

## Re-Elect Leirion Gaylor-Baird Mayor of Lincoln!

By Dennis Crawford



*Mayor Gaylor-Baird has a solid record of accomplishment. Lincoln is prospering under her leadership.*

Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor-Baird recently announced her intention to seek a second term as mayor. Mayor Gaylor-Baird will be running on a record of accomplishment because Lincoln is thriving.

Gaylor-Baird launched her re-election campaign by giving a lengthy interview to the Nebraska Examiner. The pertinent excerpts were as follows.

“She credited temporary measures such as masking and the COVID-19 transmission risk dial with helping people navigate an uncertain time. (Lancaster County had the lowest per capita death in Nebraska.)

The mayor shared rankings that show major gains in job growth, wage growth and broadband infrastructure. She mentioned a record number of building permits in 2021.

Lincoln’s violent crime rate is approaching a three-decade low, she said, even as the city has grown by 100,000 people.

She said part of recruiting young talent is being a welcoming place for all Nebraskans, including LGBTQ youths.”

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Gaylor-Baird and the Democratic majority on the City Council, the Lincoln economy is roaring. Currently,

Lincoln has an amazingly low unemployment rate of 2%.

Lincoln is ranked number 12 on the Forbes list of best places to retire in 2022. The median home price is 31% below the national average. Lincoln’s capital city also has good air quality and an excellent health care system.

Lincoln is ranked number 3 on the Storage Cafe list of best places for families with children. Housing costs and rental prices are well below the national averages. The public schools are very highly rated, with Lincoln East High School ranking as one of the best in Nebraska.

Despite that impressive progress, two extreme right-wing Republicans have thrown their hat in the ring. Former Nebraska football player and talk show radio host Stan Parker has filed for mayor. He doesn’t appear to be a serious candidate.

Leirion’s most formidable opponent is Nebraska State Senator Suzanne Geist. She has been a loyal Ricketts’ lieutenant and has compiled an extreme record in the legislature. When she was asked about what issues in which she differed with Ricketts, Geist couldn’t provide an answer.

Earlier this year in the legislature, Geist voted for tax breaks for the wealthy and the corporations but voted against middle class tax relief. Geist has also pandered to the most extreme elements of the MAGA Republican base by voting for a near total abortion ban and against LGBTQ employment protections.

When she announced for mayor, Geist was asked what she’d do differently than Baird on the issues. All Geist said was that she would talk to experts who know the systems and get them what they need. Apparently, Geist has no platform but blind ambition.

Geist is not only extreme, but she is badly out of touch. Even though she grew up in a racially diverse area of Arkansas, Geist has no understanding of the challenges being faced by African Americans. In a 2020 *Lincoln Journal Star* interview, she said: “They think about fear being a part of their lives all the time. And I didn’t know that.”

In that same interview, Geist said that she didn’t believe the issues of African Americans can be solved politically and that racism is not something

that can be eliminated with the writing of a law. Are you kidding me? Is she even familiar with the Civil Rights Act of 1964? The Voting Rights Act of 1965? Or the Fair Housing Act of 1968? Geist revealed a shocking ignorance in that 2020 interview.

Despite the lack of a rationale to run for mayor, Geist will be generously funded by Pete Ricketts and the Peed family. The Peeds have already given Geist \$250,000.00. Ricketts and the Peeds will use that money to falsely trash Lincoln's good name with deceptive and negative ads. These radical right wingers will falsely besmirch our sterling reputation and depict Lincoln as a dystopian, crime ridden hell scape.

Those ads will be deeply disingenuous since the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported on October 23 that "reports of violent crime in the city have been largely stagnant for three full decades, even as Lincoln's population has grown by about 100,000 residents....Lincoln's violent crime rate — the number of violent crimes reported per 100,000 residents — has actually dropped substantially since the 1990s and early 2000s....By last year, the city's violent crime rate had been nearly cut in half, down to 372 violent crimes reported per 100,000 residents, according to police data."

Former Kerrey and Nelson Chief of Staff W. Don Nelson said Gaylor-Baird should ask her opponents one question: "What is it I have done over the past four years that you would not have done, and what would you have liked to have done?"

It will be progress versus radicalism in 2023. Why would we want to turn over our city to the extreme MAGA Republicans? They have a reverse Midas effect — everything they touch turns into garbage. We must save our great city from these dangerous radicals by re-electing Mayor Leirion Gaylor-Baird!

## Tech Notes 120722

By Charlie Ahern

### Twitter as a Libertarian Playground

To help understand what Elon Musk is doing at Twitter, I remember that Silicon Valley is home to a significant Libertarian culture. In close election campaigns between Ds and Rs, the Libertarian candidates reliably deny the Rs about 3% of the vote. Libertarian billionaires like Musk and Peter Thiel take an engineer's approach to life: There are problems, and there are solutions. Whoever develops the best solution becomes wealthy. Musk seems to think that Twitter is an engineering problem, not a more complex problem of human behavior. It may take a recession that hurts millions of people, but Musk's Twitter may follow other "tech" failures into obscurity.

