

The Lancaster County Democrat

July 2023

LANCASTER COUNTY
DEMOCRATS

Support Our Schools

By Dennis Crawford

TOP 10 REASONS TO SIGN THE PETITION

SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS #SOSNE Nebraska

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Visit SupportOurSchoolsNebraska.org

- 01 Money sent to private schools would otherwise be tax dollars to support public schools and other services.
- 02 Private schools can and many do discriminate against kids.
- 03 Less money for public schools will make it more difficult to address teacher shortages or fund vocational education.
- 04 Private schools are not held to the same accountability requirements.
- 05 The tax incentive for school vouchers is far more generous than donations to food banks, cancer research or other nonprofits.
- 06 More than half of Nebraska's counties do not have a private school.
- 07 Public schools serve 9 out of every 10 kids in Nebraska.
- 08 In other states, voucher programs like this one start out small but balloon in cost to taxpayers.
- 09 Tax credits from vouchers in other states overwhelmingly flow to the highest earners.
- 10 Voters should have a say in sending taxpayer dollars to private schools.

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FIND A PLACE TO SIGN THE PETITION

HELP VOLUNTEER FOR THE CAUSE

The Nebraska legislature passed the so-called Opportunity Scholarships Act, or Legislative Bill 753, which allows taxpayers to divert up to half of their state income taxes to organizations providing scholarships to attend private and religious schools. A petition drive has been launched to repeal this scheme to defund the public schools.

Legislative Bill 753 is a “solution” in search of a problem. Nebraska already has excellent public schools. *U.S. News and World Reports* rated Nebraska schools seventh in the country. That same publication ranked Nebraska number four in education in best states overall.

This legislation is dangerous because it jeopardizes our excellent public schools. This new law will significantly reduce future tax revenues that could go toward funding our public schools. In addition, LB753 will significantly reduce other charitable donations. The dollar-for-dollar credit for donations to

private schools gives preferential treatment to this particular donation. The ridiculously generous incentives in this bill will not be provided to other worthy non-profits such as churches, animal shelters and foundations.

This dangerous experiment has been implemented in other states and the results have been disastrous. “In other states, these credits have started small but steadily ballooned in cost, reducing what’s available to districts to pay teachers, provide counseling services and fund vocational and technical programs fundamental to achieving many of the things that we want in the state.” Open Sky Policy Institute.

Time Magazine posted an excellent article on April 19, 2023, titled: “How School Voucher Programs Hurt Students.” The pertinent excerpts are as follows.

“Let’s start with who benefits. First and foremost, the answer is: existing private school students. . . In Arizona, more than 75% of initial voucher applicants had never been in public school — either because they were new kindergartners or already in private school before getting a voucher. That’s a problem because many voucher advocates market these plans as ways to improve educational opportunities for public school children.

But for the children who do transfer using a voucher, the academic results in the recent scaled-up statewide programs are catastrophic. . . New evaluations of vouchers in Washington, D.C., Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio show some of the largest test score drops ever seen in the research record — between -0.15 and -0.50 standard deviations of learning loss. That’s on par with what the COVID-19 pandemic did to test scores, and larger than Hurricane Katrina’s impacts on academics in New Orleans. . . And these harmful voucher impacts from existing statewide vouchers lasted for years, with little else on balance to show for it.

Private schools can decline to admit children for any reason. One example of that is tied to the latest culture wars around LGBTQ youth and strengthened in current voucher legislation. In Florida, a voucher-funded school made national news last summer when it banned LGBTQ children. In Indiana, pre-pandemic estimates showed that more than \$16 million in

taxpayer funding had already gone to voucher schools with explicit anti-LGBTQ admissions rules.

Voucher schools also rarely enroll children with special academic needs.

Vouchers are largely tax subsidies for existing private school families, and a tax bailout for struggling private schools.”

If private schools need more funding, they can hold a bake sale or raffle off some tickets — like public schools do. Perhaps they can find a right-wing billionaire to fund them. Perhaps the Ricketts family would be interested. They have plenty of money.

A petition drive has been launched to repeal this dangerous scheme. The petition to repeal the private school bailout is a local grassroots campaign organized by teachers and parents.

