

## **Torch Bearer 2015: Honoring the Past, Preparing for the Future** **By Jon Rehm, LCDP 2nd Associate Chair/Fundraising Chair**

Please join us at the Holiday Inn Downtown Lincoln, Sunday, June 28th from 7:00-9:00 p.m. for our bi-annual Torch Bearer Awards. Admission is \$25 for hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. Admission is complimentary for monthly sustaining donors of \$10 per month or more.

Torch Bearer started in 2009 as a way to honor outgoing Democratic office holders and party leaders for their service. This year's awards winners are City Councilmen Jonathan Cook and Doug Emery; State Senators Norm Wallman, Russ Karpisek, Danielle Conrad and Amanda McGill Johnson; School Board Members Katie McLeese Stephenson and Ed Zimmer and Lancaster County Public Defender Dennis Keefe. This year's award winners are a distinguished group of individuals who accomplished much while in public office and were outstanding representatives of the Democratic Party.

Lincoln has been transformed over the last 16 years. Jonathan Cook and Doug Emery were strong partners for Mayors Wesely, Seng and Beutler in Lincoln's transformation. Lincoln Public Schools has adapted right along with the changes to Lincoln thanks in part to school board members like Katie McLeese Stephenson and Ed Zimmer.

The Legislative class of 2006 was remarkable for their achievements in Nebraska's unicameral legislature over their eight years of service. Though the state senators we are honoring are now no longer serving in office, I would not be surprised if Danielle Conrad and or Amanda McGill Johnson will take another run at elected office due to their relative young age and extraordinary talent. Amanda McGill Johnson performed the almost unheard of feat of substantially outperforming the Democratic gubernatorial candidate when she ran for auditor last fall. 2014 was a bad year for Democrats in Nebraska and nationally. In a good Democratic year

such as 2006, McGill Johnson would have probably won statewide office.

Regardless of what may happen a few elections from now, we already have Democrats running in Lancaster County in 2016 who need our help now. Kate Bolz is running for re-election in Republican leaning southeast Lincoln and Airport Authority Board Member Anna Wishart has a formidable Republican opponent for Colby Coash's seat. Ken Haar is term limited out of his seat in a Republican leaning district he won narrowly twice. Finally, Cathy Campbell, an actual Republican moderate (see below) is term limited out in her Republican leaning district in east Lincoln. Torch Bearer is our kickoff fundraiser for 2016.

I was asked why Torch Bearer is being made free for sustaining donors. The reason is that I want to encourage monthly sustaining donors, especially via our Act Blue site. Rewards like admission to fundraisers are part of the encouragement. Also, sustaining donations via Act Blue make it easier for us to collect money and for the party to budget and plan for the future. The growth of our sustaining donor program really bore fruit in the 2015 city elections and it has put us in a better position for the 2016 elections than we were in for the 2014 elections.

But we as Democrats are going to have to perform better, which in part means raising more money, than we did in 2014. Our legislative races in Lancaster County aren't going to be fought in the friendly confines of the Near South and Northeast Lincoln. These races will largely be contested in GOP friendly neighborhoods. Pete Ricketts is also going to direct unlimited money into these races to elect Lincoln versions of Beau McCoy and Bill Kintner.

After this legislative session there was a lot of chest thumping by Democrats and progressives about the results of the current legislative session. There was also lots of fawning over supposed moderate Republicans and the non-partisan nature of the legislature. A lot of our friends and allies seem to think that party is irrelevant in the legislature. While I am happy about how this year went in the legislature, I am concerned that if we have another election like we did in 2014, Pete Ricketts really will control the legislature. In addition, a

few good votes doesn't turn the likes of Laura Ebke and Colby Coash into moderate Republicans. Ebke and Coash voted with the likes of Mc Coy and Kintner on the youth minimum wage and on Medicaid expansion. Control of the Unicameral could largely hinge on what happens in Lancaster County in 17 months. A financially strong LCDP can help tip the balance in close races. That's why we need you to come to Torch Bearer.

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## Meet Our Elected Officials

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### Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts: Flood Control

By Ann Bleed, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District Board Member



Last month's floods were bad, but they could have been a lot worse. Some have estimated that the May 6-7 storm that dropped 7 inches of rain was a 500 hundred year storm. Others question this higher estimate, but certainly the storm was record breaking. This storm brought the highest crest on Salt Creek since 1908! Near its peak the United States Geological

Survey measured a flow in Salt Creek at Lincoln of 33,400 cubic feet per second. The average flow on May 6th and at this site for 65 years of record was between 435 and 564 cubic feet per second.

