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**Capitol View**

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**Maybe It IS the Giant Elephant in the Room**

Let’s talk about the embarrassment formerly known as the Nebraska Legislature.

The 49 elected senators are now 60 days into the scheduled 90-day session and the scoresheet is mostly bare. There are two bills awaiting “final reading,” the last of three rounds of debate by the full Legislature. Two bills have been killed, nine have been withdrawn, and 614 are being held by committees.

According to headlines in the New York Times and other national media outlets, the Nebraska Legislature has passed zero bills. Most credit the efforts of Omaha Senator Machaela Cavanaugh for her herculean filibuster efforts aimed at stopping a bill that would change the age at which transgender youth could receive medical assistance.

In her apparent outrage at the bill, Cavanaugh has vowed to filibuster every bill on the agenda if her 48 colleagues vow to further advance the transgender bill. She is joined often by Senator Meghan Hunt of Omaha and Danielle Conrad of Lincoln who is a previously term-limited senator recently re-elected.

Cavanaugh’s dad was a former state senator who also served one term in the U.S. House of representatives. Her brother John is also a state senator in the officially non-partisan Nebraska Legislature. All of the opponents are among the 17 Democrats in the body. That means there are 32 Republicans.

With things at a virtual standstill, it’s easy to place blame. But you can’t blame the 17 Democrats without also indicting the 32 Republicans who chose to push a national conservative agenda pursuing issues that Nebraskans, by and large, probably don't care about.

The controversial bill was introduced by a freshman lawmaker, Kathleen Kauth of Omaha, who was an interim appointee of then-Governor Pete Ricketts and ran for and was

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elected recently without serving one day. It’s one of several controversial measures that seem to have been hand-delivered by the GOP to Nebraska and several other states.

As is the national norm, Cavanaugh and Hunt are blatantly guilty of using hateful language to often berate the ones they call haters. The minority is using procedural moves that allow them to belittle "the opposition" without giving them an opportunity to speak in their defense.

The whole thing has become highly reflective of the mess in Washington DC.

I thought that Nebraska was better than that. Gone is the collegiality, civility and common sense that once characterized the actions of responsible adults in Nebraska.

"Loud and angry doesn't make you right. It just means that you are loud and angry." -- Seth Godin

Was it time for this issue to come to a head? Why wasn’t this idea subjected to an interim study that could have heard statewide testimony instead of just being modeled at the party’s behest on some other states and tossed into the ring bearing the name of a freshman senator who has never debated with her colleagues.

Was this really the hill for the battle? Was this the time?

Perhaps the backlash from senators who identify as Democrat comes from all those years of Republican domination of the Nebraska political culture. Yes, that 800-pound elephant.

Maybe it's the desire of some to emulate the pockets of woke thinking that have made headlines elsewhere.

But it just doesn't feel Nebraska nice.

It feels like a junior high lunchroom fight with the “mean girls” – Cavanaugh said early on that she is one of those mean girls -- against the student body and the administration.

On the outside, it looks ridiculous. Yes, even embarrassing. Forget about winning voter approval for easing term limits or getting a raise. All those Nebraskans looking for property tax relief and school funding assistance and better access to broadband and guaranteed water with which to farm probably aren’t happy with the Legislature right now.

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Pew Research says 64 percent of Americans strongly favor protecting trans people from discrimination. There’s a place to start a discussion that should happen with more than just three disgruntled state senators who are busy grabbing national headlines.

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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*.