



Thank you to everyone who joined us September 27 at our Torchbearers Celebration!

We were proud to honor six outstanding former elected officials who truly embody what it means to be a Torchbearer: leading with integrity, defending our Democratic values, and passing the torch to those who will carry our fight forward for generations to come. Thank you all for your decades of service to our community!

Former State Senator **Ken Haar**

Former State Board of Education Member **Patsy Koch-Johns**

Former Lincoln School Board Member **Kathy Danek**

Former Lincoln School Board Member **Don Mayhew**

Former Lincoln School Board Member **Lanny Boswell**  
(posthumously honored)

Former Lower Platte South NRD Director **Mike DeKalb**  
(posthumously honored)

A special thank you to our Fundraising Committee, monthly donors, our silent auction donors and sponsors who made this event possible!

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Women Who Run Nebraska

Hannah Wroblewski

Let's keep this momentum building to the 2026 Midterm Elections! When Lancaster Democrats come together and organize, we win.

*See more pictures from the 2025 Torchbearer Celebration on Page 12 of this newsletter.*

# RACHEL ★ GARVER ★ *for* COUNTY TREASURER



I'm running for re-election because I believe the people of Lancaster County deserve someone with experience, education, and integrity.

I was honored to receive the prestigious 90+ cashVest Award for 2024, recognizing my team for exceptional leadership in managing public funds. The award highlights our dedication to maximizing the value of every taxpayer dollar and ensuring greater financial stability for our community.

You're invited to my kickoff party:  
Wednesday, October 29, 5:30-7:00pm  
The Post, 2001 N Street, Lincoln

I hope you'll vote for me and look forward to continuing the progress of efficiently serving residents as your Lancaster County Treasurer. Please support my campaign by [sponsoring my kickoff party](#), volunteering or donating at [RachelforLancaster.com](https://rachelforlancaster.com). For event info, visit my [Facebook Page](#).

## The Truth Is In The Numbers

By Kristi Egger – Lancaster County Public Defender

I have heard claims that the Lancaster County Public Defender's Office has a high turnover rate. Here are some actual facts.

In the Lancaster County Public Defender's Office, in 2025, I hired two new Deputy Public Defenders to replace the attorneys who left to work at other agencies. In 2024, two attorneys left the Office – one to be closer to family and a public defender job out of state, and the other left criminal defense work. In 2023, three attorneys left – one to start in private practice, one retired, and one took a job in the public defender's office in the county where they live. Since 2023, three support staff left the office, two of whom moved out of state with their families. This makes our turnover rate for attorneys around 8%, and the rate for our total staff about 6.6%, *well below the national average*. In contrast, in 2022, under the previously elected Public Defender, 6 attorneys left the office in that one year. The attrition rate for attorneys in 2022 was 25%.

Public Defender attrition rates are high across the United States. That is the hard reality of the profession. "A 2023 survey by the Washington State Office of Public Defense showed that attorneys are leaving the profession due to a combination of factors, including low pay, difficult prosecutors, insufficient staff support, and vicarious trauma."

<https://opd.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/000092-SurveyResults.pdf> (For further reading, here are a couple articles on defense attorneys and vicarious trauma: <https://www.ncada.org/featured-articles/13481321> and <https://www.padisiplinaryboard.org/news-media/news-article/1609/vicarious-trauma-within-the-legal-profession> ).

A report by the Minnesota Board of Public Defense states that "(b)etween 2017 and 2021 nearly 40% of defenders resigned their position. More than 1/3 of these individuals went to work for another public agency. In 2022, these numbers have increased. In the first six months of 2022, the number of applicants for Assistant Public Defender positions was down anywhere from 50% to 75% from the average of the four -year period pre-COVID 19." <https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/documents/budget/2024-25-biennial-budget-books/governors-recommendations-january/public-defense-board.pdf>, page 8.

Wisconsin's Office of the State Public Defender also reported in December 2024, that "the turnover rate skyrocketed during the pandemic. It increased from around 10-11% to more than 20%. Though that rate has slowed, it still hovers around 13% and has not

recovered to pre-pandemic levels.”

<https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2024/12/19/wisconsin-faces-a-shortage-of-state-public-defenders> It's a nationwide problem.

When I'm out and about talking to voters, I tell them who I am and I often hear “I could never do that job, but I appreciate that you do.” Being a Public Defender *is* hard work. Often, it is work that is misunderstood and/or unappreciated. We are often the second-most disliked person in the courtroom, and our client is the first. Think Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and you've got a pretty accurate picture. Add to that the pressure of the job and how that affects one's work-life balance, and the negative and lasting effects of COVID on the workforce, and you have a perfect storm. Other factors include compassion fatigue and mountains of student loan debt.

As I said before, this is a nationwide problem, whose underlying cause is our nation's addiction to overincarceration. In fact, the United States leads the world in per capita incarceration rates.

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2024.html> It stands to reason then that public defender's offices everywhere in the United States are constantly overworked. We often face an uphill battle to make sure that justice and fairness prevail for our clients and try to do so without losing our minds. Because we value each client and want to help each client, we will persist in defending their Constitutional rights, their dignity, and their liberty, in spite of the forces that work against us.