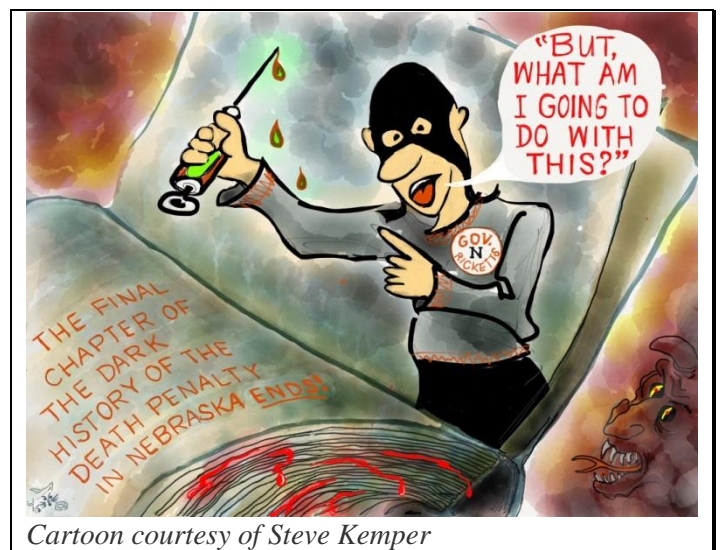
However, thanks to the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (NRD) and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control projects, the flood waters did not overtop the Salt Creek Levee in Lincoln. And, although there was some street flooding behind the levee in Lincoln, and below some dams in the rest of the district, the flood control structures held back tens of thousands of acre feet of water, with some reservoirs in the upper reaches of Salt Creek, near Hallam and Sprague, rising 10 feet or more. Olive Creek, Bluestem, Yankee Hill, and Holmes Lake all held record levels of flood water.

Earlier this spring the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimated that the levee system and Salt Creek Dams have prevented \$156 million in damage to Lincoln's homes and businesses. When the damages prevented by the flood control system during last month's storm are calculated, this number will be many millions of dollars higher.

When the NRDs were created in 1972, one of the 12 responsibilities given to the NRDs by the legislature was "the prevention of damages from flood water and sediment." Since 1972 the board members of the Lower Platte South NRD have chosen to place a high priority on controlling floods throughout the entire district.

Today the NRD is involved in maintaining 180 flood control structures, most all of which was upstream of Lincoln. Approximately one fourth of the NRD's budget is spent on flood control including inspecting, and, when necessary, rehabilitating these structures. Currently the LPSNRD is in the process of developing its budget for the next few years. The current draft of the NRD's budget for 2016 recommends that the district budget \$1.712 million, \$166,000 of which would come from grant money, to rehabilitate existing dams, provide cost share on a new dam, and provide operation and maintenance on existing structures. These numbers do not include repairing the damage from last month's storm, so the final budgeted amount will no doubt be significantly higher.

To this board member, these expenditures sound very high. However, the dollar amounts of flood control benefits from these dams are no doubt much higher, so I believe this money will be well spent. I am also very mindful of the fact that the predictions of the University of Nebraska's report, *Understanding and Assessing Climate Change Implications for Nebraska*, are that such intense storm events are likely to occur more frequently in the future.



Cartoon courtesy of Steve Kemper

## General Election Results By Patte Newman

Candidates beat themselves up after a losing election with questions of “what happened” or “could I have done more or done something different to change the outcome” or “how did my candidacy impact other races”? Here are the numbers and my thoughts on how Council District 2 worked out – for what it’s worth.



The SE Council District currently has 48,934 registered voters; 23,386 Republicans, 13,615 Democrats and 11,933 NPs according to my figures. Historically, the numbers have changed slightly but the results have certainly favored the Republican candidate:

2003 – total votes	16,404:	Johnson	7,377	Camp	8,343
2007 – total votes	18,276:	Abbott	7,337	Camp	10,114
2011 – total votes	12,281:	Kosmicki	5,262	Camp	6,748
		Kinsey write ins	21		
2015 – total votes	18,149:	Newman	8,530	Camp	9,140

I lost by 610 votes or 3.45%. The interesting fact about the Southeast (Kevin Johnson said something similar in 2003) is that the loser in District 2 received more votes than the two winners of both Districts 1 (5,391) and 4 (3,121) combined.

The total of District 2 ballots cast in May included 602 who did not vote for the Council candidate. I still struggle with numbers like 10F-12 where 188 people cast votes but only 180 for council and 186 for Mayor. What are people casting ballots for, if not their local elected representatives?