### Quick Check of Suspicious Emails

Recently I received an email allegedly from the minister of my congregation asking for donations of pre-paid debit cards to help a struggling family. I'm always skeptical about fundraising emails. So, I used a simple check to see if the email might be a fraud; I hovered my mouse cursor over the address that sent the email. In this example, the email initially indicated that the email came from my minister. The actual email address was.... NZCOUW-h0fvi4rp4oa2ds-noReply @[koploks26.tk](mailto:koploks26.tk). That doesn't look like my minister's email address; therefore, I didn't open the email. (BTW, .tk is the country code administered by the Tokelau Islands, a dependent territory of New Zealand.)

If you're suspicious about the sender of an email, hover over the email address. Would the alleged sender of the email use a nonsense email address?

### Drones, Drones, Drones

The "special military operation" that Putin launched against Ukraine (and NATO) has moved on from the failed Russian blitzkrieg in late February to a literal grinding campaign at the end of 2022. Putin has launched missiles, artillery, and drones to batter Ukrainian cities without regard to civilian casualties. A new battle set piece, captured by drone cameras, are shootouts between drones, piloted by troops miles away from the battlefield as drones costing tens of thousands to tens of millions of dollars fight for territory. Are we seeing a new form of warfare develop in which professional military remotely fight battles with low risk of direct contact with the enemy while more and more often, the casualties are civilians? Imagine a remake of *The Terminator* in

which Arnold Schwarzenegger commutes to his desk job as a “payload specialist” for drone flights over cities of smoking rubble.

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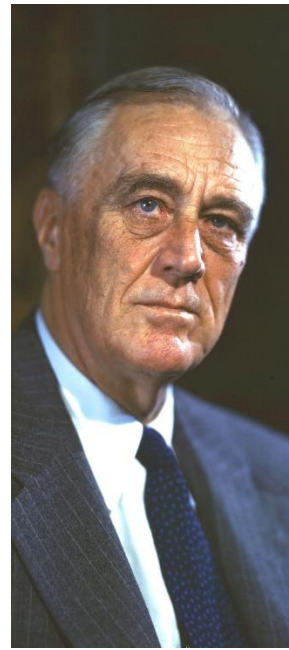
## Letter to the Editor

The fall elections are now over for the most part and I want to congratulate all of those who ran, whether they were successful or not. It takes a great deal of time and courage, especially in today's political climate, to put yourself out there. Hopefully we will get back to discussing issues and solutions and away from personal attacks and inflammatory rhetoric.

The races were close and competitive and demographic changes in Lincoln have made party registrations much closer. That means more work to capture the independent and moderate voters is vital. It is no secret that the Nebraska GOP wants to take back the Mayor position and make inroads in the district City Council races. Expect the Ricketts to throw boatloads of money at those races and, if the past three elections are any indication, a Friday surprise right before the elections. We need to make sure that we continue to tell the success stories that have made Lincoln among the best cities to live in.

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and a terrific Christmas season.

Doug Emery



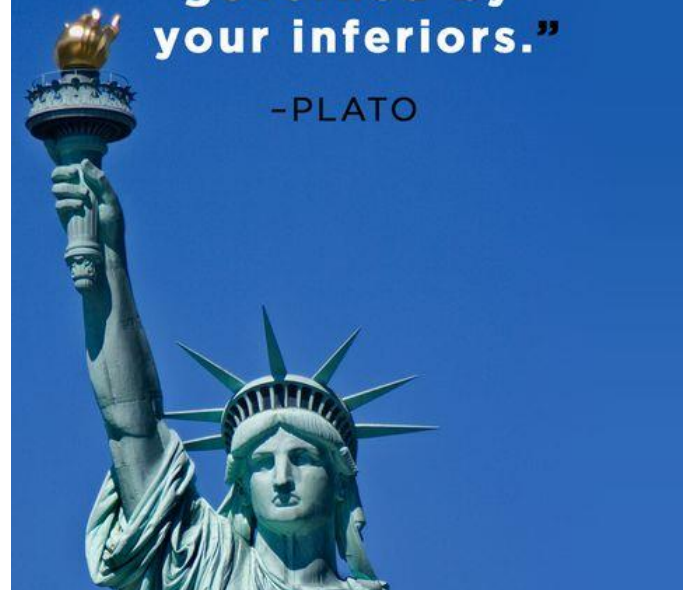
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*Let us not be afraid to help each other - let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials but the voters of this country.*

~Franklin D. Roosevelt

**“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”**

—PLATO





# Nancy Pelosi — The Greatest Speaker of All Time

By Dennis Crawford



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is the most consequential female political leader in U.S. history. Since 2003, Pelosi has won many victories for the Democratic Party and progressive causes. Pelosi has been demonized by the radical right for years because she has been a very effective advocate for progressive causes. If she wasn't good at what she does, the GOP would have simply ignored her.

Pelosi's first big challenge as Democratic House leader was when George W. Bush introduced a plan to privatize Social Security and turn it over to Wall Street in 2005. At that time, the (phony) conventional wisdom from the "liberal" mainstream media was that Social Security was going broke and the Democrats had to work with the Republicans in cutting benefits.

