



CANDIDATE GUIDE

An introduction for prospective pro-business legislative candidates



ABOUT THE GREATER OMAHA CHAMBER

Why pro-business leadership matters now.

As recent legislative sessions have shown, it is more important than ever to elect pro-business candidates who understand the value of private enterprise and are committed to advancing Nebraska's economic vitality.

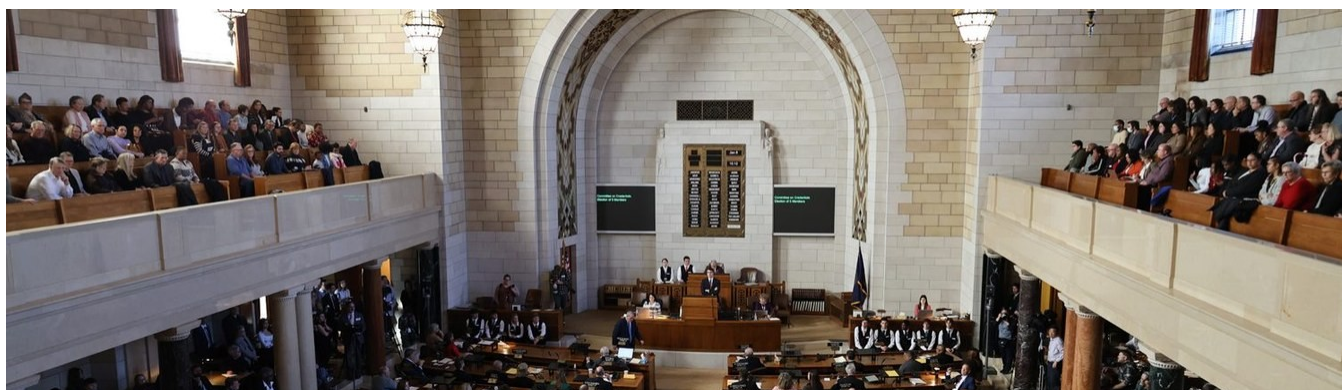
The Greater Omaha Chamber is one of the country's largest, strongest chambers with 3,000 members and a 5-star accreditation by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The mission of the Greater Omaha Chamber is to champion a thriving business community and a prosperous region through visionary leadership and collaboration.

From economic development to member services to public policy, the Greater Omaha Chamber provides programming and services to member companies across the metro region to enhance our business climate and drive economic growth.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are the lifeblood of representative democracy. The individuals whom Nebraskans choose to serve in public office have a decisive impact on the state's economic health, quality of life, and long-term prosperity.

Nebraska's policymaking environment is unique—rooted in a strong tradition of nonpartisan governance through its Unicameral Legislature, where collaboration and practical problem-solving take precedence over party politics. While Nebraskans may hold diverse opinions on specific issues, there is broad agreement on the importance of a resilient economy, a culture of innovation, and access to high-quality, well-paying jobs.



The Nebraska Unicameral Legislature in session at the State Capitol in Lincoln.

For decades, the Greater Omaha Chamber has assisted in electing individuals who understand what it takes to start, grow, and sustain a business, and who value the essential role private-sector employers play in the success of our communities and our state.

Our state thrives when leaders work together to address taxation, workforce development, education, infrastructure, and regulation in ways that strengthen opportunity for all. The Greater Omaha Chamber welcomes pro-business candidates of every political background who are committed to advancing Nebraska's economic competitiveness and community well-being.

This Candidate Guide provides helpful insights for prospective candidates, their families, campaign teams, and those involved in recruiting and supporting candidates.

“Improving Nebraska’s economy is not a partisan issue.”

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This guide offers general guidance and practical advice. It is not a substitute for the training, local political knowledge, and specialized resources available through the political parties, interest groups, and trade associations.

Although this information is tailored primarily for state legislative candidates, much of it is also valuable for individuals considering positions in local government, including county boards, city councils, and school boards.

If you are thinking about running—or have already decided to seek office—congratulations. You are considering something that few people do but that has a profound influence on the direction of our state.

RUNNING AS A PRO-BUSINESS CANDIDATE

Define your personal brand around principles and values.

Once you have made the decision to run for office, it is time to define your personal brand as a candidate.

