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**Capitol View**

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**Statewide Elections A Year Away, Here’s A Prediction**

The statewide election is a year away, but it appears former Governor Dave Heineman could win that office again. If he decides to run.

Predicting something that major this soon is risky, but I have consulted several colleagues who agree that the current candidate pool makes such a win possible. There’s always the Republican primary in May, but Heineman knows how to win primaries.

Heineman, who had also previously served as state treasurer and lieutenant governor, has said he is still meeting with constituents statewide. But he would bring considerable name recognition to the race, as well as a keen knowledge of how to win. In 2006, he defeated Nebraska football coach and U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne to win the GOP primary for governor in what some considered to be a political upset.

The Fremont resident had assumed the governorship in 2005 after then-Gov. Mike Johanns left to become U.S. secretary of agriculture. Heineman had been Johanns’ lieutenant governor. Heineman, elected twice, was Nebraska’s longest serving governor, 10 years from 2005 to 2015. Democrat Governor Frank Morrison was elected three times, but the terms were only two years.

I first met Heineman in 1990 when the state Republican Party hired him to figure out why the wheels were coming off the wagon of Nebraska's only female governor, Kay Orr. Mrs. Orr, who served from 1987 through 1991, had defeated another woman, former Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis, a Democrat. That 1986 campaign and election had drawn national attention.

I didn’t agree with him on everything, but I was amazed at how he built a following with lawmakers and managed to get many of his major ideas passed into law.

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But his experience and success rate aren’t the only positives in his possible candidacy. The strength of the opposition is, at best, lukewarm. Falls City businessman Charles Herbster, University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen, state Sen. Brett Lindstrom of Omaha and Breland Ridenour, an IT Manager for Skarda Equipment Company in Omaha, have declared they are in the race.

Herbster claims to have the endorsement of former President Donald Trump. I’ll let you folks decide if that’s an asset or a liability. Pillen of Columbus, a former University of Nebraska football player, has several major endorsements including that of Osborne. Lindstrom, a former NU quarterback, has been a vocal member of the Legislature’s Revenue Committee. Ridenour is running much of his campaign on social media for now.

Former state Sen. Theresa Thibodeau of Omaha has recently surfaced as another potential GOP candidate. The former chair of the Douglas County Republican Party had been announced months ago as Herbster’s choice for Lieutenant Governor. But a family issue caused her to step down. While she said she is still exploring her potential candidacy, the issue has been resolved and she has freed up time by selling her day care business.

Thibodeau said she plans to announce her decision within the next three to five weeks. She said she does not believe it is too late to jump into the race, even if she would be taking on two candidates with deep pockets.

Ricketts appointed Thibodeau to the Legislature in 2017 and backed her campaign to keep the seat in 2018. However, she was defeated by Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, who now holds the central Omaha seat.

State Sen. Carol Blood of Omaha has declared as the sole Democrat for the Governor’s race. Given the struggle that Democrats have had fielding viable candidates for the job since the two terms of Ben Nelson, it’s unlikely that Blood will have a primary battle.

As I said, it’s early, but I like Heineman’s chances.

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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.*