Pelosi was under tremendous pressure to come up with her own plan. In response to this pressure, Pelosi was asked when she would come up with a Democratic plan. She defiantly responded: "Never. Is never good enough for you?" Pelosi's courage in standing up to Bush, Wall Street and the press was a key factor to the demise of Bush's plan.

The defeat of the GOP's Social Security privatization scheme marked a turning point in Bush's presidency. Due to the Democratic victory on this critical issue, Bush's approval ratings dropped below 50% for the first time during his presidency and he never recovered. The Democrats rode that momentum to win a huge victory in the 2006 mid-term elections in which they regained control of the House and the Senate.

Pelosi and the Democrats governed effectively during the time of divided government in 2007–08. (They didn't shutdown the government or threaten to default on the debt.) The last federal minimum wage increase passed with bi-partisan support and Bush's signature in 2007. After the economy collapsed in 2008, Pelosi worked with Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson to save the banking system from a meltdown by helping pass the controversial TARP bill. (A major factor that turned a recession into the Great Depression was when Hoover allowed the banking system to disintegrate beginning in 1930).

After the big Democratic victory in 2008, Pelosi helped engineer the greatest Democratic legislative victories since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society in 1965–66. When the Democrats had the majority in both Houses in 2009–10, Pelosi supplied the necessary Democratic votes to pass the 2009 Recovery Act, an Affordable Care Act with a public option, cap and trade legislation and Wall Street reform. (The public option had to be dropped from the Affordable Care Act when Scott Brown won the special 2010 Massachusetts Senate election due to Democratic voter apathy.)

The years following the 2010 mid-terms were fallow ones for the House Democrats. However, Pelosi led the Democrats out of the wilderness again in 2018. In the 2017–2018 cycle, Pelosi recruited a diverse set of candidates that consisted of both progressives and moderates. Those Democrats went on to win 40 seats in the House. It was the best showing in the mid-terms for the Democrats since 1974.

That 2018 triumph laid the foundation for Pelosi's most significant accomplishments as Speaker in 2021–2022. While presiding over a narrow Democratic majority, Pelosi helped President Joe Biden pass the most ambitious and far reaching legislative agenda since Lyndon Johnson.

Thanks to her leadership, the House passed the American Rescue Act, a bi-partisan infrastructure bill, the first gun reform bill since 1994, a veteran's health bill, landmark climate change legislation and prescription drug pricing reform.

The highlights of Biden and Pelosi's accomplishments are as follows:

- Lowest poverty, uninsured rates in U.S. history.
- New business starts at record levels.
- American manufacturers have now added enough jobs to regain all that they lost during the pandemic. Manufacturers have a net gain of 67,000 workers above pre-pandemic levels.
- In 2021, the U.S. economy added over 6.5 million jobs, the greatest year of job growth in history.
- The unemployment rate has nearly been cut in half.
- Jobless claims are at their lowest point since 1970.
- Under Democratic leadership, the US has added 10 million jobs — the highest number of jobs added in any president's first 18 months. Not only is the unemployment rate at a historic low of 3.7 percent, but more Americans are now employed in the private sector than at any time.
- Deficit reduced by a record \$1.5 trillion.
- Because of the infrastructure package, repairs have started on over 65,000 miles of roads and 1,500 bridges.
- The American Rescue Plan led to a record 14.5 million Americans signing up for healthcare coverage for this year through the Affordable Care Act.
- Child poverty has been cut in half since President Biden took office. While Donald Trump was in office, child poverty was at 9.7%. Since President Biden took office, child poverty has been reduced to 5.2%.
- President Biden and the Democrats in Congress have capped insulin costs at \$35 a month for Medicare recipients.
- The Inflation Reduction Act will now save 13 million Americans an average of \$800 annually on health insurance premiums.

At the end of the day, Nancy Pelosi will be seen as towering figure in American history. She will go down in history as the greatest Speaker of the House in U.S. history, topping Henry Clay and Sam Rayburn. The United States is a much better and stronger nation thanks to Pelosi's skillful leadership.

## Robert Kennedy's Speech In Wilber, Nebraska On May 12, 1968

Contributed by Dennis Crawford



*Robert Kennedy campaigning in Nebraska in May 1968.*

Transcripts of Robert Kennedy's campaign speeches in Nebraska are few in number. This is a rare gem. During his final campaign swing before the May 14, 1968 Nebraska primary, Robert F. Kennedy delivered a speech at the dedication of the Czech Village in Wilber, Nebraska. He delivered this speech in his capacity as a U.S. Senator, rather than as a presidential candidate.

Here is a transcript of this speech.

President Novotny and distinguished guests and Reverend Father and ladies and gentlemen, I am very very pleased to be here. Very very pleased to see all of you and very very grateful for this opportunity for us to have a chance to visit with you. I'm looking forward to my doll, (laughter) that's what my children expected. And one of first things I'd do when I'm elected President of the United States and when I go to the White House, as I walk down from the second floor, I'll have this on. (applause)

Actually, I don't think I'll wait until then. (laughter) When I get home. It's very very beautiful and I am very, very grateful to all of you. And I am very pleased that John Glenn could come, and Annie Glenn is here with us to have a chance to see all of you and participate in all of this.