There are no simple fixes to this national dilemma. Though, in the Lancaster County Public Defender's Office, we have the benefit of data-driven, best practices to manage caseloads. Thanks to Dennis Keefe, now retired long-time Lancaster County Public Defender, and his hard work to get the important studies done and data collected, our Office has maintained caseload standards (see <https://www.kristiegger.org/blog>) which set out the maximum number of cases that attorneys handling certain dockets (felony, misdemeanor, and juvenile) can retain. The purpose is to balance our mission to provide effective legal services for indigent clients and the need to be good stewards of taxpayer money, while ensuring the workloads of attorneys and support staff are fair and equitable.

Yes, burnout is a real thing nationwide for public defenders. No office is immune. In my first term as your elected Lancaster County Public Defender, I have restored the stability of the office that previously suffered from lack of management and leadership, as well as the myriad lingering problems due to COVID. I show up early, leave the office late, carry my own caseload, and lead by example. I listen to the issues our

hard-working attorneys and support staff face daily and do what I can to make sure everyone is treated fairly, compassionately, and equitably. It's hard work, and we are dedicated. But it's not what one would call “fun.”

“So you want to be a Public Defender? Don't do it for the money. There isn't enough. Don't do it for prestige, you won't get any. Don't do it for the thrill of victory, victory rarely comes. Do it for love. Do it for justice. Do it for self-respect. Do it for the satisfaction of knowing you are serving others, defending the Constitution, living your ideals.”

- Carol A. Brook





# The Definition of Insanity is Voting For Nebraska Republicans

By Dennis Crawford



The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. You could say that about voting for the Nebraska Republicans. They have owned the state lock, stock and barrel since 1999 and have driven Nebraska into the ground. The state is in a recession, broke and suffering a brain drain.

A new block buster report from the AkSarBen Foundaon hasn't received enough attention due to the lamentable assassination of Charlie Kirk. Every Nebraskan should familiarize themselves with this report. The essence of the report is that the economy is under performing and stagnant in Lincoln and Omaha.

From the *Omaha World Herald* on September 10, 2025:

"In the past five years, Omaha's annual average job growth rate has been a fraction of 1%. Metro Des Moines is booming in comparison, with a growth rate more than three times Omaha's, according to an *Omaha World-Herald* analysis of federal employment data.

What's more, Kansas City is growing jobs more than twice as fast; Denver is almost four times faster; Oklahoma City more than four times faster; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, more than five times faster.

In that same time, Lincoln's employment growth is only a tick higher than Omaha's.

A recent consultant report commissioned by Omaha's Aksarben Foundation spotlighted the non-competitive job growth in Nebraska's two largest metro areas. It was also found that lagging growth is costing the state thousands of potential jobs, billions of

dollars in wages and hundreds of millions in state taxes.

The report also cited **the state's declining gross domestic product** — a measure that includes public and private consumption, investment, government spending and net exports — in the first quarter of 2025 when the state's growth ranked last in the nation when compared with the previous quarter.

But business leaders associated with the Aksarben Foundation say they reveal a clear lack of progress in addressing the state's chronic shortage of workers.

Business leaders interviewed said those efforts should include updating business incentives to target the creation of high-wage jobs, overhauling the state's tax system, and doing more to promote the opportunities and high quality of life available in the state.

Currently, the state is facing an annual budget deficit of nearly \$100 million that is expected to worsen.

Nebraska has been saddled with the Republicans' trickle-down economics for decades. Those policies have clearly failed. A large, unaffordable tax cut for the rich and corporations in 2023 has bankrupted the state. In addition, the Republicans' big ugly bill will cost the state \$400 million in lost revenue over the next four years.

The Republicans' dirty little secret is that Nebraska's wealthy and corporations are lightly taxed. We also have one of the most generous corporate subsidy programs in the country. The legislature should revisit those programs and consider channeling some of that corporate subsidy funding into middle class property tax relief, childcare and education.

Nebraska's biggest problems are a labor shortage and a brain drain. Nebraska's "brain drain" — the net loss of college-educated people through migration to other states — has more than quadrupled in the last decade. We are not going to solve these problems by doubling down on the MAGA Republicans' trickle-down economics and culture wars.

Former State Senator Adam Morfeld: "If we were more focused on things young Nebraskans cared about and less focused on going after LGBTQ people, gutting public education, making reproductive healthcare impossible to obtain, and giving tax breaks to wealthy folks, then maybe we wouldn't lose so many young people.

If lawmakers want a guide to keeping young people in the state, here you go:

1. Stay out of our bedrooms
2. Invest in public transportation, culture, and entertainment
3. Affordable housing

4. Invest in childcare and healthcare
  5. Legalize marijuana
- "Whew that was tough."

I would add to the list the repeal of Nebraska's so-called right to work (for less) law. Corporate "right to work" laws drive down wages. Nebraska is a low wage state and won't be able to retain workers in the absence of pay increases.

The Democrats are winning big in the 2025 elections. This is the most under reported story in American politics. There is a huge backlash to Trump and MAGA. Nonetheless, the mainstream press is addicted to a "Democrats in disarray" narrative. Despite our divisions, we keep winning elections. We are united against the threat to freedom and democracy posed by Trump and MAGA.

If you are a Democrat with any ambition of running for office, you should immediately start planning your 2026 campaign. If this disaster continues, it will (unfortunately) be the best political environment for you to run in for the rest of your life. The environment will most likely resemble 1932 when Roosevelt and the Democratic Party won a landslide victory across the board.

