



The Lancaster County Democrat

May 2023

We did it, Lincoln! 🎉

We re-elected Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird, Councilor James Michael Bowers and Lincoln School Board members: Annie Mumgaard and Dr. Bob Rauner! And we held onto our Democratic seats by electing Justin Carlson and Brodey Weber to the Lincoln City Council, and Piyush Srivastav to the Lincoln School Board!

Thank you to everyone who made phone calls, knocked doors, sent texts, and wrote postcards. Thank you to every candidate who put their name on the ballot, regardless of your outcome, you made a difference. Your hard work and dedication to our shared Democratic values made our collective victories possible.

Thank you to every campaign team and the Nebraska Democratic Party for your commitment to making this a coordinated campaign effort. **May 2nd proved that when we organize together, we win together.**

Thank you to everyone who joined in our Victory Party and to our event volunteers, sponsors, and local band of public-school teachers, and The Algorithms, who made our celebration one to remember!

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Now rest up, take care of yourselves and your families and then let's build up our party for 2024 and beyond.

Lincoln and Lancaster County are not for sale.

Join us: <https://forms.gle/vTsLCQbWe7HqhYue8>

Final Election Results:

<https://www.lancaster.ne.gov/1376/May-2-2023-Lincoln-City-General-Election>

Hannah Wroblewski
Chair, Lancaster County Democrats



Victory Party 2023

Photos from the Lancaster County Democratic Party's Election Night Victory Party, May 2, 2023



The Democratic Landslide

By Dennis Crawford



Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The results are in, and the Lancaster County Democrats won a landslide victory in the Lincoln city elections. It wasn't even close.

Incumbent Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird defeated former state senator Suzanne Geist by a 54% to 45% margin. Most political prognosticators predicted a close election. Lincoln has had close mayoral elections in the past.

The Democrats did well in the City Council elections. The winners are as follows:

James Michael Bowers — Lincoln City Council

District 1

Justin Carlson — Lincoln City Council District 3

Brodey Weber — Lincoln City Council District 4

The Democrats easily maintained their commanding 6-1 majority on the City Council. The voters rewarded good governance and Democratic control.

"It's overwhelming," Gaylor Baird said after taking a congratulatory call from Geist. "It's wonderful. I'm so grateful to our community, to all these people in this room and all the thousands of people who came together to make this victory

possible. It's a victory for Lincoln, for our positive vision of what we're trying to build for Lincoln."

The truth won- out over lies. Hope won over fear. The people defeated the powerful. It was a truly comprehensive victory for the Democrats and the people of Lincoln.

Two Geist supporters and their families funded most of the ads: Thomas Peed of Sandhills Publishing and U.S. Senator Pete Ricketts. They spent approximately \$1.6 million dollars on a blizzard of dishonest and negative ads that trashed Lincoln's good reputation. At the end of the day, the people still rule. It's our city.

The Geist television, digital and mailer advertisements depicted Nebraska's capital city as a criminal hellhole and failed city. The GOP ads were over the top and simply not credible. They didn't match the reality that most Lincoln residents experience.

Geist didn't respect the voters by trashing Lincoln. Calling this town a dystopian crime hellscape alienated the proud residents of our successful city. It's not a good campaign tactic to say that Lincoln sucks.

During the campaign, the mayor correctly portrayed Geist as an extremist. In the legislature, Geist had voted with the most extreme members of her party. As a state senator, Geist voted for abortions bans, a permitless conceal carry law, against LGBTQ rights and for a middle-class tax increase.

Geist tried to run away from her legislative record, but the past can't be washed away so easily. She simply wasn't a good fit for Lincoln.

The Gaylor Baird campaign rolled out a series of contrast ads after the primary informing the voters about Geist's record. This is when the voters began to tune in and pay attention. Brandon Bayer and Kevin Cass ran a brilliant campaign.

The Nebraska Democratic Party issued the following statement regarding the Lincoln General Election results:

"Lincoln voters soundly rejected the MAGA Republicans and millions dumped into the races by the Peed and Ricketts families. Nebraskans do not want our elections bought by millionaires nor do they want constant lies told by the Republican Party. The elections were won tonight because Mayor Leirion and her fellow Democrats put forward their positive ideas to continue building a welcoming Lincoln for all."

The voters rewarded good governance and know that Lincoln is a great city. That's why the Democrats won a decisive victory.

