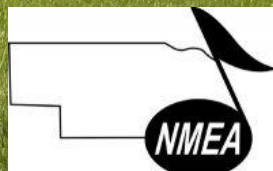


Candidate Survey Responses

Nebraska Legislature 2020 Primary Election



The 2020 elections will have a huge impact on the arts in our state. If you agree with thousands of Nebraskans who believe the arts play an important role in our families, our schools and our communities, you will want to know where the candidates stand.

Candidates in the May 12th primary election for the Nebraska State Legislature were asked to complete a survey on issues important to the arts. This report summarizes responses received from candidates as of April 28th. Each candidate's survey response can also be found at our [2020 Election Center](#).

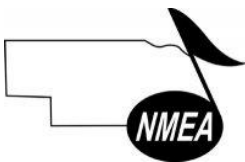
This survey was conducted in partnership with the following organizations:



Nebraskans for the Arts (NFTA) is a statewide citizen organization dedicated to advising policy makers, elected officials, and community leaders on the importance of strong arts-education in our schools, the economic impact of the arts in our communities, and the benefits of pro-arts policies for Nebraska.



The Nebraska Art Teachers Association (NATA) advocates for and advances art education in Nebraska to fulfill human potential and promote global understanding.



Nebraska Music Educators Association (NMEA), founded in 1966, is the statewide association for music educators, whose purpose is the advancement of music education through the promotion of better school music, and to foster active music-making by all Nebraskans.



The Nebraska Speech, Communications, and Theatre Association encourages high standards in speech, debate, and theatre instruction throughout Nebraska elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities.

The first section of this report lists the candidates running for office by Legislative District. The candidates who responded to the survey are identified and their responses to multiple choice questions are listed. The full text of the questionnaire follows this section. The second section provides candidate responses to the final two questions of the survey, where narrative responses were requested.

We hope you find this voter resource beneficial in your evaluation of candidates. This report will be updated before the general election.

<i>Legislative District</i>	<i>Candidate Name</i>	<i>Response Received</i>	<i>Q2: Aware of Nebraska Arts Council?</i>	<i>Q3: State funding for NAC next year?</i>	<i>Q4: Access & participation in arts education?</i>	<i>Q5: Need for certified teachers in the arts?</i>	<i>Q6: State appropriations & policies to advance creative industries?</i>	<i>Q7: Support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment?</i>
1	Janet Palmtag							
1	Dennis Schaardt	★	Not So Aware	Same Amount	Very Important	High Priority	Very Important	Support
1	Julie Slama							
3	Carol Blood	★	Very Aware	No Opinion	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
3	Rick Holdcroft							
5	Gilbert Ayala							
5	Mike McDonnell							
7	Jorge Sotolongo							
7	Tony Vargas							
9	John Cavanaugh							
9	Marque Snow	★	Somewhat Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
9	Mark Vondrasek							
11	Fred Conley							
11	Gwen Easter	★	Somewhat Aware	No Opinion	Very Important	High Priority	Very Important	Neutral
11	Teela A. Mickles							
11	Terrell McKinney	★	Very Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	High Priority	Extremely Important	Support
11	John Sciara							
11	Cornelius F. Williams							
11	Dennis J. Womack							
13	Justin T. Wayne							
15	David Rogers							
15	Lynne M. Walz							
17	Joni Albrecht							
17	Sheryl Lindau	★	Very Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	High Priority	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
19	Mike Flood							
21	Joseph Couch	★	Somewhat Aware	Same Amount	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
21	Mike Hilgers							
21	Brodey Weber							
23	Bruce Bostelman							
23	Helen Raikes	★	Very Aware	Increase in Funding/ Same Amount	Extremely Important	High Priority	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
25	Suzanne Geist	★	Very Aware	Same Amount	Very Important	Essential	Very Important	Strongly Support
25	Stephany Pleasant	★	Somewhat Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
27	Brenda Bickford							
27	Anna Wishart							