Ignoring one partial precinct, I compared the 54 Southeast precincts with the Mayor’s race results.

- Mayor and Council races won: 10
- Mayor and Council races lost: 24
- Mayor won and Council race lost: 14 (3 substantially)
- Council race won and Mayor lost: 6 (4 of which I walked personally)

The Mayor won in 24 and I won in 16 precincts. In the precincts I received more votes than my opponent, I personally walked five and had volunteers walking another seven. On the other hand, of the 29 precincts where we did walk and knock, we lost twelve. Several of those precincts were hit by paid canvassers in the last week and two of those were won by the Mayor who received 30 to 40 more votes than I did on the 200 votes cast (i.e. voting for the person and not party lines?).

So the question is does canvassing and hard work win elections or does it all come down to name recognition, money, ads, mailers, party or even negative hit pieces (whether by mail or radio?).

Using the County Board race in 2014 as an example, I lost by 555 votes on a partisan ballot with 19,447 ballots cast. The vote was 9,134 to 8,579 (with 1,734 down ballots or people not voting for that office) in a district consisting of 9,511 Republicans to 7,246 Democrats registered. I walked 340 miles knocking on nearly 8,000 doors and lost. Call me skeptical on whether knocking on doors works in today’s world.

In this race, trying to make sense from precincts we walked and those we didn’t, I see no real significant sign that it helped. In the case of paid canvassers in the last week, it actually appeared to work against me. Friends who know you and believe in you are better suited to “promote you” than paid-walkers-for-hire.

My (non)-conclusion is simply that races with more money do succeed, whatever the strategy employed. We saw that impact in the NE District 1 race as well. Ultimately, second guessing doesn’t win elections. It is unfortunate that with all the hard work to get out the vote (the wonderful people making phone calls for the Party or canvassing that last rainy weekend!) that the people we need to fill in that oval just don’t show up. For the 30,000 some registered SE voters who did not vote and the multitude of citizens who cannot even be bothered to register, I repeat the quote of Alexis de Tocqueville: “In a democracy, we get the government we deserve.” I stand by my conviction that I *was* the better candidate!

Thanks to all of you who helped in any way; walked, phoned, donated front yards for/found locations for or planted yard signs, wrote checks, offered encouragement or voted. You made it worth throwing my name in and fighting a good fight. We almost managed to pull off a win! Thank you!



## From the State House By Patty Pansing Brooks



Greetings, fellow Democrats! My first Legislative Session has just drawn to a close and it has been a whirlwind of a year. As you know, the final days of session were filled with monumental, historic votes on difficult issues and I feel honored and privileged to have been chosen to participate in the process.

Overall, five of the ten bills that I introduced this Session passed and were signed by the Governor, either in their original form or amended into other bills. These bills will make it easier for those who have been unjustly convicted to receive a new trial, standardize international family support payments, increase the monthly personal needs allowance for seniors and those with disabilities in assisted living homes, and continue to provide funds for teachers to receive higher education. The remainder of the bills that I introduced this year will be carried over into the next Legislative Session and I am looking forward to continued discussion about these bills in Committee and on the floor next year.

Of course, one of the most significant votes that we took this year was the override of Governor Ricketts' veto of LB 268, the bill introduced by Senator Ernie Chambers to repeal the death penalty and replace it with life without parole. Casting my vote in favor of the override was a solemn and historic moment that I will remember for the rest of my life. The next day, I was one of the overwhelming number of Senators who voted to override the Governor's veto of LB 623, Senator Jeremy Nordquist's bill to allow DREAMers to apply for driver's licenses. I can't emphasize how gratifying it was to know that our vote meant that hundreds of young Nebraskans were able to apply for driver's licenses the very next day in order to participate more fully in our community and in our workforce. These two votes demonstrate the power of our nonpartisan, Unicameral system of government, which allows each and every Senator to vote according to his or her independent judgment rather than pressure from political parties. The passage of LB 268 and LB 623 took a village to achieve, and I greatly appreciate hearing from all of the constituents who have taken the time to contact my office about these two bills.

Even though the Legislative Session is finished for the year, my office doors are open if you have any issues that you would like to discuss with me and my staff. I always enjoy the conversations that I have with constituents who call or stop by my office to express their thoughts on legislation or to just introduce themselves. Thank you again for this opportunity to

represent and to serve the people of LD 28 in our Legislature!