I want to thank the candidates, the campaign staff and the volunteers for their hard work. They

made a difference and have made Lincoln an even better city.

This was a great win for the citizens of Lincoln, for Lancaster County and the state of Nebraska. Lincoln will continue to be a shining city on the hill and an inspiration to all Nebraskans.

'We're Doing It Because There's A Need.' Fighting for A Greener Omaha Comes with Success, Setbacks for Students.

by Chris Bowling

Reprinted with permission. *This story is part of The Reader's [Climate Beacon Newsroom initiative](#) with [Solutions Journalism Network](#).*

From starting composting programs at the largest high school in Nebraska, to holding climate strikes to demand city action, these Omaha students are leading the charge on sustainability efforts. Now they want local politicians to join in the effort.

The garbage bags were streaked with ketchup, mustard and mayonnaise. At the bottom sat a compacted, unidentifiable mass — the remnants of hundreds of lunches at Omaha South High School.

While it wasn't appealing to look at, for South senior Mia Perales, the green bins marked "compost" smelled, metaphorically speaking, like success.

"It's so awesome to see what you've been working for so long come true," she said. "It's very rewarding. And it makes me excited for the future. If this could happen, who knows what else we can do?"

After about a year of stops and starts, South started a composting program in March thanks to Perales. The 18-year-old spent her junior and senior years advocating, petitioning and pestering administrators until the school of about 3,000 students, the largest high school in Nebraska, took the plunge.

So far, it seems to be working.

"It's taken them time," said South custodian Shawn Jakes, who helps students divvy up their waste and stack biodegradable trays, "but now, since I'm here, they're getting it."

In their first week, South students diverted about 1,100 pounds of biodegradable waste from landfills where it would have produced methane gas, the second-largest greenhouse gas and a major driver of climate change. Instead [Hillside Solutions](#) takes the waste, along with other compostable material from around Omaha, to their compost facilities where it breaks down into nutrient-rich soil.

So far 24 schools, representing about 9,000 students, compost through Hillside Solutions, diverting 15,000 pounds of food waste a week, according to Brent Crampton, the organization's director of partnerships. Others hope to add their schools to those numbers.

"[It helps] being able to say, 'We have these other schools in other districts able to make this work that have more budget issues with more students,'" said Rachel Carraher, a science teacher at Bellevue East High School after touring South's composting program. "This is doable."

'We're Doing It Because There's a Need'

What's most encouraging about Perales' success is it's a system change, pushing the fight against climate change off the individual and onto institutions such as schools, governments and companies, said Omaha Central High School senior Chlöe Johnson.

"If everyone was doing every tiny little thing that they could, it would be a drop in the bucket," Johnson said. "We're trying to do system change within our schools and within our state."

Johnson and Perales are both members of [Students for Sustainability](#), a citywide group of about a dozen high school students from Westside, Creighton Preparatory, Elkhorn, Omaha Public Schools and others. Most recently, the group organized their annual climate strike on April 14 that drew about 200 people to Memorial Park calling on the city and state to apply for federal climate funds, Nebraska to develop a climate action plan and for the Omaha Public Power District to close the [North Omaha coal plant](#).

Johnson said she and other students would rather not have to be the mouthpiece for climate issues, but they don't feel like they have a choice.

"If we had a city that was doing everything right, we wouldn't need to have teenagers doing this," she said. "We're not exactly doing this because it's fun. We're doing it because there's a need ... if we lived in, like, Portland, Oregon or something, I don't even know if we'd be in a group like this."

While the [City of Omaha is developing a climate action plan](#), it's [behind other cities](#) such as Kansas City, Minneapolis and Des Moines. The seeming lack of urgency at the state and local level is frustrating, students said.

"A lot of people in Nebraska, politicians specifically, want to know why young Nebraskans are leaving," Perales, who plans on attending Gonzaga University or the University of Oregon in the fall, told senators at the Nebraska Legislature in February. "I

can tell you it's not because the price of property taxes is rising. It is because our voices aren't being heard, and they aren't being taken seriously."

Hitting Walls

Other students in Omaha find their sustainability efforts running into obstacles.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has several [2030 sustainability goals](#), including reaching net-zero carbon emissions, diverting more than 90% of campus waste and promoting sustainable forms of transportation. Until recently, the university had a full-time sustainability coordinator to oversee progress. That position within UNO's Office of Sustainability has been vacant for about a year and is now the responsibility of Zoe Miller, a third-year student who leads the student group Sustain UNO.

