**For Release Wednesday, July 20, 2022**

**Capitol View**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

**Statehouse Correspondent**

**Nebraska Press Association**

**State Republican Party Delegates Change Things**

Today's letter is R. R as in Republican, Red State and Ricketts.
R as in ruh roh and rebellion.

It appears the Nebraska Republican party was feeling a bit rambunctious when a larger than usual group of delegates to the state convention in Kearney wrested control from the Ricketts stranglehold and moved things a little to the right.

Revolutionary? No, just a sign that even Republicans can become nostalgic for the old days.

The warning shot was fired days before the event when the Nebraska Republican Party told six GOP activists they were not welcome to attend. They were told they would not be credentialed because they either had switched political parties, started new parties, or supported candidates outside of the party.

It has been a lengthy struggle between populists and Governor Pete Ricketts whose eight-year reign ends in January. One of the six, failed Secretary of State candidate Robert Borer said he was rejected because he threatened to create a new party. He is now running a write-in campaign for Governor. He has also refused to endorse University of Nebraska Regent Jim Pillen as the GOP nominee for governor and told the Nebraska Examiner the whole thing boils down to “‘We the People’ against the self-appointed ruling elite.”

The six delegates were ultimately seated after the tide turned inside the convention hall. One of the six, Matt Innis, was arrested and jailed for allegedly trespassing and assaulting a plain-clothes private security guard. Innis, a vocal critic of Ricketts, was released from jail and entered the convention floor to applause.

**For Release Wednesday, July 20, 2022 – Page 2**

When the dust settled, State Party Chairman Dan Welch was voted out of office. One of the six dissidents had recorded a phone conversation with Welch a year ago in which he admitted a mistake in targeting then-GOP legislative candidate Janet Palmtag in a GOP-on-GOP legislative race. Welch pointed out that Ricketts had made the decision to target Palmtag, who has since re-registered as a Democrat.

In addition to Welch being ousted, at least 10 top party leaders, including Executive Director Taylor Gage resigned. Gage is the grandson of former Republican Governor Kay Orr who remains a popular figure in the party. Also resigned are two of three district chairs, national committeewoman, three assistant state party chairs, secretary, treasurer and lawyer.

 As the result of a contentious primary election for the Republican nomination for Governor, some have complained again that the governor and state GOP had taken sides in open races with Republicans running against Republicans. Several also cited the legislative race between State Sen. Julie Slama and Palmtag.

Ricketts has been known to give thousands of dollars to candidates he favors. He has also been involved in negative attack ads against opponents of those he supports. His father and mother have also been substantial donors to campaigns, most recently the petition drive to place a voter ID measure on the November ballot, which was mostly funded by Mrs. Ricketts.

Nebraska's Democratic Party Chair Jane Kleeb said people are fed up with Ricketts and his money.

In a released statement she said "Republicans are sick and tired of Ricketts using his father's money to buy elections. The culture of corruption runs deep in the Nebraska Republican establishment.

“The majority of Nebraskans want our government to work for the people," Kleeb said.

Given that Ricketts and Welch were the biggest funders and fund-raisers for the party, it will be interesting to see if a “new” Republican party without a lot of money will be on a more level playing field with the Democrats.

**For Release Wednesday, July 20, 2022 – Page 3**

I’m also interested to see if the ranks of Nebraska’s independents grow. Life is pretty grand here in the neutral zone.

 -30-

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