunities for its youth is what counts the most. Reich finishes the documentary to reaffirm the wonderful progress the U.S. has made over the past century with unemployment insurance, civil rights, voting rights, the EPA, Social Security and other

Patte Newman — continued from page 7.

major changes. He refuses to be cynical and says we make the rules and can change those rules. As an economist, he knows that history is on the side of positive social change.

Take the time to watch Robert Reich's *Inequality for All*.

Other documentaries (in no particular order) to consider:

- ***Inside Job*** (2010) produced by Charles H. Ferguson, an informative and easy to follow look at the policies (or lack thereof) and banking practices that led to the financial crisis of December 2000.
- ***Outfoxed*** (2004) by Robert Greenwald, about Rupert Murdoch's "fair and balanced" Fox News Channel.
- ***The Queen of Versailles*** (2012) by Lauren Greenfield on the life and times of Westgate Resorts/timeshare owner David Siegel and his wife to adapt to an economic downturn and attempt to build their 90,000 square foot dream home in Florida. (This is NOT everyone's cup of tea.)
- Anything by Errol Morris. (Look him up on *Wikipedia* to see what a "colorful" character he is.) His documentaries are a bit harder to find and somewhat quirky, but many are worth the search. Famous works include ***Gates of Heaven*** (1978), ***The Thin Blue Line*** (1988), ***Mr. Death*** (1999), and ***Tabloid*** (2010). His documentary ***The Fog of War*** (2003) with former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara who served during the Viet Nam war is a must-see.

Don't hibernate through a cold winter. Grab the remote, nestle into your comfy sofa and enjoy yourself watching something both entertaining and educational.

Labor's Perspective

Examining the Role of Government in Shaping an Economy that Works for All of Us

By John Kretzchmar

The New Year has brought with it a changed political landscape in both Nebraska's Unicameral and in the U.S. Congress. On the bright side, 2015 ushers in improved minimum wage rates Nebraska and 19 other states. But 2015 has also brought more conservative voices to the making of public policy.

Regardless of who is in elected office, Americans understand that in our democratic republic government all levels have a moral responsibility to use our commonwealth in ways that protect and empower ALL of us EQUALLY. This means government has a legitimate interest in insuring that our economy functions in ways that promote the general welfare of the nation as a whole.

As such, government is a "leveler of playing fields" and a promoter of the American Dream, not just for an elite few, but for everyone who works hard and plays by the rules. This is especially important as we continue to come out of the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression. The stock market is at record highs, and Wall Street firms are sitting on trillions of dollars of idle cash waiting for ways to invest it that will maximize short-term profits for corporate investors. At the same time, our current economic recovery is failing to create good paying jobs which is intensifying growing income inequality.

All that serves as prolog to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP): the largest trade agreement in U.S. history. Will it work to support the general welfare of the nation or merely help an economic elite?

Unfortunately, the negotiation of the TPP is going on behind closed doors, and corporations and Wall Street have a greater voice in determining what the TPP looks like than do our elected leaders.

Because the champions of the TPP are the same folks who championed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), organized labor is leery of what the TPP will do. Some within the labor movement fear that the TPP will be NAFTA on steroids!

If the purpose of history is to learn from the past, organized labor learned some hard lessons when the U.S. Congress ratified NAFTA. NAFTA's passage created a large job drain as employers seeking to maximize short-term profits exported good-paying jobs from the U.S. to Mexico in order to drive down the costs of doing business. NAFTA provided a vehicle for stoking corporate profits while accelerating a "race to the bottom" with respect to pay and working conditions in

John Kretzchmar — continued from page 8.

the U.S. Union leadership argued that NAFTA, without enforceable labor and environmental safeguards, was an assault on American values in terms of creating an economy that worked for everyone.

Part of the problem with the TPP, like NAFTA, is being negotiated in secret by corporate interests. Transparency and accountability are missing. The majority of Congress is denied the ability to review and assess what's in the working document. That problem is compounded by the push to give the TPP "fast track" status in Congress. Fast track has, in labor's opinion, three strikes against it: first, there will be limited debate; second, there can only be an up or down vote on the TPP; and finally, Congress will be denied the ability to amend or change the TPP to insure that it's consistent with American values.