<i>Legislative District</i>	<i>Candidate Name</i>	<i>Response Received</i>	<i>Q2: Aware of Nebraska Arts Council?</i>	<i>Q3: State funding for NAC next year?</i>	<i>Q4: Access & participation in arts education?</i>	<i>Q5: Need for certified teachers in the arts?</i>	<i>Q6: State appropriations & policies to advance creative industries?</i>	<i>Q7: Support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment?</i>
29	Eliot Bostar							
29	Jennifer Carter	★	Very Aware	Same Amount	Extremely Important	High Priority	Very Important	Strongly Support
29	Jacob Campbell							
29	Neal Clayburn	★	Somewhat Aware	Same Amount	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
29	Michael Connely	★	Not So Aware	No Opinion	Extremely Important	Not a Priority	Not at all Important	Neutral
29	Lisa Lee							
31	Mark B. Gruenewald							
31	Alexander J. Martin							
31	Rich Pahls							
31	Tim Royers							
31	Melanie Williams	★	Very Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
33	Steve Halloran							
35	Raymond M. Aguilar							
35	Dan Quick							
37	Mercadies Damratowski							
37	John S. Lowe Sr.							
39	Allison Heimes	★	Somewhat Aware	Same Amount	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
39	Lou Ann Linehan							
41	Tom Briese							
43	Tom Brewer							
43	Tanya Storer							
45	Susan Hester							
45	Rita Sanders							
47	Steve Erdman							
49	Jen Day	★	Somewhat Aware	Increase in Funding	Extremely Important	Essential	Extremely Important	Strongly Support
49	Andrew LaGrone							

The following list is the full text of the questions candidates were asked. Questions 8 and 9 requested a narrative response; elected officials' verbatim responses are listed on pages 6-8.

Question 2

Are you aware of an agency of state government – the Nebraska Arts Council (NAC) – whose mission is to support the arts, humanities and creative activities in Nebraska?

- ☐ Very Aware
- ☐ Moderately Aware
- ☐ Slightly Aware
- ☐ Not Aware

Question 3

The Nebraska Arts Council invested \$1.5 million in FY2019-20 state general appropriations in grants across the state to support arts programs and access, arts education programs, and supporting local arts councils and organizations. Most grant dollars required a 1:1 match. With which statement do you most agree?

- ☐ The NAC should receive an increase in state funding in the coming fiscal year.
- ☐ The NAC should receive the same amount of state funding in the coming fiscal year.
- ☐ The NAC should receive a decrease in state funding in the coming fiscal year.
- ☐ No opinion at this time.

Question 4

Research has shown that arts education increases achievement across all academic disciplines, enhances student engagement, and fosters development of critical thinking and learning skills. How important do you think it is to have access and participation in arts education for youth in Nebraska schools?

- ☐ Extremely Important
- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Moderately Important
- ☐ Slightly Important
- ☐ Not at all Important

Question 5

The State of Nebraska has curriculum standards in the fine arts, which includes art, music, theater, dance, and media arts. How important do you think it is for schools to have content-specific certified teachers in the arts?

- ☐ Essential
- ☐ High Priority
- ☐ Medium Priority
- ☐ Low Priority
- ☐ Not a Priority

Question 6

According to data from the Creative Economy State Profiles, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that arts and cultural production accounts for \$2,943,343,023 and 2.4% of the Nebraska economy, contributing 28,735 jobs. The Nebraska Blueprint report recommends investing in “community vibrancy” projects to attract businesses and workers, increase tourism, and generate revenue for state and local government. How important do you feel state appropriations and policies to advance Nebraska’s creative industries (an example is this year’s LB943) are in relation to creating a strong economic future for Nebraska?

- ☐ Extremely Important
- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Moderately Important
- ☐ Slightly Important
- ☐ Not at all Important

Question 7

In 1998, the Nebraska Legislature established the Cultural Preservation Endowment Fund to join the Nebraska Cultural Endowment to create a private-public partnership for providing stable funding for arts and cultural programs in the state. These funds must be matched dollar-for-dollar by private contributions. The earnings from both the state and private sides are then distributed to the Nebraska Arts Council and Humanities Nebraska to fund grants and programs all across the state. As a candidate for the Nebraska Legislature, what is your position in supporting this investment in Nebraska's rich arts and humanities assets?