Every candidate carries labels—some chosen, some assigned. Your professional background, community involvement, and personal values all contribute to how voters perceive you. In Nebraska, where legislative races are officially nonpartisan, it is especially important to communicate what you stand for in terms of principles and values.

Running as a “pro-business” or “pro-jobs” candidate tells voters that you value Nebraska’s economic foundation and understand the essential relationship between employers, employees, and communities.

What Defines a Pro-Business Candidate?

The term “pro-business” does not mean “partisan.” Nebraska’s economic success depends on people across the political spectrum who share a commitment to responsible growth and opportunity. Whether

you identify as conservative, moderate, or progressive, a pro-business perspective centers on sustainable prosperity, innovation, and collaboration.



Business and community leaders turn dirt at the groundbreaking for a member-company expansion.

Here are some key qualities that define a strong pro-business leader in Nebraska:

- 1. Commitment to Strengthening Nebraska's Economic Environment.** Pro-business leaders support policies that create high-wage jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and attract investment. They recognize how taxation, regulation, workforce development, and infrastructure directly impact competitiveness. They value Nebraska's strong agricultural base and growing industries in technology, professional services, health care, and advanced manufacturing—and they work to expand those opportunities.
- 2. Understanding the Challenges of Running a Business.** A genuine pro-business candidate listens to and learns from business owners, large and small. You should be able to empathize with their challenges—rising costs, workforce shortages, supply chain hurdles, and complex compliance obligations—and factor those realities into your policy decisions.
- 3. Pragmatic, Solutions-Oriented Leadership.** In Nebraska's Unicameral, progress often depends on cooperation across ideological and political party lines. Voters respect leaders who show integrity, adaptability, and respect for differing views while staying focused on outcomes that help families and employers alike.
- 4. Respect for Workforce Development and Education.** Strong business climates depend on skilled workers. Supporting career and technical education, internships, apprenticeships, and partnerships between schools and employers demonstrates your commitment to growing Nebraska's future workforce.



Business leaders and elected officials convene at the Federal Legislative Summit.

When expressed in these terms, “pro-business” becomes a powerful and integrated part of your campaign message—one that resonates deeply with Nebraska’s values of hard work, responsibility, and community.

GETTING YOUR CAMPAIGN STARTED

A successful campaign begins long before the first yard sign goes up.

Once you decide to run, your first task is to get organized. A successful campaign begins long before the first yard sign goes up. It requires strategy, a strong support network, and consistent communication.

Know the Election Timeline

Understanding Nebraska’s election calendar is essential for planning your campaign milestones. For the 2026 election cycle, key dates are expected to include:

ELECTION CYCLE — KEY DATES

- ▶ **January 5, 2026** First day to file for office
- ▶ **February 17, 2026** Filing deadline for incumbents
- ▶ **March 2, 2026** Filing deadline for non-incumbents
- ▶ **May 12, 2026** Primary election
- ▶ **November 3, 2026** General election

Always confirm current dates and deadlines with the Nebraska Secretary of State’s Office.

Craft Your Core Message

Many first-time candidates struggle to clearly articulate why they are running. You should be able to express your motivation and vision in a brief, heartfelt way—often called your “elevator speech.” In 20–30 seconds, explain who you are, what you value, and what you hope to accomplish for your district.

You will repeat this message countless times at doors, fundraisers, and community events, so it must be authentic and concise.

Build a Strong Team

Running for office is a team effort. No one wins alone. You will need people who share your vision and are willing to commit time and energy. Key roles include:

- ▶ **Campaign Manager:** Keeps the campaign on track, manages tasks and volunteers, and sometimes tells you “no” when necessary.
- ▶ **Treasurer:** Responsible for financial compliance and reporting.
- ▶ **Campaign Committee (or “Kitchen Cabinet”):** A trusted group of advisors who offer honest feedback and help guide strategy.
- ▶ **Finance Committee:** Business and community leaders who assist with fundraising and networking.

Organize early, set clear roles, and delegate responsibility to prevent burnout. Keep volunteers motivated and appreciated.

Fundraising

Fundraising can feel uncomfortable for many candidates—but it is vital. In Nebraska, as elsewhere, campaigns fail more often from lack of funding than lack of support. Think of fundraising as inviting others to invest in your vision for better government. Donors give not only money but also credibility, networks, and enthusiasm.