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## How to Encourage the African-American Communities To Get Out And Vote By Pastor Janet Goodman Banks, Community Advocate

So much wonderful legislative action has taken place in just the latter month of May. Let the "CELEBRATION CONTINUE!" The passage of legislature to end the "Death Penalty," the passage of "DORCA," concerning the "THE DREAM ACT" for the Latino Community, and so much more.

African American or Black Voters make up a sizeable amount of the vote in the Democratic Party as a whole, whether it be here in the State of Nebraska, or across the country. The views to make this a more positive and promising experience for this demographic culture, as well as the party, there are concerns that this culture of community feels the need to be addressed. Some of the concerns have been addressed but not to the degree that would encourage this loyal body of cultural believers to feel that their voices and concerns are being heard, addressed and, even more so.

I have engaged in conversations with many African American or Black people from within the State of Nebraska and from the North, South, East and West of this great country of ours. The concerns are either similar in nature, or the same. Either way, African Americans are very passionate about their values and concerns. African Americans speak about these concerns around the kitchen table, in the faith communities, coffee shops, barber shops, beauty shops, and at work.

Here are some of the expressed concerns that were either brought to me or when I asked as a Community Advocate, Pastor and Woman of Color:

- Those running for public office "DO NOT" engage the Black Community very often, if at all, until election time. How many of those running for office, know the names of, or have visited the black owned business owners here in this state and across the country? Do those running for public office try to set up a time or place to speak to these black owners about their concerns? The black owners feel that they could make a tremendous contribution to those running for public office campaigns by speaking to their customers and clientele. Renaye states, "Election cycles are too late to engage the black voters." Jeanette says, "While engaging the black community, those running for public office, need to be brutally honest is the key. . . ." Jeanette stated, "Our issues and concerns are key to our existence!" Dr. Tyra stated, "Rebuild a relationship with the community residents."

- Derrick states, “Work on issues that need to be addressed by importance.” Renaye states, “Talk about the bread and butter issues such as jobs, incarceration and working family issues impacting the black voters’ families significantly. I personally believe that some headway into some of these issues have been, or are trying to be, addressed here in Nebraska. The pace needs to pick up to the degree that it must. We all realize what has been going on concerning the incarceration rate and ratio of blacks, especially black men, to other races for years. We all are witnessing what is going on concerning the police across the country when it comes to racial profiling, arrest, police brutality and an abuse of power concerning some. I, personally, would like to see legislation for the use of body cameras on Police Officers in this state and across the country. The cameras should aid in the protection of the Police Officers as well as those citizens they are placing under arrest. Those running for public office “MUST” start addressing and “LEGISLATING” laws that will end this. Jeanette states, “Start a movement by offering black men who are locked up for non-violent crimes, a get out of jail card, by training and allowing them to serve a tour of duty in the Armed Forces in exchange for time served, or before time is served. Jeanette states, “This will re-introduce them back into society by allowing them to vote and get an education, which would assist them in being marketable in the job markets and become productive citizens . . . Our Black Men Are Not Throwaways.” Jeanette also stated, “Address the community with ‘HOPE,’ that all is not lost. Dr. Tyra states, “Take an interest in the social justice of ‘OUR’ communities.”
- Johanna states, “Knock on doors, pass out flyers and run television campaigns of the importance of voting.” Derrick states, “Teach the importance of voting and knowing who you are voting for. I personally would also like to see more blacks and people of color in your television campaign ads. You are soliciting the vote of the black communities but there are very few represented in your campaign ads. Also, I, as a Community Advocate and Woman of Color, and volunteer, it would make my job a lot easier to ask voters of the black community to vote for those running for public office if they would engage the black community. The people of the black community need to “KNOW WHO YOU ARE!” The people of the black community will appreciate you as a person running for public office that took the time to speak to them. I personally can and will ask, assist in making phone calls and “GOTV” to those in the community to ask that they vote for those public servants running. It becomes more challenging to do so if you are not willing to “SHOW OUR FACE,” endorse their events or sit down in their homes and engage this community of people.
- I personally believe the black vote cannot be taken for granted. In some cases it has, and I believe “PEOPLE OF COLOR, BLACKS IN PARTICULAR, WILL NOT POSITION THEMSELVES FOR THIS TO CONTINUE!” There is no need for this to happen. Black voters as a whole have been very faithful in the voting block to the party, especially in the General Election. Many want to continue to do so but, so many issues have to start being addressed and legislated from the City, County, State levels all the way to Capitol Hill.
- Renaye States, “Engage strategic partners without being transactional. Churches, Community and Advocacy Groups can be great helps but, don’t wait to be “PIMPED” out and valued only during “GOTV!” Renaye also stated, “Have a strategy to engage the black and latino youth.” Renaye states, “Millennials of color are great assets but we must use different strategies to engage them. Renaye states, “Including young leaders as you develop a plan is important.” I, personally, believe in investing and supporting the “YOUNG DEMOCRATS.” The diversity needs to continue to be taught there as well. This group is “SO TALENTED” and has so much to offer this party. The Young Democrats need financial and educational support. Mrs. Daisy states, “Find a way to get into the high schools and engage these young voters.” Mrs. Daisy states, “Don’t forget the Senior Citizens and those in the Senior Citizens Housing.” Mrs. Daisy states, “Those Senior Citizens are still an active part of the voting block.” Jeanette states, “Introduce a program for mothers in the State’s System (Welfare-DHHS) for all women not working. . . . Parenting Classes, Economic Classes, Character Building Classes making them mandatory to receive funds.” Jeanette also states, “Provide job training classes, opportunities for them to assist teachers, volunteer opportunities in the hospitals, soup kitchens, tutoring kids, while aiding and investing into their communities.”
- I came up during the civil rights era. The African American civil rights started in, and has always been rooted in, the church and its leaders. We may not agree on every issue embodied by the party but, let us agree to disagree in love. We are called “THE BIG TENT PARTY FOR A REASON!” There is room for mature adults to be able to do the above, come back together as a party and people and sing “KUMBYAH!” which the Democratic Party is known for and “VOTE!”

