

Greater Omaha Chamber

2026 OPPD Board of Directors Candidate Questionnaire

Instructions: Please answer each of the following questions. Please keep each response to 150 words or fewer. Responses will be shared with Chamber members as submitted.

Candidate Name: Sara Kohen

OPPD Subdivision: 1

Occupation/Background (Limit to 200 words):

I'm a mom of four and attorney who now works to engage families and build community as a school administrator. I have a B.A. in Political Science and Spanish from James Madison University and was the university's nominee for the Rhodes Scholarship. I attended law school at the University of Nebraska College of Law, serving as an Executive Editor for the Nebraska Law Review and graduating fourth in my class.

Following graduation, in 2011, my family and I moved to Omaha, so that I could serve as a judicial law clerk for Chief Judge William Jay Riley, on the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. I subsequently worked as in-house counsel, focusing on real estate law, contract litigation, and insurance regulations. I now work as a school administrator, supporting children and families.

I am involved in the community in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Nebraska State Bar Association (2011 – present)
- Robert M. Spire American Inn of Court (2017 – present)
- University of Nebraska Medical Center, Chancellor's Board of Counselors (2022 – present)
- Nebraska Center for Workforce Development and Education, Board of Directors (2024 – present)
- Omaha Library Neighborhood Steering Committee (2022 – 2023)

Questions

Each question includes a short background note in italics to help readers understand the issue.

1. Planning for Growth

Background: *OPPD is updating its long-range plan (the 2026 Integrated System Plan), which forecasts how much electricity the region will need in the years ahead. If that forecast is too low, new and expanding employers may not be able to get power when they are ready to open.*

Greater Omaha is competing with other regions for major employers, including advanced manufacturing and technology projects that need large amounts of power. How would you make sure OPPD plans for enough electricity to support that growth, and how would you manage the risk of building too much too soon?

Making sure that OPPD has sufficient generation and transmission resources is crucial for supporting economic development, including good jobs. The goal of the Integrated System Plan is to look ahead at potential growth scenarios to make sure we can support that development, while maintaining affordable and reliable electricity for existing customers. Given supply chain delays for certain types of generation equipment and transmission constraints, I believe that it is important to plan for higher-growth scenarios so that these do not create bottlenecks that limit economic development. This infrastructure buildout should be done in a way that prioritizes flexibility and is conscious of costs in order to manage risks associated with building too much too soon.

2. OPPD as an Economic Development Partner

Background: *Site selectors often rule out communities that cannot promise reliable, affordable power on a fast timeline. A utility that works closely with economic developers can be a deciding factor in where companies invest.*

What should OPPD do to help Greater Omaha win new business investment and jobs? How would you work with the Chamber, local governments and site selectors while treating all customers fairly?

Reliable, affordable power is an engine for economic development, and we need to make sure we plan for enough generation and transmission to support that. I think it is also important to partner with the business community and other governmental subdivisions to find creative ways to support that growth, such as through behind-the-meter generation, battery storage, and other strategies.

3. Serving Large New Customers

Background: *Data centers and large manufacturers bring significant investment, jobs and tax base, but they also need large amounts of power and new infrastructure.*

What principles would guide how OPPD serves very large new customers? How would you keep OPPD competitive in attracting these projects while making sure existing homes and businesses are not left paying costs that belong to someone else?

I support economic development, including through well-paying jobs and increasing the tax base. It is also crucial that the costs of these projects are not passed on to

households and other businesses. OPPD can attract large projects through making sure that we are building the grid in a way that ensures we have enough power on a fast timeline. I am interested in finding ways to partner with the business community to work together to make important grid improvements. I also will push to make sure that the rate structure is transparent and fair so that other customers are not subsidizing large new customers, and I have a number of ideas for how to do this.

4. Building the Grid Ahead of Demand

Background: *Transmission lines and substations can take years to plan and build. Communities that wait until a project is fully committed can lose it to a competitor whose sites are already powered and ready.*

When should OPPD invest in transmission, substations and other grid infrastructure before a customer has signed on? How would you manage the financial risk of those investments?

OPPD should invest in grid infrastructure based on projected growth so that we can attract more companies that will bring good jobs to the Omaha area. It is also necessary to manage financial risk, and the Integrated System Plan process looks at all of the relevant factors to balance these interests.

5. An All-of-the-Above Energy Mix

Background: *OPPD produces power from a mix of sources, including natural gas, coal, wind, solar and purchased power. Relying too heavily on any single source can increase costs and reliability risks.*

Do you support an all-of-the-above approach to power generation? How would you balance natural gas, coal, wind, solar, battery storage, nuclear and other resources, and which factors (such as reliability, cost and speed to build) would carry the most weight in your decisions?