I've been to Czechoslovakia on a number of different occasions. I was with my oldest brother Joe who was in Czechoslovakia at the time the war broke out—the beginning of the second World War. And he told us with great sorrow about the events that occurred in your land during that period of time. I was there during another very, very sad time in 1948, when Jan Masaryk was murdered, and I came in through Bratislava and drove in from Vienna and went to Bratislava. I was taken in by the police at the time down by where all those Slovaks are. And I was taken in by the police and then I was released because

by the work and the effort of the Consulate General of Bratislava who was Claiborne Pell and who is now the Senator from Rhode Island, and who serves with me in the United States Senate. But I went up to Prague and I drove up to Prague and participated at that time in the Sokol and then I came back. It was a sad period of time—obviously a very difficult time for the Czechs and the beginning of a very very difficult time. But I was impressed at that time even then with the courage and the determination of the Czech people, as I think people were all across the rest of the globe. I came back again during the 1950s and visited Prague for several days. Traveled through Czechoslovakia. Traveled and met a lot of Czech people, a lot of your relatives in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia and was again impressed with their determination and their feeling for freedom. And I think that's what we see nowadays. To say again is an inspiration around the rest of the world.

What is happening in Czechoslovakia today, is demonstrating quite clearly if the lesson is ever going to be learned. A lesson that is as old as history itself is that to force nationalism, force of justice is going to be far stronger than any other ideology. It's going to be far, far stronger than communism. And that's what the Czech people stand for at the moment. And that's why I think you are so proud that you are of your Czech background and of your Czech ancestry. Not just what you have done here in Nebraska over the period of the last one hundred years. Not only what you have contributed to this state—to the growth of this state and why people are so proud of what you have done and proud of what you have contributed to this state but what you have contributed to the force of freedom all over the rest of the globe. By the demonstration of courage that is being exhibited in Czechoslovakia at the very moment. So, I'm proud to be here. I'm proud to be associated with you as I know that you are proud of your Czech ancestors. (applause)

None of my children are Czech. (laughter). But if things keep going like they are, maybe one of them will be — (laughter) Just by the force of statistics. (laughter) I don't know what that means exactly. (laughter) But it sounds like it's brought us closer together.

But I'm very pleased as I say, and I am very pleased at what you are doing here for the elderly people. I think the greatest single group of those who suffer from poverty in the United States are our elderly people. Between five and seven million of our Americans, fellow Americans over the age of sixty-five suffer from poverty and the legislation that we passed to try to deal with some of these problems is inadequate. Insufficient. The fact that you have taken

this personal initiative yourselves, to try to help the elderly people, that I think it's such an inspiration and what has brought me here today.

The fact is our Social Security system that we set up during the 1930s, we anticipated that it was going to provide for our elderly people and keep them above the poverty level. The fact is that it has not. We raised the minimum benefit to fifty-five dollars a month and the last session of Congress to a great deal of pride in that, but how can one single person in the United States at the present time get by on fifty-five dollars a month? A person cannot possibly do that. We raised a couple up to eighty-five dollars a month, but a couple can't get by on eighty-five dollars a month in the United States. If this is way well below the poverty level, that has been established by the Department of Congress and the Department of Labor and people do suffer. They suffer from lack of housing, suffer from lack of food, suffer from the lack of medical attention. Our medical bills over the period of the last two years have gone up twenty percent. Our hospital bills have gone up forty percent and it's anticipated over the period of next eight years that our hospital bills are going to go up another one hundred forty percent. How are our elderly people going to pay those bills? How are they going to be taken care of? And they have a right to live out their lives in dignity and honor.

If we have any responsibility at all it's to our elderly people. If we have any prosperity in the United States, at the present time, it's because our elderly people have given us that prosperity. They have built this country. They have spread our economy, developed our economy so the rest of us can live in relative affluence. That's all due to the last generation of Americans. We have a certain responsibility, those of us who are in public life and those of us who have a private life. We have a certain responsibility to our elderly people.

And I think what you have demonstrated here, the Czech people, what you have demonstrated in this community, is the fact that you care. That it's not just what the government does. You are not just waiting for a mandate from Washington, but you have demonstrated what you clearly intend to do yourselves. That's why I think it's such an inspiration here in the state of Nebraska. Not just to you but it's an inspiration around the rest of the country because it shows what the people who what they care what the people themselves can do and that's why I'm proud to be with you today. (applause)

Two out of about every five couples here in the United States live under the poverty level. Live under income of less than two thousand dollars a year. I think that we have to change that. I think we

have to increase our Social Security benefits so that a single individual receives a payment of at least one hundred dollars a month. I don't think that's asking too much. So that a single individual gets at least one hundred dollars a month and a couple gets at least one hundred fifty dollars a month and then I think also we have a penalizing factor that within our Social Security system, if you go out and work you lose the money that you get from the Social Security system or that you lose the money that you get from welfare. I think we have to start to end that.

