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**Capitol View**

**Nebraska Press Association**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

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**Where Have We Been? Where ARE We Going?**

Here we are sandwiched between Christmas and New Year. Time to take stock of what we've been through as it impacts what lies ahead.

In case you were somehow fortunate enough to sleep through it, 2022 was an election year. A couple really rich guys and some others ran for the Republican nomination for governor to replace term-limited Deep Pockets Pete Ricketts who still managed to throw enough money around to have an influence. Before you get all upset by that, remember that I have said before it isn’t illegal to spend *his own* money or the family money that way, it just doesn’t look good.

His money went to millionaire pig farmer Jim Pillen who won the primary. He was up against millionaire Charles Herbster whose campaign was almost derailed by allegations of sexual misconduct. In a last-ditch effort, the agribusinessman brought in the still boasting former President Donald Trump to rally the troops. It didn’t work.

But, Herbster spread some post- election dollars to a political action committee with the express goal of making sure that elections for committee chairs in the Legislature are done by open ballot. They have been secret since the inception of the nation’s only one-house legislature. That’s enough to make you wonder what kind of agenda Herbster would have had if elected.

The big election news was that the Democratic Party failed to field candidates in most of the races for statewide office. Senator Carol Blood was the sacrificial lamb in the Governor’s race. Her plans to get the message out were thwarted when Pillen refused to debate. That makes one wonder if the guy isn’t very good on his feet. I’m sure he is aware that the silent governor act isn’t going to cut it.

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Pillen has been perpetuating the employment of many of the state government department heads chosen by his predecessor. Why mess with a good thing? Or is he just being lazy. Or are his true colors showing and he really is planning another Ricketts- like four years. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Come to think of it, having a mime for governor might not be such a bad thing.

The decision by Ben Sasse to leave the Senate and go back to academia opens the transfer portal for the term-limited Governor. That's Ricketts best shot at the office he was denied in 2006. Incumbent Democrat Ben Nelson won reelection to a second term, defeating Ricketts with 63.9% of the vote to Ricketts' 36.1%. Ricketts later won the 2014 gubernatorial election. Nelson’s 2006 win was the last statewide race in Nebraska to be won by a Democrat.

In true Trump fashion, Republican legislative candidate Russ Barger of Lincoln sued to force Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen to hand-recount Barger’s 223-vote loss. Evnen argued that state law does not specify anything beyond a machine recount.

Lancaster County Judge Kevin McManaman ruled against Barger’s lawsuit on a technicality and on its merits. The judge said his court lacked the jurisdiction to consider the lawsuit because Barger’s original digital copy of the filing lacked the proper electronic verification of signatures required by state law. He also sided with Evnen on the method.

What was it mom always said? The devil’s in the details.

So, there’s the foundation for 2023. Let’s see where this journey leads.

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