Please sign a petition to keep this bad law off the books. You can go to Support Our Schools to find out where petitions are being signed.

Support Our Schools Nebraska

The private school tax scheme in LB753 will hurt kids, Nebraska public schools, and taxpayers.

<https://supportourschoolsnebraska.org/>



In contrast, the opposition is funded and organized by out of state special interest groups. That is pretty revealing. Do they really care about Nebraska’s children? The organization that started running the “decline to sign” TV ads on local stations last week is the so-called American Federation for Children based in Maryland. This effort is being funded by former Trump Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

This is a fight that we can win. “The perception that this is popular (with voters) is a complete misnomer,” said Brian Mikkelsen, the political action director for NSEA. He added that Nebraska voters have rejected providing public funds for private schools three previous times.

Now let’s get it done!

Legislators Need to Protect Workers

By John Markey

The South has been embroiled in a heat wave. Cities in Texas set record high temperatures, with Rio Grande Village, on the border with Mexico, reaching 119. As Texans turned on the AC to deal with this heat, they set a record for electricity demand at 80,878 megawatts on June 27, this year. Last year, Texas experienced its hottest summer since 1895.

Opening with this information, one could easily go on to show that climate change is here and the importance of moving to carbon free energy. One could also find a silver lining as Texas also set a record on June 28, producing 31,468 megawatts of electricity with wind and solar. This renewable energy is the reason the Texas grid was able to deliver as needed.

I’m taking this somewhere else. As Texas was experiencing the heat, Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill passed by Republicans in the legislature preventing cities from creating regulations over and above state requirements in agriculture, business and commerce, insurance, finance, natural resources, occupations and property and labor.

One of the primary targets of the bill, mandatory water breaks for those working outside in the heat, will be nullified when the law takes effect September 1. The City of Austin passed such an ordinance in 2010 after the death of a local worker from heat related injuries. Dallas followed in 2015 after the death of a worker there. Of the 436 heat related deaths of workers reported in the U.S. from 2011 to 2021, 42 were in Texas, nearly 10%. It appears Republican controlled Texas has no interest in reducing such deaths. Most states don’t require such breaks for employees working in the heat and I won’t fault Texas for not doing so. Some cities, though, have taken the initiative after experiencing heat related deaths. Republicans felt the need to get these progressive, Democratic cities under their control. Other targets of the law include city minimum wages and attempts by some cities to pass paid time off ordinances.

Meanwhile in Florida, as if attacking public sector unions wasn’t enough, the Republican controlled legislature passed a strict immigration law that took effect July 1. This new law requires employers to use the E-Verify system, requires hospitals to question patients about immigration status, ban driver’s licenses issued by other states to undocumented immigrants and criminalizes the transporting of an undocumented immigrant into, within or out of the state.

Anyone driving people who lack legal status to work, to the hospital, or to the grocery store risk being

charged with a felony and identified as a human smuggler. Undocumented workers make up at least 10% of Florida's workforce in construction, farm work, hospitality, and other labor-intensive industries. As Florida struggles to meet its labor force needs, like most other states, this ill-advised law is driving vital workers out of the state.

Both anti-worker bills were opposed by Democrats.

Indigenous farmers hope their knowledge of regenerative practices can influence others

By Eva Tesfaye for Harvest Public Media

Reprinted with permission



Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska Chairman Timothy Rhodd (right) and two other members of the executive committee, Cheyenne Colborn (middle) and Tony Fee (left), show off a pear tree in the tribe's orchard. The tribe is also hoping to bring back native berry plants. Eva Tesfaye / Harvest Public Media

On a recent summer day, Timothy Rhodd fearlessly opened the lid on a box of bees and pointed out the hive's complicated systems.

"It's pretty cool once you start learning what these insects do for the whole world. And they're dying and it's agriculture that's causing it," said Rhodd, the chairman of the [Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska](#).

Not only do the bees produce honey that is sold, but the tribe's agricultural operation, [Ioway Farms](#), also uses the bees to pollinate its orchard. It's all part of the work the tribal nation is doing to better farm the land. Rhodd said just a few years ago they used the same row cropping practices as the rest of the Midwest.