We began a little bit in the last session in Congress, but I think there is a lot more that needs to be done. I don't think there should be a one hundred percent tax if a person goes out and works and supplements their income as there is at the present time above a certain income and still below the poverty level. So, I think what we need in legislation that I have introduced over the period of the last couple of years will raise the Social Security. It would bring a cost of living index within our Social Security so that if our cost of living went up 1 percent, that the Social Security payments would also go up one percent so that people could keep even with that. And that's terribly important nowadays. Our cost, our inflation last year was three and a half percent. The inflation rate for last, this past March, was up to five percent. That's unacceptable, obviously in this country and it proposes a particular hardship on our elderly people, who live either on Social Security or live on a fixed income. So I think we should have a cost of living index in our Social Security system and I think it should also be possible for our elderly people, not to just to retire but to contribute their skills, and their ability and their wisdom, even after the age of sixty-five.

A lot of people after the age of sixty-five or sixty-two don't want to retire. They are not willing to retire and there is no reason for them to retire. They shouldn't be penalized because they want to continue to work. They shouldn't have a one hundred percent tax as they do at the present time under our present system because they want to go out and work and they want to supplement their income, rather than just sitting at home. So, I intend if am elected president of the United States, to work to ensure that we have a more adequate Social Security payment. To have an index or an increase in the cost of living and three, that we also make it possible for an individual, an elderly person not to be penalized if they go to work even if they are on Social Security. I think these are three measures that are extremely important, and I intend to do something about it if I am elected president of the United States. (applause)

I think also that we have to ensure there is going to be adequate housing and adequate medical care. I think that we have to have first in the field of medical care. We can't just rely on hospitals. With the tremendous increase that's anticipated if we go along the way that we are at the present time, with the tremendous increase that is anticipated, we need more hospital clinics that are going to be available. There are doctors that talk about the problems of our urban centers. The fact is, in our rural areas of the United States, there are only half as many doctors per thousand people as there are in our urban centers. We need more doctors and more medical care for our people in our rural areas in the United States and we need more housing.

Even though we have tremendous problems with housing in our urban centers of the country, we still, we have the same kinds of problems in our rural centers, and we need rural housing—housing for our rural people and particularly for our elderly. There's where I think we should bring in the private enterprises to give the tax incentives and tax credits to the private enterprise system so that they will go out and build housing and construct housing, not only in our urban communities but in our rural centers as well. I think this is terribly important. It would decentralize the control. Take the control out of Washington and bring the control back to the people themselves in their local community and bring in the private sector as an active partner of government and get them involved in these major social issues. I think that's terribly important and a different philosophy. It would be terribly important for the 1970s and for the years ahead. (applause)

And I think that there are things that we could be doing for our elderly people to ensure we have a foster grandparent program that works with great effectiveness at the present time. I think it should be expanded so that our elderly people can work with children and be actively involved. I think they can be actively involved in hospital clinics, and I think that they can be actively involved in training younger people who suffer from poverty. Those who are elderly people who know a trade, who know a particular skill, why should they just retire when they would like to work? Why shouldn't they be used to train our younger people who need this kind of additional education? And additional kind of educational opportunities.

I would like to develop programs, again at the local level. Not out of Washington but bringing the control back to the local level with the federal government coming in and helping to finance it. But the people themselves developing the program and

working out the program and deciding what needs to be done. I want to decentralize the control from Washington and bring back as much as possible the control of the local community and let the people themselves work out the programs and develop the programs and develop them with the federal government helping to finance them. I think it makes much more sense than some of the programs that we've been having that have been in existence over the period of the last few years.

Our problems now in the late 1960s and the 1970s are different than the problems that they had in the '50s or the '40s or the '30s. And we are going to have to look at them differently. Abraham Lincoln said in 1858: "Our cause is new and therefore we are going to have to think anew and going to have to act anew." The same thing is true about the United States in 1968. Our problems are different in 1968 than they were in the early 1960s or the early 1950s.

All you have to do is look at what is happening in Czechoslovakia. Obviously, our relationship with Eastern Europe. Obviously, our relationship with Czechoslovakia is going to be far different now that it was a year ago or two years ago or five years ago or ten years ago. We have to adjust to that. And the programs and plans that we have for our elderly people or the programs and plans that we have for our poverty problem or the programs we had in dealing with our foreign relations problem are going to be far far different now and must be different. We have to adjust to those changes. That is what is of great concern to me, whether we will adjust, whether we will have the wisdom to adjust and whether we will say we did this ten years ago, we did this five years ago and therefore we are going to continue to do it now. We can't do that.

Our relationship to Western Europe is going to change. Since the Cuban Missile Crisis, it's obvious that the countries of Western Europe are going to be far more independent of the United States than they were after the Cuban Missile Crisis. When they were in the 1950s when they needed, felt they needed the protection of the United States far more than they do at the present time. We have to adjust to that. We have to have the agility and the wisdom to be able to adjust to a new Czechoslovakia. We have to have that here within our own country, but that's not impossible. That's not impossible. We've done that in the past and we will do it in the future.

We have to adjust to what the problems are that face our farmers here in the United States. It's unjust, it's unacceptable within our country that a farmer is receiving ten percent less income than he did a year ago. It's unjust here in the United States

that a farmer receives here in the state of Nebraska receives fourteen percent less for his wheat and ten percent less for his corn than he did a year ago. It's unjust that a farmer here in which has an effect on this community as well as on the farmer himself that the farmer has the purchasing power as the same as it was in 1936. We can do things about that. What we are doing in the United States at the present time, which we must recognize in the United States is that we are penalizing the farmer for being so efficient and being so effective.

