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**Capitol View**

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**Thank Heavens for Nebraska Congressional District Debates**

With the presumptive next Nebraska Governor refusing to debate and a general election ballot largely devoid of Democrat challengers, this hardly seems like an election year.

Thanks to the candidates running for the First and Second Congressional Districts, there are at least two races worth watching come November 8 and both are providing live TV debates, albeit along predictable party lines.

For the last 30 years, Republicans have won all three of Nebraska’s seats all but twice. This election cycle, Nebraska’s 2nd District is officially considered a toss-up with challenger Tony Vargas, currently a state Senator, challenging incumbent Don Bacon. Bacon flipped the seat from the Democrats in 2016 with less than 50% of the vote; he won in 2018 with 50.8%.

In the First District, state Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk faces off with term-limited state Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln. Just months ago, the Republican Flood won a special election to replace incumbent Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of Lincoln who resigned after conviction of federal charges dealing with accepting campaign contributions from a foreign national. He defeated Democrat Pansing Brooks 53 percent to 47 percent.

In their first televised debate on Omaha’s KETV, Flood took the Republican line of attacking President Joe Biden and his "out-of-control federal spending" and the need to focus on control of the nation's southern border. He said he’s been working on those things in his initial weeks in Congress.

Pansing Brooks said she is "the only candidate who will fight for women's reproductive rights" in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision overruling Roe v Wade protections of a woman's right to choose to seek an abortion.

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Flood said inflation is out of control. “It’s creating problems for families, and I am talking to families who are telling me they have less money at the end of the month than a year ago,” he said.

Pansing Brooks agreed and said she is considering solutions such as “lowering prescription drug costs, lowering ACA premiums.” She said her nonpartisan experience in the Nebraska Legislature has taught her the importance of coming together and not just fighting according to what the party is dictating.

Flood said he wants to shut down the border and fix the immigration process. "This is a national security issue, a humanitarian crisis, what’s happening on the border is not right, it's heartbreaking,” he said.

Pansing Brooks said a more secure border comes from funding agencies that are working there. “Stopping immigrations saying we're going to build a wall is the same as sticking your heads in the sand and saying there's not a problem," she said.

On the topic of a woman's right to choose, Flood said his opponent’s views on the topic are extreme. “She supports abortion up until the day of birth,” he said.

“I do not believe in abortion up until the last minute, I do not believe in abortion on demand,” Pansing Brooks said.

Pansing Brooks said she's the bi-partisan choice for Congress. "I wouldn't have been able to pass over 60 bills in the Nebraska legislature, if I were a flaming liberal with no ability to work across the aisle,” she said.

Flood served several terms as Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature and was at one time considered a leading contender for the office of governor. When his wife was diagnosed with cancer he dropped out of politics for a few years. With her cancer gone, he returned to the Legislature two years ago representing his old district.

So, could Flood also be the bi-partisan choice for Congress or is he towing the party line? For that matter, is Pansing Brooks towing her party’s line?

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 Incumbent Bacon of Bellevue and challenger Vargas of South Omaha face off in two upcoming debates.

At least that gives some sense of normalcy – boring -- to an otherwise strange election year.

But, given that Nebraskans survived a Trumpster-infused gubernatorial primary in May, boring actually looks pretty good, thank you.

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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*.