The tide is turning. Be confident going forward. Take nothing for granted. Keep working hard. Blue wave 2026! Let's go!

Sources:

[https://journalstar.com/news/local/business/article\\_06c02988-0ef2-4e1c-88f7-f2808b3191ab.html#tracking-source=home-top-story](https://journalstar.com/news/local/business/article_06c02988-0ef2-4e1c-88f7-f2808b3191ab.html#tracking-source=home-top-story)

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**As a voter, please become informed. Please factcheck and please ensure that your precious vote is cast in a manner that is completely in line with what you support and not what you have been manipulated into thinking.**

- **Mary Dougherty**

## Will Bryan transformed the Democratic Party

By Jim Schaffer

"Look at all those folks," says someone in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "You'd think William Jennings Bryan was speakin'." The character is describing a large crowd gathered for Tom Robinson's trial, the kind of gathering that was common during Bryan's long career as an orator and three-time presidential candidate. It would be hard to find a more notable Democrat in Nebraska's political history.

Bryan came on the scene when things had never looked quite so bleak. Nebraska's leading Democrat, J. Sterling Morton, had run for every state office—congressman, senator, and governor—and lost each time. Frustrated by the power of the Republicans, Morton despaired of turning around the fortunes of Nebraska Democrats.

And then in 1888, he met a newcomer from Illinois, Will Bryan, and when he heard him speak, Morton felt a newfound hope. "Bryan is a remarkably promising young man," Morton wrote. "He has gifts. He will be, with good habits and right direction, a benefactor to good government."

Over time, Morton and Bryan would become rivals and then foes, but Morton's vision for Bryan's career was correct: he became one of the most important and influential politicians in the nation over the next 40 years. Starting with Bryan's first presidential campaign in 1896, the Democrats ceased being the more conservative of the two major parties. Bryan helped transform the party through his support for the federal income tax, the election of senators by the people rather than legislatures, and a variety of other significant reforms including insured bank deposits, government-owned railroads, publicly financed political campaigns, and strategies for preventing the nation from going to war.

### A misleading image

But the image most of us have today for Bryan is a self-righteous simpleton who tried to preserve a long-gone past. Unfortunately, and probably unfairly, he is mainly known for his role in the Scopes trial over teaching evolution, immortalized in the play *Inherit the Wind* which portrays Bryan as an unthinking religious buffoon. But in his time, Bryan's millions of followers thought of him as a hero who preached that the duty of a true Christian was to transform a world plagued by the arrogance of wealth and the pain of inequality.

### The Babe Ruth of politics

After Bryan's death, a reporter remarked that the press should build a memorial to him "because he was

to the world of news what Babe Ruth is to baseball—the real drawing card.” Mass appeal lifted Bryan to the top rank of American leaders, despite his failures at the ballot box. Only Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson had a greater impact on political culture during the era of reform that began in the mid-1890s and lasted until the early 1920s.

Author Michael Kazin argues that Bryan was the first leader of a major party to argue for expanding the power of the federal government to serve the welfare of ordinary Americans. Bryan argued that the national government should counter the power of banks and industrial corporations by legalizing strikes, subsidizing farmers, taxing the rich, banning private campaign spending, and outlawing the “liquor trust.”

### **Family ties**

Will Bryan was born in Salem, Illinois, on March 19, 1860. As a child, Will came to know orators of all kinds because his father Silas reserved a guest room in the family home for traveling ministers and politicians; he donated an annual load of hay to every local church. Instead of becoming a Baptist like Silas or a Methodist like his mother, however, Will chose his own path. At the age of thirteen, he attended a revival lead by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and then helped establish a small congregation with about seventy other teenagers.

Yet long shadows chilled his family in the middle of the Midwest. Only five of the nine Bryan children lived to adulthood. When he turned fifteen, Will was sent off to private school in Jacksonville, a city of ten thousand in the central part of the state. He stayed there for six years, attending first Whipple Academy and then Illinois College.

A popular student, Bryan was often seen with a Bible tucked under his arm. “He was very good,” a college classmate remembered. “His goodness was not the kind that rubbed against you and turned the fur the wrong way.”

Will was valedictorian of his class, but he saved his true passion for oratory. At the age of four, according to family lore, he began giving “little talks” to his playmates from the steps of his house. As Will grew up, the oratory of adults was a constant companion: he heard his father give dozens of addresses in court, sat through innumerable sermons at local churches, and attended the occasional revival that swept into town.

There was never much question that Bryan would enter the law. In the 1880s, it remained the ideal profession for a person who spoke well and had political aspirations—and it could provide a comfortable income. Bryan completed two years at the Union Law College in Chicago to launch his legal career.

Returning to Jacksonville, Bryan spent four years working for insurance companies, his alma mater, Illinois College, selling real estate and locating Wills for out-of-town clients. But like his father half a century before, Will was drawn to the West. On one of his trips, he stopped in Lincoln, Nebraska, to visit a friend from law school. After two days, he caught a vision of “future triumphs” and returned home to persuade Mary to leave for “a new country.” She quickly agreed.

On October 1, his third wedding anniversary, Bryan moved to Lincoln and began a law partnership. He also built a frame house just a few blocks from the imposing new capitol. Lincoln was well suited to Will’s ambitions and personality. It had a population of forty thousand and was the capital of a fast-growing state. True, Republicans ruled both city and state, but Nebraska’s mushrooming variety of immigrants—from Ireland, Germany, Bohemia and Scandinavia—might give an appealing Democrat a chance.