Be transparent, thank contributors often, and comply fully with reporting laws (see Legal Information section).

Engage with Your Community



An attendee asks a question at Politics & Eggs, the Chamber's public policy forum.

Talk to local leaders, civic groups, and small-business owners. Build connections with chambers of commerce, trade organizations, and nonprofits. Attend community events and learn about local

priorities. As a pro-business candidate, your goal is to connect with people who value growth and opportunity—and to show that you are ready to listen and collaborate.

Stay Grounded

Finally, humility goes a long way. Listen more than you speak. Voters respond positively to candidates who genuinely seek to understand their concerns. Running for office is not about personal recognition—it is about service.

THE ENDORSEMENT AND NOMINATION PROCESS

Navigating Nebraska's nonpartisan landscape.

Nebraska's nonpartisan Unicameral differs significantly from most states. There are no official party labels on the ballot for legislative races. However, political, civic, and business groups often provide endorsements that can influence voters and shape your campaign.

Understanding Nonpartisan Elections

All candidates for the Nebraska Unicameral run in the same primary election. The top two vote-getters advance to the general election, regardless of political affiliation. This structure encourages coalition-building and rewards candidates who can appeal to a broad base of voters rather than a single party bloc.



State senators greet one another on the Unicameral floor at the opening of session.

While the elections are officially nonpartisan, candidates will likely have personal ties or philosophical alignment with one of the major political parties. You will likely engage with local county party organizations, business coalitions, and advocacy groups that seek to support candidates consistent with their goals.

Community and Organizational Endorsements

Endorsements from respected community leaders, professional and trade associations, or advocacy organizations can lend credibility and visibility to your campaign. Consider seeking endorsements that reinforce your core message—for example:

- ▶ Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Agricultural and agribusiness associations
- ▶ Industry or trade groups
- ▶ Civic or neighborhood organizations

These endorsements not only provide credibility but can also open doors to volunteers, donors, and voter outreach networks.

Maintaining Independence and Integrity

Because Nebraska's legislative races are officially nonpartisan, it is critical to project independence of judgment while staying true to your values. Voters appreciate candidates who evaluate every issue on its merits rather than through a political lens.

Endorsements should amplify your credibility—not define you. Always ensure that your alliances align with your values and your district's interests. Demonstrating balanced, thoughtful leadership will resonate with Nebraska voters across political lines.

Learn from Experienced Voices

Seek guidance from current and former state senators, local officials, and experienced campaigners. Nebraska's political culture generally values civility, cooperation, and "Nebraska Nice" friendliness. Observing these norms and working within them will strengthen both your campaign and your effectiveness once elected.

RUNNING FOR OFFICE IS HARD WORK

The candidate must always be the campaign's engine.

There is no way around it: running for office is hard work.

While building a strong campaign team is essential, the candidate must always be the campaign's engine. No one else can substitute your energy, authenticity, and presence.



Advocates, staff, and press wait outside the legislative chamber during session.

Stay Motivated and Strategic

There will be long days and occasional discouragement. You will knock on doors that do not open, attend events with small turnouts, or encounter criticism online. Successful candidates push through these challenges with purpose and persistence. Staying positive and consistent is key.

Mathematics matter, too. Every campaign boils down to numbers—votes, donors, volunteers, and hours. Determine early how many votes you will need to win your district, how many doors you must knock on, and how much money you must raise to communicate effectively. Work backward from Election Day to create achievable weekly and monthly goals.

Remember, Nebraska's legislative elections are nonpartisan and competitive. Many races are decided by only a few hundred votes. Strategic organization, message discipline, and perseverance can make the difference.

The Importance of Door-to-Door Contact

“Nothing replaces personal connection. Start early, do it daily, and do not stop until the polls close.”

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Direct voter contact—especially door-to-door outreach—is consistently the most effective way to win support. Wear comfortable tennis shoes, plan your routes, and track your progress. You will learn what issues matter most to voters by listening at their doorsteps.



Face to face: state senators and staff talk through the day's business on the floor.