"It's really tough [when you're] relying on students who have other responsibilities," Miller said. "I think a lot of the work that [the Office of Sustainability] does falls with [Sustain UNO]."

The students have had some success. Some dorms have composting access. The university bought and gave away 200 passes to Heartland Bike Share, said Sustain UNO member Nate Ostdiek. Through a community garden, the students provide fresh produce to the campus food pantry.

But budgetary restraints have kept a lid on many ideas, Miller and other students said, such as expanding the compost program, which is currently voluntary, or making Heartland Bike Share access free to all students.

For some students, such as Isabella Manhart, it's disappointing to feel like sustainability isn't a priority.

"College is a place where people build skills, they're going to use for the rest of their life ... [sustainable skills] are really valuable, and I want for myself and my peers," they said. "And the picture that I think was presented as I was deciding colleges is maybe not the picture that I've seen since coming here."

Ostdiek said fighting climate change in Omaha as a student can feel aimless at times.

"We partner with a good number of community organizations, but it is incredibly decentralized," he said. "It's so hard to find out what everyone else is doing and how we can better support each other."

A.T. Miller, UNO's chief diversity officer, understands students' frustration. Shortly after Miller was hired in February 2022, they took on the Office of Sustainability. The program, which had subsisted without regular funding, had 67 cents left in its

account, Miller said. Miller and others were able to secure three paid student positions for the office, including Zoe Miller (no relation), but the focus in 2023 has been charting a future for the office. It could be coming at the right time as the University of Nebraska unveiled its [system-wide sustainability plan on April 28](#).

A.T. Miller, along with others on the chancellor's Sustainability Committee, are looking at grants and funding opportunities to bring in a full-time coordinator as well as, ideally, staff and programming dollars.

"It is, of course, a setback to not have a sustainability coordinator," A.T. Miller said. "However, to get back to a staffed office, I think it's far healthier to say, 'No, we want to get back when it's a real position that has a future to it.'"

Beth Chalecki is a political science professor and director of the university's academic approach to sustainability. She said increasingly more students want to learn about climate change and how to impact the systems that perpetuate it. UNO has degrees in environmental science as well as a sustainability concentration and minor. Sustainability and climate science also factor into classes in business, social sciences and the arts. And Chalecki said it's not uncommon to pursue a new class at a student's request.

But she said more could be done.

"I think if we had clear direction from the city ... then we could make a lot of progress in a hurry," Chalecki said. "I mean, a hurry as in a few years. We only have less than a decade to bend that carbon curve downward."

A Word from Above

There is one leader whose clear directives are having effects in Omaha schools.

"The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail,'" [Pope Francis wrote in May 2015](#).

The Pope's appeal to Catholics to take up the cause of climate change struck a chord with Eric Krakowski, assistant vice principal at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart. He was an at-home composter and tried to make sustainable choices, but he realized Duchesne, a private Catholic girls school of about 300 students, could do more.

"That's not a political statement," Krakowski said, referring to the Pope's comments. "That's a matter of our religious faith." Since then, Duschene has [made a lot of progress](#).

- Students led a project in 2020 to put solar panels on Duchesne's roof, which powers the school's STEM lab. Since coming online, the panels have generated 11.5 megawatts of power — enough to drive a car from New York to Los Angeles nearly 17 times.
- In November 2022 the school reached net-zero waste (diverting more than 90% of its waste) eight years ahead of its 2030 target.
- Since 2016, the school, built in 1881, has been awarded an Energy Star rating for its energy efficiency by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Its 2022 certification is proudly displayed under portraits of the archangel Gabriel.
- Much of the perimeter of the building has been converted to gardens that sometimes provide produce for lunch.
- Sustainability and climate change figures into several Duchesne courses, and Krakowski is co-teaching a theology class of Pope Francis' call to action on climate change.
- In 2020 Duchesne was recognized as a Green Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education for its commitment to sustainability.

Duchesne does have an advantage in that it's a small school that services many affluent families. Its solar array, for example, was paid for by school donors. But it's not about any one school or person doing everything perfectly, Krakowski said. It's about setting an example, whether that's for students, their families or other schools.