"What folks didn't see was the financials of our operation. We were spiraling downwards," Rhodd said.

"Financially we weren't a profitable farming operation, and it's due to the mindsets that's been instilled in us."

The tribe decided to stop "chasing yields" and start implementing practices that are better for the soil, such as prescribed burns and cover crops that keep the ground planted all year round. According to Rhodd, the farmers now consider the soil to be the "livestock" of the operation — just as important as the plants that are grown out of it.

Sharing traditional farming knowledge

Now the tribe hopes to share what it has learned with other tribes and farmers in the region. The Iowa Tribe is working on a new project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#), to create the [Center for Excellence for Regenerative Native Agriculture](#) (CERNA). Through the center, it will share traditional knowledge and regenerative practices to farmers, Native and nonnative, and help them transition from conventional agriculture to Native regenerative agriculture, while also providing technical and financial assistance.

"The Iowa Tribe people were known as agricultural people. They were known as farmers," said Rhodd. "And so through this we're getting to reeducate and say that regenerative agriculture is Indigenous agriculture, that it is from an Indigenous mindset."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is making it a priority to support these Indigenous efforts to improve farming practices, according to Josiah Griffin, the policy advisor for economic development and food systems at the USDA's Office of Tribal Relations. He said the USDA has a ["trust and treaty"](#) responsibility to make sure that it is working flexibly with tribes to give them access to USDA programs.

"The partnership with the Iowa Tribe is really kind of the pinnacle or a significant spotlight in our examples of how we're moving forward in a productive and proactive way in partnership with tribes," Griffin said.

He added that Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge plays an important role in helping the Biden-Harris administration reach the goal of [net-zero carbon emissions by 2050](#).

"As we look at today's landscape of changing climates, we recognize Indigenous knowledge as an opportunity for us to be reflective and better meet our trust and treaty responsibilities for our tribes," he said, "while also elevating and meeting some new benchmarks and priorities that the White House has set for us."

Other tribal-led projects funded by the climate-smart commodity grants in the Midwest and Great

Plains region include a market initiative for buffalo led by the InterTribal Buffalo Council and a financial assistance project for livestock and pecan products with the conservation districts from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.

"It's providing me hope just because the federal government is putting a significant amount of dollars in these pilot projects to hopefully take out the things that work and start incentivizing some of these producers for the transition into a different model," said Rhodd.

Relying on one another

Tribes are already sharing regenerative practices with each other. Michelle Bowden, the food sovereignty director of the [Quapaw Nation](#) in Oklahoma, said that sharing experiences with other tribes has helped in their regenerative agriculture efforts.

"I'm able to reach out to several other tribes and it's really amazing because they like to share their knowledge as I like to share my knowledge, and we just kind of talk about things that work," Bowden said.

The Quapaw Nation's regenerative agriculture efforts sprang from a food sovereignty assessment it did in 2018. Since then, the tribe has started a [farmers' market](#), a seed library, new greenhouses and gardens and is even looking into a foraging and permaculture project.

Similar to the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska's changes to its farming practices, one of the driving forces behind these efforts was giving the community access to fresh healthy foods, to improve the health of the tribal members, in addition to the health of the ecosystem.

"We wanna make sure that we take care of Mother Earth and the soils and the waters and everything around us and bring back traditional foods. Things that are not highly processed," she said.

However, Bowden said that like many other tribes, pieces of their land have been sold off, leaving a checkerboard of tribal and non-tribal land. The tribe is trying to get much of that land back.

Bowden said it can be challenging for tribes to keep up regenerative practices when not all the land is owned by the tribe. For example, it became necessary to reach out to other producers when pesticides they were using on crops started to waft towards the tribe's apiary.

