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

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**Governor Encourages Senators to Say “No,” Tells Trump to Butt Out**

Governor Pete Ricketts has cautioned state senators to just say “no” to special interest groups who want to tell them how to spend American Rescue Plan Act funds.

He has also asked former President Donald Trump not to endorse anyone running for Nebraska Governor in the primary election.
 So there’s your early dose of drama for the year, just when you thought things could be ho-hum as Nebraskans look to shake the shackles of the pandemic and return to normal, whatever that is. Legislative observers had set some lofty goals: an overhaul of the state’s tax code; a guaranteed way to finance public education and reduce property taxes at the same time; and an attempt to build a way out of the prison overcrowding crisis.
 In a recent weekly column, Ricketts wrote that he’ll be working this year with Senators on new plans to slow property tax growth to ensure property tax relief benefits hardworking Nebraska families.

“We must also guard against the expansion of state government. The Legislature will decide how to spend funds received by the State as part of ARPA. Senators need to make sure these one-time ARPA dollars are devoted to one-time projects.  Otherwise, the ARPA money could end up growing the size of government and putting the burden on future generations of Nebraskans to pay for it.”

Finally, he wrote, “senators need to be prepared to say ‘no’ to special interest groups looking to take advantage of the State’s strong financial position.  We worked hard to rein in spending when setting the current two-year budget.  Now isn’t the time to take on more spending with costly budget adjustments.”

Ricketts has said the state is in line to get $10.8 billion in federal coronavirus relief money, including about $1.6 billion of stimulus payments that were sent directly to Nebraska

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households. Nearly two-thirds of the rest — some $6.4 billion — is going out through the Paycheck Protection Program to help small businesses keep employees on their payroll. Money also is earmarked for various programs to help struggling families, unemployed workers, health care providers, schools, human service organizations, and state and local governments.

With six Republicans and one Democrat seeking the office from which Ricketts is term limited, the Governor said he asked Trump to “stay out of the race” and not endorse anyone in the Nebraska primary. He also took a shot at one of those Republican candidates, Charles Herbster who has made a big deal of being endorsed by Trump.

“When it comes to the candidate that he ultimately endorsed, I don’t believe if you put your company headquarters in a different state that you’re going to be able to be effective with regard to economic development here in the state,” Ricketts said referring to Herbster, who runs Herbster Angus Farms at Falls City and is also the CEO of Conklin Company Inc., with executive offices in Kansas City, MO, and manufacturing and distribution facilities in Shakopee, MN.

In addition to Herbster, NU Regent Jim Pillen, State Senator Brett Lindstrom, Omaha IT manager Breland Ridenour, Lincoln military veteran Michael Connely, and Herbster’s former running-mate, Theresa Thibodeau, a former state Senator are seeking the nomination. State Senator Carol Blood is the only Democrat who’s announced a run so far.

Former Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman ruled out a bid that ended months of speculation. Heineman said he did have plans to be an active voice in the race but did not endorse anyone yet. Ricketts said he plans to wait to see who will be in the race before commenting on that, though it’s speculated he’s throwing support behind Pillen.

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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.*