

With practice set to begin, Nebraska basketball will start focusing on the details.

SPORTS



Gardener, 82, leads effort to make South Omaha's 24th Street bloom again.

MIDLANDS, PAGE A3

Omaha World-Herald

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ANDREW SMITH PHOTOS, THE WORLD-HERALD

People wait to get photos with Louisiana U.S. Sen. John Kennedy during U.S. Sen. Pete Ricketts' annual Nebraska Steak Fry at the Cass County Fairgrounds on Sunday.

Kennedy joins Republicans at Ricketts' annual steak fry

The Louisiana senator draws laughs while also emphasizing seriousness of election

JOSH REYES
World-Herald Staff Writer

WEEPING WATER, Neb. — To rally Nebraska conservatives ahead of November's midterm elections, Sen. Pete Ricketts' campaign took a comedic approach Sunday, inviting Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana to deliver some signature one-liners in his folksy drawl at Ricketts' annual Nebraska Steak Fry.

While Kennedy drew laughs, he made clear that the stakes of the election are serious.

"All of the good work we're doing in D.C. is at risk because the D.C. Democrats have lost their minds," Kennedy said to a crowd of about 800, many dining on steak, potatoes, cornbread and peach cobbler. General admission cost \$20 per person or \$35 for a family, though some guests paid more for a VIP option.

Kennedy and Ricketts said



Sen. Pete Ricketts stands for recognition during his annual Nebraska Steak Fry.

Republicans have cut regulations for businesses, severely reduced illegal immigration, passed a bill to lower the cost of new housing, delivered higher tax refunds and preserved tax cuts that would have expired, with the help of the One Big, Beautiful Bill.

Kennedy said Democrats are taking the lead of Democratic Socialists and the far left, a common GOP refrain in an off-year

election with Republicans in power and Democrats being increasingly favored in generic ballot polls.

"It's a truly radical ideology," Kennedy said, adding that registered nonpartisan candidate Dan Osborn, who is seeking to unseat Ricketts, would essentially function as a far-left Democrat.

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Questions raised on no-bid contract

Records shed light on influence of Pillen's hand-picked contractor

ANDREW WEGLEY
Flatwater Free Press

Months before Gov. Jim Pillen recommended her for a \$2.5 million no-bid consulting contract that Nebraska's auditor later said "smacks of favoritism," Julie Bushell was lobbying state officials for another deal.

She seemed poised to get it, despite skepticism from the state's top environmental administrator. In emails obtained by the Flatwater Free Press, she called the technology she was selling "developing and aspiring at best."

That warning, sent to Pillen's chief of staff,

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NIKOS FRAZIER, THE WORLD-HERALD

Julie Bushell speaks during a press conference in Omaha on Aug. 7, 2024. Her role inside state government has been questioned.

OPPD board authorizes the selling of downtown HQ

JULIE ANDERSON
World-Herald Staff Writer

The Omaha Public Power District's board last week authorized the utility's managers to continue work on a proposed sale of its downtown headquarters to a local developer.

OPPD managers recommended selling Energy Plaza, 444 S. 16th St. Mall, to Omaha development group Urban Village for nearly \$13.3 million. Urban Village plans a mixed-use residential and commercial development on the site.

With the board's approval at its monthly meeting, utility managers will proceed with the details of the sale, which is expected to close in April.

OPPD has been gradually transitioning out of Energy Plaza as part of a long-term effort to modernize its workspace and operations, according to a press release. The utility currently leases space in the Blue Cross Blue Shield building in Aksarben Village for its administrative headquarters.

"It would have been very costly for us to refurbish a building that would not have delivered the larger meeting spaces we needed," Javier Fernandez, OPPD's president and CEO, said in a statement. "At same time, we saw this enormous load growth and the need to spend capital on building electrical infrastructure."

Redevelopment by a qualified buyer like Urban Village, he said, allows OPPD to focus on facilities better suited for the future while helping breathe new life into an important downtown location.

The 1.8-acre property comprises two office buildings and a five-story parking garage. In February 2025, an independent appraiser assessed the value of the parcel at nearly \$14.3 million. But OPPD managers told board members during board committee meetings Tuesday that they believed the proposed price tag is "reasonable and fair compensation" for the property.

OPPD, according to the press release, conducted an extensive, competitive process to identify the right buyer. The developer will set aside 250 spaces within the Energy Plaza parking garage for public use.

The utility dedicated the plaza in 1988, according to World-Herald archives. It consisted of a then-new 11-story building, the utility's existing nine-story building, the parking garage and an atrium.

The Metropolitan Utilities District moved out of its longtime headquarters at 17th and Harney Streets several years ago. It was renovated as a new Douglas County Justice Center.

Urban Village has its roots in rehabilitating properties, including some 200 units in various buildings, many abandoned and vacant, that the company purchased and refurbished around what is now Midtown Crossing.

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Firefighter mourned

A Yutan firefighter who died of cancer is being mourned by the community he served for over 35 years. **Midlands, Page A3**

Big Ten play

Michigan State offers a step up in competition for the Nebraska football team. **Sports**

Weather

High: 64 • **Low:** 55
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