- ☐ Strongly Support
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Oppose
- ☐ Strongly Oppose

Question 8

Nebraska adults have one of the highest the highest participation rate in the U.S. in annually attending an art exhibit or arts performance. Is there a specific arts or culture organization in your part of the state that you or your family particularly enjoy, or do you have an artistic talent or hobby?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ If yes, please list your talent/hobby and your favorite organization(s) here:

Question 9

We welcome any additional comments or experiences you would like to make with regards to the arts in Nebraska. Please use the space below. Your comments will be posted on the Nebraskans for the Arts website and in a voter guide of survey results received, sent to the network of arts advocates in the participating organizations.

Legislative District	Name	Q8 Talent/hobby and favorite organization	Q9 Additional comments
1	Dennis Schaardt www.schaardtforlegislature.com/ Schaardt4legislature@gmail.com		
3	Carol Blood www.carolblood.com/ info@carolblood.com	Bellevue Little Theater. Sumtur Amphitheater.	I believe in the arts. Have participated in the arts as an actress/singer. I believe funding should be consistent in Nebraska and have always supported this type of legislation when reasonable. I will continue to do so in the future.
9	Marque Snow www.votesnow.com/ marqasnow@gmail.com	Opera Omaha, Union of Contemporary Arts	If elected, I would be interested in creating or increasing opportunities to obtain local talent in Nebraska once they graduate from high school. This incentive could be in a grant.
11	Gwen Easter Facebook page GwenEasterforLegislatureDistrict11 gwenester1@gmail.com	Love Jazz, Joslyn Museum, Rose, Omaha Community Play House	

<i>Legislative District</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Q8 Talent/hobby and favorite organization</i>	<i>Q9 Additional comments</i>
11	Terrell McKinney www.peopleforterrellmckinney.com mckinneyforld11@gmail.com	Love's Jazz and Art Center, Malcolm X Memorial Center	
17	Sheryl Lindau www.lindauforlegislature.com/sheryl@lindauforlegislature.com	Omaha symphony, Lied Center for Performing Arts, Joslyn Art Museum, Kaneko	I am particularly grateful for arts programming in the covid-19 environment. Public radio and television music and arts programming have been particularly uplifting during this time of sheltering in place.
21	Joseph Couch www.josephcouch.com/joseph@josephcouch.com	I've been learning to cut and solder glass recently. I also play several musical instruments poorly. I sang, danced, and played in the band in high school. The cost of tickets means I only go to shows every once in a while, but I also visit the free museums on occasion.	It stifles creativity in our youth when they think it's impossible to live as an artist. Especially for poor children who might not have the same opportunities. I got a degree in Mathematics because I'm good at it, but as a child, I wanted to dance or become an astronaut, both of which seemed impossible. I want a Nebraska that raises children who actually can do anything they want. Economic justice and the arts are both essential to helping people believe.
23	Helen Raikes www.raikes2020.com raikeshelen@gmail.com	Theater and dance, visual arts. One of my daughters is a virtual artist and dancer. Another is a painter. Photography is my hobby.	The arts are central to a great society. They lift us up to experience and express what is best about being human.
25	Suzanne Geist www.geistfornebraska.com/geist4nebraska@gmail.com	Music at the Lied, theater	
25	Stephany Pleasant www.PleasantforNE.com spleasantmaness@gmail.com	I attend the lied center, community playhouse, Ta-Da Theater, Sheldon, First Fridays in Lincoln, Haymarket Theater, Wesleyan Theater, UNL Theater, the Ross	Art has always been a means of building community. In every form, art brings people together and reminds them of their shared experiences.
29	Jennifer Carter www.carterforlegislature.com/jennifer@carterforlegislature.com	I serve on the Board of Directors for the Friends of Lied and my husband serves on the Board of Directors for the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra. I used to dance and perform from childhood through college. My husband is a trombonist and our daughter play violin and percussion. My mother has always painted and my uncle was an artist and portraitist. Our home was full of art from our	My experience is that the arts are even more accessible in Nebraska than in other places. For example, the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra works hard to keep their ticket prices down to make it more accessible. The Lied Center brings in world class artists and shows that one might see in larger cities. I am so grateful for this and believe it is integral to making Lincoln an attractive place to live and do business.