### **New to politics**

Bryan began his political activity in his newly adopted state during the 1888 campaign by stumping his district for Morton who was running for Congress and for President Grover Cleveland. A fellow Lincoln attorney enthused, “By your personal magnetism you won all the hearts.” Early one morning he returned from a speaking trip and woke up his wife. “Last night I found that I had power over the audience,” he told Mary. “I could move them as I chose. I have more than the usual power as a speaker . . . God grant that I may use it wisely.”

### **Running for Congress**

Bryan decided to run for Congress in 1890—from the same district that had just elected a Republican named William Connell. Bryan’s plan was to run as the leader of the prairie insurgency. His opponent, to his lasting regret, accepted Bryan’s challenge to a series of eleven debates. Bryan spoke in a clear, vigorous manner and, as a regular reader of Proverbs, had acquired the knack of coining memorable phrases. Speaking of tariffs, for example, he said that most Americans “are not interested in getting their hands into other people’s pockets, but in keeping the hands of other people out of their pockets.” Bryan’s rhetorical mastery made up for his lack of cash; he spent less than \$200 on the race.

On Election Day, Bryan became just the second Democrat in Nebraska history to win a seat in Congress. Less than five months after he’d arrived in Washington, he had already become one of his party’s most popular orators. Invitations to speak flooded in from all over the country. Reporters were glad to have

a new personality to liven up their dispatches and freshen their store of gossip. A decade before Theodore Roosevelt praised “the strenuous life,” the freshman legislator from Nebraska was embodying it on the floor of Congress.

### **Running again**

In 1892 Bryan ran again for Congress, following the same game plan. In an election so close it took four days to decide, Bryan won reelection by a mere 140 votes. He then spent much of that term preparing to compete in a larger arena. Political allies were already comparing him to a David who had bravely challenged Grover the Goliath [Grover Cleveland, the president].

In May 1894 he announced he would not run for reelection to the House; instead, he declared his candidacy for the Senate. He also became editor-in-chief of the *Omaha World-Herald*, the state’s most popular daily. The job was more ceremonial than anything else. The real editor of the *World-Herald* was its publisher, Gilbert Hitchcock, a Democrat exactly Bryan’s age whose family had been in Nebraska since its founding.

On Election Day 1894, Bryan both won and lost. He proved that he was the people’s choice, crushing his opponent by a margin of 73 percent at the ballot box, but because the Senate seat in those days was chosen not by voters but by a majority of state legislators, Republicans named John Thurston the new senator from Nebraska.

### **Future prospects**

Seven years after arriving in Nebraska, Bryan had become a hero to a widening circle of people. His frequent references to the Bible and to Christian history dovetailed nicely with his condemnation of worldly evil. “It would seem to me,” Bryan said, “as if I was born for this life and I must continue to fight the battles of the people for what I think is right and just”.

Tens of thousands of Bryan voters adored their candidate and told him so—loudly cheering at his speeches and writing him letters of encouragement. Many would remember the campaign that turned a politician from a rural state into a national leader as the most gripping public event of their lives.

### **Seeking the presidency**

To win the presidential nomination, Bryan faced a daunting set of obstacles. He was a decade younger than any other serious candidate; in fact, on March 3, 1895, he was still two weeks shy of the minimum age for the presidency. He held no public office and hailed from a small western state that had never voted Democratic in a national election. He had

no funds to contribute to his own campaign and had incurred the antagonism of Grover Cleveland, the current president.

Within a few months, however, Bryan was earning \$100 per speech, about what he made for two weeks of legal work before his election to Congress. He had a great voice and good looks. Although he was approaching middle age, Bryan seemed strong and vigorous. His muscular chest, thick arms, and well-defined jaw made a sharp contrast to most politicians who sported beards, bushy moustaches, and ample bellies. And then there was his voice: even though there was no sound technology at the time, amplification was not one of his problems. Mary recalled one day when, from inside a hotel room in Corpus Christi, she could hear her husband perfectly “three long blocks away.”

### **Democratic Convention in Chicago**

In 1896, the Democrats met for their presidential nominating convention in the Chicago Coliseum, a space as large as a Gothic cathedral. By the time of the convention, Bryan had emerged from the pack of dark horses to compete for the prize. “I have never had such an opportunity before in my life,” he said. When his time to speak came, Bryan stepped straight into the headlines of American history.

To compete with the chatter of a packed audience, a speaker had to use every trick he knew to increase the volume of his voice—spreading and raising his arms to expand the diaphragm and moving around the podium to project his words. Raising his hands to his temples, Bryan told the audience, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” As he spoke the final words, Bryan stunned the crowd by stepping back from the podium and extending his hands straight out from his body—holding the Christlike pose for perhaps five seconds.

For several moments, the Coliseum was silent, as if thousands of people were all holding their breath. Then, as Bryan left the stage and walked slowly toward his delegation, the crowd exploded. “The floor of the convention seemed to heave up,” marveled the *New York World*. “Everybody seemed to go mad at once . . . the whole face of the convention was broken by the tumult—hills and valleys of shrieking men and women.”

Bryan had spoken for about twenty minutes, but the celebration lasted twice that long. Bryan had become an instant hero.