I traveled through the farm areas of the Soviet Union, between the Caspian Sea and outer Mongolia. An area as big as all of Western Europe, where they grow their corn and where they grow their wheat. And the fact is what is different between what we do here in the state of Nebraska and what you are doing in the surrounding area and what they've done there is that you have been so efficient, and you have done so well. They are not as 1/25 as effective as you are here in the state of Nebraska, as you are here in the surrounding area. But you are penalized for being so efficient. They can make an atomic bomb. They can make a nuclear delivery system. They can go to the moon. Even communist China can do all of these things. But they cannot do what we have done, what you have done here in the state of Nebraska on farms. They can't be as efficient as you have on farms and the farmers here and the family type farmer has been in the state of Nebraska and the surrounding area. Why should we penalize the farmer for being as efficient and as effective as he has been here in the state of Nebraska? I think he should be rewarded, instead of penalizing him as you have in the past. (applause)

And I come from old farm stock myself. You can tell that, can't ya? (laughter) Now why do you laugh? (laughter) New York's moving in that direction. (laughter) We're first in sour cherries. (laughter) Does that have sort of an appeal for you? Can you feel that when you look at me that you are talking to a fellow farmer or somebody who — the fact is that we can do some things. Like we talk about people coming from other sections of country.

George Norris came from the state of Nebraska and yet he was one of the ones that helped develop the TVA. Franklin Roosevelt came from the East and yet he focused a great deal of attention of the farmer and what needed to be done about the farmer here in the United States. We've had people from other sections of the country that people from Czechoslovakia helped develop this country. The fact is that we can work together. We can deal with what the kinds of problems. But one of the first things we have to do in this country is to focus attention on



what the problems are and then start to act on them. And that's what I intend to do if I am elected President of the United States. (applause)

I'm going to — not that I come here and promise that all of these matters that deal with our elderly people and our farmer or what the problems are with our urban centers are going to disappear. But what I do say is that we can do something about it. We can make progress. Jan Huss made that quite clear, you know, what can be done by an individual. And you people here and the people that preceded you of Czech ancestry made it quite clear what people can do with the land, what they can do with a country. You should be so proud as you are, of what you have done here and your Czech ancestry and what those who preceded you came here, what they did. That's what this country stands for. That's what this country stands for. The fact that people can make progress. That they can take a great problem as you took, and your ancestors took it, and they can turn it to public good and for their own families and for themselves. That's what I want to see. That spirit in the United States of America. That's what this country stands for. That's what you have stood for. That's why you have been an inspiration in this state. That's why you will continue to be an inspiration in this state. And that's why you will continue to be an inspiration around the rest of the country. And that's why your people are an inspiration to all of the world in the cause of freedom and justice in Czechoslovakia over the period of the past few weeks. And that's why I am proud to be associated with you today. (applause)

So, I'm pleased to be here. I would hope that you would remember that there is an election on Tuesday. (laughter) This is a non-political gathering, so I won't say anything other than that I hope that you remember all of those little tiny children at home when they are looking at their father and say where is your daddy now? He's out in Nebraska and then on Wednesday morning, how did he do? (laughter) And see can you picture those little children with tears running down their cheeks? (laughter) You wouldn't want that to happen, would ya? No. No. (applause) So thank you very much. (applause) Thank you father. I need all the help I can get. (laughter)

The speech can be heard here at this link:  
<https://soundcloud.com/sourecky/rfk-speech?in=sourecky/sets/robert-f-kennedy-wilber-czech>



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## The midterm culture war over plant-based meat

By Kenny Torrella

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Nebraska's next governor made his fortune in bacon and racked up pollution complaints along the way. Now he's turning his sights on alternative meat.

### Part of the 2022 midterm elections, explained

[Recently,] Nebraskans **elected** Republican businessman Jim Pillen to be the state's next governor. It's no surprise he won: Nebraska has picked a Republican in every gubernatorial election since 1998. But what made Pillen's campaign so peculiar — and alarming to those who care about animal welfare and climate change — is that no other political candidate has campaigned so vehemently against veggie burgers and soy milk.

Throughout his **campaign**, Pillen vowed to “stand up to radicals who want to use red tape and fake meat to put Nebraska out of business,” and promised to **work to pass laws** that ban plant-based food producers from using words like “meat” and “milk” on their packaging.

While Pillen has a financial interest in such a ban — he runs Pillen Family Farms, the nation's **16th largest pork company** — “fake meat,” or more accurately, plant-based meat, currently poses little actual threat to Nebraska's farmers, as it accounts for just **1.4 percent** of US meat retail sales. Plant-based milks like oat milk or almond milk have captured a much bigger share of the dairy aisle — around **16 percent** — but **the dairy industry says** it's a minor factor in the decline of milk sales.

Pillen also has a financial interest in maintaining Nebraska's hands-off regulatory landscape: His giant hog operations have been trailed by air and water pollution **complaints** since the

1990s. Pillen's campaign did not respond to an interview request for this story.

The real aim, it seems, of his vitriol toward bean burgers — a tactic **increasingly deployed** by Republican politicians — is to ensnare plant-based meat into the culture war and further cleave an already divided electorate.

