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Walz talks data centers, division in Columbus

JARED BARTON
Columbus Telegram

Gubernatorial candidate Lynne Walz called her running mate Ben Steffen the yin to her yang at a town hall Thursday at Columbus’ Micek’s Shangri-La.

Steffen, a farmer from Humboldt, joined Walz’s campaign in late July. His knowledge on topics like agriculture and ground-level concerns in rural areas mesh with her knowledge of the Legislature and topics like education. His particular experience and motivation are things she thinks most Nebraskans can appreciate.

“He’s salt of the earth. He’s a farmer. He has his hands in so many corporate situations in the ag community, very, very, very involved in the agricultural community,” Walz said. “The thing I love about Ben the most, though, is that he cares about Nebraska and he cares about the people who live here, and it doesn’t matter what side of the state you’re on. He truly cares about what’s going on.”

The duo jumped right into concerns

voters have raised in recent months with a few questions from the audience. One attendee simply asked “Data centers?”

“If you guys have been watching the commercials, you’d think that I am a data center queen, and I am not,” Walz said. “But if you are watching, he’s got me pegged as wanting every single data center that I can get my hands on in Nebraska, and that is not true.”

She is opposed to the idea that state government could tell communities what they can and cannot allow in their areas and said that those should be local decisions.

“I think that communities should be able to build their plans because they know the people who live there and their communities best,” Walz said. “They should be the ones building their economic development plans. It is up to government to support them and provide them with the resources that they need to get it done but I think that this is honestly a local control

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JARED BARTON, COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Lynne Walz, Democratic candidate for governor, speaks to a Columbus resident following her town hall visit at Micek’s Shangri-La in Columbus on Thursday, Sept. 3, 2026.

‘A HAND UP’



CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

LaRue Marcos poses for a portrait at Ooh De Lally. Marcos sat down with Gov. Jim Pillen and Department of Correctional Services Director Rob Jeffreys to share his perspectives on reducing recidivism in Nebraska.

Pillen, Jeffreys discuss reentry programs with formerly incarcerated Nebraskans

JOSH REYES
Omaha World-Herald

Nebraskans Justice Cummings and LaRue Marcos didn’t want their first stop after exiting prison to be a restaurant job. Cummings didn’t enjoy previous service industry work, and Marcos had trained to repair appliances.

But circumstances led them to Ooh De Lally, an upscale eatery in Omaha’s Dundee neighborhood that primarily employs individuals returning to society after incarceration.

On Friday, the two employees of the nonprofit restaurant and

participants in the reentry program sat down with Gov. Jim Pillen and Department of Correctional Services Director Rob Jeffreys to share their perspectives on reducing recidivism in Nebraska — keeping people from returning to prison.

Marcos said about 1,600 people are released from incarceration to the Omaha area each year, and more than half are expected to be incarcerated again within three years.

Marcos and Cummings relayed to the officials that individuals need their basic safety needs met and a place to live away from their old lives and the temptations that led

them behind bars. They said more than just programs, they need personal connections to create a village of support. They also need to feel the fruits of their hard work, being able to translate doing the right thing to supporting their families and bettering themselves.

The two men said that’s what they got from Ooh De Lally, where both have waited tables, cooked food and washed dishes.

Marcos said he was first arrested at age 12 and has spent years in and out of the system. Ooh De Lally

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Candidates to lead elections split on Pilen proposals

JOSH REYES
Omaha World-Herald Bureau

LINCOLN — Two candidates to become Nebraska’s next chief elections officer said they agree with Gov. Jim Pillen and departing Secretary of State Bob Evnen, Republicans who pushed last week to remove what they called the “bounty” paid to people collecting signatures for ballot initiatives.

A third candidate said the system in place works, but the state’s executive branch must stop stonewalling ballot initiatives its leaders disagree with.

Pillen, at a press conference on Thursday, announced he would pursue a bill to ban paying per signature collected, shifting the state to hourly pay for signature gathering instead. The “bounty” system, he said, incentivizes aggressive tactics and perhaps dishonesty.

Signatures collected for statewide and local petition drives are under additional scrutiny after several efforts were rejected over allegedly falsified signatures. Authorities have arrested six circulators for a set of Lincoln city charter ballot initiatives that some conservative groups sought.

Even voiced support for Pillen’s proposal while also commending election officials for upholding security and noticing the issues with this year’s petition efforts. Pillen is running for reelection against Democrat Lynne Walz, America First’s Brett Lindstrom and Legal Marijuana NOW’s Rick Beard.

Because he lost the May GOP primary, Evnen will not be the election official to help Pillen usher new petition-adjustment bills through the Legislature.

The next Nebraska secretary of state will be Scott Petersen, the Republican who beat Evnen, Democrat Sarah Slattery, America First nominee Bob Krist or Nebraska Working People Party nominee Paul Rumbaugh

Petersen and Slattery said they would support a bill ending pay-per-signature. Krist, a former state lawmaker and gubernatorial candidate, said he would not.

Changing mindset

Krist is a new entry into the race. He was a Republican for most of his tenure as a state lawmaker and ran for governor

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