Reliability, cost, speed to build, and health and environmental impacts are all important factors that should be considered when looking at the energy mix. Different sources of energy have different benefits and drawbacks, and these should be balanced to produce the best results for everyone in OPPD's service area.

6. Keeping the Lights On

Background: *In February 2021, extreme cold across the region forced rolling power outages in OPPD's service area. Reliable power around the clock is essential for employers, hospitals and families.*

What should OPPD do to make sure the power stays on during extreme weather and periods of record demand? What role should always-available (“dispatchable”) generation play in that plan?

Making sure that the power stays on, including during periods of extreme weather and record demand, is essential. That is why, as discussed above, reliability is a key factor when considering the mix of energy generation. Dispatchable power plays an important role in ensuring reliability.

7. Nuclear and Emerging Technologies

Background: *Advanced nuclear, including small modular reactors, could provide around-the-clock power with no carbon emissions, but these technologies are still early in commercial development.*

Should OPPD pursue advanced nuclear and other emerging technologies as part of its long-term plan? What would you need to see on cost, timeline, safety and regulatory approval before supporting a major investment?

I am open to the possibility of adding advanced nuclear generation, provided that we can do so safely and in a way that is financially responsible. Nuclear energy provides steady, baseload power, which is important. A potential drawback is the high startup cost, and maintaining affordable electricity is a key priority of mine. However, this cost might be mitigated through a partnership. OPPD is partnering with LES and NPPD for the Great Plains New Nuclear Consortium, which is examining whether these three public power districts can work together to open a new nuclear plant using advanced nuclear technology. I look forward to seeing their findings.

8. North Omaha Station

Background: *OPPD’s current policy allows North Omaha Station to keep operating as it does today. OPPD’s long-range plan assumes the plant’s three oldest units (Units 1, 2 and 3) will eventually retire and its two newer units (Units 4 and 5) will be converted from coal to natural gas.*

What conditions must be met before OPPD retires or converts any North Omaha Station units? Please address replacement power, transmission readiness, reliability, cost, environmental impacts and impacts on the surrounding community.

As part of its planning process, OPPD’s current board already has instructed management that North Omaha Station should be transitioned to a gas-only plant. North Omaha Station already is much older than the average useful life of a coal plant. We

need to plan for the future as infrastructure ages so we're not caught off-guard by costly repairs that could have been avoided.

I understand why people are frustrated with the timeline for North Omaha Station's transition being pushed back repeatedly. I believe that when you make a commitment to do something, it's important to follow through. It is also important to consider the health and environmental impacts of OPPD's operations. I support moving forward with the transition in a way that is strategic and that factors in affordability, reliability, and meeting future growth needs. The Integrated System Plan is being created with the assumption, in all scenarios, that the North Omaha Station transition will be completed on schedule, and therefore will account for these important considerations.

9. Balancing Environmental Goals with Reliability and Growth

Background: *OPPD has set a goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. At times, that goal may compete with keeping power reliable, rates affordable and capacity available for new growth.*

If meeting the 2050 goal on its current schedule would threaten reliability, raise rates or limit OPPD's ability to serve new customers, how would you set priorities? Would you support adjusting the goal's timeline or approach?

Failing to consider climate impacts creates risks related to the affordability and reliability of electricity, as well as the health, safety, and economic well-being of the Omaha area. Climate disruption is already affecting our community, and the best way to deal with any challenge is to acknowledge it and face it head-on. Record heat is placing new demands on the grid, and the increased severe storms that we are experiencing can—and do—damage and destroy important infrastructure.

Fortunately, we now have more options than ever for clean, affordable, and reliable electricity. In an emergency, we must prioritize meeting immediate power needs. In general, though, I support a balanced approach that considers all important priorities and looks toward the future.

10. Rates and Affordability

Background: *Competitive electric rates are a key advantage for Nebraska employers and households. OPPD will need major investments in new generation and grid infrastructure to keep pace with growth.*

How would you keep OPPD's rates competitive while making the investments needed for growth? How should rate impacts factor into the timing and scope of major projects?

Keeping OPPD's rates low is one of my top priorities. As the cost-of-living has gone up faster than people's incomes, families and small businesses are struggling to make ends meet. While much of this is due to bad economic policies coming out of Washington, we can do something about it locally with OPPD's rates. It is certainly important to make sure we have reliable power and are planning ahead so that we have enough electricity to support economic growth. All of these interests—affordability, reliability, and economic development—are important, and the right approach balances these.