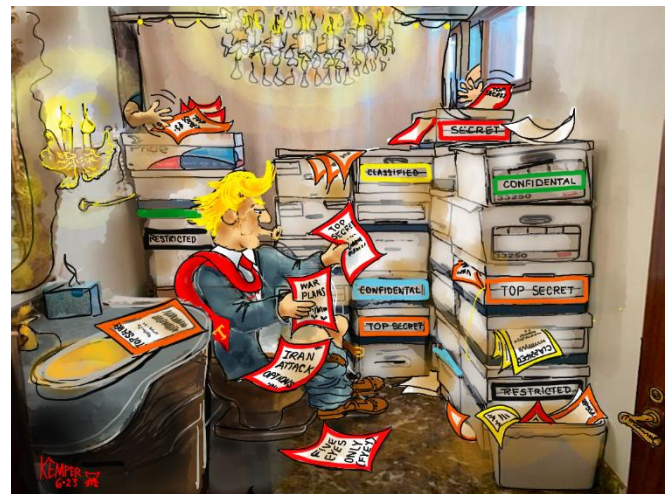
"It'd be nice if we can get everybody else involved in this; just all, all of the community," Bowden said, "we really need to bring a sense of community back."

The Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska is having similar challenges — particularly with nitrates from conventional practices on other farms contaminating its water. It was part of the reason why the CERNA was started, said Rhodd.

"We've only got 12,036 acres within the reservation. And currently we only own half of that, so we still today do not have the full control of our homelands," he said. "But if we can find ways through CERNA to change the practices and the mindsets of these producers and reeducate those folks, we can have better water."

Eva Tesfaye covers agriculture, food systems and rural issues for [KCUR](#) and [Harvest Public Media](#) and is a [Report For America](#) corps member.

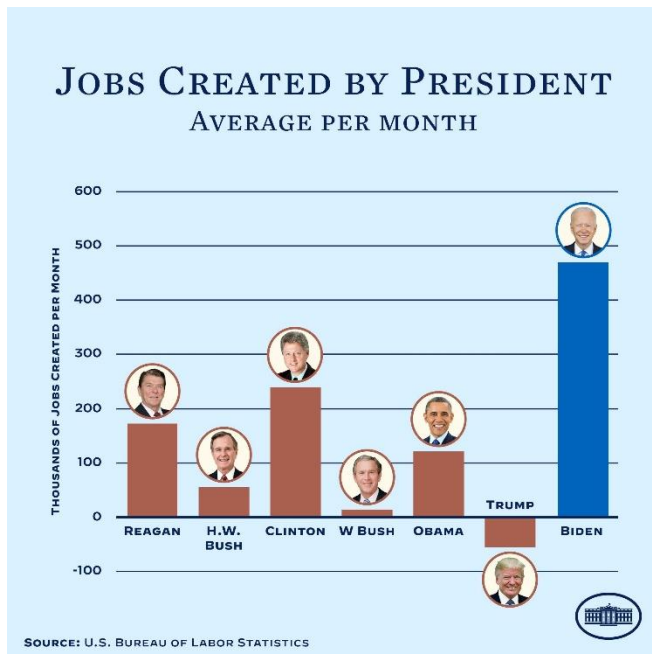
This story was produced in partnership with Harvest Public Media, a collaboration of public media newsrooms in the Midwest. It reports on food systems, agriculture and rural issues.



Rumor has it that Mar-a-Lago also has a SCIF reading area.

The Good News Is That the Bad News Is Wrong

By Dennis Crawford



Under President Biden and Vice President Harris, we've regained all the jobs lost during the pandemic and created 3 million more.

Good news keeps rolling in that will make the MAGA Republicans very angry. MAGA Republicans are invested in the failure of Biden and the United States. They only way they can win next year is if bad things are happening to the American people.

The Atlantic has reported that the murder rate is falling: "Murder is down about 12 percent year-to-date in more than 90 cities that have released data for 2023, compared with data as of the same date in 2022. Big cities tend to slightly amplify the national trend — a 5 percent decline in murder rates in big cities would likely translate to a smaller decline nationally. The drop shown in the preliminary data is astonishing."

As I've noted in previous posts, a report from Third Way finds that the murder rates are actually higher in red states than blue ones. Republicans like to explain this away by claiming that homicides are concentrated in blue cities. This isn't true — the homicide rates in blue and red cities are essentially the same. In addition, the *Wall Street Journal* reported in 2022 that murder rates soared in rural America in 2020.