### **Two views of government**

Bryan’s Republican opponent in the 1896 race was William McKinley, a Civil War major who never led

a charge or fired a shot; he made his name as a champion of tariffs, which he always draped in patriotism. A Methodist elder and Sunday school teacher, the major guarded his incorruptible image and spoke in a plain, patient manner that could put listeners to sleep.

Starting with the campaign of 1896, thanks largely to Bryan, the Democrats ceased being the more conservative of the two major parties. Bryan was the leading proponent of three constitutional amendments—for the income tax, the popular election of senators, and prohibition. He also did much to place on the national agenda a variety of other significant reforms: insured bank deposits, government-owned railroads, publicly financed campaigns, and a reliable method for preventing war.

Bryan's rhetoric, preaching both for God and the welfare of the common American, helped create a new style of politics that may be his most enduring legacy. John Scopes, of all people, regretted that Bryan hadn't survived into the age of television, when "he could have projected his personality to millions" and had a better chance of being elected president.

Soon after the campaign began, McKinley decided not to try to match Bryan's oratory. "I might just as well put up a trapeze on my front lawn and compete with some professional athlete as go out speaking against Bryan," he said. So, he stayed at home in Canton, Ohio, greeting a summer-long parade of visitors. McKinley campaigned from his front porch like a man who had already been elected.

The primary weapon that Democrats possessed was the voice of one man. The party could muster only about a tenth of the GOP's war chest, but Bryan was determined to turn necessity into a virtue. With practically no help from the National Committee, he organized a railroad tour that lasted from the first week of August until November 2, the eve of Election Day. Reporters who traveled with him calculated that he made some 250 scheduled stops in 26 states, where he spoke to as many as five million people.

### **The campaign**

The campaign made compelling news. Most newspapers supported McKinley but his front-porch approach lacked drama and news value. In contrast, nearly every day Bryan supplied something for reporters to run with, either to marvel at his skill and endurance, or both. "It was the first time in my life," remembered William Allen White, editor of a Republican daily in Emporia, Kansas, "in which any man large enough to lead a national party had boldly and unashamedly made his cause that of the poor and the oppressed."

But in November, McKinley won a decisive victory, taking 23 states with 271 electoral votes and 51 percent of the popular vote. Bryan carried 22 states, good for 176 electoral votes. What is remarkable is not that Bryan lost but that he came as close as he did. He had to overcome a severe economic downturn that occurred with Democrats in power, the determined opposition of most prominent newspaper publishers, and hostility from the nation's largest companies. Bryan had to run as a protest candidate, a Populist in Democratic clothing.

Remarkably, the result of the election only increased the size of Bryan's correspondence and the passion of his followers. They wrote to console him, to brag about the part they'd played in his campaign, to condemn the powerful enemies they shared, and to promise unflagging aid in his next battle. And there would be another battle.

[End of part one]

## **Outraged Farmers Blame Ag Monopolies as Catastrophic Collapse Looms**

**By Chris Bennet**

The inescapable crop math of sustained crippling commodity prices and high input costs has many growers screaming for immediate relief. However, bailouts are Band-Aids over bullet holes, contend farmers desperate for fundamental change.

"This is what farmers know and experience," says producer Adam Chappell. "You can bet your ass, the monopolies will get their money. If you think otherwise, you've got blinders on."

Farmers are not crying wolf. The wolf is real and right outside the door in the form of generational collapse.

The inescapable crop math of sustained crippling commodity prices and high input costs has many growers screaming for immediate relief, potentially via aid payments in late 2025 or early 2026. However, bailouts are Band-Aids over bullet holes.

Alarm has turned to extreme despair on many operations. On Sept. 2, 2025, a telltale farm meeting went nuclear. Field representatives from the offices of Sen. Tom Cotton, Sen. John Boozman and Rep. Rick Crawford, along with a rep sent by Gov. Sarah Sanders, initially intended to speak with a handful of growers in Brookland, Ark.

Instead, 400-plus farmers packed the house to overflow on a Tuesday — despite the pressing demands of rice and corn harvest and a mere three days' notice — and unleashed a chain of grievances.

Where does blame lie? Where to begin digging for a long-term solution?



Amid the fallout of the Sept. 2 meeting, three farmers sound off on markets, monopolies, moratoriums and mismanagement in U.S. agriculture. They spare no sacred cows.

**Adam Chappell: “This is the Worst Economy of My Lifetime ...”**

Denial ain’t just a river in Egypt, says Adam Chappell. “Year after year of sweeping all this under the rug and pretending it’s not happening has got us to this point. Years of barely squeaking by, surviving with a bailout and then doing it all again. That is the definition of insanity.”

Growing 2,400 acres of soybeans, rice, and corn in east Arkansas’ Woodruff County, [Chappell](#), 46, accuses USDA of head-in-the-sand policy: “I’m sick of USDA graphs saying agriculture income is set to rise. They’re baking cattle and coming payments into their recipe and pretending things are good.

“This is the worst agriculture economy of my lifetime over at least the past three years, and right this minute, guys are going under — as in [bankruptcy](#) or leaving the farm,” he exclaims. “The solution is supposedly another bailout or a gap payment the following year? Wake the hell up: Where do you think that money is gonna go? It won’t go to farmers. It’ll go into supplier’s pockets.”

