**For Release Wednesday, May 1, 2024**

**Capitol View
Commentary by J.L. Schmidt
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**Fifteen Senators Will Be Replaced**

Term limits claim 13 Nebraska state senators while two are leaving for other reasons. That’ll mean 15 new faces in the nation’s only one-house nonpartisan legislature come January.

I’ve made it clear before how I feel about term limits. I don’t like them. This isn’t the Washington, DC, swamp. This is Nebraska, one of those mostly square states out west where it’s not that hard to vote somebody out of office. It has worked for years.

Then along came the two-term limit, eight years, and institutional memory went out the window. Ray Aguilar, Ernie Chambers and Steve Lathrop all stayed away for the mandatory four years and managed to get elected again. Ernie, who is running again, has 46 years in the Legislature under his belt. Often vilified and the likely reason that voters adopted term limits, Chambers knows and plays the legislative rule book like a piano.

The 15 will serve through any called special sessions and until the end of the year will be available to constituents.

Those departing include 10 registered Republicans and five Democrats in the officially, non-partisan Legislature, where 33 of its current 49 members belong to the GOP. That leaves 15 Democrats and one Independent. The Republicans are already circling their wagons to ensure a filibuster-proof majority.

These 15 are among the group who survived the COVID-19 pandemic — a historic pause and later working behind clear plastic partitions — and doled out an unprecedented amount of federal COVID funds. Some landmark legislation passed during their tenure, including allowing “constitutional carry” concealed weapons and a long sought, albeit phased-in, reduction in state income taxes.

**The nearly, and not always dearly, departed include some I’m sad to see leave and a few who deserve to have the door… well, you get it!**

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**They include: Joni Albrecht of Thurston, a** leading advocate for a ban on abortion. The Republican served a rural district but also had experience as a Sarpy County commissioner in a past life.

**Democrat Carol Blood of Bellevue who decried** unfunded mandates and pushed legislation for the military workers and veterans in her district. She’s running for nomination as a candidate for Congress.

**Republican Bruce Bostelman of Brainard**. He recently served as chair of the Natural Resources Committee recently got a bill passed to push companies to expand broadband services in rural areas.

**Tom Brewer of Gordon, a decorated** military veteran and Republican who served several tours in Afghanistan. He was the Legislature’s most fervent advocate for gun rights and chair of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

**Republican Steve Erdman of Bayard, a frequent critic of property taxes proposals as “**a Band-Aid on an amputation.” He followed his son, Phil, in serving his Panhandle district in the Unicameral.

**Steve Halloran of Hastings, the Republican who should have been censured for inserting the names of three Democrat colleagues in a story about rape, which he read aloud during floor debate.**

**Republican Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn who proved** adept at crafting deals and passing bills that would favor the rich and advocates of “school choice.” She chaired the property tax cutting Revenue Committee.

**John Lowe of Kearney, a Republican who chaired** the General Affairs Committee, which handled issues, related to slot-machine like “skill games”, alcohol sales and the advent of legal casinos in the state.

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**Democrat turned Republican Mike McDonnell, the retired Omaha fire chief who as a member of the** Appropriations Committee steered millions of dollars to “shovel ready” projects across the state.

**Tony Vargas of Omaha, a Democrat who** used his seat on the Appropriations Committee to seek funding for affordable housing programs. He is taking a second run at election to Congress.

**Democrat Lynne Walz of Fremont, a former teacher and school board member who** focused on education bills and improving security of Nebraska schools amid school shootings in other states.

**Justin Wayne of Omaha, a Democrat and** attorney who played the rules almost like Ernie Chambers. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, he fought for criminal justice reforms to end prison overcrowding.

**Democrat Anna Wishart of Lincoln, a** long-time member of the Appropriations Committee who worked both sides of the aisle to gain additional funding for mental health care and social service providers.

Republican Fred Meyer of St. Paul. Meyer was appointed to the Legislature in November of 2023 to fill out the term of State Sen. Tom Briese. He opted not to run beyond that.

**Julie Slama, a Southeast Nebraska Republican** appointed in January 2019 and later elected in a nasty campaign against another Republican, earned a law degree, got married, had a child and called it quits.

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*This is J.L. Schmidt’s final Capitol View column. J.L. passed away unexpectedly on April 21, 2024, in Lincoln, NE. J.L. had covered Nebraska government and politics since 1979, and had written the Capitol View column since 2012.*