"After undergoing one of the largest increases in US history under Donald Trump in 2020, the murder rate was flat in 2021, city-based statistics showed it declined slightly in 2022, and now appears to be in a

free fall in 2023. Will anyone mention this happened under Joe Biden?" [@What46HasDone](#)

What this means is that the crime issue will be an even less effective issue for the GOP in 2024. Last year, the "liberal" mainstream media and the GOP believed that the crime issue was a silver bullet for the Republicans. As it turned out, the Republican fearmongering on crime fell flat nationally in 2022 and in Lincoln in 2023. A majority of voters recognized that the Republicans have a record of failure on crime.

We're also getting good news on the inflation front. The New York Federal Reserve has estimated that underlying inflation in April was only 3.4%. If that marks a new trend, then inflation has already fallen to a rate only moderately above the Fed's long-term target — and will probably reach the Fed's target of 2% by the end of the year.

Unlawful entries along the southern border have decreased 70% from their record highs since the end of Title 42 on May 11, according the Department of Homeland Security. This was the dog that didn't bark. Both Fox and CNN obsessed about a predicted border surge before May 11. It never happened and they have since lost interest in the issue.

"Probably worth noting that inflation, gas prices, violent crime and border apprehensions — three sources of HUGE coverage on their way up — are all coming down significantly." Chris Hayes. However, media coverage of these positive developments has been virtually non-existent.

The media did briefly mention that we had another great jobs report in May that disappointed the MAGA Republicans. The U.S. added 339,000 jobs in May alone. This is the progress Pete Ricketts and Deb Fischer tried to destroy by voting for default. Aren't you glad they failed?

Another 92,000 new jobs were added from prior revisions. There have now been over 13 million jobs created during the Biden administration. In 28 months, Biden has created more jobs than any president has created in a 4-year Presidential term. Under President Biden and Vice President Harris, we've regained all the jobs lost during the pandemic and created 3 million more.

The unemployment rate is currently 3.7%. That means the unemployment rate has been under 4% for 16 months in a row. The last time our nation had such a long stretch of low unemployment was in the 1960s.

Under President Biden's economic plan, more Americans are joining the labor force — with the highest prime-age labor participation in 16 years.

Because a record number of people are working, the American people are traveling again. At airports, it's likely to be busier than it was in 2019 pre-

pandemic, according to a recent AAA travel forecast. Air travel is expected to be up by 11% over last year. That figure exceeds the previous 2019 record levels by 5.4% — or 170,000 more air travelers.

While the media briefly covered the good news on jobs, they have not mentioned that domestic U.S. oil production reached the highest level since 2020. The Energy Information Administration has predicted that the U.S. oil production will be at a record high in 2023 and 2024.

America is also experiencing a factory construction boom. Investment in manufacturing has surged. What Trump's tax cuts for the rich didn't achieve, President Biden's industrial policies have.

There was no investment boom after Trump cut taxes for the rich and corporations in 2017.

(Approximately 80% of these tax breaks were grabbed by the top 1%.) Instead, 85% of his corporate tax cuts were used for stock buybacks and dividends. In contrast, under Biden, manufacturing construction has doubled over the past year.

"And there's no real question about the causes of the surge. It's being driven by two major pieces of legislation: the misleadingly named Inflation Reduction Act, whose actual core is subsidies for green energy, and the CHIPS Act ("creating helpful incentives to produce semiconductors" — call in the acronym police!), which is supposed to protect national security by promoting domestic production of, um, chips." Paul Krugman.

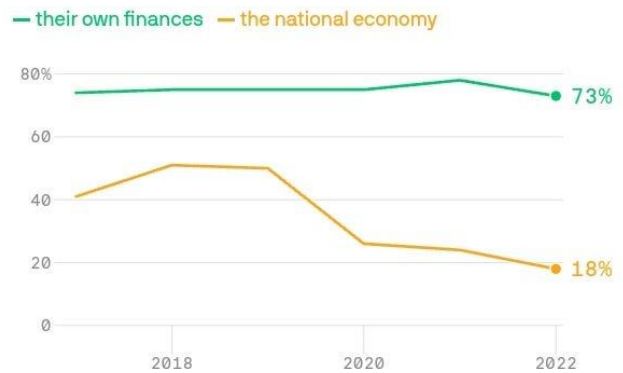
Real Construction Spending: Manufacturing



The good economic news is reflected in the fact that 73% of Americans are satisfied with their own personal finances. However, at the same time, an overwhelming majority consistently erroneously believes that we're in a recession — just 18% think the national economy is in good shape.

