

NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM ISSUE PAPER:

WHY TAXPAYERS SHOULD NO LONGER SUPPORT MAYOR JEAN STOTHERT.

BACKGROUND. After serving many years on the Millard Public School Board, during which she showed no sign of fiscal conservatism, Jean Stothert ran for Omaha City Council. NTF endorsed and supported a conservative attorney for this position, as he had a conservative legal record. Surprisingly but refreshingly, Stothert, once elected to the city council, evidenced strong fiscally conservative initiatives and voting records. NTF members often attended city council budget and other public hearings to support and praise Stothert fiscal initiatives. We enthusiastically supported her mayoral races. As mayor, she lowered our property tax twice, enhanced city services, cracked down on crime, fixed our garbage problem, and reined in the runaway inflationary city employee pension system. NTF spoke in favor of her annual budgets. However, over the past few years, Stothert has moved Left, disconcerting her conservative taxpaying constituents. If she runs for another term as Mayor in 2025, we believe that fewer taxpaying residents will support her candidacy. We hear the refrain, "Send her back to St. Louis (her home town) on a streetcar." The following text will explain why taxpaying residents are now disillusioned with our current mayor.

TAXES. During her first years as mayor, Stothert twice cut our property taxes a bit. However, she lobbied the Legislature to revive a bill to allow collection of sales taxes on Internet purchases. She never has attempted to repeal the obnoxious restaurant tax, despite her campaign pledge in 2017, or the wheel tax hike. In her 2017 campaign, she pledged to reduce the restaurant tax, also promised to reduce the property tax rate, if property valuations remained high, and they have skyrocketed. The restaurant tax normally brings in twice the amount expected, so it is a tantalizing revenue source. In her re-election campaign in 2021, she said that a priority was improving taxpayer experience. However, she has not lowered the city property tax levy to neutralize the spikes in property valuations.



BIKE LANES. Mayor Stothert endorsed bike lanes, a "progressive" primary goal, on major Omaha thoroughfares. Drivers continually become aggravated and complain about bike riders hogging traffic lanes, thereby impeding vehicle traffic and endangering themselves. Ditto with scooters. Surprised that more of these careless riders do not become hood ornaments.

REVERSE DISCRIMINATION. Mayor Stothert pressed the city council to endorse a \$25,000 contribution for Hispanic student internship programs but none for White students. She aims to improve diversity within city government, code words for discrimination against White applicants and employees. Stothert established a LBGT^%#@? advisory committee. The city ordered Gay Pride flags to fly from city libraries and community centers, at the request of her LBGTwhatever advisory board. "We are raising the Progress Pride flag and raising awareness to support Omaha's LBGTQ+ community and celebrate diversity in our city," said Mayor Stothert. National Hunger Awareness Month, Great Outdoors Month, Children's Awareness Month, and Student Safety Month all occur in June, but no city celebration for these worthy causes. She is an enthusiastic supporter of the new LGB&%#@?? community center with programming for queer and transgender individuals and families. Her LBGT*%\$ advisory board prioritized establishing this center. The mayor's office contributed \$15,000 to the effort and solicited philanthropic donors. "This is one more way Omaha is growing and changing for the better," she declared (7-22). In June, 2023, the mayor recommended an additional \$20,000 to operate the LBGTQ+ Center. She marches in Gay Pride parades but no conservative ones. Stothert hired a new Human Rights Director, another unnecessary city position, an attorney with 3 years of experience litigating as a public defender, 7 years of experience imposing civil rights and labor standards laws. She was a legal intern for the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and organizer for Washington State Democrats. She created and led organization of almost 400 volunteers to ID Democrat voters and get out the vote in Federal Way, Washington. She spent a year working for the National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, where she advocated for economic and international justice issues at the U.S. House and Senate. Her salary: \$175,000. In May, 2020, the mayor sponsored a city hate intimidation ordinance, allowing for special prosecution of alleged hate crimes against federally-designated oppressed minority groups. In 2016, she revived the Human Rights & Relations Board, which advises the mayor on alleged discrimination claims. This board has the legal authority to compel individuals to appear by subpoena, examine witnesses under oath, and force individuals to produce private correspondence. The mayor pledges to increase diverse representation on city boards and commissions and expand racial diversity and inclusion in every city department through an employee board. Translated: reverse discrimination against White employees and applicants. Mandatory bias training for all city employees. This change will

lead to an Animal Farm-like atmosphere in city government, whereby all employees considered equal, but some more equal than others. The mayor praises these actions as achieving positive change. In reality, her actions will only increase dissension among city employees and create increased polarization and resentment in the Omaha community.