The entire agriculture industry — a bedrock of U.S. security — rests squarely on the shoulders of the American farmer. Ironically, that same farmer is the only player in the ag chain who cannot pass costs down the ladder.

Blame partially belongs on “Big Ag,” Chappell contends.

“Seed, chemicals or fertilizer, it’s all in the hands of a few companies that are the only game in town. You want to fix farming? Start a federal investigation on those big companies. Booming quarterly earnings and big stock dividends make no sense when farmers can’t pinch a penny.”

“If corn prices were to suddenly jump this month, nitrogen prices will magically rise the following year,” he continues. “If soybean prices explode to \$15 tomorrow, a bag of beans will climb to \$90. Guaranteed. Potash will hit \$1,000. The monopoly problem is real.”

Behind closed doors, away from microphones and cameras, Chappell says federal politicians acknowledge “monopoly influence.”

“They all tell me they’re aware of a monopoly problem, and they don’t deny it exists. But they do nothing. Instead, we get bailouts and the money slips right out of our hands and into the big corporations we owe the money to — the monopolies. Meanwhile, those

same corporations lobby for us to get the bailouts. Get it?”

“This is real talk,” Chappell describes. “This is what farmers know and experience. You can bet your ass, the monopolies will get their money. If you think otherwise, you’ve got blinders on.”

**Kenneth Graves: “At Every Level of Agriculture, There Must Be a Reckoning.”**

The Sept. 2 farm meeting, held a stone’s throw outside Jonesboro at Woods Chapel Baptist, was monumental, says retired Dewitt grower Kenneth Graves, 71. “I’d say 400 people or so showed up, maybe more. We’re talking about people standing outside the building in the middle of harvest. That tells you all you need to know.”

Dwarfing expectations, the line of overflow attendees wrapped around the building on Sept. 2.

Graves, chairman of the [Arkansas Rice Growers Association](#), understands severe hardship. He farmed through the anemic ag crisis of the 1980s. However, the current unrest is a “coming disaster” unlike anything he’s witnessed across a 50-year career: “I’ve never seen this kinda look in farmers’ eyes. It’s fear. And it’s based in undeniable facts.”

In August 2025, Graves sent an open letter to media and politicians, pleading for attention to eye-popping numbers. “My letter told what things are like right now. In our geography, it looks like you need to yield 100-300-300 to stay ahead,” Graves describes. “That’s 100-bushel beans, 300-bushel rice and 300-bushel corn. Basic Arkansas averages are 56-bushel beans, 166-bushel rice and 175-bushel corn. In a nutshell, we are going over a cliff. Banks are forecasting farm bankruptcies at 25% to 40%, and the dirty secret is out. Everyone knows it; everyone feels it.”

How does the industry even begin to crawl out of the hole? Start with markets, Graves urges. “Our international competitors play under the table and get hidden subsidies. The whole dynamic is off. At every level of agriculture, there must be a reckoning. That certainly includes seed, chemical and machinery companies. Back off.”

Death of a thousand cuts, according to Graves: “It’s been building over time and now it’s on the doorstep. You can argue that guys will be able to get back in their fields next spring, but that’s just denying the inevitable. Whether this year or next year or the next, there’s a crash coming.”

“In a nutshell, we are going over a cliff,” says Kenneth Graves. “Banks are forecasting farm bankruptcies at 25% to 40%, and the dirty secret is out. Everyone knows it; everyone feels it.”

Graves advocates for immediate political intervention. “I’m urging legislators at all levels to act now,” he says. “We’re talking about our food and agriculture security, and when that tanks, the economic effect will spill over every rural region in the country.”

“Remember when that Chinese spy balloon flew over the U.S. in 2023, and our politicians did nothing? They made a lot of noise and acted too late, shooting it down after it collected data across the country,” Graves adds. “It’s past time to act. Our politicians either recognize this now or let us be some other country’s economic hostage later.”

### **Bailey Buffalo: “Farmers, Not the Giant Agriculture Manufacturers, Are the Ones Hurting.”**

Adios to fifth- and sixth-generation farmers?

Yes, says Bailey Buffalo, 40, owner of [Buffalo Grain Systems](#) in Jonesboro, and president of [Farm Protection Alliance](#).

“Horror stories. The pain is unreal. Worst farming situation I’ve seen in my life,” Buffalo says. “Look at Extension [University of Arkansas] numbers — corn growers losing \$240 per acre; soybeans losing \$144 per acre; and rice losing \$380 per acre. The cotton growers may be worst of all.”

Agriculture’s handbrake must be pulled, says Bailey Buffalo, with an economic reversal contingent on a deep look at consolidation, moratoriums, and diversification.

Storms can be weathered during agricultural tumult, Buffalo maintains — except when a thumb rests on the scale. Consolidation, he says, has turned a market rut into a debacle.

“Basic macroeconomics (CR4) tells us that if the top four competitors in any sector control more than 40% of the market, abuses become likely and that sector is approaching a monopolistic risk. That’s where I believe we’re at in farming,” he explains. “We can’t climb out of this mess partly because we’re at the mercy of agriculture monopolies.”

“Take corn, cotton, rice and soybean seed. They’re at 70% to 90% control by corporate cartels, in my opinion. Take fertilizer where the top four players control about 82% of the market,” he adds. “If 40% of any sector is a monopoly risk, then what the hell do our agriculture percentages tell us?”