Like NAFTA, any disputes arising from how the TPP is implemented will be settled in an "investor-state dispute" mechanism. The "investor-state dispute" mechanism is, in reality, an international tribunal of unelected representatives who make decisions behind closed doors and who can levy fines against governments that fail to alter their laws and regulations to comply with tribunal decisions.

The fear is that the TPP and its international "investor-state dispute" tribunals have the potential to undermine public interest regulations of its signatory members. In the U.S., the TPP can open the door for foreign corporations and the foreign subsidiaries of U.S. corporations to challenge laws and regulations aimed at protecting wage earners, consumers, and the environment.

Nearly every aspect of the TPP as it is currently understood is an assault on the idea of government working in ways that protect and empower all of us equally. As concerned Nebraskans, each of us needs to learn more about the TPP and educate others about the hidden and not so hidden dangers that are part and parcel of this trade agreement.



Opinion

Pure Malice By Bob Haller

Can somebody tell me: Is there any other motive in the opposition to the Affordable Care Act except the desire to do harm to others?

The opponents, who are all persons covered by employer-provided insurance, or by Medicare or veteran status, are trying desperately to keep coverage from the self-insured rejected for "pre-existing conditions," the self-employed, the employees of companies not providing insurance, and the unemployed? They have not tried to explain why they deserve coverage, but their fellow citizens, not so.

The opponents cannot plausibly claim that the ACA has worsened the actual practice of medicine. They have not been supported by any formal spokespersons for:

- doctors, nurses, physical therapists or dentists;
- hospitals and clinics;
- pharmacies and drug companies;
- insurance companies and HMO's;
- public health professionals and agencies;
- think tanks and NGO's seeking ways to improve health care and lower its cost;
- the uninsured, at the time of its passage, or today.

And the opponents have not been able to assert any harm to those who receive coverage thanks to the ACA.

Instead they cheer when they find defects in the on-line exchanges instead of expressing regret at the problems of those seeking to obtain coverage. Our retiring Governor and our filibustering Senators who followed his lead boast of their effectiveness in preventing the state's poor from getting insurance. Our retiring Attorney General wasted taxpayer money on nuisance suits to block implementation of provisions of the law.

Nothing would please the opposition more than a Supreme Court decision to end subsidized insurance payments to the newly covered people in states that refused to expand Medicaid.

Our recently elected U.S. Senator wants to "repeal ObamaCare." He follows up that assertion by listing alternative strategies, certainly less effective, for achieving the goals of the ACA. He at least understands that the ACA was trying to assure universal coverage as the essential precondition of health care reform. See <https://sasseformebraska.com/agenda>.

The opponents justify their malice by asserting that there should not be "government" solution to a

Bob Haller — continued from page 9.

public problem. That assertion undermines democracy, substitutes acrimony for public discussion, and, irrationally allows those motivated by pure malice to claim a virtue.

Sadly, many fellow citizens agree with them.



Cartoon courtesy of Steve Kemper

Do you have an opinion you want to share with the Lancaster County Democratic Party? If so, please write a Letter to the Editor at jsanders@neb.rr.com.

There can be no settlement of a great cause without discussion, and people will not discuss a cause until their attention is drawn to it.

William Jennings Bryan

Opinion

Unicameral Watch 2015

By Ken Snyder, Chairman, Issues Committee

January brings a new session of the Nebraska Unicameral. Each committee will prioritize the issues they want to address. Governor Ricketts will form his coalitions to push his agenda. Special interest groups and individuals will be pushing their causes.

A strong player in the special interest groups in recent years is the Platte Institute for Economic Research. It is a non-political and non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. It advertises itself as an economic research group specializing in economics and education. It does not disclose its contributors but was founded by Pete Ricketts. It takes in about half a million dollars in contributions annually. Its research seems to be tax reduction, anti-union, moving to privatizing education, and reducing government regulations.

Being well funded, it is able to pay for research from respected individuals who support their agenda. It also is able to host seminars that are well publicized and held at very attractive venues (resorts). The major newspapers in Nebraska seem to give them ample space in their papers.

