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**Capitol View
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

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**Higher Office Beckons? Governor Seems to be Acting Like It**

The term-limited seated Governor has become a very vocal critic of the Biden Administration policies – to the point of releasing press statements in opposition to some of them.

Probably not unprecedented, but it’s obvious that Republican Pete Ricketts has his eye on the prize, whatever that may be. There is no declaration of U.S. Senate aspirations. He tried that once and lost. Many thought he was expecting an appointment from the Trump Administration had there been a second term. That did not happen.

So, what is the prize? Rumors have been whispered that he wants the big show; he wants to be the next President of the United States. There is even talk that a campaign committee has been formed, though there is a lack of evidence to prove that, yet.

Well, if it is POTUS, who are we to deny those aspirations? The reality is, he is the governor of one of those mostly square states out west that most people can’t find on an unmarked map, and many of us like it that way. In that regard, get in line somewhere behind Governor Kristi Noem of South Dakota, that mostly square state just to the north.
 She’s out there making visits to Iowa and Texas in an effort to test the waters and make friends. Her controversial anti-virus attitudes won national attention when she refused statewide shutdowns and mandatory masking during the pandemic. Nebraska’s governor had the same attitude about imposing federal directed initiatives as the country battled the coronavirus.
 While some hope that Trump stays on the sidelines in 2024, the candidates are lining up for what could be a crowded field. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Texas Governor Greg

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Abbott are likely contenders. They come from states that figure prominently in national politics. Then there’s Mike Pence, Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo. People with name recognition.

Noem jumped on defying pandemic restrictions early and found the fodder for building a national profile. Nebraska figured prominently in the coronavirus picture thanks mostly to the top, often-quoted – doctors at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, which is well known for its infectious disease research and treatment. Science versus politics. That’s a tough national sell.
 So Nebraska’s Governor has turned his attention-getting thoughts to things like Biden’s cancellation of the Keystone Pipeline, which would have brought hundreds of jobs to Nebraska. But the biggie, by far, is the opposition to President Biden’s plan to conserve 30 percent of the nation’s land and water by 2030. The Governor calls it a federal land grab and has held statewide townhall meetings to spread the word. Proponents say it is strictly voluntary and an attempt to improve the environment. Opponents say the Conservation Reserve Program already in place is enough.

Given that an attempt in the recently completed Legislature to enact voter ID legislation failed, there is a petition drive underway to place the issue on the next general election ballot. Senator Julie Slama, a Republican in the officially non-partisan Legislature, and the Nebraska Republican Party – and most likely some of Ricketts’ personal funding – are behind the measure.

So, what’s next? There is an upcoming special session, maybe in September, for redistricting based on new census figures. This would be a good opportunity for the Governor to wield some behind-the-scenes power and grab a few headlines.

It all adds to the political intrigue.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years.*