Real meat is for real Americans, while the stuff made from plants is touted by “coastal billionaires,” Pillen's campaign **asserted**. The same message **lit up** right-wing media last year when the Daily Mail speculated — with zero evidence — that President Joe Biden's climate change plan might limit red meat consumption. (What became the Inflation Reduction Act, which passed a year and a half later, **didn't touch meat**; ensuring an abundant, cheap meat supply is a goal that still has **bipartisan consensus** in the US.)

The message resurfaced this summer when Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene nonsensically **warned** that the government was going to surveil and “zap” people who eat cheeseburgers. Texas Rep. Ronny Jackson, who served as the White House physician for five years and who won reelection last week along with Greene, **tweeted** “I will NEVER eat one of those FAKE burgers made in a LAB. Eat too many and you'll turn into a SOCIALIST DEMOCRAT. Real BEEF for me!”

Alarmism over imagined threats to meat consumption is nothing new. In 2012, an internal USDA newsletter about the agency's sustainability efforts mentioned Meatless Mondays which **prompted pushback** from congressional Republicans. But the sparring over meat has escalated in recent years, which is terrible news for the planet. Leading environmental researchers warn that even if we do stop all fossil fuel use, we're still **cooked** if we don't change what we eat.

Agriculture accounts for a **quarter** of global greenhouse gas emissions, with meat, dairy, and eggs making up the **bulk** of those emissions. And farmers won't be spared from the effects of a changing climate. Extreme weather events, like droughts, wildfires, and floods, can **destroy harvests and kill farmed animals**. **Rising temperatures** and changing ecosystems lower livestock productivity, reduce crop yields, and degrade nutritional quality.

Dragging plant-based meat into the culture war could also hurt Nebraska farmers' bottom line in another way: The state is devoting more acreage to crops that go into plant-based meat. Late last year, the ingredient company Puris, which subcontracts for Beyond Meat, **told the Independent** it had increased pea production in Nebraska by 81 percent from 2019

to 2021 and expected further growth in the state. (The farmer interviewed also raises cattle and joked that he's grabbing “both of these markets.”)

Nebraska is also a leader in **growing beans**, a longtime staple of plant-based products.

Johnathan Hladik, policy director for the Center for Rural Affairs — a Nebraska-based nonprofit that works to improve quality of life for small farmers and rural citizens — said farmers in the state don't see plant-based meat as a significant threat. “It might be a humorous line in a conversation or a political punchline that gets good laughs and cheers,” he told me. “I don't hear anybody having serious conversations about it.” Hladik's family farms corn, soybeans, and cattle, and he raises animals himself that he sells directly to consumers.

According to Graham Christensen, a corn and soybean farmer and the head of a renewable energy company in Nebraska, plant-based meat and other issues **invoked by Pillen** — like state agriculture regulation, the EPA's clean water rule, and the Biden administration's **conservation programs** — are trotted out as boogeymen to distract from problems wrought by large meat producers like the governor-elect.

“This is a psychological scheme that has been deployed over and over on good rural Nebraska people and beyond, in order to allow business to go forward as is,” said Christensen, who isn't a fan of plant-based meat but agrees the US needs to cut back on meat consumption.

What most worries farmers and advocates like Hladik and Christensen, more than the rise of plant-based meat, is the **rapid consolidation** of the meat and feed industries, which has squeezed out smaller farmers, as well as the scourge of **air and water pollution** across the Midwest that's been caused largely by industrialized agriculture. Pillen, who has inveighed against “**environmental crazies**” and “the assault on modern agriculture,” is unlikely to address either.

Pillen's not wrong that what he calls modern agriculture, a euphemism for large-scale, industrialized animal agriculture, is under attack. But in Nebraska, it's not necessarily from the specter of plant-based meat or the Biden administration, which has largely taken the same hands-off approach to agricultural pollution that Pillen advocates. Rather, it's often from Nebraskans angry that their state government has known about its water pollution problem for decades and has only allowed it to **get worse**.

## “Don’t tell me how to farm”

Nebraska is home to around 100 million farmed animals, fattened up with a lot of corn and soybeans. An even **bigger proportion** of the state’s corn production goes to make ethanol that’s blended with gasoline, which **researchers say** is an inefficient use of land. Most farmers apply nitrogen-based fertilizers to make the corn and soybeans grow as big and fast as possible, which means they usually need less land to grow more feed than organic farmers — a good thing. But the synthetic fertilizer comes with a steep public health toll: Nitrogen from fertilizer leaks out as nitrate into groundwater, which some **85 percent** of Nebraskans rely on for drinking water. **Researchers** have found that areas with high nitrate levels have higher rates of childhood cancer and birth defects, and high nitrate levels are linked to **colorectal cancer** and **thyroid disease**.

Rain, as well as water used to irrigate crops, also carries nitrogen off the land and into rivers and streams, which can **kill off fish** and pollute waterways.

The other major source of nitrogen pollution comes from farmed animals themselves. Farmers spread their manure onto crops as a natural fertilizer, but some of it — like the synthetic stuff — leaches into waterways and groundwater.