The Institute's board of directors is made up of entrepreneurs, bankers, lawyers, and business people. Some board members are first time successful business people while others are second generations of established wealthy families. How much influence and information between the Platte Institute and national interest special groups cannot be determined as to how much funding comes from people like the Koch brothers and major corporations.

As individuals who are concerned about the agenda pushed by groups like the Platte Institute, we have to ask how we counteract it.

E-mail and letter writing are both ways to contact senators, but they probably receive a large number of these requests. For a senator's staff to track requests and keep the senator fully informed may be a task that has some shortfalls. One problem with individual contact is that groups have a staff that can assist in forming legislation and doing research to equip the senator with information that can be used to support a particular bill.

So is your effort more effective by supporting a lobbying group or by individual effort?

The easiest way is financially supporting the group and doing volunteer work for them if they accept volunteers. If you are not able to provide this type of support, do not get discouraged. Keep your representative informed on the issues that are important to you.

Marijuana in America By Maggie Mae Squires



I think it is time we had the talk...

Marijuana in America is nothing new and it is here to stay.

Perhaps you don't like talking about marijuana?

Let me be the first to say: You are standing in the way of progress (and please don't complain about the tax rates you pay).

Those who call themselves "conservative" do not waste hard-earned tax dollars suing other states for making smart, calculated decisions that improve their quality of life (thank you, Attorney General Bruning). And those who call themselves "liberal" do not stick their head in the sand when a viable option is presented to them.

Marijuana will be legalized in all 50 United States of America.

Luckily for Nebraska, we need not look further than our closest neighbor to see how marijuana has affected a state and its people.

Colorado brings in a jaw-dropping average \$8 million per month in recreational and medical marijuana use tax revenue. Colorado has the nation's fastest growing economy. Each year the first \$40 million of excise tax revenue from marijuana goes to Colorado schools. Eight million dollars in marijuana tax revenue is allocated to Colorado youth for mental-health programs and drug-prevention education. Colorado has seen a decrease in crime rates, traffic fatalities, arrest rates and judicial savings totaling millions of dollars. In one year, marijuana tax revenue alone could top \$3 billion.

Twenty-three states have legalized medical marijuana. Alaska, Colorado, Oregon and Washington have legalized marijuana use. Washington D.C.'s legalization is currently blocked by Congress. (The House also passed a bill that prohibits expert scientific

advice be given to the Environmental Protection Agency.)

Watch for a medical marijuana bill in the Nebraska Legislature this year. Senator Crawford has one and look for another, better written medical marijuana bill, perhaps by Senator Seiler. Nebraska legalized hemp in 2014. Farmers thank you, Senator Norm Wallman.

The benefits of marijuana use far outweigh the risks.

Marijuana decreases pressure in the eyeball caused by glaucoma. Marijuana increases lung capacity and can reverse the carcinogenic effects of tobacco. Cannabinoids (the active ingredient - THC) in marijuana controls seizures. A chemical (CBC) found in marijuana stops cancer from spreading. THC in marijuana slows the progression of Alzheimer's. Marijuana controls bodily pain and arthritis when THC binds to the receptors in nerves and muscles. Marijuana eases anxiety, PTSD and regulates the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Marijuana calms muscle spasms. Marijuana lessens brutal side effects from treatments and increases appetite. Marijuana keeps you skinny and helps your metabolism. Marijuana treats inflammatory bowel diseases by regulating bacteria and intestinal function and could possibly cure Crohn's Disease. Natural chemicals in marijuana reduce inflammation and promotes sleep. Marijuana improves symptoms of Lupus. Marijuana spurs creativity in the brain. Marijuana soothes Parkinson's Disease tremors. Marijuana seems to have neuroprotective properties that can help heal the brain from trauma, stroke and concussions. Marijuana is not harmful to the body and can help overcome addictions to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. (How many prescriptions could you dispose of properly and replace with a plant?)

We are only scratching the surface of the many uses for marijuana (and we haven't even started on hemp).

The war on this natural weed has failed. Now that jails and prisons outnumber colleges and universities in the United States, it's time to stop and think.

Why are we afraid to say the word "Marijuana"?

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