"Our hope is our students see what we're doing, hear what we're doing, learn about things in the classroom, have their eyes open to things going on in the world around them," Krakowski said. "That's the social awareness — that they see a need and that they feel driven, to some degree, in their own lives to act on that."

The Pope's message around climate change has also been received loud and clear at Creighton University, said Mary Ann Vinton, who oversees Creighton's environmental science program. After the Pope's declaration, Creighton organized faculty and student task forces, students formed their own advocacy groups, and the [university set goals for 2028](#), including:

- increasing sustainability classes
- halving greenhouse gas emissions
- decreasing campus waste by a quarter
- increasing funding for student-driven initiatives

The progress may not be moving quickly enough for some — in 2019, 86% of students supported a referendum to divest from fossil fuels, [which the](#)

[president rejected](#) — but staying committed to these goals sends a message to students.

"We all want to be part of a larger solution," Vinton said. "If you can see how your role as an individual or as an institution is nesting within a broader strategy, it's really good for morale. It's hard to sustain if you don't think your efforts are going to make a difference."

'Give Us a Couple Years'

Trying to change the world isn't easy — especially when you're a teenager in Omaha, Nebraska.

But there are bright moments, schools adopting composting, alternative forms of energy and goals to lessen their impact on climate change. The students know nothing's going to change overnight, but doing this work together has ultimately made them more optimistic about the future.

"People underestimate the change they can create as one person, especially when they come together as a group," said Ryan Quinn, a senior at Creighton Preparatory School.

But the students are far from satisfied. When asked what they'd do if they were given control of the city, they quickly rattled off about 20 ideas. Those included expanding transit options, taxing carbon, growing native plants and investing in neighborhoods to make sustainability accessible for all.

They know it costs money. And they know change is hard. But they don't care. If Omaha, Nebraska or the United States doesn't get with the program soon, it won't be long before a new generation is in charge.

"Give us a couple years, and we will take over," Johnson. "We will be the adults."

"Without agriculture it is not possible to have a city, stock market, banks, university, church or army. Agriculture is the foundation of civilization and any stable economy." - Allan Savvy

Fact Checking Pete Ricketts' Maiden Senate Speech

By Dennis Crawford



Pete Ricketts is a faux cowboy since he grew up in a very wealthy family in Omaha.

Pete Ricketts delivered his maiden Senate speech last week. Normally, maiden Senate speeches are serious and non-partisan in nature. For example, Robert Kennedy's maiden speech in 1965 was the first occasion when he expressed his opposition to Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam War policies. In 2015, Ben Sasse denounced excessive partisanship. However, Ricketts' speech was much different — it was overly partisan, misleading, and sounded like a campaign kickoff.

During his fifteen-minute partisan screed, Ricketts blasted the Biden administration's alleged "reckless spending," the so-called border "security crisis," and claimed that our allegedly "disastrous, shameful withdrawal" from Afghanistan supposedly showed weakness to both our allies and enemies.

Pete Ricketts' maiden speech was hyper-partisan and misleading. The point of this piece is to fact check this tone-deaf speech.

Ricketts cited alleged "out of control spending." Pete didn't tell you that federal spending was 31.2% of GDP in 2020 and was 25.6% of GDP in 2022. Federal spending will be 24% of GDP under Biden's budget. Pete also didn't tell you that the GOP wants to extend the failed Trump tax cuts and repeal the corporate tax increase of 2022. That would add \$3 trillion to the national debt.

There is an old saying, "Figures don't lie but liars figure." In raw numbers, Biden is spending more money. However, as a percentage of the economy, federal spending is down significantly since 2020. Ricketts neglected to mention that fact.

Ricketts made another misleading omission in his speech. As governor, Ricketts signed into law \$1.3 billion of federal stimulus funds that was spent on tax cuts, canals, and a lake. Ricketts didn't denounce

alleged out of control spending when he took the Biden stimulus money.

Ricketts didn't mention that the current border surge began in the summer of 2020. Senator Christopher Murphy (D-CT) pointed out that, "The surge at the border began in the fall of 2020, in the last four months of Donald Trump's presidency there was an 80 percent surge in apprehensions at the border."