- Dr. Tyra states: “Relationships take time to build. Also, the community needs to be educated on the voting laws, the voting process and the importance of voting. Dr. Tyra also states, “Many don’t feel their vote matters and they must understand why.” Dr. Tyra states, “Community Captains or Neighborhood Associations need to have voting educational campaigns. Dr. Tyra goes on to state, “Campaigns that involve Stop the Violence, Don’t Do Drugs and Rock The Vote!”

It has been an honor and privilege to write this article for the newsletter. I hope and pray that it will awaken and inspire each of us to make this world a better place for everyone.

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## Labor’s Perspective

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### Understanding the Dangers of “Fast Track” and the Trans Pacific Partnership By John Kretzschmar

No one believes buying a vehicle sight unseen is a good idea. Good purchasing decisions are made after people have “done their homework.” Public policy decisions deserve the same careful consideration. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement is public policy that likewise needs careful consideration. Right now there is a “rush to judgement” as the forces aligned for and against the TPP are mustering their forces. On the side of pushing the trade agreement through, for all intents and purposes “sight unseen,” are President Obama, a few Democrats, a larger number of Republicans and a coalition of pro-big business outfits like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and large agribusiness associations.

Opposing the TPP are organized labor, the moderate to liberal wing of the Democratic Party (think Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown and others), the National Farmers Union, environmental groups, and the conservative wing of the Republican Party (think the Tea Party and talking heads like Laura Ingraham). Wow, strange bedfellows both supporting and opposing the TPP and the Trade Promotion Authority (a.k.a. “fast track”).

What’s at the heart of labor’s concerns? The mobility of capital in the never ending search for the maximization of short-term profits. Capital has always moved around the world in search of ever cheaper ways to make goods and services so as to maximize short-term profits for owners. Modern trade agreements reduce

trade barriers and allow capital to move at the speed of electrons. Here’s Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, talking about this well over a decade ago: “Ideally employers should put every plant they own on a barge so that it could move around the world to take advantage of lower wages.” The concern is no longer strictly lower wages, but the minimal regulation for consumer and environmental protections as well.

Organized labor is opposing this trade agreement because it has all the negatives of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA, like the TPP, came after Congress passed a “fast track” approval process. “Fast track” limits our elected representative from modifying the agreement. Essentially fast track turns the vote on the TPP into an unamendable, up-or-down, simple majority vote.

History reveals that the passage of NAFTA (which was also negotiated in secret) created a “giant sucking sound” as manufacturers sent jobs to Mexico where both labor costs and governmental regulations with respect to safety and environmental protections were much looser than in the U.S. NAFTA had virtually no enforceable labor and environmental protections. What is actually in the TPP is being kept a secret until after “fast track” is passed. From the TPP material that’s been leaked, the TPP looks like NAFTA on steroids.

Over and above the very real fear of job loss, reduced food safety and environmental degradation is another issue which focuses on giving up some of our sovereign power to multilateral institutions in the form of TPP dispute tribunals. Large corporations can go directly to the secret trade dispute tribunals which can find that laws and policies like a “Buy American” policy of any governmental agency is actually a “trade barrier.”

