**For Release Wednesday, May 25, 2022**

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

**Statehouse Correspondent**

**Nebraska Press Association**

**Lawmakers Have Gone Home, But the Governor Labors On**

With the legislative session over and senators back in their districts, the direct influence of two-term Governor Pete Ricketts might seem to have diminished.

But he does have about seven months left in office. He still has deep pockets – enough money to make or break a candidate. He still has the duty to appoint candidates to fill vacancies – he has to replace deceased Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha and whichever senator wins the special election to replace Rep. Jeff Fortenberry who resigned. State Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk and Sen. Patty Pansing-Brooks of Lincoln are running for that job June 28.

Lame duck or not, Ricketts said he still has the megaphone, but more about that later.

Ricketts has been known to contribute as much as $10,000 to assist legislative candidates he favors. Most of them have won. He has recently admitted to contributing to so-called dark money entities that promote negative advertising against candidates he doesn’t favor.

He endorsed and campaigned for Jim Pillen who won a contentious GOP gubernatorial primary. But Ricketts also contributed funds for negative advertising against Pillen’s challengers Charles Herbster and Brett Lindstrom. He said he thought Herbster was a flawed candidate and political observers believe Ricketts’ attack on Lindstrom was in retaliation for some legislative votes the Omaha lawmaker cast against Ricketts-backed bills.

The Governors’ legislative appointments would come into play if the Supreme Court of the United States overturns Roe v. Wade and Nebraska is forced to call a Special Session of the Legislature to deal with the issue.

During the regular session, lawmakers attempted to pass a bill that would have banned all abortions in the state if Roe v. Wade were overturned. Ricketts expressed support for the

**For Release Wednesday, May 25, 2022 – Page 2**

bill, but it died after it failed to reach 33 votes for a filibuster-ending cloture motion. The final vote was 31-15. A couple new handpicked senators could help that cause.

Aside from such high-profile issues, the Governor said many parts of his job are invisible to most Nebraskans. His short list includes working with state agencies on day-to-day business such as improving customer service, monitoring public infrastructure projects and promoting Nebraska business development to other states and countries.

Ricketts also faces a role in overseeing the implementation of a bill that allocates more than $1 billion in federal funds for pandemic relief projects through the American Rescue Plan Act. Within 60 days of the bill's passage, the state must complete guidance for how to apply for grants listed under the bill. Within 90 days, the state has to share information on how applicants can qualify for those grants.

The construction of a $500 million canal-and-reservoir system in eastern Colorado and western Nebraska is also on the table. The state just released a request for proposal on the project, which likely will face years of litigation before it comes to fruition. Same with the big lake the Governor supports for construction between Lincoln and Omaha.

The Governor will step outside his official capacity to campaign for Pillen. Back in office, he’ll work on the transition of his office to the winner of November's general election. That will include information on the next state budget and an overview of the big decisions the next governor must make.

About that megaphone. Ricketts said he plans to continue using his position to speak out about issues he finds important. Early on, many thought he was preening for a spot on the national stage in a second Trump administration. When Trump lost, some thought Ricketts was still preparing himself for a bigger spotlight.

He became highly critical of Biden administration policies on energy and the environment which he said are hurting Nebraskans. He also criticized the state Board of Education's proposed development of health and sex education standards. He said that

**For Release Wednesday, May 25, 2022 – Page 3**

prompted parents to speak up and led the board to shelve the proposal. He also openly opposed Lincoln’s mask mandate during the height of the Covid pandemic.

What’s ahead for Ricketts? I guess we’ll just have to pay attention for the next seven months.

-30-

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