

Top 10 Nebraska News Stories, 2005⁵²

1. With his predecessor Mike Johanns confirmed as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Dave Heineman officially took over as Nebraska's 39th governor on Jan. 21, 2005.

2. The Legislature approved dissolving the state's elementary-only, or Class I, school districts, but a petition drive and court battle delayed the move.

3. U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne ran for the Republican nomination for governor. Osborne retired as head football coach at the University of Nebraska at the end of the 1997 season and was finishing his third term in Congress when he made the announcement.

4. After an 18-year-fight to build a nuclear waste site in Nebraska, a settlement was reached. Nebraska paid \$141 million to Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma, with which it originally joined to build the regional low-level radioactive waste dump.

5. The Legislature voted 31-0 to ask University of Nebraska Regent Dave Hergert to resign for campaign finance violations. When he refused, a special legislative committee was formed to investigate whether he should be impeached.

6. Parts of Nebraska suffered from a sixth year of drought. However, the situation improved as timely rains in the summer helped replenish some of the water Lake McConaughy lost. The state's largest lake finished the irrigation season up about seven feet from last year's record lows.

7. Gov. Dave Heineman led a trade delegation to Cuba and secured \$27 million in trade agreements for beans, corn, wheat and other agricultural products.

8. The ongoing battle of how best to regulate the state's surface and irrigated water continued with several water-use lawsuits.

9. After keeping its borders closed to American beef for two years because of concerns about the safety of U.S. beef, Japan, the country's former top beef importer, reopened its borders. A shipment of Nebraska beef was the first to be cleared by customs. State Department of Agriculture Director Greg Ibach was on hand to serve the beef at a banquet in Tokyo.

10. The Nebraska volleyball team finished as national runner-up with a 33-2 record. Nebraska's Christina Houghtelling of Cambridge was named national player of the year. The Nebraska football team bounced back from the previous year's 5-6 season to go 7-4 under second-year coach Bill Callahan.

⁵²Source: Associated Press; surveys of Nebraska newspaper editors and broadcast news directors.

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1. Gov. Dave Heineman defeated legendary former Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne in the GOP gubernatorial primary. Heineman went on to win the office in the November election.

2. The death of Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy W. Mulhair of Omaha on Nov. 30 brought the number of Nebraskans killed while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to 11 for the year.

3. The Platte River Cooperative Agreement was signed by the governors of Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming in the final months of the year. The plan is designed to benefit threatened and endangered species and provide water users in the Platte River Basin with coverage under the Endangered Species Act without giving up their access to federal water, land or funding.

4. Twenty state lawmakers became the first forced out by the term limits law passed in 2000. The law limits senators to two consecutive four-year terms, but former senators may run again after sitting out a term.

5. University of Nebraska Regent David Hergert was impeached by the Legislature and removed from office by the Nebraska Supreme Court in July. Hergert was convicted of manipulating campaign-finance laws during his 2004 campaign.

6. Eight workers at the Cook's ham plant in Lincoln won the record \$365 million Powerball in February. The winners each received approximately \$15.5 million after taxes.

7. The University of Nebraska volleyball team spent the entire season ranked No. 1 and won the NCAA tournament. Sarah Pavan was picked as the national player of the year by the American Volleyball Coaches Association on the eve of Nebraska's title win over Stanford.

8. Wildfires plagued the Valentine area and the Panhandle in July and August, forcing hundreds of evacuation and scorching about 80 acres.

9. The state's elementary-only, or Class I, schools were dissolved after the state Supreme Court ruled the mergers could happen as outlined by the Legislature, despite a petition drive to put the matter on the November ballot. Voters later repealed the law, but the effect of the vote was unclear because the roughly 230 Class I districts had already been merged with adjoining K-12 districts.

10. State Auditor Kate Witek switched political parties and went to court to be placed on the ballot. Witek decided not to run for a third term when she signed on as Osborne's running mate, but reconsidered after the loss. Mike Foley had already garnered the Republican nomination, so Witek defected to the Democratic Party and was nominated at the state convention. She lost to Foley, picking up 39 percent of the vote.