But when a trade agreement nation acts in ways that may violate a side agreement on labor or the environment, only governments can go to the tribunals to seek redress. What are the chances that a President Scott Walker would act in ways that address labor and environmental side agreements? And even if it did happen, what are the odds that corporation lawyers who will sit on the tribunals would act in ways to raise living standards in treaty partners?

The problems and unknowns greatly outweigh any benefits of the TPP and that’s why organized labor is opposing it and more immediately “fast track” approval of it.

### Subsidization Modification By Maggie Mae Squires



Farm subsidies are a big part of the Nebraska budget.

\$14 billion was paid to farmers in 14 years: 1995-2009.

I see farmers with brand new tractors pulling gallons of chemicals, and brand new diesel trucks smoking out pedestrians on street corners.

I see bees dying and diseases multiplying.

Chemicals used in farming run off the land and into waterways, lakes and rivers that our children and their children play in, swim in, and drink from.

We live in the Great American Desert. Farmers have no right to pull water from the Ogalala Aquifer to irrigate their chemical laden fields, sending what was fresh, clean, drinking water downstream in a now poisoned form.

It is no question why autism and other lifelong disorders are prevalent among our children.

*Why* are we giving money to farmers to poison us? To buy genetically modified seed?

When I was young, I'd never met a farmer who wanted to plant a seed that was biologically engineered.

Use GMO seed and chemicals on your land and you are poisoning the earth more than any KXL pipeline ever could.

What do you want to leave your children's children?

Come to my garden and dig down a foot, I'll come to your field and dig down a foot. Let's compare worms. I don't make bets, but I'd shake your hand there's not one worm (or any other live organism) on your chemical-laden, barren land.

I'm not interested in supporting food suppliers spraying their crops with chemicals requiring hazmat suits.

Most of these insecticides, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides are the most dangerous chemicals found in the world.

I drive in all directions and see brown, dead fields.

At what point did we lose our way? When did this start and how did it begin?

Monsanto fooled us all, and continues to do so. Monsanto owns farmers' seed. That's something new. Farmers used to own their seed once it was purchased.

Subsidies should be given to farmers who rotate hemp, plant non-genetically modified seeds, and who

stop dumping chemicals onto our soil that runs downstream poisoning our water.

Organic farmers are not subsidized. In fact, they are charged exorbitant fees to grow what our grandparents grew: organic.

My family plants organic gardens, eats non-GMO foods, and will never support the use of deadly chemicals on our growing food (I don't care if that apple lasts 6 months).

Farmers, you may have my hard-earned tax dollars, but you will never have my heart.

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## Opinion

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### Marriage Equality: A Theological Defense

By Roger W. Eschliman

**NOTE: One of the Resolutions of the Lancaster County Democratic Party declares the following: "We promote the end to discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identification, including housing, employment, and same sex marriage. We support the Lincoln Fairness Ordinance and similar legislative efforts."**

The wind was whipping up to about 50 miles per hour. Wild rain was pounding in an endless torrent. It was a long and perilous journey along I-80, as my wife Carolyn and I inched our way towards Iowa City, Iowa. The wedding ceremony would begin in two hours and I was driving as fast as I could.

Two hundred guests gathered in the great hall at Iowa State University. Proud parents and grandparents were ushered in to their seats of honor. The wedding party walked slowly down the long aisle and stood in their assigned places. Officiating was the Honorable Mark Cady, Chief Justice of the Iowa State Supreme Court. A Lutheran choir sang and a brass band played. Then it was time for the two radiant women to repeat their wedding vows of love and devotion for one another. "I, Mary, take thee, Sarah . . . I, Sarah, take thee, Mary . . ."

Iowa is one of 37 states that has recently legalized same-sex marriages. Now, the Supreme Court may make history this summer, in a landmark case, by ruling that same-sex marriage bans are unconstitutional.

It's like a mighty wind of change blowing across the land, a wild torrent of rain washing away long held customs and beliefs. There is a cultural shift taking place in the United States, and we are all bearing witnesses to it. In our lifetimes American society has been steadily



warming to the notion of marriage equality. It's a remarkable shift in the opinions and attitudes of Americans. A January-February 2015 [Human Rights Eschliman – Continued from page 7](#)

[Campaign](#) poll found that 60% of Americans favor same-sex marriage, while only 37% stand in opposition. The same poll also found that 46% of respondents say they know a same-sex couple who has gotten married. In the past year, there have been many other polls with similar results. Five years ago we never could have guessed that public sentiment would shift so quickly. It has been breathtaking!