Despite Buffalo’s alarm, the input market contains exceptions, he notes: “I can name small seed suppliers and fertilizer suppliers who are providing very high-quality products at fractions of what those much larger corporations are charging. The farmers just have to put the extra work into finding them and into getting their orders in early as possible. They are

proving that it’s possible for small operations to sneak into corners of the market.”

Yet, exceptions do not move the overall dial. “Farmers are literally losing money per acre while Big Agriculture is making hundreds of millions of dollars and more,” Buffalo says. “How can that be sustainable? You can make all the excuses or justifications you like, but any fair-minded person knows the situation is way out of balance.”

“At every level of agriculture, there must be a reckoning,” says Kenneth Graves. “That certainly includes seed, chemical, and machinery companies. Back off.”

Bailout cash is a “gross Band-Aid,” according to Buffalo. “The subsidies send farmers back to the pit, over and over. The money trickles to lenders, loans, suppliers, banks or somewhere else in chain. Bailouts are the same as kicking the can down the road,” he adds.

That “can” has grown exceedingly heavy and the end of the road is in sight, Buffalo says: “Some people blame tariffs. Some blame the current president. Some blame the last president. Some blame other politicians. In the background of all this blame, nobody is looking at where farmers spend their money. Farmers pay monopolies and often feel they have no choice.”

Agriculture’s handbrake must be pulled, Buffalo says, with an economic reversal contingent on a deep look at consolidation, moratoriums and diversification — via both a federal and state lens. In his opinion, the following four changes are in order:

**1. Start with monopolies.** “State constitutions have anti-trust legislation. Create smoke at the state level and force USDA and the feds to follow.”

**2. Put an indefinite moratorium on all mergers and acquisitions in the food and ag sectors.** “End consolidation and demand long-lasting change.”

**3. Get a handle on D.C. lobbyists.** According to a 2024 report, [Cultivating Control](#): *Lobbying by the agribusiness sector has steadily increased: In just the last five years, the agribusiness sector’s annual lobbying expenditures have risen 22%, from \$145 million in 2019 to \$177 million in 2023. And each year, agribusiness spends more on federal lobbying than the oil and gas industry and the defense sector.*

A five-year “cooling off” lobbying period should be set in stone for any government official exiting office, Buffalo says: “Defense, SEC going to Wall Street, any of them, including agriculture. You should never, never be allowed to retire from an ag committee in Congress and then run over to a board at Tyson, Cargill, ADM, John Deere or any other company.”

**4. The grain industry must diversify.** “I think diversification must be part of any solution. I’m talking about an effort to grow all our food in this country. Our grain goes to feed and ethanol, but we need a structure to grow our own edible food as well, and protect our national security like never before.”

The entire agriculture industry—a bedrock of U.S. security—rests squarely on the shoulders of the American farmer. Ironically, that same farmer is the only player in the ag chain who cannot pass costs down the ladder.

At the Sept. 2 spillover meeting in northeast Arkansas, Buffalo was present, listening to the plight of the common grower. The meeting was noted by media and politicians as evidence of a dire “agriculture crisis.” Ironically, no such crisis exists, Buffalo asserts.

“They don’t get it and therefore they can’t properly find the solution,” he says. “Right now, if I was to walk into Congress and ask all the senators and reps, ‘Who thinks the *agriculture industry* is hurting to the point of collapse?’ all the hands would go up. Instead, the question should be, ‘Who thinks *farmers* are hurting to the point of collapse?’”

“There’s a giant difference between the two questions, and that difference is indicative of the separation between local Ag and Big Ag,” Buffalo concludes. “Farmers, not the giant agriculture manufacturers, are the ones hurting to the point of going belly up. There’s no solving any of this until that difference is recognized.”

## **The Reports of the Death of the Democratic Party Are Greatly Exaggerated**

**By Dennis Crawford**

The legacy media is no ally of the Democratic Party.

We Democrats have to come to grips with the fact that the mainstream or legacy media simply doesn’t like us. For years now the default position of the legacy media and national discourse is to overestimate Don Old Trump’s strength and underestimate ours. I’ve seen numerous news and analysis pieces that cherry picks data to forecast doom for the Democratic Party. At the same time, they ignore other data points and election results that indicate that the Democratic Party is alive and well.

The *New York Times* ran a much-hyped piece by Shane Goldmacher on August 20 that once again forecast the demise of the Democratic Party. Here is the key excerpt: “Of the 30 states that track voter registration by political party, Democrats lost ground to Republicans in every single one between the 2020

and 2024 elections — and often by a lot. That four-year swing toward the Republicans adds up to 4.5 million voters, a deep political hole that could take years for Democrats to climb out from.”

Ed Kilgore of *New York Magazine* did a brilliant job in rebutting this false narrative. The pertinent excerpts are as follows: “What these Cassandras are discussing is major-party voter-registration trends from 2020 to 2024 in the 30 states that allow registration by party. So right off the bat, the data exclude 20 states. Goldmacher’s analysis also mostly ignores the largest group of new registered voters, those who choose not to register as members of either party.

Here’s what Gallup had to say about that just a few weeks ago: In the second quarter of 2025, an average of 46% of U.S. adults identified as Democrats or said they are independents who lean toward the Democratic Party, while 43% identified as Republicans or said they lean Republican.