Mindset and Professionalism

Maintain professionalism in all interactions. Be courteous to everyone—even those who disagree. Treat volunteers with appreciation and opponents with respect. The way you conduct yourself during the campaign shapes how you will be viewed as a leader.

Keep your broader purpose in mind: serving your community and improving your state. Winning matters, but how you win matters just as much. Run a campaign that reflects integrity, humility, and Nebraska's tradition of neighborly respect.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Compliance is not optional — it is essential to maintaining trust and credibility.



The Sower crowns the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln.

Running for public office requires a solid understanding of Nebraska's election laws and campaign finance regulations. Fortunately, Nebraska provides clear, accessible resources to guide candidates through the process.

Registering Your Campaign Committee

If you plan to raise or spend more than \$5,000, you must form a campaign committee and register with the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission (NADC). Registration involves:

- ▶ Naming your committee (i.e., Friends of Jane Smith)
- ▶ Designating a Treasurer
- ▶ Opening a separate campaign bank account
- ▶ Filing the committee's Statement of Organization within 10 days of crossing the \$5,000 threshold

Forms and detailed instructions are available on the NADC website at nadc.nebraska.gov.

Financial Reporting

Your campaign treasurer must maintain accurate financial records of all contributions and expenditures. Regular reports must be filed electronically with the NADC according to established deadlines—usually quarterly, pre-election, and post-election periods.

The NADC offers online tutorials and handbooks to help treasurers file correctly and avoid penalties. Transparency and accuracy are critical to maintaining voter confidence.

Contribution Limits and Fundraising Rules

Nebraska law places very few limits on campaign contributions from individuals, political action committees (PACs), and corporations. While Nebraska does not impose many restrictions on legislative candidates, it enforces strict rules on reporting contributions and expenditures.

Consult the NADC's Campaign Finance Handbook for up-to-date contribution limits and donor disclosure requirements. When in doubt, ask the NADC directly—they are there to help you stay compliant.

Filing for Office

To appear on the ballot, candidates must file an Affidavit of Candidacy with the Nebraska Secretary of State or their local county election office (depending on the district). For the 2026 election cycle, key filing periods are expected to be:

- **Incumbents:** January 5, 2026 – February 17, 2026
- **Non-incumbents:** January 5, 2026 – March 2, 2026

The filing must include your affidavit and the required filing fee. Details, forms, and deadlines can be found on the Elections Division page at sos.nebraska.gov.

Campaign Practices and Ethics

Campaigning can be competitive, but certain behaviors are prohibited by law. Nebraska's election statutes regulate campaign materials, signage placement, advertising, and the use of public resources.

Candidates must avoid misrepresentation, harassment, or interference with voters' rights. Violations can lead to penalties, disqualification, or criminal charges.

The Nebraska Secretary of State and NADC both provide guides summarizing campaign conduct laws. Before your campaign launches, review these carefully with your team to ensure compliance.

Local City & County Regulations

Most Nebraska cities and counties have ordinances governing campaign signage or major event permits. Always check with local election offices or city clerks for any additional rules that may apply in your district.

“Transparency and accuracy are critical to maintaining voter confidence.”

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OFFICIAL CANDIDATE RESOURCES

- **Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission** nadc.nebraska.gov — committee registration, financial reporting, Campaign Finance Handbook
- **Nebraska Secretary of State, Elections Division** sos.nebraska.gov — filing forms, deadlines, and campaign conduct guides
- **Local election offices and city clerks** Signage ordinances and event permit rules in your district
- **Political parties, interest groups, and trade associations** Candidate training, local political knowledge, and specialized campaign resources

SERVE WITH INTEGRITY AND PURPOSE

Public service in Nebraska is a profound opportunity to make a difference. The challenges are real—time, sacrifice, and scrutiny—but so are the rewards: influence, respect, and the satisfaction of improving your community.

Running for office is about more than ambition—it is about stewardship. Nebraska's Unicameral Legislature has a proud tradition of civility, collaboration, and pragmatic leadership. The Greater Omaha Chamber invites you to join that tradition and to bring your experience, vision, and dedication to shaping a stronger, more prosperous Nebraska.

“If you are thinking about running, start today. Prepare. Learn. Listen. And above all—serve with integrity and purpose.”



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OmahaChamber.org

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