Theologically speaking, people of faith are also making an enormous shift. A few denominations have eagerly embraced marriage equality and have welcomed believers within the LGBTQ community as full participants, both as ordained clergy and as laypersons. Those churches shining a bright light of inclusion within the faith community include: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Metropolitan Community Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Many other denominations are struggling with how to uphold faithfulness to their long held biblical beliefs, while also practicing acceptance and respect for those in the LGBTQ community. I believe acceptance and respect are Christian values and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Thus, after two thousand years of New Testament wanderings, the church is finally focusing on the question of marriage equality. I like to think that God is directing the faith community to finally open wide their doors to those who have been historically ostracized by the church.

Some of what various Church leaders are worried about, I would call "red herrings." For example, some are afraid that they will be forced into performing same-sex weddings. I'd tell them to stop inventing things to worry about. In this country, churches chart their own theological course. There are church bodies, for example, who don't believe in saluting the flag or serving in the Military. Other clergy won't perform a wedding if the couple hasn't undergone extensive pre-marital counseling. Many churches have the policy of not being involved in weddings where neither the bride nor the groom is a member. Yet they all have the freedom to live out their beliefs without interference. One time I rejected officiating at a wedding because it was clear that the prospective bride was being manipulated into the union by her mother. So churches will continue to be faithful to their own biblical interpretations and polity, regardless of what the larger society decides on the issue. And that's a good thing. Church bodies should have the freedom to practice their

faith, according to their own traditions and biblical interpretations.

Some conservative Christians want the rest of us to believe that they hold all truth. They might start off by saying, "Well, my Bible says . . ." It's their way of letting us know that they know the truth, too bad about us. But even those who seem to believe in the inherent word of God, don't seem to take seriously every word of the Bible. I suspect we are all reading scripture through our own set of eyes—our individual prejudices, fears, and life experiences shape our understandings of the scriptures. Therefore, if someone despises the thought of same-sex marriages, then that person might well obsess over six or seven different scriptures that burn and stone those "sinners" who live among us, even though those scriptures are open to many different interpretations. Yet they are usually quick to ignore other signs of the "sinful nature" as outlined in Scripture—wearing polyester or any other fabric blends, divorce, public stoning, wearing gold, eating shellfish or pork, working on the Sabbath, and gossip. These are a few, but there are dozens more and nearly all of us ignore them.

My thoughts are not intended to diminish the power of our faith, but instead to recognize and celebrate its unique mystery within each of our lives.

As Mary and Sarah stood before the altar, Chief Justice Mark Cady addressed the couple: "In 2009 when I wrote the decision which legalized same-sex marriages in Iowa," he said, "I had another special couple in mind. But now that I've become acquainted with Mary and Sarah, I realize that I was really writing the decision for them. I am so pleased and honored that they have asked me to participate in their wedding." It was a tender moment for all of us who were there. It highlighted the mystery which is two lives being joined together as one in love and devotion. I also believe that the mystery of God's presence was in that room, blessing the union of those two women.

**I like to believe that God is working and moving as passionately through God's people today, as God did in Bible times. It's a good thing that we can struggle together over complicated issues and reach new levels of understanding. I think that is happening now. God created remarkable, talented, passionate children whom we call the LGBTQ community. I thank God for God's remarkable creation, every single part of it!**



## Health Care By Dayle Williamson

In November of 2014, I wrote an article regarding health care for a military retiree newsletter with the first sentence stating, “Doing what Congress does best—nothing, is a common refrain.” I discussed the dire need for a “doc fix.” In May of 2015, I had to take that sentence back because the “doc fix” was finally fixed!



What is the doc fix? It is the name attached to a requirement passed by Congress in 1997 when the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) pegged the amount of money budgeted for Medicare payments to the projected growth of the economy. The formula affected the amount paid to doctors for services provided to Medicare and TRICARE patients.

The effect of the requirement didn't work out well at all. By 2002, doctors were experiencing cuts for their services that were in excess to their costs of providing those services.

It was almost unbelievable in March of this year when Republican and Democratic lawmakers came together, led by House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to overwhelmingly pass by a vote 392-37 for a \$141 billion bill that fixes the doc fix. All three of Nebraska's members of the House were in the “aye” column. The Senate followed through in April with a 92-8 vote in favor. Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE) was among the 8 in the “nay” column. President Obama signed H.R. 2 into law on April 16, 2015.