That three-percentage-point Democratic advantage compares with a tie between the two parties in the first quarter of 2025, after a four-point Republican lead in the fourth quarter of 2024. Until now, the Republican Party had led or tied in most quarters since 2023.

Biased articles like this one by Goldmacher are common in the legacy media. They are addicted to a Democrats in disarray narrative — the facts be damned. The likes of the *New York Times* are enabling Trump and MAGA’s push for fascism by pushing out these false narratives of GOP strength.

Other important evidence rebuts this false narrative from the *New York Times* and the corporate and billionaire media.

“2024 was a very close election. Trump won by 1.5 points and failed to reach 50%. 115,000 votes changing in MI, PA, WI and Harris wins. We picked up a seat in the House and were less than 4,000 votes from making Hakeem Jeffries Speaker. We had important downballot wins in AZ, NC, MI, NV, PA, WI. While we have work to do this was a narrow win not a landslide, and our road back is not insurmountable.”

Simon Rosenberg: Trump’s low approval ratings and unpopular policies have already spurred a backlash. Democrats are doing very well in the 2025 elections. The *Washington Post* recently committed journalism and reported on this very important trend. But for this lone, solitary story one would have no idea that this is happening. Is it even legal to report that the Democrats have been winning big since November 2024?

From the *Washington Post* on June 27: “Beyond what the historical record suggests, there is an additional warning sign for Trump allies who want to

continue single-party GOP rule in Washington: Democrats have made big gains in special elections since Trump took office in January 2025.

Among all special elections this year, Democrats have outperformed Kamala Harris's vote share in 2024 by 13 percentage points, based on Harris-Trump baselines. That's the largest shift toward any party in years. In fact, all but four of the 31 special elections have seen movement toward Democrats.

In special elections ahead of the 2018 midterms, Democrats beat Hillary Clinton's 2016 numbers by six points and preceded a nine-point win in the House popular vote.

When a party consistently outperforms its last presidential outcome in special elections, it usually does well in the next House cycle."

The Democrats have continued to over perform since late June. The results have been even more encouraging. "On average in 2025, Democratic candidates in special elections are running about 16 percentage points ahead of Kamala Harris's margin versus Donald Trump in last year's presidential election. That is 5-6 points higher than the average Democratic overperformance in 2017." — G. Elliott Morris

The recurring problem in these special elections for Republicans is that Democrats continue to turn out at much higher rates than Republican voters do. For example, in Omaha Democratic challenger John Ewing crushed three time GOP incumbent mayor Jean Stothert by a 57% to 43% margin. After the election, Governor Jim Pillen complained about low GOP voter turnout in the Republican strongholds in west Omaha.

While some elite pundits complain about the party's reputation, Democratic candidates have been doing pretty well this year. Many Democratic voters may be disenchanted with their party leadership but they continue to turnout for their local candidates.

Polling data verifies the rising Democratic tide. A new Strength in Numbers poll finds that the Democrats leading the generic congressional ballot by a wide margin, 49% to 41%. The same poll found that Trump's job approval is at 41% approval and 56% disapproval.

The Republicans know that a blue wave is coming. That's why the Republicans are doing everything they can to gerrymander and suppress the vote. It also explains the surprise retirements by Senators Thom Tillis and Joni Ernst, and Representative Don Bacon.

In the aftermath of the 2024 elections, the conventional wisdom from the legacy media alleged that not only that Republicans had entered an era of dominance, but also that Democratic voters had supposedly given up and had resigned themselves to

this imaginary permanent Republican governing majority. The more Democratic candidates overperform in 2025 elections, the more this false narrative unravels.

"It boggles my damn mind that in the midst of a military takeover of our cities, the flaunting of the rule of law, that the press finds the need to talk about, 'Oh, there's a division in the Democratic Party' — Tim Walz

"Democrats need to organize their future politics around the simple reality that the establishment media is structurally hostile to the Democratic Party." — Josh Marshall

Be confident going forward. Keep working hard. Take nothing for granted. Voters want to be associated with winners. Enough with the infighting and self-flagellation. It's time to look forward. We have a big opportunity in 2026.

MAGA means Morons Are Governing America. Throw the rascals out! Blue wave 2026!

Sources consulted:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/20/us/politics/takeaways-democratic-decline-voter-registration.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/20/us/politics/democratic-party-voter-registration-crisis.html>



## 2025 Torchbearer's Celebration

Pictures below are from the 2025 Torchbearer's Celebration, held September 27, 2025, at the Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln.

See more photos at

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DWP4ZuU1B/>



Torchbearers awardees and their representatives.

Left to right:

Hannah Wroblewski (representing **Patsy Koch-Johns**, State Board of Education);

**Don Mayhew**, Lincoln Board of Education;

**Kathy Danek**, Lincoln Board of Education;

Piyush Srivastav (representing **Lanny Boswell** (deceased), Lincoln Board of Education;

**Ken Haar**, City Council & State Senator;

Tom Green (representing **Mike Dekalb** (deceased), Natural Resources District)



Maxine Moul, DiAnna Schimek, and Hannah Wroblewski



Hannah Wroblewski with members of the Nebraska Young Democrats



Eric Moyer, candidate for Congress District One, with Jayden Speed, candidate for Legislature



Jay Pitts, candidate for County Sheriff, with Gina Frank from the Nebraska Democratic Party



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