

## Political Roundtable

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(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Let's talk a little about what's intriguing about this campaign season so far. Henry, you were talking a little bit about how a year ago this looked like a fall that there may not be a lot going on.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) Yeah I mean this is one of those years where we don't have a senate race. We don't have a governor's race and looking a year ago, I mean it was looking like pretty slim pickins' for us people who actually make a living covering elections. At least part of our living and actually things have gotten, you know we had Doug Bereuter surprising announcing in December that he was not going to run again. And that opened up the First District you know for the first time in a generation. The gambling thing has hit the ballot in two ways now. I mean there's two different gambling initiatives and who knows how that's gonna be sorted out. And the state fair thing is intriguing too.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) And then you have the interaction of the gambling and the congressional race. I think that'd be pretty interesting. Because if they anti-gambling forces mobilize a bunch of people to come out, that could help in the First District, Fortenberry. And if the pro-gambling folks get a bunch of people out, that could help Connealy, so.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Let's talk a little bit more about that. How much is that gonna drive voter turnout. I mean that may be the issue that spends the most money on advertising.

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) I think the presidential race will probably drive more so than the gambling possibly, but I think there are definitely people out there who are going to go vote because they want to vote on the gambling issue. People have been waiting a long time to you know be able to vote on legalizing casinos and so we'll see.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) It's been seven years as a matter of fact. The Blue Book says in 1938 Nebraskans voted on licensing slot machines. And it was defeated 333 thousand to 115 thousand.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Kudos to Fred for bringing a copy of the Nebraska Blue Book. This is impressive. Do you think that your average voter is gonna be able to distinguish between the two gambling measures?

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) It's really gonna be interesting to see how they parse their arguments to set themselves apart. And that and throw in the fact that issue I think plays differently across the state too. I think it plays differently in Omaha than it does in Lincoln and it does in rural Nebraska. I have no idea how A, they're gonna sort out their arguments. And I have no idea how voters are gonna sort this thing out too. And I think that's one of the real intriguing things to watch about this initiative.

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) So far based on the TV ads that have run, they're not differentiating the arguments that the legislature's plan, which is Amendment Three on the ballot has a TV ad that talks about keeping the gambling money in Nebraska. The initiatives petitions, which are Initiatives 417 through 420 on the ballot, I mean the organizing committee is called to keep the money in Nebraska. Their ad—their first ad showed money flying across the state going

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into Iowa, so the themes are the same. And at least up to this point, it's up to the—it's been left up to the voter to sort out the differences between the two.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) Isn't there a possibility that people will get so confused that they'll just vote no. I mean when in doubt, vote no.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) That's what things have always done on ballot issues in the state. If people are undecided and are confused, they will always vote no.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) There's some interesting players that are surfacing on both sides of this, especially the anti-gambling side which was brought in Warren Buffett, Tom Osborne and such.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) Yeah. And it's also interesting that the anti-gambling folks are basing so much of their organizing on church congregations. You don't see that explicitly in Nebraska politics that often. And because of the IRS rules, apparently you can stand up in a pulpit and say, vote against gambling, but you can't stand up in a pulpit and say vote against this candidate because then you lose your tax exempt status. So it'll be interesting to see if the religious folks can mobilize a whole bunch of the voters to go the poll and what effect that'll have on the other races.

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) The other interesting thing on the gambling issue is you've got you know, the anti-gambling people this time around are waging the battle at the ballot box as opposed to in the courts. And in previous years, we've seen them effectively knock things off the ballot the legal challenges. In this time around, they basically resign themselves to saying, it appears sound, so we're gonna take it out and once and for all have a vote and you know put the information out there and let people decide on their own. So that's another interesting difference this time around.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Let's move on a little bit. Fred started to bring this up earlier. What role is religion playing in this campaign season? We talked a little bit about it being a prevailing factor in the gambling issue.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) Well I think it's an undercurrent at least in the first Congressional district race. Both Jeff Fortenberry and Matt Connealy are Catholics. They've struck different positions on the issue of fetal tissue research with Fortenberry opposed to it and thereby earning the endorsement of Nebraska Right to Life, which is a pretty powerful political organization. And Connealy having voted against a ban on the University conducting research on aborted fetal tissues and thereby earning the enmity of Nebraska Right to Life.

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) The conventional wisdom on the race is that Fortenberry is from Lincoln and he needs to get the Lincoln vote and that the question is how deep is that support in Lincoln and does it reach out beyond the core you know of religious-backed support that he apparently has. I've heard that Connealy you know his stuff is out all over the countryside, but the race will be won or lost in Lincoln, I believe.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) Right, although it is—I think countryside is real important in that race too. I mean you look at you know the Democrats thought when Connealy was nominated that they had the you know the prototypical candidate for this race because you had a Democrat that hopefully would play well in Lincoln, which has been a Democratic stronghold, but he's a farmer and had dirt under his fingernails and so they thought that they had the right

candidate. I think there's a reason that when once Fortenberry got the nomination, the first you know thing he announced in the fall campaign just before Labor Day was his farm—his ag plan and his ag committee and his eight point—I think it's eight point ag plan and his first commercial that went up on the air this weekend was talking about farming and the importance of farming and so I mean I certainly wouldn't rule out the importance of the countryside too because I think Connealy feels like he can make inroads in traditionally Republican areas because of his ag background and you can obviously see Fortenberry's trying to do something about that.

