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**Capitol View**

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**The Fix Is In, Legislature Off to Rocky Start**

My observation from the opening days of the 108th Nebraska Legislature:
“The fix is in!”

Google it, information worth having as this highly partisan influenced session stumbles on. In the 20’s, when the term first surfaced, it meant the deal was done – probably in advance. There is also mention made of bribes or pay-offs. I’m not suggesting that’s in play right now, or is it?

Chairmanship races this year were cut and dried, not unlike five years ago when the majority party in the officially non-partisan Legislature met before the session convened and decided who was going to do what. This year was similar with the 32 Republicans exercising their power in numbers over the 17 Democrats. Most seats went to Republicans.

In a contested race for the Education Committee Chairmanship between Republican Dave Murman and Democrat Lynn Walz, the vote was 32-17in Murman’s favor. Imagine that. I predict we’ll see a lot of 32-17 votes this session. We’ll see a lot of filibusters from the 17 to stop or slow down the wants of the 32.

The Committee on Committees – tasked with assigning senators to various standing and special committees – issued its report. At first glance, some of the committees appeared to have been stacked with Republicans to allegedly ensure easier passage of bills favored by that party.

The Committee consists of three caucuses representing Nebraska's three congressional districts with four senators elected from each caucus by its members. According to the rules of the Legislature, it is charged with submitting a preliminary report on committee membership immediately following chairmanship and Committee on Committees membership elections and then a final report for legislative approval.

**For Release Wednesday, January 18, 2023 – Page 2**

In subsequent floor debate on sending the report back to the committee for a do-over, Omaha Senator Meghan Hunt, a Democrat, called the Committee on Committees action “bald faced partisan steamrolling.”

Democrat colleague Danielle Conrad of Lincoln characterized the process as “throwing custom, tradition and precedence out the window.”

Republicans staunchly denied wrongdoing and smugly said they were simply following the process outlined in the rules of the Legislature. They rejected allegations that the process was infused with partisan politics and denied they had ignored several precedents used to decide committee membership in previous legislative sessions.

“This institution only works because we adhere to rules and norms, and we have respect for each other and the value of the institution,” said Hunt. That respect has clearly eroded.

Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas, another member of the committee, said the 2023 process ignored precedent and “wasn’t as fair as it should be or was in the past.” That includes keeping incumbents on committees on which they have served and protecting seniority. “I just want to make sure the process is not political,” he said.

Committee Chair Sen. Joni Albrecht of Thurston said the outrage originated from senators — all Democrats — with talk that “I want to railroad them because there’s more of (Republicans) than there are of (Democrats). That’s not it at all.”

Sorry senator. My Capitol View sees nothing but the end of the nonpartisan Legislature, as we know it. Please remember and remind your 31 party-line toting colleagues that this is still a nonpartisan body. Imagine the work that could be done if everyone acknowledged that.

I will grant you that Republicans have the edge in registered voters, elected officials statewide and members of the officially nonpartisan Legislature. But don’t let that go to your head.

Remember the people you were elected to serve and do something meaningful for all Nebraskans, not just the administrative branch or for the sake of the Grand Old Party.

**For Release Wednesday, January 18, 2023 – Page 3**

Remember my favorite Charles Kuralt line from “On the Road” on CBS TV back in the 70s. “It’s not likely that tolerance will soon break out in Nebraska.”

Prove him wrong senators. Just do the next right thing.

-30-

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