Proportion of Americans who feel good about...

Survey of U.S. adults taken annually, 2017–2022



Data: Federal Reserve Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking;

Chart: Axios Visuals

We can blame the "liberal" mainstream media for this paradox. The overwhelming majority of stories on the economy are negative. Media coverage largely has focused on inflation and the possibility of a recession. The media has been predicting a recession for two years.

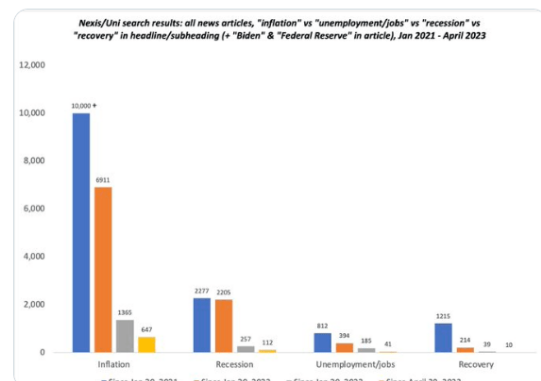
The media's ignorance and incompetence is deeply misleading and frustrating. The media has worked in concert with the Republican Party to convince Americans into believing the economy is bad despite their own personal financial situations. The media somehow believes its partisan to point out that the economy is doing well. Actually, it's partisan for the "liberal" mainstream media to repeat GOP talking points that everything is terrible.

Mark Copelovitch
@mcopelov

New update of the Inflation/Recession Hysteria media coverage chart. In case you thought the balance might improve as inflation ebbs & the job market keeps hammering on all cylinders, well...no

wHy dOeS eVeRyOnE tHiNk ThE eCoNoMy iS TeRrIBLe?

Verily, it's a total mystery 🤔🙄



The Republicans don't need or deserve any help from the media in pushing out their false narrative of doom. The Republicans have been predicting doom during Democratic presidencies since 1993.

Every Republican office holder predicted that Bill Clinton's economic policies would cause a recession. When Barack Obama was president, they GOP doubled down and predicted "Armageddon" and that America would "cease to exist." Those predictions of doom were wildly off the mark.

President Obama did a great job in 2015 when he ridiculed the GOP's predictions of imminent disaster: "We're making enormous progress."

Why is it that so many Republican politicians are so down on America?

They've constructed this entire separate reality. It's like the Twilight Zone," Obama said.

"Have you noticed that?" Obama asked the crowd of about 500 cheering women. "I mean, they are gloomy. They're like Grumpy Cat."

Then he turned the corners of his mouth down into a frown, emulating the famous feline.

"Everything is terrible, according to them," he said. "We're doomed!"

A big problem for Democrats is we are too often reluctant to declare that things are getting better. In 2000, Al Gore ran away from Bill Clinton's economic record. In 2016, Hillary Clinton rarely mentioned that unemployment had declined from 10% to 4.7% under President Obama. We don't focus on our accomplishments because there's always something more to be done.

Now just imagine if you will that if under a Republican president, that we're creating more than 300,000 jobs per month with inflation going down, which is incredibly rare. If a GOP president were in office, the Republicans would be shouting about it from the rooftops. (Of course, this would never happen during a GOP Administration — the Republicans are wreckers.)

Don't take this progress for granted. In 2000 and 2016, some of us were complacent and stayed home or voted third party. The last two Republican presidents destroyed their predecessors' progress and presided over deep recessions. We can't let that happen again. The Republicans are dangerous when they are in power.

The choice in 2024 is America or the MAGA Republicans. Choose wisely. Now let's get it done!

LCDP Summer Activities

Pictures on the following pages are from County Party summer volunteers: Lincoln Pride, the Fifth Parade, and the Waverly Fourth of July Parade.









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