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) I mean Connealy announced he was going to run back in August, last August, and Bereuter at that point was the candidate or had appeared that he was going to be the person that Connealy was going to run against and he was preparing for that. And then you know as Henry mentioned, Bereuter retires and then you've got this Republican field that has the Speaker of the Legislature running with Bereuter's support Curt Bromm, and it appeared to most people early on that Bromm was gonna be the—the opponent for Connealy. And then Greg Ruhle entered the race and Jeff Fortenberry and I don't think a lot of people, when Fortenberry announced would have predicted that he was going to be the ultimate winner, but in the primary, but he was.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) He ran a very good campaign. I mean he I mean that guy was on message. He never I mean I saw him speak easily a dozen times in the primary and it was the same, you know, message every time I mean that the strength of the country, you know, is based on the strength of families. And he would never deviate from that. I got to the point where I could kind of give this spiel on that myself and I mean he comes off well. I mean he looks congressional.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Is the value of being in the Legislature in terms of name recognition for running for something else, is that overrated?

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) Yeah I think that's been proven time and time again. I mean the Legislature has never proven to be a springboard to higher office and in this state and I think people in the Legislature, I mean you get in the statehouse and the statehouse is a pretty tight-knit little community and I think people think that when they're in there, you know, everybody knows who they are. I think they become a little surprised once they get outside of that environment. Well they think everybody knows they are and they think everybody likes them. And I think they get surprised when they get outside that environment that how that really isn't true.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Let's talk a little bit about second district. Is this Lee Terry's toughest challenge. It's the fourth time he's run.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) Yeah it's definitely the toughest opponent he's faced and the most credible opponent that he's faced and the most experienced opponent that he's faced. The fact that she's a woman you know has she can draw some support from that. The fact that she comes from Sarpy County which is a traditional strong Republican base within that district. You know, whether she can peel off some votes there. You know, the polls have still shown that you know it's still gonna be a tough race for her, but you know, Lee has made a couple of mistakes and left a couple of openings and I think it really does remain to be seen whether she'll be able to exploit them or not. I have yet to see a poll that suggests that that's gonna be a tight race, but I think if anybody can do it, I think it's gonna be her.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) And she raised what about \$460,000 through June, which is maybe half of what Lee Terry has in the bank.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) For a congressional challenger it was an impressive number and it's very, very hard for a congressional challenger to raise money and there's a reason that 98 per cent of incumbents that run for Congress get re-elected. That's what—you know, that's what she's up against.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) Almost lost with everything else that's on the ballot is the state fair funding issue that would give roughly two million a year to try to bail the fair out. Is that gonna be lost on the minds of voters too?

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) Well the Fair people certainly don't hope so. I don't think they've got any TV ads out yet, but they're planning on it. And money is an issue for them as well to get their message out, but you know, they're hopeful based on the increase in fair attendance this year up 10 per cent. They had information at the fair for people about the amendment, Amendment Four. I've talked to people who were working behind the scenes on that one and they feel pretty good about it at this point that people will vote to support the fair. But again, you know, it's gonna be a pretty full ballot and people may get down to that one and see that it uses lottery money and think it's somehow related to gambling. And if you're anti-gambling, you might vote no on that. And that's a concern for the Fair people too. They always make a point to try to explain that they are not tied in with the other gambling issues on the ballot, so that's somewhat of a hurdle for them I think.

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) I'm real intrigued that how that one is gonna turn out. I mean I think it'll probably have some support in Lincoln because Lincoln has embraced the fair and you would think in rural areas it would have support, but I'm real intrigued at how that plays where I come from in Omaha. I mean if you're sitting in Omaha and if they're not a regular fair-goer, I don't know what your reason to vote for that would be.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) I think it's important to note on that one that even though it would divert about two million dollars a year, that the plan is to use that as the basis for a bond issue of some sort and there would be lot more money than that. I think it's very grandiose plans of new buildings they're gonna construct and new horse track and all sorts of stuff. It's not just two million.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) They want to take I think one point five of that and start leveraging it to get about 25 million in bonds, is that what?

(Scott Bauer/Associated Press) There is a plan that was done that listed what needed, what needs to be done at the fair and it's well beyond even the 20 million dollar bond issue to get to where they want to be. But I think that people at the fair feel like they're on the right track in that certainly this is an integral part of it. If Amendment 4 doesn't pass, the people at the fair will tell you that the state fair as we know it today would probably not exist. It would either be scaled back dramatically or over time just phased out.

(Mike Tobias/Reporting) You were at the Republican Convention. How much talk is there about Chuck Hagel running for President in four years?

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) You know, the Convention was obviously totally focused on George Bush in 2004. I mean the obviously for press—for Chuck Hagel and for us reporters

from Nebraska who were there following, it was obviously a lot of our focus and it was an important place for him to begin to plant seeds and he certainly wasn't the only one there doing it. But we don't like to admit it, but the national media does decide who is a credible candidate and who isn't. I mean because the ones they decide are not credible, they just do not cover. And he would have instant credibility in that race. There's a reason he appears on the Sunday morning talk shows. I think the national media like him. They respect him.

(Fred Knapp/Nebraska Public Radio) Do you think that that publicity cuts two ways in that he's what he's on there for is critiquing the Bush Administration's conduct of the war or at least the way the war is going. And might that not cost him some of the very base that he would need in order to get the nomination?

(Henry Cordes/Omaha World-Herald) There's talk that he's undercutting his you know the conservative base there that is generally strong and behind the president and the war, but who's to say four years from now what the political climate is gonna be. And if Iraq becomes an absolute morass that we're still stuck in four years from now and then the guy who's been out there from the beginning, you know, critical of the way things have been connected over there all of a sudden becomes that becomes a huge political advantage.

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