Murphy followed up that interview with another tweet on immigration: "I'm not contesting there has been an increase in apprehensions. What I'm pointing out is that it didn't start when Biden became President." Here's the rough data on % increases in border encounters in 2020:

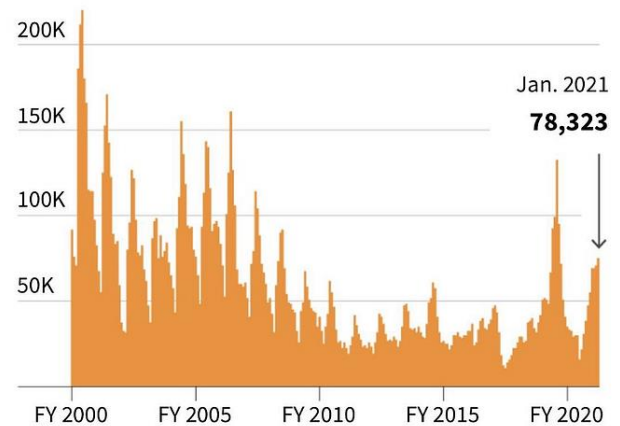
June-Aug — 73%

Sept-Nov — 44%

Dec-Feb — 38%

Number of people apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border each month

TOTAL APPREHENSIONS



Border crossing continues to be a problem because conservative Republicans have blocked immigration reform since 2007. The right wing of the GOP blocked immigration reform bills with bi-partisan support in 2007, 2013, 2018 and 2022. The GOP creates the problem and runs against the solution.

Another thing that Ricketts failed to mention is that border crossings are down substantially in 2023. The Republicans are now at the stage where they are complaining that Biden isn't cleaning up Trump's mess fast enough.

Nebraska's appointed junior senator also criticized the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Unfortunately, Ricketts didn't mention the flawed Doha Agreement of 2020 in which Trump agreed to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

One can draw a direct connection between Trump's 2020 Doha agreement and the swift collapse of the Afghan Army in 2021. It caused the Afghan Army to sell their weapons to the Taliban and to cut and run. According to the *Washington Post*: "The Taliban capitalized on the uncertainty caused by the February 2020 agreement reached in Doha, Qatar, between the militant group and the United States calling for a full American withdrawal from Afghanistan . . .

Former Trump National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster described the Doha agreement in scathing terms: "Our secretary of state (Mike Pompeo) signed a surrender agreement with the Taliban. This collapse goes back to the capitulation agreement of 2020. The Taliban didn't defeat us. We defeated ourselves."

Guy next to @mikepompeo here in November of 2020 is the guy the Trump administration helped get out of jail in 2018 and who is now the "president" of Afghanistan



In 2020, in Mike Pompeo's words, the Taliban was represented by a "gentleman," was "working diligently to reduce violence," and was "sincere in wanting what's good for the Afghan people."

Does Ricketts want to re-invade Afghanistan? How would Pete pay for his new war? Wars are expensive. We already spent \$2 trillion in Afghanistan over a twenty-year time period. How much more does Pete want to spend there?

So far, no Democrat has yet to announce plans to challenge Ricketts in a 2024 special election. However, Republican Chuck Herbster has expressed an interest in throwing his hat in the ring. A Ricketts versus Herbster GOP primary would be the political equivalent of nuclear war.

I hope a good Democratic candidate runs against Ricketts. I realize it's hard to recruit a good

candidate to run an uphill race. I've been there and done that myself two times. If no Democrat runs against Ricketts, I may have to do something crazy and enter the race. Please don't make me do that. I appreciate everything that you all do.

Governor Pillen has a bronze gilt pig which resides in his official office. It has been named Petunia. What would Petunia say if she could communicate with him?



A little background on my reference in the cartoon of brood sows only having 12 to 16 sq. ft. of space to farrow in. When I was a kid, my 4-H sows had a pen about 7' square, where they could lie down easily on straw bedding and have freedom to move around. If outside temperatures were cold, each pen would have a shielded heat lamp to provide warmth for the young pigs.

There were guard rails placed around the pen perimeter near the floor so the young pigs would not get crushed accidentally when the sow laid down.

Sows, during their gestation period, were placed in a small pasture. Supplemental feed was provided so as to be free to exercise and such. Portable wooden hog houses gave necessary shelter from the elements.

They were let out twice daily to a small lot to eat, drink and do their job. There, an "old-timely" recollection of hog husbandry.

The rural community I grew up in 60 years ago was known for their animal husbandry practices and the quality of the animals raised.

I cannot stand the thought of how these animals are treated in those corporate run hog production facilities.

- Steve Kemper



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