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 **Capitol View
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**Happy 157th Birthday Nebraska, My How You’ve Grown**

Three of the four kids in my family were born on the same day in December over a span of 14 years.

The "other" one was born on March 1. To appease her, my older sister and brother and I told the March- born she was special because she shared a birthday with the State of Nebraska! (I'm pretty sure it didn't work.)

So, happy belated 157th birthday Nebraska. And happy 82nd to my late sister.

Too much cake and party hats? Where are we now? Let's take a look.

A is for agriculture. Still more counties with more cattle than people. Corn is king. A pig farmer with a veterinary science degree was recently elected governor. Of course he’s a Republican. There’s a full-size pig sculpture in the governor’s office. Pigs have executive privilege.

N is for new as in not much is. Some homegrown innovation is winning national acclaim as evidenced by a robotic surgery tool developed at the University of Nebraska and recently approved by the FDA. Software start-ups continue to sprout in what some wags have referred to as the “Silicon Prairie.”

G is for gaming. Casino gambling and sports betting are blowing in like a prairie derecho. New casinos are popping up like ditch weed in a borrow pit. The Nebraska Lottery lingers as do pickle cards. Someone has decided to crack down on Bingo and the prizes it could offer. Sorry Grandma, some folks don’t want us to have too much fun.

U is for University of Nebraska. The highly vaunted system president who once ran the Naval Academy has moved on to greener pastures, albeit The Ohio State University. The football team went without a bowl appearance, again. The men and women's basketball teams are winning and eyeing post-season play. But Nebraska is now clearly a volleyball school based on playing, again, for the National Title (they lost) and scoring the biggest crowd ever – 92,003 -- in the world for a match at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln.

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I is for Independent (nonpartisan) voters who are growing in numbers – 269,224 in February -- catching up with the number of registered Democrats – 332,066 in February – against 602,197 Republicans. Yes, Nebraska is a red state. Ben Nelson was the last Democrat governor in the state from 1991-1999. That must seem like a Century ago, or at least a quarter Century. But the wheels are coming off the Republican wagon with the state party refusing to endorse the state's all Republican Congressional delegation.

S is for school aid, still floundering despite "new innovative payment plans" and school choice options. The Legislature passed a bill last year authorizing tax credits for folks who donate to private schools. Public education advocates rallied and got enough signatures to get a measure before voters this November to repeal that law. School spending still gets the blame for high property taxes. The governor and some of his legislative minions are still touting spending caps, which have proven, historically, unreliable in Nebraska.

H is for heavy lifting. The Nebraska Legislature still acts like it's going to do some, but the big paranoia now is that the executive branch is running amok in a power grab further aimed at shifting the balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Put them all together and they spell anguish. The dictionary says that’s to “be extremely distressed about something.”

Judge for yourself. I’ve never felt living in Nebraska was distressing. Now, the six years I lived in Illinois, well that’s another story for another time.

If you’re feeling stressed by it all, throw a big scoop of ice cream on that cake. It’ll help!

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for 25 years.*