**For Release Wednesday, July 13, 2022**

**Capitol View**

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**Special Election Reveals Interesting History**

The special election to replace former First District Congressman Jeff Fortenberry was the first in Nebraska in 71 years.

State Senator Mike Flood of Norfolk was elected to replace Fortenberry who was sentenced, the same day, to two years’ probation, a $25,000 fine, and 320 hours of community service after being found guilty of lying to the FBI about receiving campaign contributions from a foreigner.

The special election in 1951 was to replace longtime Rep. Karl Stefan who died in office in Washington, DC, in October that year. The Norfolk resident had served the Third District for 16 years.

Stefan was born on a farm in what is now the Czech Republic. In 1885 the family moved to Omaha where he received his schooling and joined the United States National Guard. He became a private in the Illinois National Guard and then a lieutenant in the Nebraska National Guard. He served in the Philippines for two years and moved to Norfolk in 1909.

He became an editor of the Norfolk Daily News until 1924 and a radio commentator and contributor to newspapers and magazines until 1934. He was president of the Stefan Co. and publishers' agent for magazines and newspapers. During his years as WJAG's first announcer, Stefan is credited with developing much of WJAG's programming, including a noontime show.

Stefan was elected to U.S. Congress in 1934 to represent what was then Nebraska’s 3rd District. He was reelected eight times. He died of acute cardiovascular collapse while in office on October 2, 1951, in Washington, DC, and is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery in Norfolk.

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He had defeated Edgar Howard, the owner of the Columbus Telegraph. Howard had served one term as Nebraska Lieutenant Governor and was elected as a Democrat to Congress. He was reelected five times between 1923 and 1934. He ran twice against Stefan and lost. He died in 1951, three months before Stefan died.

Robert Dinsmore Harrison, a Republican, was elected in the 1951 special election and served until 1959. He was born in Panama, Nebraska, and graduated from Peru State College, the University of California, and the University of Nebraska.

During World War I, he was a sergeant in the Twenty-second Engineers. He was the superintendent of schools in Bradshaw and DeWitt and a member of the Norfolk School Board from 1942 to 1951 and a member of the Governor's Highway Advisory Committee. He owned an oil business in Norfolk and a farm in Cedar County, Nebraska.

He ran unsuccessfully for election again in 1962 and retired to Norfolk where he died in 1977.

Flood, an incumbent Republican in the officially nonpartisan Nebraska Legislature, defeated fellow Senator Patty Pansing Brooks, a Democrat who is term limited. The two will face each other for the two-year term of the Congressional seat in November.

Pansing Brooks won Democrat-leaning Lincoln and Lancaster County. Flood won the rest of the district. She admitted she has more work to do outside Lincoln and Flood said he needs to spend more time on Lincoln voters.

The outcome of the special election apparently played a role in the decision about a special session of the Legislature to deal with the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade. If Pansing Brooks had won, Republican Governor Pete Ricketts could have appointed a Republican to be the 33rd vote necessary to overcome a planned filibuster of any abortion bill.

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With a Flood win, any Republican appointed would simply replace him as the 32nd likely vote. Thus, it appears the issue might be left for the next Legislature, which convenes in January.

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