CRUMBLING STREETS. Stothert managed to pass a \$200 million bond issue (2020) to fund a long-term plan to improve Omaha streets through pavement maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation. Paid for by a \$52 increase in our city property tax load. Yet, each winter, potholes still make our streets look like war zones. Motorists pay thousands for vehicle repairs. Cracks, holes, and bulges appear in new pavement after 2 years because of inferior construction. Yet, the mayor will seek future bond issues to soak taxpayers additionally for street work. More work for construction companies that donate to city candidates.

MEANINGLESS CUTS. The mayor periodically has cut the budget. However, cutting neighborhood grants and summer camp are merely cuts to superfluous expenditures. Many non-basic city services could face the chopping block.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY. In 2020, the mayor hired a Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion manager in her office. DEI are code words for Critical Race Theory. His \$95,000 salary paid by resident taxpayers for bias training for city employees. Stothert established 2 advisory boards (2020) to develop plans for DEI training in city government.

LAW & DISORDER. Stothert took credit for enacting a mandated face mask ordinance during the pandemic, even though scientific evidence proves that masks are ineffective deterrents to the coronavirus. During 2020 rioting and looting, Omaha police showed amazing restraint in dealing with radical hoodlums while Omaha businesses suffered vandalism, burning, and looting. Citizens feared leaving their homes, and business people feared for their stores, as rioting continued for several days. The Stothert Administration had no plan to severely punish these brawlers. The spineless city prosecutor did not seriously charge these agitators or order them to compensate victims vandalized and looted, instead offering many of them get out of jail free cards or community service. We need a more firm city prosecutor. The legal criminal processing of these hundreds of leftists cost city taxpayers millions in police overtime and thousands in additional criminal justice processing. Instead of instructing local law enforcement and urging the Governor to mobilize the National Guard to take decisive action to quickly quell the rioting, the mayor created 2 new advisory boards to develop plans for diversity and equity in city government, a



community advisory board of 15 members and city employee advisory board of 13 members. Applications for both committees reviewed by a committee of mostly liberals. She revised police presence policy away from quickly stamping out rioting to instead requiring additional training, including anti-bias training. New police policies will prevent officers from using several types of physical force to subdue criminals resisting arrest. The mayor also amended the Civilian Complaint Review Board to provide an additional option for citizens to file complaints against police officers with the board. This change definitely will lead to many more unsubstantiated complaints about police brutality and lower police morale. Instead of crushing crime, the mayor hired 2 more housing inspectors to harass landlords providing needed housing to the poor. In her re-election campaign in 2021, she said that public safety was her #1 priority, but crime is out of control in Omaha, shootings and murders weekly.

LIBRARY FIASCO. Yes, the old downtown library was a warm place for derelicts and sex perverts to loiter, but instead of renovating the building and expelling the tramps, the mayor decided to give away the valuable real estate space to



Mutual of Omaha, a megacompany that could have bought its own land for expansion. City taxpayers then had to pay for moving the downtown library, built in 1976, to a shabby old 109-year-old brick building that cost a fortune to renovate. The library moves cost taxpayers \$870,000 in annual lease payments for a library hq building and \$3.5 million in renovation costs. The city paid thousands more than anticipated for design and construction of the new downtown library and administration building, \$3.9 million boosted to \$5.9 million. \$2.43 million additionally for renovations to the permanent building. Because of delays, the city opened a temporary library. The city paid \$27,000 to lease this temporary building for 6 months and \$10,000 for design services there. The library director began a 2023 summer reading program, in which participants must read at least 1 book in several categories, including an LGBT*^# category. In response to public outrage, the director reversed herself and allowed readers to substitute a book from another category.