According to a damning recent **investigation** by the Flatwater Free Press, 59 of Nebraska’s 500 or so public water systems have violated the EPA’s nitrate limit of 10 parts per million since 2010 — a limit **some researchers argue** is still unsafe for children.

There are some practical, win-win solutions that Christensen and Hladik would like to see farmers take up to reduce nitrogen pollution, like planting trees and shrubs between cropland and waterways to prevent nitrate runoff, and cover-cropping — planting certain crops alongside corn and soy that can absorb nitrogen or reduce reliance on fertilizer. Silvia Secchi, a natural resource economist at the University of Iowa, told me the benefits of these practices will be limited because they’re voluntary and most farmers will only employ them if they get subsidies, which come and go.

Secchi, Christensen, and Hladik all agree that what’s really needed is regulatory activity and enforcement, such as improving water pollution monitoring and testing, permitting livestock farms so they’re further from homes and schools, fining repeat polluters, and requiring farmers to better manage manure.

But given the **outsized political influence** meat and animal feed producers wield in the state,

it’s a lot to hope for, even at the local level. Nebraska has 23 natural resource districts, or NRDs — local governmental bodies made up of elected boards with the goal of improving water quality (among other issues). One elected NRD member, who wished to remain anonymous out of fear of retaliation, told me most NRDs are stacked with farmers or others involved in agriculture who resist reform.

“I hear this almost every board meeting: ‘Don’t tell me how to farm,’” they told me. The NRDs also have little to no enforcement authority: they can issue cease-and-desist orders that, if violated, can result in fines. The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) has more authority, but Hladik said it’s underfunded and understaffed.

Even if it had people and money, it would need a mandate from the governor to clean up Nebraska’s wells and waterways. So far, that hasn’t come to pass; neither the NDEE nor any of Nebraska’s 23 NRDs have **ever issued** a cease-and-desist order or fine for excessive nitrogen fertilizer or manure application, according to the Flatwater Free Press. Meanwhile, cities, towns, and individuals have spent millions to treat water.

Water quality will likely worsen in the coming years, as **Costco** recently set up **hundreds of barns** and an enormous slaughter complex in the state to raise and process nearly 100 million chickens each year.

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts did not respond to an interview request for this story. NDEE, responding to a request for comment, said in an emailed statement that it is “committed to an integrated approach to nutrient reduction that incorporates science-based and cost-effective targeted management practices” and that it “adheres to state statutory requirements and enacts regulatory authority through the department’s rules and regulations.”

Pillen, who has been on the receiving end of numerous state and citizen complaints against his business, benefits from Nebraska’s weak regulatory environment. In 1997, he received a **complaint** from the state over odors from one of his facilities. In 2000, a group of 18 plaintiffs **sued** over the stench of his hog operations, reporting a “musty hog shit smell” that “chokes you.” One woman said she felt she was a prisoner in her house, while another plaintiff complained that they couldn’t spend any time outside with their children and grandchildren. In 2013, a **group of more than 100 people** opposed new hog barns Pillen wanted to set up in Butler County, and two years later Pillen was **cited for water pollution** in another county.



It's really like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse to elect a guy like that," said Secchi. The NRD member I spoke to, used the same phrase when I asked them what they think of a Pillen governorship, as did a farmer.

Pillen and his family have received at least hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal subsidies from 1995 to 2019, according to the Environmental Working Group's [farm subsidies database](#).

### We can't afford to drag meat into the culture war

Pillen has entered the political arena during a moment in which agricultural policy is returning to the national political stage; President Biden even [mentioned cover crops](#) in his first address to Congress. This is a welcome turn of events. But agriculture is full of counterintuitive trade-offs, and blanket statements made by red-meat conservatives like Pillen, and sometimes by progressive advocates of organic agriculture, only serve to degrade the discourse on a complex, critical issue.

With a global population [hitting 8 billion](#) people on a heating planet, we need to be able to ask why we're growing so much corn to produce so much meat — and [ethanol](#) — in the first place, without the conversation devolving to pithy campaign slogans.

America's meat consumption, at more than [250 pounds](#) per person per year, is simply unsustainable at current levels. If we raised fewer animals in a more ecologically sound fashion, and opted for more plant-based meat, or occasionally swapped meat for Nebraska-grown beans, we wouldn't need to grow so much animal feed that pollutes waterways and endangers rural communities. It'd be far easier to manage the mountains of waste generated in the US each year by [nearly 10 billion animals](#) that makes rural life increasingly unbearable for some. Less meat doesn't mean rejecting agriculture, but rather rethinking what we devote precious land to — a rethinking that could also help struggling farmers economically diversify, as Christensen told me.

It's all but guaranteed Pillen would've won without his polarizing comments on meat alternatives and his anti-regulatory ethos. But the culture war-ification of meat — intended to shore up rural identity and needlessly divide voters — is something to keep an eye on as the climate footprint of what we eat becomes increasingly impossible to ignore, and essential for policymakers to address.

***Kenny Torrella** is a staff writer for Vox's [Future Perfect](#) section, with a focus on animal welfare and the future of meat.*



"Our children should learn the general framework of their government, and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine."

—Eleanor Roosevelt







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