There are a number of things in the law but most have focused on the “doc fix.” H.R. 2 establishes a new payment schedule for doctors in place of a formula that has tied doctor payments to economic growth, the sustainable growth rate, or SGR. The bill's passage averts a 21% payment cut that would have gone into effect on April 1, and provides modest increases in doctor's payments through 2019. This is certainly a relief to seniors who use Medicare and for those military retirees who use TRICARE.

For the past decade, the term “doc fix” has been in common use for a nearly annual process by which Congress, facing a big, unintended cut to how much Medicare pays physicians, would scramble in ways to stop the cut. At times, physicians loudly asserted they would stop treating Medicare patients. In fact, Congress acted 17 times between 2003 and 2015. Seventeen times!

Soon after 2003, most everyone agreed that the SGR policy didn't work, and had to be replaced with some other method of restraining physician payments. To top it all off, Congress started pretending that one year's cuts would simply be delayed and added to the next year's cuts. And when next year rolled around, they would block that one too, and so on. By failing to face the bad policy for nearly two decades, by April 1, 2015 doctors were facing a 21% cut in payments.

As with any legislation, not everyone is happy. As noted, there are many parts to H.R. 2, and critics are already predicting the new policy will fail based on rosy assumptions about its effectiveness. Someday, will we need a doc fix to fix the fix that has been fixed?

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## County Party History

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### History of the County Party Communications Committee By Jim Johnson

In 1986 I found myself between jobs, so I did what all job-hunting people should do: I went out and did volunteer work in the community. One of the things that kept me occupied was working on a political campaign, specifically the gubernatorial campaign of Helen Boosalis, one of my heroes when I was growing up as a teenager.



(Like many people my age who grew up in the Sandhills and points west, I got most of my statewide news from Channels 10/11's wide reach across the state; during my high school years, Mayor Boosalis was a regular guest on the local news, so I picked up a good deal of respect for her.)

Fast forward to post-campaign; Helen came close but didn't win. I wasn't yet immersed enough in City politics to understand that Lincoln has important elections going on even between the statewide elections. (I know better now, but sadly I still meet people who need to learn that.) So my first impulse was to step out of politics for a couple of years and maybe check back in '88. But somewhere along the line, someone (I'm afraid I don't remember who) talked me into checking out the Lancaster County Democratic Party. I was hesitant; I've always been a little more moved by individual people than by “groupthink.” But I checked it out, and found that there was plenty to do, and the people you met while working with the party were pretty interesting folks.

*Johnson – Continued from page 9*

So at some point in the late '80s or early '90s, I joined the County Party Central Committee.

Fast forward, again, to somewhere in the mid-'90s. At the annual Patriots' Dinner, a guy named Hank Balters stopped me and asked if I liked doing technical stuff. He already knew the answer would be yes, (computers are my "friend," and by then I'd found employment, as well as helped the party with some database stuff), and I did in fact say yes. I expected that he was going to ask me to help out with some type of database. But no; what Hank had in mind wasn't data management or number crunching; he was the chair of what was then called the Public Relations Committee, and he wanted me to help put together the County Party newsletter, as well as a new County Party outreach with a public access TV program. That wasn't really something that I'd thought would interest me, but I decided to bite anyway; I made arrangements to meet Hank and talk further about it. And it worked out. In those days Hank was the TV show host as well as the newsletter editor; he had a distinct personality that sometimes grated on people, but all the same you had to love Hank Balters. He was set in his ways, and that doesn't always work, but he was a good interviewer, and he always kept the party focused on welcoming individuals and working with minority groups to get things done.

Hank stepped down as chair in the mid-2000s, and he passed away in December 2007, but he left big shoes to fill on the Public Relations Committee (later renamed to the Communications Committee). However, it's far from a one-person effort. The newsletter is what it is today thanks to the excellent editorial and proofing efforts of Jean Sanders, and has benefitted from lots of helpers: Gerry Finnegan, Bennie Shobe, Carter Van Pelt, and numerous articles submitted by countless authors. And the TV show is a gem, thanks to people including Jane Egan, Bennie Shobe, Janeen Ward, Barbara Baier, Josh Cramer, Carter Van Pelt, and Jennifer Brinkman, and lots of great guests. (In both instances I'm sure I've left out important names; sorry in advance for the omission.)

I love this committee; come join us!

## 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.

And check our video archive on Youtube:

<http://www.youtube.com/LancasterCountyDems>

In politics, all candidates and volunteers are ambassadors to voters who expect better than parroting the politics of personal destruction. Being able to find common ground at the higher ground is what separates the stateswoman from the stuntwoman.

**- Christine Pelosi**



## County Party Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

Pictures from the Volunteer Appreciation Picnic, held at Bethany Park on June 7, 2015





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