HOUSING. Stothert often reiterates her support for “affordable housing,” a progressive term for taxpayer-subsidized housing. She estimated that up to 1,100 subsidized housing units could arise by using federal pandemic funds, monies originally meant to assist the medical and health needs of COVID-19 victims. The city affordable housing plan will destroy property values in Omaha for single family homeowners by plunking low-cost housing units in established neighborhoods and further compete with private landlords already suffering from the landlord registration ordinance. The state *does* mandate such a plan, but the city could develop one that involves only private developers. Stothert hired a homeless services coordinator and another to serve as overseer of the city subsidized housing action plan (2022). The mayor supported granting \$65,000 to a liberal nonprofit group to give vouchers to the homeless to reside in hotel and motel rooms. But no property tax cuts for working homeowners this fiscal year. In 2020, the city required all city landlords to register their rental properties and allow city inspectors to inspect their properties, thus penalizing reputable landlords along with slumlords. Local landlords unsuccessfully sued to stop the ordinance. This ordinance encourages radical tenant advocacy groups that seek to eliminate private rental property for low-income people and replace it with taxpayer-subsidized government housing.

ILLEGAL ALIENS. In April, 2016, the mayor lobbied the legislature to offer NE driver licenses to illegal aliens, despite the fact that illegal aliens have killed and continue to kill and maim NE citizens on our roads and highways. She also supported giving commercial and professional licenses to illegals. Yet, when Stothert ran for legislature years before, her campaign literature boasted that she opposed driver licenses for illegals and opposed amnesty. In 2022, the mayor agreed to use pandemic emergency rental assistance for illegal aliens, allowing them to apply for \$18 million in aid.

STREETCAR FIASCO. In her 2017 campaign literature, Stothert promised that she would require a vote of the people for a streetcar project, that Omaha voters should decide if the city should move forward with the project. Then the city cleverly issued other kinds of bonds that do not require a public vote. Based on results from other cities and on the contract signed by the city, Omaha taxpayers will become obligated to pay a huge amount after the bond sales fail or adjoining properties fail to become enhanced economically and generate additional tax revenue to pay back bondholders.

WASTEFUL SPENDING. The city, under Mayor Stothert, appropriated \$10.7 million to a UNMC Global Center for Advanced Interprofessional Learning (2016), not a basic city service. She steered the city council into voting for a climate action plan, to pay \$376,000 to a company to create such plan. Much of the global warming hysteria bases on faulty logic and bogus science. She recommended in July, 2022, \$131,725 appropriated to the National League of Cities Race, Equity, & Leadership Team for consultant services, workshops, and leadership training. A combined \$560,000 of pandemic funds went to Completely Kids, a kid activity group. This administration offered \$17.5 million in tax increment financing (TIF) to a local casino in an area not blighted, though the original intention of TIF was to assist the redevelopment of blighted and depressed areas. In 2020, the mayor negotiated a paid holiday for police officers for Juneteenth, before it became a national holiday, costing taxpayers \$400,000 annually. The Stothert Administration critically raised salary adjustments for longevity pay, pay to employees for merely sticking around. In her FY 2020-2021 budget, she promised to increase community program funding. That funding, some from the General Fund, totaled about \$20 million in 2020 for such programs. The city gave the Latino Center of the Midlands \$100,000 for job training, although the State does the same job training. \$25,000 to the Women’s Center for Advancement (2020), also not a basic city service.



PENSIONS. The city could pay into the underfunded city pension systems at an accelerated rate, if the city council changed the city charter, which it can do at any time, but the mayor has balked. Paying at a slower pace provides monies for the Stothert Administration to spend on other services.

TAKE ACTION NOW. The next city election will not occur until spring 2025. Therefore, there is time to search for and find a true fiscally conservative candidate to run for mayor of Omaha. The current Stothert Administration has gone “woke” and closely mirrors a Democrat administration. We must find a mayoral candidate who appeals to taxpayers in all areas of the city and who would manage and operate an administration that is fiscally conservative on taxation, spending, and government regulation. Begin looking now, or our city will slide down the liberal fiscal slope that will turn Omaha into another Chicago or San Francisco. Join our candidate search effort by contacting NTF at netaxpayers@gmail.com.

Research, documentation, and analysis for this issue paper done by **Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom**. This material copyrighted by Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, with express prior permission granted for its use by other groups in the *NE Conservative Coalition Network*. 7-23. C