<i>Legislative District</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Q8 Talent/hobby and favorite organization</i>	<i>Q9 Additional comments</i>
		family and friends. I know first-hand how much art enhances our lives. Teaching youth about art and beauty enriches their lives, helps them learn, and helps them grow. It is critical to a vibrant community.	
29	Neal Clayburn www.voteclayburn.com/ voteclayburn@gmail.com	Lied Center, Lincoln Community Theater, The Stage (Hickman), Pinewood Bowl Concert Series, Pinnacle Concerts, LSW Theater	As an educator I know the vital role the arts play in the schools. I strongly support the need for arts in the public schools.
29	Michael Connely www.michaelconnelysenate.com michaelconnelysenate@gmail.com	I have 2 uncles who played for President Jimmy Carter. I am at odds with some art performance areas that severely discriminate against one category of disabled individuals.	I visited a theater that was installing closed captioning devices for hard of hearing. These are based on a blue tooth radiation system that is deadly for individuals with Electro Magnetic Hypersensitivity. These systems should be hard wired. There are SERIOUS flaws in your current systems and I would work to correct them before any funding. AND I am from a family of professional artists.
31	Melanie Williams www.melanieformillard.com Info@MelanieInMillard.com	I came from parents who were professional actors -first in Minneapolis, and then here in Omaha, when friends opened the Sweetness & Light Theater in the Old Market back in 1971. Our son grew up singing in the Des Moines Children's Choruses, before we moved back to Omaha. He graduated from Omaha North High School in 2005, where he participated in the choir, show choir, and musical theater. He graduated with two full-ride scholarships and the Fine Arts Scholarship. When Broadway Songbook came to the Holland Center, Nick auditioned and was accepted. That once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with a Broadway producer/composer was a tremendous experience. One of our daughters participated in spoken word poetry during speech competitions throughout high school, which played a critical part in her developing confidence and a	I have been so happy to see more maker spaces, pop-up art exhibits and an increase in small art galleries and indie film shops. We need more! I have enjoyed the education and opportunities presented by Omaha's annual Film Festival, as well as the Louder Than a Bomb program that is so amazing for young people to participate in - learning about stage presence, pacing, voice control, memorizing lines, acting, and building confidence to use their voices in powerful ways ... All of it helps youth to apply these skills to anything they choose to do in life. I will do all I can to make sure the arts are always a priority for our communities.

<i>Legislative District</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Q8 Talent/hobby and favorite organization</i>	<i>Q9 Additional comments</i>
		sense of herself. Another of our daughters grew up as a dancer and has now been a dance instructor for several years. As a child, she was chosen to attend a prestigious weeklong Broadway theater camp with another Broadway composer, which culminated in delivering prepared monologues on a New York off-Broadway stage for producers and casting directors. I am a visual artist, and a political and children's book writer. I've done some acting when I was young. My now grown baby sister just graduated from UNO's Fine Arts program with a Masters degree in Poetry. Honestly, the arts have touched all of our lives in so many unique ways. I would be hard-pressed to believe this isn't true for every person living.	
39	Allison Heimes www.heimesforlegislature.org Heimesforne39@gmail.com	I love to sing. We had season tickets to the Orpheum last year. I take my kids to the Rose theatre to introduce them to the arts.	As a kid, I was involved with musical theatre and choir. I was in Seussical the Musical, Into the Woods, and Little Women. I still love to sing and I regularly attend concerts, symphonies, and musical performances at various venues. My kids love to sing and dance and I hope to nurture that interest and let it grow as they grow. You can count on me to always work with you to increase Nebraska's support of the arts.
49	Jen Day www.jendayfornebraska.com/ jendayfornebraska@gmail.com	We love Kaneko, Joslyn, and American Midwest Ballet. My children are both avid music fans; my youngest son (Noah, 7) has his own DJ set and drum set and likes to create his own music, while my older son (Canyon, 11) prefers to listen to a wide variety of music. Personally, I love painting (watercolor usually) and visiting art museums when we travel.	Thank you for sending this questionnaire out to candidates and for the work you do to promote and preserve the arts in Nebraska!